

Windsor Port Authority traffic ebbs after banner year

Officials expect to bounce back with another great year in 2017 as work on Gordie Howe bridge begins

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Steve Lutsch snapped this photo "to put into perspective" just how big freighters that traverse the Great Lakes and Detroit River really are. (Steve Lutsch/Facebook)

After a near-record year of ship traffic, the Windsor Port Authority saw cargo volumes take a bit of a dive in 2016.

The number of ships docking in the port last year dropped 14.85 per cent, while tonnes of cargo dropped 15.49 per cent, according to figures presented at the port authority's annual meeting Wednesday.

But the ebbing numbers simply reflect the banner year of traffic in 2015, largely because of early construction work on the Gordie Howe International Bridge, say officials.



Windsor Port Authority president and CEO David Cree expects to see ship traffic and cargo volumes to soar as work on the Gordie Howe International Bridge starts. (Stacey Janzer/CBC)

The 2016 traffic is more on par with the 10-year average, explained David Cree, president and CEO of the port authority.

"We're never happy to see a decrease, but that's sort of the nature of the business," he said. "We think we're going to bounce back very quickly."

Officials expect to see an increase in traffic in 2017 with numbers from the first month reflecting that projection, according to port authority board chairman George Sandala.

He anticipates salt aggregate will return to normal levels after a slight decrease last year. A \$60-million expansion at Windsor Salt will be a driving factor behind that, Sandala explained.

Another boon to aggregate starting again this year and ramping up in 2018 will be from the construction of the Gordie Howe bridge.

A spike in cruise-ship traffic was a bright spot in last year's numbers. Ports around the Great Lakes have been promoting tourism internationally, which is starting to roll in, according to Cree.

"It's been a nice little added bonus that we were hoping for, but didn't really expect," he said.