

Coastlink plans shortsea conference in Antwerp

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Coastlink is committed to expanding the role shortsea shipping plays around Europe.

Coastlink is to return to the port city of Antwerp in September for its 2010 Annual Conference. Reflecting its close cooperation with the Antwerp Port Authority, the event will be held on 14 and 15 September in the Havenhuis, the authority's headquarters building on Entrepotkaai.

Coastlink is an association of companies committed to expanding the role shortsea shipping plays in transporting containers around Europe.

The conference programme is now being prepared and will reflect the evergrowing geographical range covered by Coastlink, which can today be considered as extending from St Petersburg to Istanbul.

At its 2009 Annual Conference in Dunkerque, significant emphasis was placed on the shortsea trades linking Northern Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa and on the growing importance of reefer traffic in these trades. These two themes will be revisited with specific attention being paid also to Iberia.

Being in Antwerp, attention will also be directed at the Benelux ports and the various shortsea and feeder activities that serve them. Despite the global downturn in trade, ports such as Antwerp, Rotterdam and Zeebrugge have recorded a number of successes and investment continues, especially in the provision of better hinterland links.

Discussing developments in and around Antwerp, a port authority spokesman said,

'Within the intermodal landscape, major investments are taking place. This is enabling the transfer of more cargo to barge and rail modes so as to achieve significant environmental and cost savings without sacrificing reliability.

'Existing rail terminals are being expanded and new facilities are being built. Better communication and the opening of the rail market create interesting opportunities for rail while barge operators are restructuring their services and looking into the possibilities to improve the performance of their product.

'Port organisations have always recognised the importance of good intermodal links. The Antwerp Port Authority is no exception and is investing in realising master plans for rail and barge in order to improve the modal split in favour of these modes of transport.

'Inland waterway links have always been important for Benelux ports, especially with their central location in Europe. What is the future for intermodal transport by barge? What efforts are necessary to create an ideal modal split? Serious issues for ports and shortsea operators alike, rail and barge operators and inland terminal operators will discuss these at Coastlink's Annual Conference.'

Other topics to be discussed include the changing route patterns taking place in North Europe, including the growth of Rotterdam as a hub for the Baltic, a trend which has impacted on the North German ports of Hamburg and Bremerhaven. Is this reversible? And as port congestion fades into distant memory, Coastlink will ask how shortsea and feeder operators have benefited and whether, if port congestion returns, we might learn from past experience.