

Coastlink ponders future of "river ports such as Hamburg and Antwerp"

A heated debate is expected in Dunkirk, the host port for Coastlink's 2009 annual conference on 24 and 25 September

Do 'inland' ports such as Hamburg and Antwerp, have a long term future as major deepsea container hubs?

This provocative question could generate a lively debate in Dunkirk – a deep water port dwarfed by Antwerp and Hamburg– at the upcoming Coastlink conference.

Aad Koolard of Samskip Logistics believes that the case for continually dredging deeper the approaches to ports such as Antwerp and Hamburg is becoming harder to justify both on financial and environmental grounds.

He argues 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.