BUSINESS

Inland port foresees interest

Ag exporters could be customers, CEO says

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Companies from as far away as the Midwest that export grain or other agricultural products are among the possible customers of the South Carolina Inland Port in Greer, the chief executive of the state Ports Authority said.

The freight-handling facility, which the Ports Authority is developing next to Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport, is scheduled to open for business this fall.

It will use cranes to lift cargo between trucks and trains and provide overnight delivery of shipping containers via rail to and from the port of Charleston 212 miles away.

Jim Newsome, the Ports Authority's president and chief executive officer, said Tuesday he expects exporters of agricultural products to be among the inland port's customers.

They could save money on transportation costs by transferring the cargo from rail cars to shipping containers in Greer instead of doing it in Charleston, port officials said.

Newsome said he can also envision e-commerce companies using the inland port to bring imported goods up from the port of Charleston to Greer, where they could then tap air-freight service at GSP to fill online orders.

BMW Manufacturing Co. will use the inland port to haul imported auto parts from the port of Charleston by rail instead of by truck along Interstate 26, Newsome confirmed.

"Any business that's handling containers to and from the port of Charleston or other ports in the South Atlantic within a 40- or 50-mile radius of Greer is a candidate to use that facility as far as I see," he told Upstate reporters during a conference call.

Newsome also said he isn't sure what impact the inland port might have on truck traffic along Interstate 85.

"I don't have any specific answers on that at this point," he said.

Also on Tuesday, the Ports Authority board authorized spending another $12.9 million on the inland port, which is now expected to cost between $43.4 million and $47.4 million, including $7.5 million from Norfolk Southern Corp. for rail infrastructure.