

Current Statistics ♦ April 2006

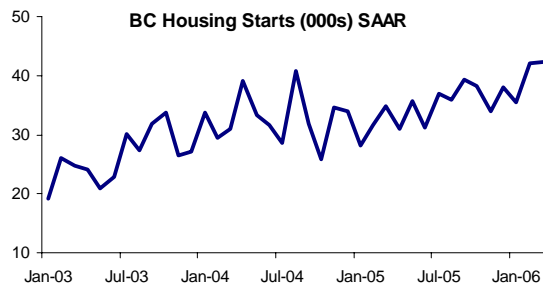
- **The value of building permits issued by BC municipalities increased 11.2% (*seasonally adjusted*) in February.** Non-residential building projects (+20.3%) fuelled the climb, but planned spending on residential projects was also up (+7.0%). Victoria (+19.9%) posted the strongest growth among BC's census metropolitan areas, but intentions for building projects in Abbotsford (-37.8%) were substantially lower than in January. In Vancouver, permits rose 5.1%.

Nationally, permits rose 3.6%, on the strength of a 14.4% increase in planned construction of non-residential buildings. BC was one of the largest contributors to the Canadian increase in the non-residential sector.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **The number of housing starts in the province inched up 0.2% (*seasonally adjusted*) in March, following a considerable 18.6% jump in the previous month.** Nationally, starts were up 4.0%, on the strength of robust building activity in five provinces. Increases ranged from 9.3% in Alberta to 30.5% in Nova Scotia. PEI (-63.2%) and Newfoundland (-45.5%) posted the biggest declines.

Data Source: CMHC



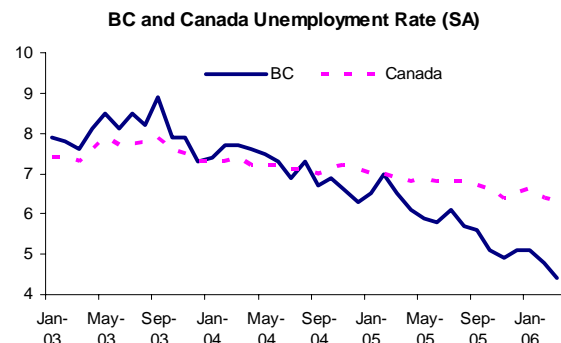
- **British Columbia's unemployment rate continued to fall in March, dropping 0.4 percentage points to a new thirty-year-low of 4.4% (*seasonally adjusted*).** Among the regions,

only Alberta (3.4%) and Manitoba (4.2%) had a lower incidence of unemployment in March. BC was not the only jurisdiction setting new records. Canada's unemployment rate (6.3%) was also at a thirty-year low.

The improvement in the unemployment rate came as the province recorded the strongest job growth (+0.6%) since November. The labour force expanded by 5,700 people (+0.2%), but with a net gain of 13,100 jobs, there were more than enough positions available for them to fill.

Historically, four percent has been pegged as the natural rate of unemployment—the rate at which the labour market is in balance (there is neither an excess supply of, nor demand for, labour). A further decline in the jobless rate could mean that employers in the province will begin to face labour shortages as the supply of workers can't keep up with the demand.

Data Source: Statistics Canada



- **The number of regular Employment Insurance (EI) recipients in BC decreased 1.6% (*seasonally adjusted*) to 44,840 in January.** Nationally, there were 499,710 EI beneficiaries, up 1.2% from December 2005.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **British Columbia's year-over-year inflation rate edged up to 1.8% in March.** Energy products (+5.4%) continued to put inflationary pressure on the economy, contributing almost half a percentage point to the overall increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Excluding energy, the inflation rate was 1.4%.

Piped gas (+15.0%) continued to take a bigger bite out of household budgets, and home insurance premiums (+5.2%) and property taxes (+6.3%) were also more expensive. However, modest increases in the price of electricity and fuel oil (both +0.5%) helped moderate shelter prices, which rose 2.6% overall. Owned accommodation cost 3.2% more than in March 2005, while the price of rented accommodation was up 0.3%.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **Nationally, energy (+7.4%), transportation (+3.5%) and shelter (+3.5%) all contributed to a 2.2% rise in the overall price level.** Saskatchewan (+1.7%) was the only province where prices increased less than in BC. In Alberta, the average inflation rate was 3.2%, the highest in the country.

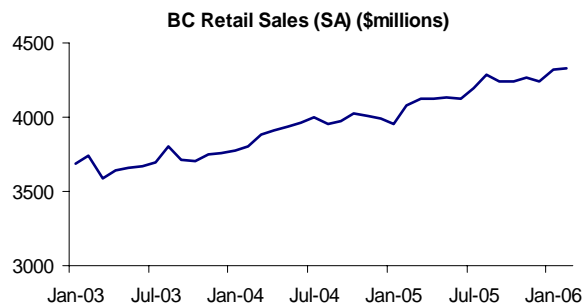
Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **Sales by wholesalers continued to seesaw, dropping off 3.2% (seasonally adjusted) in February after growing 2.4% in the previous month.** Canadian sales were off 1.1%, with seven provinces posting declines.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **Sales by BC retailers stalled (+0.1%, seasonally adjusted) in February, after posting a solid 2.0% increase at the beginning of the year.** Retailers of general merchandise, clothing & accessories, automotive products and furniture, home furnishings & electronics all saw sales drop in February, while sales by food and building supplies retailers advanced. Retail sales were lacklustre across the country, edging up just 0.3% overall, as sales were flat or dropped in six provinces.

Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats



- **Shipments of goods produced by British Columbia manufacturers slipped (-3.4%, seasonally adjusted) in February, following a modest gain in January (+1.1%).** Durable manufacturers saw notable declines (-5.9%) in the value of shipments, mostly due to weakness in the wood industry (-10.1%). Fabricated metals (-6.2%), non-metallic minerals (-6.4%), and transportation equipment (-7.4%) also posted significant declines. Driven by an increase in the value of paper shipments (+4.7%), non-durable goods managed to inch up (+0.3%) despite slips in other large manufacturing sectors such as chemicals (-7.7%) and food (-2.8%).

Across the nation, manufacturing shipments shrank (-2.2%) for the second consecutive month. With the exception of Newfoundland (+1.8%), shipments were down in all provinces, with Saskatchewan (-12.1%), New Brunswick (-8.4%) and PEI (-7.9%) posting the biggest declines.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

