

## **Port futures under scrutiny**

The future of 'inland' ports like Hamburg and Antwerp, as major deepsea container hubs is up for discussion at Coastlink's annual conference in Dunkirk on 24/25 September.

The Coastlink network, which is chaired by David Cheslin, is an association of companies committed to expanding the role shortsea shipping plays in transporting containers around Europe.

The case for continually dredging deeper the approaches to ports like Hamburg and Antwerp is becoming harder to justify both on financial and environmental grounds, according to Aad Koolard of Samskip Logistics.

Koolard also notes that deepsea lines are increasingly choosing Rotterdam rather than Hamburg as a transshipment centre for their Baltic traffic, a trend he predicts will continue as Rotterdam expands its capacity and offers more dedicated berths to the major carriers.

Despite the current downturn in overall container traffic, which is hitting ports and carriers hard, Coastlink reports that interest in shortsea shipping has never been stronger. It attributes this to a number of factors including shippers seeking cheaper and more sustainable transport solutions and innovation on the part of shortsea shipping companies and port operators.