

Coastlink announces key dates for 2009

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The European independent shortsea shipping organization, Coastlink, is arranging two major meetings in 2009.

The first will be a summer conference in the city of Tallinn in Estonia on June 4th and 5th, while the second, Coastlink's Annual Conference, will take place in the French city of Dunkirk on September 24th and 25th.

Further smaller Coastlink events linked to specific subjects will also take place during 2009.

Coastlink will also be represented with a stand at Multimodal 2009, the UK's largest logistics and freight transportation event, which takes place in Birmingham on April 28th – 30th April.

Coastlink Tallinn is being staged in close association with the Port of Tallinn and the Baltic Ports Organization. It will focus on bringing together shippers, shipping lines and ports to establish the most appropriate maritime/intermodal solutions for the routing of volumes transiting Europe. As ever, Coastlink's goal is to see more traffic transferred from Europe's crowded roads onto shortsea shipping and intermodal services.

According to Gavin Roser, Coastlink's deputy chairman, cost effective solutions are being demanded by shippers and consumers alike: "In the current economic climate, this is now more critical than ever. No matter which sector of the industry we are in, we must all direct our efforts to sustaining our own businesses whilst contributing to a competitive European economy."

He added that most major manufacturers and retailers are committed to environmentally friendly transport policies but the cold reality is that they will not pay more to be green. Shortsea shipping must be competitive with alternative forms of transport.

At Coastlink's 2008 Annual Conference held in September, shippers and carriers made it clear that discussion, consultation and cooperation between all parties involved in the supply chain was more important than ever.

"Coastlink encourages shippers to consider shortsea shipping solutions," said Roser. He said that shippers and service providers need to discuss the development of transport solutions. It isn't enough to put out a tender based on past ways of doing things and demand the lowest price; that does not result in improved systems as it closes the door on innovation.

"With the aim of taking this process one stage further, Coastlink is establishing a working group representing shortsea operators, shippers, ports and other relevant parties. It will investigate the practicalities of making cooperation happen; at the moment, it seems that everyone agrees that it is a good idea but few people actually put it into practice. The working party will then report to the conference in June.

Roser says that amongst the apparent barriers is the risk of legal action should competitors be seen to be talking together: "This is a major issue for shortsea as ships need large volumes of cargo to be viable; cooperation between large shippers, be they brewers, retailers, car manufacturers or whatever, can deliver the critical mass that makes a service viable."

Other topics to be covered include the role of ports in supply chain corridors west/east/west, a subject high on the agenda of the Baltic ports; an update on fuel issues impacting on shipping and retailers/consumers; changing feeder patterns in the Baltic as a direct result of the upheaval in the deepsea trades; and the potential for more movements of reefer containers on multimodal transport systems.

With the outlook for 2009 being so uncertain, it is far too early to formulate the program for Coastlink's Annual Conference in Dunkirk. Nevertheless Coastlink's chairman David Cheslin urges potential attendees to put the relevant dates in their diaries: "We can guarantee that this September event, organized in association with the Port of Dunkerque, will cover issues of the moment and that the debate between delegates and the panelists, always a feature of Coastlink events, will be vigorous and at times amusing."