



International trade likely to flow faster after major recovery

BY ZACHARY S. FAGENSON

The gears of Miami's international trade engine seem well oiled to remain an important part of the region's economy, but it's not the only, or even the most important, part of international commerce, experts argue.

Trade through the Miami Customs District, which stretches from Port St. Lucie to the Keys, made more than a full recovery in 2010, registering \$95.4 billion. That's well past the \$90.2 billion in 2008, prior to recession hitting the sector.



Jerry Haar

That susceptibility to economic trends, however, is a key concern for

Miami's economy, says Jerry Haar, an associate dean and professor at Florida International University's College of Business.

"Are we absolute best transshipment center that we can possibly be in providing cost-effective, world-class services to exporters, importers and business facilitators?" he asked. "I think those are the only questions that count."

"If we do that, that means we will do great during good times and less poor than many other ports during bad times," he added.

The Port of Miami, one of the



Photo by Maxine Usdan

Port of Miami is preparing for larger ships, rail link to Hialeah and Miami Access Tunnel to Watson Island.

region's key international business drivers, in recent months has seemed the recipient of good fortune. It received federal dollars to restart the Florida East Coast rail track back to the Hialeah railyard being built out into a potentially massive logistics center by Flagler.

Sitting in traffic on the MacArthur Causeway you can tell work on the billion-dollar Miami Access Tunnel to link Dodge Island to downtown is well underway.

Finally, Gov. Rick Scott answered many prayers upon announcing the state would put up

the remaining \$77 million necessary to dredge the port's south channel to 50 feet.

While those projects, once complete, will work to Miami's advantage, the region will have to work doubly hard to ensure it remains relevant as a trade hub.

"Historically, in the last decade or two the advantage Miami had is that we had all the flights and the American legal system," said WorldCity President Ken Roberts. "As Latin America continues to grow, prosper [and] become better educated, I think those two key advantages will diminish in im-

portance."

Another concern is that the new, large ships moving through the expanded Panama Canal will be able to bypass ports like Miami.

That situation, however, may not be set in stone.

"I think where you take the business from is Los Angeles, Long Beach," Mr. Roberts continued. "There's any number of ports both on the East Coast as well as the Gulf Coast that understand that LA, Long Beach is having a hard time with much more throughput."

Most of that cargo volume

comes from Asia, he added, and with an expanded Panama Canal, Asian shippers may opt to bypass West Coast ports to drop goods off closer to markets in the east.

What will also be relevant is if Miami can establish relationships with growing economies that will want access to Latin America.

"The opportunity will be for Miami to connect Greece, Turkey, Vietnam, wherever it might be, to Latin America," Mr. Roberts said.

Meanwhile, Dr. Haar of FIU said trade is often undeservedly eyed as the barometer of international business.

"Trade and its importance to us is not the whole ball of wax," he said. "Trade ebbs and flows, but a group of Brazilian orthodontists decides to build a strip mall near Doral that has 38 stores and applies 20 people per store

"The multiplier that generates is far more important than trade to Miami today," he added.

Dr. Haar made a point not to downplay the importance of trade but said it needs to be looked at alongside all forms of international business to properly benchmark its impact.

"Of the five dimensions of international commerce we only look at one, trade, and that's wrong," he argued. "In terms of employment revenue and the multiplier effect, trade is no more important and perhaps even less so than foreign direct investment."

Employers planning to hire 13% more college grads of 2011

BY JACQUELYN WEINER

Employment outlook is brightening for soon-to-be college graduates, with employers looking to hire 13.5% more Class of 2011 bachelor's graduates than the previous class, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' "Job Outlook 2011."

However, competition remains thick and companies are increasingly picky with who they hire, advisors at local universities say.

"It becomes more a means of not just hiring someone because of their degree, but hiring on a comprehensive level," said Harold Clayton, associate director of the Career Services Office at Florida International University.

In addition to skills and education, employers are seeking hires with flexibility and the right attitude, he said, looking to avoid applicants with a sense of entitlement.

Many employers also want workers who are willing to relocate, he said, which can be particularly challenging for Miamians reluctant to leave their family or cultural connection to the area.

Many students are "somewhat wary

of moving out of sunny South Florida," Mr. Clayton said.

And with more jobseekers in the market, more employers are using grade point average to whittle down applicant pools.

More than three out of four companies in the National Association of Colleges and Employers survey said they are using grade-point averages to screen candidates, higher than ever before.

Most candidates use 3.0 as the cut off, according to the survey.

Employers are also scrutinizing applicants "by weighing a wide variety of attributes more heavily this year," according to the survey.

Top qualities sought include problem-solving skills, being team oriented, dealing well with conflict and a sense of humor, said Christian Garcia, director of the Toppel Career Center at the University of Miami.

Although "not necessarily things learned through the classroom," he said, employers want to ensure new hires will fit into the company culture.

Overall, employers are looking to hire more entry-level employees, according to the National Association of Colleges

and Employers survey, although Southeast hires trailed the national average with a projected 8.3% increase in hiring of recent college graduates.

The West topped the other regions with a 23.5% year-over-year increase in hiring of new graduates.

As for sectors, business, engineering and technical-field bachelor's degrees like computer sciences are in the highest demand, according to the survey.

Education and architecture sectors are still hurting, but health care and finance are picking up, Mr. Garcia said.

"Our accounting majors get snatched up really quickly."

Also cutting back employment of new graduates is the federal government, Mr. Garcia said.

Federal government recruiting at colleges was on the rise since the early 2000s, he said, but is now declining.

"We're seeing a huge decrease in those organizations coming to recruit."

Mr. Clayton is also seeing the business and engineering fields increasing openings, evidenced through postings on Florida International University's online job bank.

Science, technology and healthcare

are also doing better, he said.

One field he's seeing students leave is communications, he said, with communications majors using their transferable skills in other fields.

Another big employer in South Florida now cutting back is local governments, said John Moriarty, interim director of career services with Barry University.

"The local governments are not hiring," Mr. Moriarty said. "That's a big void still in the economy."

In contrast to Mr. Garcia's take on government hiring, Mr. Moriarty said federal government continues to be a major recruiter at its career fairs, including Barry's most recent fair Monday.

"They're still hiring and they said they've got plenty of openings," Mr. Moriarty said.

While health care is touted as a growth industry, local hiring in those fields is "still down from a few years ago," he said, held back by protracted budgets.

As for Miami-Dade's big sectors, tourism is picking up hiring, he said, while construction, real estate and development continue to lag.

"It's probably going to be a while before those come back."