

Current Statistics ♦ April 2007

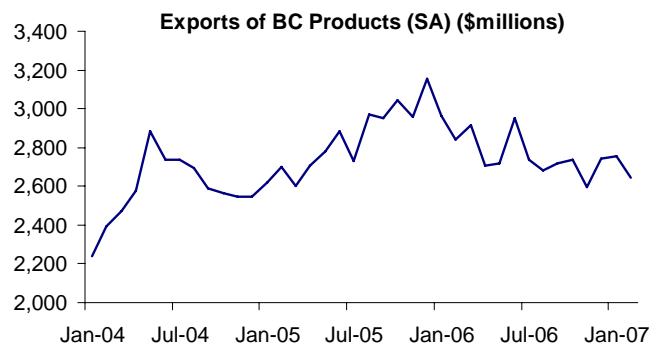
- **British Columbia's unemployment rate fell to a new low of 3.9% (seasonally adjusted) in March, as job growth (+0.6%) continued to outpace the increase in the number of people who were either working or looking for work (+0.4%).** BC's net gain of 12,500 jobs in March was second only to Quebec.

Public sector employment advanced 1.1% (seasonally adjusted), while the number of people working in the private sector rose 0.3%. Self-employment was up 0.8% in March. Part-time workers made big gains (+3.5%), but there were fewer people with full-time jobs (-0.2%).

The youth (aged 15 to 24) unemployment rate dropped to 7.3%, the second-lowest level in more than 30 years (the rate had reached 6.7% in November 2005). For more experienced workers (aged 25 and over), the jobless rate was a very low 3.2%. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **BC product exports fell 4.1% (seasonally adjusted) in February.** The value of industrial & consumer (-14.1%) and forest (-9.1%) products shipped from the province dropped sharply, but energy exports soared (+15.0%), marking the third consecutive month of price-driven growth. US-bound exports were off 1.2%, as shipments of industrial & consumer (-2.0%) and forest (-11.2%) products south of the border declined. Together, these accounted for about 55% of the total value of exports to the US. Energy exports south of the border continued to surge, jumping 18.9%.

The overall decline in exports was largely due to weak overseas markets (-8.7%). Although shipments of most products were down substantially, the value of energy exports (+9.5%) bounced back after slumping in January. *Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats*



- **Housing starts in the province rebounded (+9.9%, seasonally adjusted) in March, after plunging in February (-16.1%).** With the exception of Nova Scotia (-47.7%) and Newfoundland (-34.5%), new home building activity was up or unchanged in all provinces, ranging from 0.2% in Ontario to 58.6% in New Brunswick. *Data Source: CMHC*

- **Room revenues in the province fell 3.2% (seasonally adjusted) in December.** A slump in Mainland/Southwest (-5.8%), which accounts for over half of all room revenue in the province, was the main reason for the decline. Revenues were also down in Northeast (-14.7%) and Nechako (-1.9%). Other regions of the province fared better, with Kootenay (+5.8%) seeing the strongest growth. *Data Source: BC Stats*

- **The value of building permits issued by BC municipalities fell 22.4% (seasonally adjusted) in February.** Planned spending on residential projects plummeted (-27.2%), and permits for non-residential projects were also down substantially (-12.6%). Abbotsford (-41.1%) posted the most significant decline among BC's census metropolitan areas (CMAs), but intentions for building projects in Vancouver (-34.4%) and Victoria (-19.3%) were also markedly lower than in January. Kelowna (+35.5%) was the only area to see an increase in the value of permits in February. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

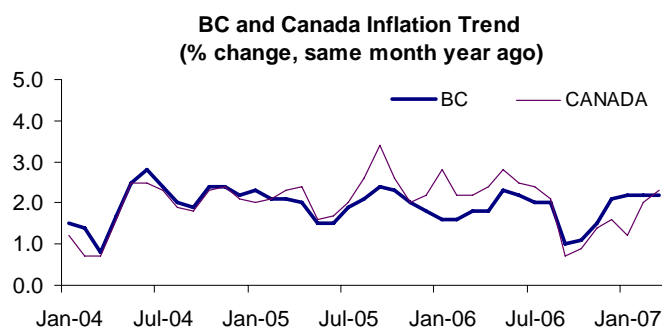
• **British Columbia's year-over-year inflation rate remained at 2.2% in March, marking the fourth straight month of stability in the overall inflation rate.** Energy products (+5.4%) continued to put inflationary pressure on the economy, contributing a third of a percentage point to the overall increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Excluding energy, the inflation rate was 1.9%.

Transportation costs rose 3.6%, largely due to higher prices for gasoline (+10.1%). Gas prices were a factor in the increased cost of operating a private vehicle (+6.8%), but appear to have had less of an impact on public transportation (+1.7%).

Fuel oil (+6.1%) continued to take a bigger bite out of household budgets, and home insurance premiums (+4.9%) and maintenance & repairs (+3.4%) were also more expensive. However, declining prices for piped gas (-8.2%) helped moderate shelter prices, which rose 2.0% overall. Owned accommodation cost 2.7% more than in March of last year, while rental accommodation was up 0.8%.

BC consumers faced higher prices for most types of goods except clothing & footwear (-0.7%) in March. Food prices jumped 4.0%, reflecting significant increases in the cost of food purchased from stores (+5.0%). Prices for fresh fruit (+15.3%) and vegetables (+18.0%) continued to be affected by the volatile weather on the US West Coast earlier in the year.

Data Source: Statistics Canada



• **Shipments of goods manufactured in the province dropped 1.4% (seasonally adjusted) between January and February.** Producers of durable products (-1.6%) saw shipments fall for the fourth time in five months. Shipments by wood producers dropped (-4.6%) as manufacturers continued to face low prices for softwood and other wood products. BC producers of machinery (-3.2%), computer & electronic products (-5.1%) and transportation equipment (-6.9%) also showed notable declines. However, manufacturers of primary (+3.2%) and fabricated (+1.7%) metals saw an upturn in February.

On the non-durables side, shipments by the food (-1.0%), plastic & rubber (-3.0%), chemical (-6.2%) and beverage (-6.6%) industries were down in February, but paper manufacturers posted a third straight monthly gain (+1.4%) Overall, non-durables shipments were down 1.2%.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

• **Sales by wholesalers edged up (+0.4% seasonally adjusted) in February, marking the fourth straight month of growth.** Canadian sales were 0.8% higher, with five provinces posting increases.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

• **Retailers in the province posted a modest 0.4% (seasonally adjusted) sales increase in February.** Pharmacies, building and outdoor home supply stores, and food stores bounced back after slipping in January. The automotive sector did not fare as well, as gas stations and retailers of used cars and RVs saw receipts fall. Despite a modest increase in the number of new vehicles sold in the province in February, receipts for new car dealers were down slightly, suggesting that purchasers were buying less expensive vehicles. Retailers of clothing and accessories posted relatively steady growth, but general merchandisers saw only a marginal increase in the value of sales.

Data Source: Statistics Canada