

Marseilles Fos completes port reform transfers

The Marseilles Fos port authority has completed the transfer of 410 personnel and various equipment to privatised terminals as required under national port reforms.

The final stage came at the Marseille harbour area's Mourepiane container terminal on June 4, when 41 crane drivers and maintenance staff, four gantries and a mobile crane were assigned to newly-formed Intramar STS. Stevedore Intramar has a 66% stake in the company, with the port authority holding 34%.

Cargo handling at the port is now entirely carried out by private or part-private companies. On May 3, a total of 160 Fos-based personnel were transferred to Eurofos and Seayard at the container terminal and to Carfos at the ore and grain terminals. Six post-Panamax container gantries were also handed over together with cranes and conveyor plant for the dry bulk operations.

This was followed on May 16 with the transfer of 210 personnel, discharge arms and the pipeline network for the Fos and Lavera oil terminals. These are now operated by Fluxel, a specially formed venture between the port authority and three private industrial partners.

Under the national reforms, the port authority's overriding future focus will be on development and infrastructure. In this respect the executive board hosted a meeting on May 24 to seek further backing from its public funding partners.

National, regional and city authorities contributed 25% of the EUR560m required under the port's 2005-2010 investment plan for projects such as the Fos 2XL container, Tellines cereals and Marseilles passenger terminals.

The port now wants support for its 2009-2013 strategic plan, which budgets EUR600m for developments including Fos 4XL, the Distriport and Feuillane logistics zones, an enhanced rail network and enlarged access for the new generation of ferries and cruise vessels.

Executive chairman Jean-Claude Terrier says: "Our ambition is to offer world class infrastructure and leading-edge multimodal logistics facilities. Strong investment partnerships, particularly with local authorities, are essential in helping us to develop port traffic and employment opportunities."

Three private partners for Fluxel

The Fluxel board held its first meeting on May 13 to mark the company's official constitution as the new operator of the Fos and Lavera oil terminals.

The Marseilles Fos port authority has a 66% stake in the company since the terminals are deemed to be of national importance, with three private partners holding the balance.

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Global petrochemicals company INEOS, part of a group with existing interests in the Lavera industrial complex, has a 20% stake. SPSE – responsible for South European Pipeline deliveries to Switzerland and Germany – has 10%, while the remaining 4% is held by inland waterways products carrier CFT, which serves the Rhone-Saone corridor.

The port authority has the discretion to seek new partners and reduce its share while maintaining a majority stake.

Green light for LNG growth

The companies behind two proposals for methane terminals at Fos have confirmed they are pursuing the projects after receiving official sanction.

Public enquiries were held between September and December last year on plans by Elengy to modernise its 1972-built Fos Tonkin facility and by Fos Faster to construct a new terminal. Earlier this year a national commission reviewed the debate and approved the proposals. The companies have now announced that they are launching detailed studies.

Their decision was welcomed by the Marseilles Fos port authority, which had voiced support for the projects as a further diversification of its oil-dominated energy sector activities.

Both projects are scheduled for completion in 2016. Fos Tonkin capacity would rise to between 4.3 and 5.5 million tonnes of LNG per year while Fos Faster would add an initial 6MT – ahead of a possible extension that would double output.

Together with Elengy's 6.5MT per year Cavaou terminal, which opened last year, LNG throughput at the port would rise to up to 18MT per year by 2017 - compared with 4.6MT in 2009 – and represent more than 10% of the port's total traffic.

Marseilles Fos is the world's third largest oil port. Last year it handled 55MT of oil and oil products, including 5.5MT of LNG.

Oil and cruise sectors beat traffic dip

Cargo throughput at Marseilles Fos to the end of April fell 2% on the first four months last year to 29.2 million tonnes.

General cargo was down 7% at just under 5MT. Container units, worth 60% of the tonnage, reduced a 17% slump in the first quarter but were still 10% adrift for January-April on 297,166 teu. Conventional trades slipped 1% to 0.7MT but ro-ro stayed 3% ahead on 1.4MT.

Oil and gas throughput rose 6% to 20.2MT, other liquid bulks – mainly chemicals – remained 1% down at 1.2MT and dry bulks tumbled 29% to 2.9MT.

Passenger numbers fell 7% to 331,000 overall, with ferry carryings 18% worse on 191,000 but the cruise sector adding 15% for 140,000.

Yang Ming duo in Fos debut

Fos has welcomed the first of two new container ships that Taiwan's Yang Ming has positioned on the MD2 Asia-Mediterranean service – a joint operation with K Line as part of the CKYH alliance that also includes Cosco and Hanjin.

YM Mutuality made her first call on May 26 and will be followed by sistership YM Mobility on June 13. Both newbuilds were completed in April. Their 6,589 teu capacity is 500 teu more than the ships they replace on the service, which has called at Fos since 2000.

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