

Marseilles Fos containers up 16% to end-May

Cargo handled at leading French port Marseilles Fos to the end of May reached 36.6 million tonnes - up 6% on the first five months last year – with container throughput contributing a 16% increase in both tonnage and units.

The container total of 421,143 teu included 309,038 teu (+10%) at the deepsea Fos terminal – its best performance for three years – and a 37% rise to 112,105 teu in the mainly intra-Mediterranean trades handled at Marseilles.

Container tonnage of 4.1MT led general cargo to 6.7MT (+18%). Ro-ro traffic advanced 3% to 1.6MT on the strength of North Africa trades, with trailer numbers up 1% on 72,396. Conventional traffic of almost 1MT maintained the 68% year-on-year surge due to revived demand for steel products.

Meanwhile steel industry demand for raw materials saw dry bulks leap 110% to 5MT. Chemicals industry traffic drove liquid bulks up by 37% to 1.47MT, which included 0.43MT (+27%) in biofuels.

Oil volumes declined 8% to 23.3MT as crude imports continued to suffer from technical refinery shutdowns at home and abroad. Pipeline deliveries to Switzerland and Germany slumped 27% to 3.2MT and imports for local refineries fell 10% to 11.5MT. Crude throughput should improve as the Total facility returns to full capacity following a plant breakdown last July. In addition, a new crude berth that came on stream in late April has restored full capacity at the Fos terminal.

Refined oil products rose 3% to 5.4MT, LPG was stable on 0.89MT and LNG soared 19% to 2.3MT following the April 1 start of commercial operations at the Fos-Cavaou methane terminal.

Passenger numbers for the five months rose 11% to almost 543,000. Despite increases of 15% for Algeria and 11% for Tunisia, ferry carryings slipped 3% to 328,000 with Corsica down 10% on 202,000. Cruise numbers reflected the growth of ‘home port’ calls with a 43% increase to 214,000.

New operator for Marseilles Fos rail network

Following a call for tenders last July, the Marseilles Fos port authority has chosen a group led by SNCF subsidiary VFLI to operate and maintain the port’s 110km internal rail system.

VFLI will take overall responsibility for network management, SNCF engineering arm Inexia will be in charge of relevant studies, while maintenance will be carried out by RDT 13, part of the regional transport authority, and Eurovia subsidiary ETF. Following a preparatory phase, the group will take over running the network from SNCF at the beginning of next year.

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Meanwhile the port has been carrying out an overhaul of the Fos rail network - due for completion in July - with four projects involving 10km of upgraded and 5km of new links.

A EUR5m new installation for the Fos 2XL container terminal has been under way since the port finished construction of the quays and yards in April.

Rail lines at the Graveleau service area, where containers are stored and repaired, have been extended by 200 metres to more than double reception capacity.

Renovation of a rail link at the ore terminal has provided extra capacity since early June. Eight lines covering 2km at the Tellines cereals terminal have also been renovated and are now about to come on stream after being out of service for some ten years.

Two further works are scheduled under the 2007-2013 regional development plan – modernisation of the Graveleau rail network and the reopening of a link to the Mourepiane container terminal in Marseilles.

Port on show in Shanghai

Fast-expanding container facilities at Marseilles Fos were in the spotlight when the port exhibited at the Transport & Logistics China trade show in Shanghai (June 8-10).

The appearance underlined China's place as the port's top box trades partner after 40% growth in 2009.

Port representatives described how container capacity would rise to 2.5m teu per year from 2011 with the opening of Fos 2XL, where two new terminals will be operated by MSC and the CMA CGM/Dubai Ports venture Ports synergy. They also showcased the Fos 4XL project, due in service from 2017/2018 in partnership with Hutchison Port Holdings.

Further presentations focused on logistics zones including Fos Distriport, where a first phase of 600,000m² of warehousing is in operation, and Feuillane, where home furnishings giant IKEA has established its southern Europe distribution base.

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