

Inland Port Greer has been in operation since 2013. Officials announced plans for a second inland port in the state earlier this year.

FILE

INLAND PORT GREER BUSINESS GROWS

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The South Carolina Ports Authority's Inland Port in Greer handled 57-percent higher volume of rail moves in the fiscal year that ended June 30 compared to the previous year, representing a hot spot in an otherwise largely lukewarm annual report from SCPA officials.

Inland Port Greer achieved a record volume of 91,698 rail moves during the 2016 fiscal year, compared to 58,407 in the facility's first full fiscal year of operation in 2015, as its customer base continues to grow.

At the Charleston port facilities, SCPA officials reported growth of 1.4-percent to 1.9 million 20-foot equivalent units, or TEUs, standard units for describing cargo ships' capacity. As measured in pier containers, or box volume, nearly 1.1 million boxes moved across the docks of the port's container terminals.

"Container volumes this fiscal year were quite moderate compared to last year, reflective of uncertainty and a general slowing of the world economy," said SCPA president and chief executive officer Jim Newsome. "However, import-loaded volumes were 5-percent ahead of last year, marking a bright spot in volume development, and export-loaded volumes were flat despite challenging markets. Our non-containerized cargo segments performed well, and we saw record-setting growth at Inland Port Greer."

In the non-containerized cargo segment, Charleston breakbulk tonnage exceeded planned volumes by 33-percent with 901,974 pier-tons handled during the fiscal year. Roll-on and roll-off cargo within the breakbulk sector grew significantly, and SCPA achieved the highest finished-vehicle volume ever handled at the Columbus Street Terminal with 274,426 vehicles moved, an increase of 8 percent over the previous year.

The recent expansion of the Panama Canal could provide a boost to next fiscal year's numbers.

"Looking ahead, the port expects container volumes to increase as a result of the upsiz g of ships with the Panama Canal expansion," Newsome said. "Today, 16 of our 26 weekly container-ship services now employ vessels larger than could pass through the Panama Canal prior to expansion."

"Our port has made significant progress on key projects this fiscal year, including harbor deepening, Leatherman Terminal construction and the Wando Terminal wharf project," said Pat McKinney, SCPA's board chairman. "We are well-positioned to meet the changing needs of our industry and remain focused on increasing growth while completing the necessary improvements to our facilities and infrastructure to be competitive into the future."

The board recently authorized a $23.6 million purchase for two new ship-to-shore cranes for the Wando Terminal in order to serve the growing size of vessels calling Charleston. The cranes are scheduled to be commissioned at the end of 2017 in conjunction with the completion of the Wando wharf-strengthening project. Next month the terminal will receive the first delivery of larger cranes to be commissioned for use this fall.

The board also approved the purchase of 12 rubber-tired gantry cranes for the Wando Terminal and 12 empty container handlers for Wando, North Charleston Terminal and Inland Port Greer.

The SCPA operates public seaport facilities in Charleston and Georgetown as well as the Inland Port in Greer, handling international commerce valued at more than $74 billion annually and facilitating 187,200 jobs statewide, officials say. Charleston's port is the deepest in the Southeast.

Inland Port Greer opened in late 2013 to extend the Port of Charleston's reach 212 miles into the Upstate, providing shippers with access to more than 95 million consumers within a one-day drive. Norfolk Southern serves the facility through its main rail line along the Interstate 85 corridor between Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta.

The Inland Port boosts efficiency for international freight movements between Charleston and companies located across the southeast, and it's expected to continue to spur economic investment in an area where BMW, Michelin and other international manufacturers already operate.

Earlier this year SCPA officials announced plans for a second inland port, along Interstate 95 in Dillon, a strategic move in the face of competition with the Port of Savannah.

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