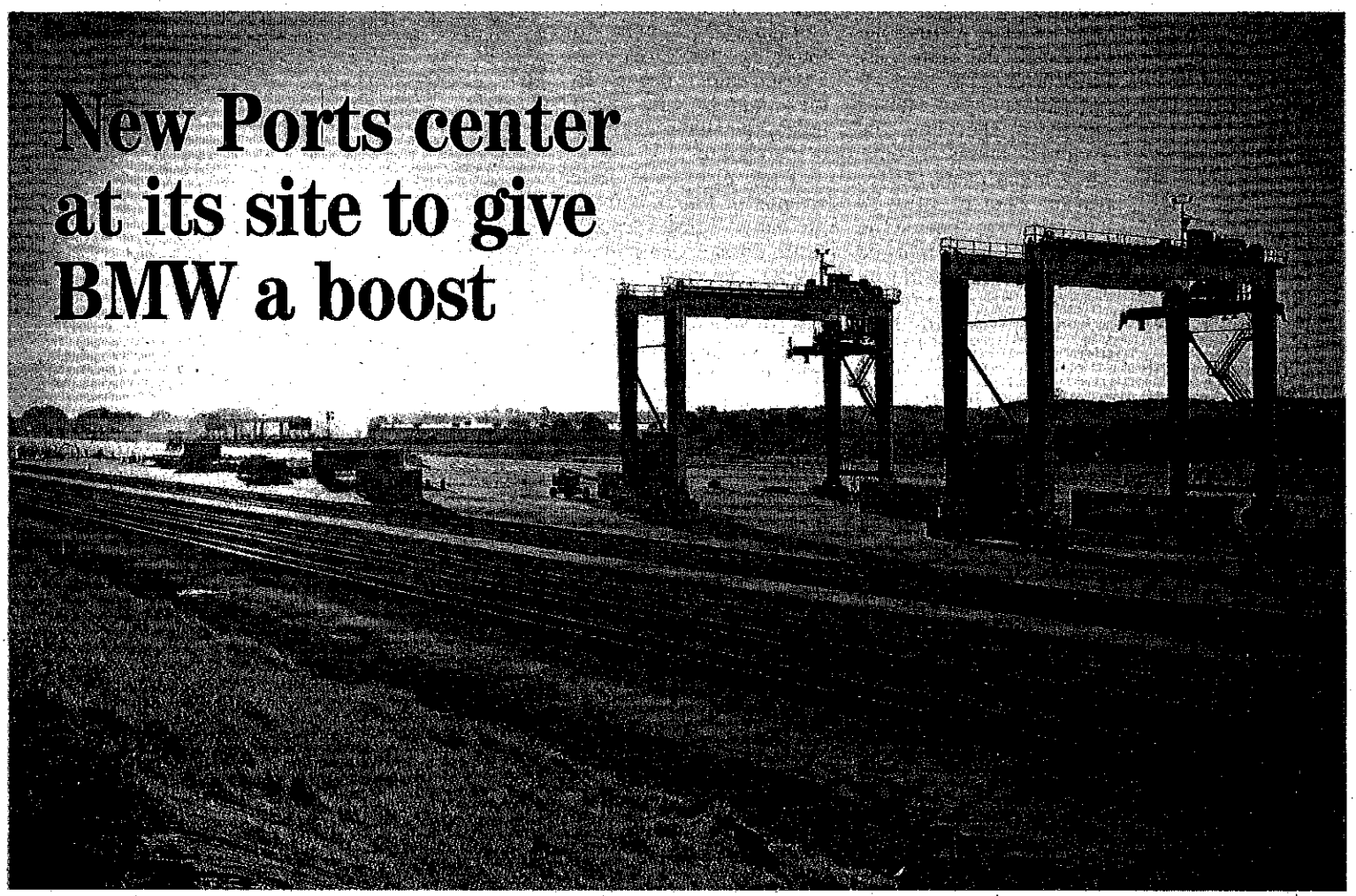
New Ports center at its site to give BMW a boost



STAFF FILE

The SCPA Inland Port in Greer, which serves BMW and others, reached an all-time high in monthly rail lifts in January.

Operations facility in Greer to be completed by early 2016 will help automaker with its shipping

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The South Carolina Ports Authority has authorized the construction of a site operations center on the campus of BMW in Greer. The project is scheduled to be completed by early next year.

The center, on property owned by the authority but leased by BMW, will help facilitate BMW's shipping.

And that shipping is substantial. With $9.2 billion of value shipped overseas in 2014, as BMW has announced, the Germany-based automaker's Greer plant is the nation's leading exporter of passenger vehicles. A $1 billion investment to expand its facility and add a fifth vehicle platform was announced last year. An X7, a large sport-utility vehicle with three rows of seats, is set to join the 3, 4, 5 and 6 series vehicles produced in Greer.

Opened in 1994 with a workforce of around 500, the plant is expected to employ about 8,800 by 2016.

The port authority's Inland Port in Greer, meanwhile, which serves BMW and others, reached an all-time high in monthly rail lifts in January with 5,068 rail moves.

That helped drive the authority's January total of 152,917 20-foot equivalent units, standard units for describing cargo ships' carrying capacity known as TEUs. It marks an 18 percent increase over the same month last year.

Greer's inland port opened in October 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.

The inland port boosts efficiency for international freight movements between Charleston and companies located across the Southeast, Ports Authority officials say, and it's expected to create additional economic investment in an area where BMW, Michelin and other international manufacturers already operate.

Norfolk Southern serves the inland port through its main rail line along the Interstate 85 corridor between Charlotte, N.C., and Atlanta.

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