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Port of Davisville shatters annual auto import record - by Steven King

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Steven King

Quonset's Port of Davisville continues to be a North American maritime powerhouse. Importing its 242,568th car on October 18th, the Port shattered its annual auto import record this year on the earliest date ever.

The continued success at Davisville wouldn't be possible without our partners at North Atlantic Distribution (NORAD), who process thousands of vehicles each week and distribute them to dealerships throughout the Northeast, and beyond. While we wait to see what the final 2019 year-end total will be, we expect import volumes to increase even further in 2020. To prepare, construction crews at Quonset are working around the clock to update and enhance our infrastructure to handle this accelerating growth.

In 2016, voters of Rhode Island approved a bond measure to provide \$50 million for the rehabilitation of Pier 2, the workhorse of the Port of Davisville. Phase 1 of construction began with the renovation and expansion of the new east facing berth on the pier in June 2018, and is expected to be complete early next year. Phase 2 consists of the rehabilitation of the south side of Pier 2 and is expected to begin in early 2020. Built in 1956 and designed to last 50 years, Pier 2 handles heavy cargo imports including automobiles, electric transformers, and sea shipments for the Business Park's companies, and businesses throughout the Northeast. The components for every land based wind farm in Rhode Island have crossed Pier 2, as well as components of the Block Island Wind Farm in 2017. The Pier 2 rehabilitation project will extend the life of the Pier until 2072.

Renovations will enter a new phase this month as dredging begins at Pier 2. The project entails removing over 235,000 cubic yards of natural silt from the Davisville Channel and east berth. This will require the use of a dredge excavator with the capacity to remove 18 cubic yards of silt at a time – roughly the amount of material that would fit into an average-sized dump truck. A scow barge will then bring the material to the Federal Rhode Island Sound Disposal Site, located nine nautical miles off of Point Judith.

This will be only the second time Pier 2 and its channel has not been dredged since the 1940s. Previously, sections of the Davisville Channel and areas adjacent to both piers were dredged in 2013, at no expense to taxpayers. Next year's dredging project will allow the Port to accommodate even larger ships with more cargo. Dredging will also create the depth needed for the new third berth on the East face of Pier 2.

The dredging will be done by Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Co., an Illinois-based company whose recent project sites include the Boston Harbor and Corpus Christie, TX. Dredging at Pier 2 is expected to cost \$3.6 million, funded in full by the 2016 bond.

In advance of the dredging, we worked closely with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management and the R.I. Coastal Resource Management Council to ensure strict compliance with all environmental regulations and guidelines. This included extensive pre-dredge surveys and testing of dredge material to ensure its suitability for disposal. The disposal site is monitored by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and is designed to have minimal impacts on marine activity in the area.

Meanwhile, we've worked diligently to ensure that activity at the Port of Davisville continues at the usual pace throughout the construction process. The sequence of dredging has been carefully coordinated to ensure that two berths at the Port remain open to incoming vessels at all times.

Over the past 15 years, the Port of Davisville has grown rapidly into one of the top ten auto importers in North America, and a gateway to markets throughout New England. With this next phase of renovation and expansion at Pier 2, Rhode Island will continue its investment in critical infrastructure, ensuring that Davisville continues to power the region's economy for years to come.

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