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Port of Davisville seen as "ahead of the curve"

October 20, 2014 - Rhode Island

U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx recently visited Rhode Island with senator Jack Reed to see some of Rhode Island's key port infrastructure and meet with transportation officials and marine shipping leaders. Among his stops was Quonset Business Park, where the secretary got to see the more than 175 companies with nearly 10,000 employees, and the Port of Davisville - one of the Top Ten auto importers in North America.

The secretary's visit was an opportunity for him to see how hundreds of millions of dollars in federal investment are paying off for Rhode Island, and more broadly the nation. In the past two decades, Rhode Island's Congressional delegation has directed some \$350 million in federal funding for upgrades of our railways, airport, roadways, and overall infrastructure. Senator Jack Reed, a long-time member of the Appropriations Committee, senator Sheldon Whitehouse, and congressmen James Langevin and David Cicilline have all been tireless in their support of Quonset. That investment has led to nearly triple that amount of additional investments at the Park, in addition to the jobs and additional tax revenue it means for the state.

The Port of Davisville was of significant interest to the secretary because of the success it has seen as one of the top auto importers in North America. Now we are making preparations to expand into other shipping areas as the Marine Highway effort takes root. As secretary Foxx said himself, Quonset and the Port of Davisville "are ahead of the curve" when it comes to other ports in the country, much of which is due to the infrastructure improvements we have made at this multi-modal facility.

At Quonset, we are pleased that the auto import activity at the Port of Davisville has quadrupled over the past 15 years. In 2013, more than 173,000 autos arrived at the Port by sea, our fourth record breaking year in a row, while another 33,000 autos arrived via rail. Earlier this year Honda began shipping autos to the Port of Davisville from Mexico. This growth would not have been possible without the hard work of our longtime tenant and the major auto processor at the Port, North Atlantic Distribution, Inc. (NORAD).

There are other factors that have made the Port of Davisville a success when it comes to auto importing. Those benefits include: available laydown space within close vicinity of the piers; clean, open air spaces to ensure manufacturers that their autos won't be subject to heavy congestion, dust or smog; competitive pricing; and no federal harbor maintenance tax.

Despite the Port of Davisville's role as a major player in the Ro/Ro (roll-on/roll-off) cargo business, we are not resting on our laurels. We have long known that the key to our success is our ability to constantly evolve and find new ways to nurture our growth. With the addition of the new mobile harbor crane and the \$22 million in surface and pier improvements made at the Port of Davisville through federal TIGER grants, we have been active and continue to expand into the break bulk and project cargo businesses.

Although most studies show a limited opportunity for expanded container shipping in this region, we are poised to serve that market if the Panama Canal expansion creates a need for more feeder services along the Eastern seaboard. In fact, we have already been hard at work moving lumber, windmill components and other project cargoes since the mobile crane arrived. In 2013, more than 1,100 tons of project cargo was moved with the mobile harbor crane.

We are ready to continue to bring more commerce and more jobs to the region. Much of that growth will come from what we are already excelling at - the auto importing business at the Port of Davisville. However, we are well positioned to see growth in other sea shipping businesses because as secretary Foxx said, we are already "ahead of the curve."

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