

Published July 26, 2007

Tacoma port boom may spill over

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A major port development to the north could boost Port of Olympia business, and another to the south probably will not hurt it, Olympia port officials said Thursday.

The Port of Tacoma announced Thursday that it will open a \$300 million container terminal in five years, and Port of Vancouver officials hope to build a \$453 million vehicle-distribution center in three to four years.

The Tacoma project could someday drive more noncontainer business to Olympia; the Vancouver project is not likely to have any effect here, Olympia port officials said Thursday.

As Tacoma container terminal space expands, that could squeeze space for noncontainer goods, known in the industry as "break bulk" cargo. Port of Olympia officials hope to target break bulk cargoes to boost their business at the struggling marine terminal.

Olympia's main cargoes are forest products and garnet, a finely ground compound used in high-speed water-cutting operations. The Olympia port has added spot shipments of windmill blades, mining equipment and automobiles during the past couple of years.

Container expansion

"As they (Tacoma) continue to expand on containers, the more they may limit capacity to handle break bulk cargo," said Ed Galligan, the Olympia port's executive director. That, he said, adds to the possibility that some of those cargoes could be recruited to Olympia.

The ports of Olympia and Tacoma are increasingly cooperating instead of competing, Olympia port commissioner Bob Van Schoorl said. The ports share dockworkers and are cooperating on a proposal to build a rail cargo and storage facility near Maytown in South Thurston County.

The cooperation allowed Olympia to compete for an overflow shipment of Kia automobiles when Tacoma temporarily ran out of space to unload the cars earlier this month.

Olympia's hope would be to recruit other break bulk cargoes that might run out of room in Tacoma as that port expands its container terminal space, Van Schoorl said.

"They're going to be shifting some break bulk here," he said. "We will be the break bulk center."

Olympia commissioner Bill McGregor also thinks Tacoma's expanding container business could boost Olympia port business.

"As they (Tacoma) continue to go after container traffic, the smaller shippers are going to have to go somewhere where they can be a big fish in a small pond," McGregor said.

The Kia Motors Corp. delivery in Olympia was a fortunate opportunity but doesn't mean Olympia is counting on several more car shipments, said Kari Ovigstad, the Olympia port's director of marketing and business development.