

New deal brings container service back to Lewiston

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AP Photo/Elaine Thompson File Loaded container trucks line up at the Port of Seattle in this 2015 file photo. A new arrangement allows containers from the Port of Lewiston, Idaho, to be transported to the ports of Seattle and Tacoma by way of the Port of Morrow, where they are transferred from barges to rail cars.

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container service to Lewiston.

Under the agreement, containers are loaded on Tidewater barges in Lewiston and are unloaded at the Port of Morrow in Boardman, Ore. They then travel by rail to the Port of Tacoma or Seattle before being loaded onto container ships bound for international markets.

“We expect there to be strong demand over the next couple of months,” said David Doeringsfeld, manager of the Port of Lewiston.

The initial shipment was 20 containers, all by one company, he said.

Full containers weigh 58,000 pounds, with 51,000 pounds, or 23.1 metric tons, devoted to product, he said.

Roughly 80 containers will leave Lewiston every other week. As demand increases, the service will shift to weekly, Doeringsfeld said.

“The constraint right now is the availability of heavy haul rail chassis,” Doeringsfeld said. Northwest Container Services is

Container service has reopened at the Port of Lewiston in Lewiston, Idaho, after an eight-month hiatus.

The Port of Lewiston, Idaho, has resumed container service after labor and shipper problems at the Port of Portland halted it eight months ago.

Container shipping lines Hapag-Lloyd of Germany and Hanjin Shipping of South Korea quit calling at the Port of Portland in April, citing long loading and unloading times.

The Port of Portland, Port of Morrow, Tidewater barge company, Northwest Container Services and the Port of Lewiston partnered to return

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At roughly \$1,400 per container, the new option is more expensive than barge service directly to Portland but less expensive than using trucks, Doeringsfeld said.

Shipping by truck to the port of Seattle or Tacoma costs roughly \$1,600 to \$1,800 per container. Shipping directly to Portland cost about \$850 per container.

Of the 99 ports in the Pacific Northwest, only Seattle and Tacoma export containers, Doeringsfeld said.

“We’re hopeful once manager-labor relations are resolved in Portland that steamship lines again provide service,” he said. “Until that happens, this at least provides exporters alternative transportation.”

The shipment of peas and lentils was particularly impacted. The industry ships roughly 55,000 to 60,000 metric tons of peas and lentils each year, said Tim McGreevy, CEO of the USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council.

When container service stopped at the Port of Portland, that cargo was trucked to the ports of Seattle and Tacoma, increasing road congestion and costs, McGreevy said.

The supply of trucks is small and the cost is higher, and many steamship lines accept containers only three to five days before the ship sails, Doeringsfeld said.

“Clearly it’s good news that they have found at least a partial solution to this issue,” McGreevy said. “We are happy with this solution, even though it would be nice to have full container service back at the Port of Portland. But that’s maybe a way off.”

The industry will continue to push for the return of container service to Portland, McGreevy said.

“This is a good first step, and we are looking forward to seeing how this works out. We are supportive of at least some movement that brings container service back to the Port of Lewiston,” he said.

