

Marseilles Fos acts on port reform transfers

Leading French cargo port Marseilles Fos is preparing an appeal for candidates to run the Graveleau container terminal at Fos under the 2008 port reform law requiring the transfer of some cargo-handling operations to private stevedores.

The port said it was obliged to act after the national evaluation commission for port reform noted the failure of existing operators Eurofos and Seayard to reach agreement on setting up a joint company.

The announcement of the appeal – to be launched “soon” – came after a meeting of the supervisory board, when members were advised of the commission’s initial reactions to four dossiers delivered in June reporting on the private transfer process at Graveleau and three other port terminals.

Regarding the Mourepiane container terminal at Marseilles, the board heard that the commission’s observations were expected by mid-December following a request for additional information.

The board was also told that the commission supported transfer proposals for two dry bulk terminals handling cereals and ore at Fos. The port authority now has up to six months to finalise operating agreements with the stevedoring companies – Carfos, which operates at both terminals, and Stockfos, a Carfos subsidiary at the ore facility.

In addition, the board noted the port management’s objective of setting up a liquid bulks subsidiary during 2010 in association with other partners.

Green light for tariffs freeze

The Marseilles Fos supervisory board has approved a freeze on 2010 port tariffs to support customers “in a strained economic context” and to enhance the port’s competitiveness.

Tariffs are being held at 2009 levels across all cargo and passenger activities, including the container, oil and bulk sectors. Rental charges for warehouses and yards are also being held. In addition, access to the port rail network – currently charged at EUR31 per train - will be free.

The only general price increase will be for utilities, with an average rise of 4% for electricity, water and telecommunications.

Charges for the use of shiprepair facilities are being raised by 1% - less than the rate of inflation – while the yacht repair sector will see a 5% increase.

The port acknowledged that 2009 had been a difficult year and that the tariffs freeze would impact on earnings in the year ahead, but said it was acting to encourage a return to economic growth in 2010.

Major rail upgrade on horizon at Marseilles

Fos

Development and financing strategy for major upgrades to the port rail network have been agreed in principle by the Marseilles Fos supervisory board. Total costs are estimated at EUR250-300 million over the next ten years.

The main management proposals under consideration included:

the rapid completion of projects already under way within the 2007-2013 regional development plan to improve rail access to the Marseilles and Fos harbour areas

the launch of network modernisation projects such as the addition of two new rail lines serving the Graveleau container terminal at Fos

the development of combined transport terminals at the port's container facilities and at the Lavera petro-chemical complex. Within the next few months, the port is to seek tenders regarding Mourepiane container terminal in Marseilles and will also start studies relating to Graveleau

completion of a current study into a road/rail terminal serving trailer traffic in Marseilles

The board gave the go-ahead for further studies and called for a timetable and financing details for each project.

It also agreed in principle that the port's existing 110km rail network should be extended by 60km in a project to enhance services in the Fos port-industrial zone. In addition, the board requested research into appointing a rail operator to handle local traffic flows by 2010, as recommended under the national rail freight policy presented to government in September.

The port said its rail plans responded to this policy, which aims for a modal shift from road, as well as the French port reform requirement for internal rail systems to be managed by port authorities, which Marseilles Fos implemented in September 2008.

It also stressed that, under its strategic plan to 2013 published earlier this year, rail is scheduled to take 30% of multimodal traffic compared with 13.7% in 2008. Sixteen proposals towards this aim were presented by the port's development board in September and were noted at the supervisory board meeting.

Tough ten months despite deepsea box boom

Cargo throughput at Marseilles Fos totalled 68.8 million tonnes to the end of October, a fall of 16% on the first ten months of 2008, but passenger carryings rose 5% on the back of booming cruise business.

The oil and dry bulk sectors each finished the period some 6MT down on last year, while general cargo dropped by 1MT despite 5% container growth to 741,548 teu - a trend shared only by Valencia within Europe.

Deepsea container volumes via Fos rose 25% to 589,668 teu - with ship calls rising 55% to 789 - but overall growth was pegged by the 35% decline in intra-Mediterranean trades through Marseilles, which handled 151,880 teu.

Container tonnage rose 4% to 7.3MT and helped general cargo to some 12MT for the period. This was down 7%, with ro-ro finishing on 3.3MT (-11%) - largely due to new import restrictions in Algeria - and conventional trades falling 37% to 1.4MT despite a gradual revival in steel products shipments following the re-commissioning of a local steelworks.

This also triggered a slight increase in the steel industry's demand for raw materials, but dry bulks still ended 48% down on 6.2MT. With chemicals industry demand also slow to recover, liquid bulks reduced the year-on-year deficit by just one point on around 2.6MT (-16%), although biofuels continued to bolster the sector with a 44% increase to 0.85MT.

Oil and gas volumes fell 11% to total just over 48MT. Crude imports finished 15% worse on 32.9MT, partly because deliveries to Swiss and German refineries were down 20% to 7.75MT after a pipeline fracture that occurred in August and will not be fully restored until 2010. With refined products down 4% to 9.9MT and LPG falling 6% to 1.5MT, LNG remained the only growth trade - up 16% to 3.8MT and set for further gains next year as the Fos Cavaou terminal comes on stream.

Passenger throughput rose 5% to 1.945 million, marked by cruise numbers gaining 26% to just over 619,000 passengers.

Ferry lines serving Corsica, Algeria and Tunisia carried 1.326 passengers for an overall increase of 4%.

Italian repairer wins Marseilles dry docks

tender

Genoa-based shiprepairer San Giorgio del Porto has won the bidding to operate number 8 and 9 dry docks at French port Marseilles-Fos.

The port authority chose the Italian firm following a call for tenders launched last July after the judicial liquidation of former concession holder Union Naval Marseille.

Negotiations are now under way on an agreement defining conditions for occupation of the site - which includes adjoining buildings and workshops - with the aim of resuming operations by the end of March 2010

The authority stressed that its decision was based on the objective of choosing a repairer with recent experience of high added-value ships in order to re-establish a high-performance facility in the port.

Marseilles set for solar power

The Marseilles Fos port authority has named two successful bidders under a call to tender for the installation of rooftop solar power systems that by 2012 will generate more electricity than is consumed in the Marseilles harbour area.

One lot involves a surface total of 65,000 sq m on 11 buildings in the north of the harbour – the largest being a warehouse with a 23,000 sq m roof - and has been awarded to a consortium of NUR Energie, Agence Archi-ecture, SPIE Sud-Est and Solar Enviro Partners.

The other lot has been awarded to EDF Energies Nouvelles and relates to a 40,000 sq m surface total on nine sites in the centre and south of the area.

Following negotiations on the contract details, work is scheduled to start by next summer for completion by late 2011. The port has stressed that normal activity must not be interrupted.

With solar panels on more than 100,000 sq m of roof, the project is among the most important of its kind in the region. The combined power output of 15MWh (mega watts per hour) will exceed user requirements and confirms the port's strategy of seeking renewable energy solutions.

For port images, see Espace presse/Phototheque at www.marseille-port.fr