



Harlingen: once the third-biggest Dutch port but now dwarfed by Rotterdam and Amsterdam, it aims to increase its role in the country's shipping and logistics sector.

# Harlingen harbours ambition

**Port has plan for major expansion to build role as 'northern gateway' while boosting barge services**

FELICITY LONDON

HARLINGEN Seaport was once the third-largest port in the Netherlands and, while its activities may be dwarfed by Rotterdam and Amsterdam today, it has ambitious plans to increase its role in the country's shipping and logistics sector, with modal shift as the central focus.

Located on the Wadden Sea, just outside the IJsselmeer dam, Harlingen has plans for a major expansion seawards to help build its role as the Netherlands' 'northern gateway', with particular focus on links to Scandinavia and the Baltic.

The port is also looking inland, and a €2m (\$2.8m) project to deepen the lock access between Harlingen and the IJsselmeer, due to go ahead before the end of the year, is a key part of this. The port wants to increase its activities as a hub for the country's two major ports; already linked by a twice-weekly container barge from Rotterdam, it is championing a plan for a twice-weekly barge service around the IJsselmeer, to pick up and drop off containers that would otherwise be clogging up the roads between the region around Harlingen and Amsterdam/Rotterdam.

"If we don't do anything, in a few years' time the

Netherlands will be completely full of trucks and everybody will be sitting in traffic queues," says Harlingen port manager Jeroen van den Ende. "We have to think smarter — shippers simply can't turn down the opportunities to transport their cargo in a greener and more cost-efficient way."

Mr van den Ende says many exporters in the area around Harlingen are routinely putting containers on to trucks to join the hard-pressed motorway network to the main ports.

"Through a little bit of planning, they could save money and reduce their carbon footprint by choosing the barge option," he says.

Harlingen handles about 1m tonnes of cargo by sea and 1.5m tonnes by inland waterway; it has set itself a target of 2m and 3m tonnes respectively by 2015, and plans to invest €500m in new facilities and equipment within the next two years.

"We are very optimistic about the future of

***"We are very optimistic about the future of Harlingen. Of course 2009 was a difficult year, but now the phones are ringing again, the economy is building up again, and there are good reasons to be positive"***

***Harlingen port manager Jeroen van den Ende***

Harlingen," says Mr van den Ende. "Of course 2009 was a difficult year, but now the phones are ringing again, the economy is building up again, and there are good reasons to be positive."

Harlingen is a partner in the EU Dryport project, and the barge service project is being pursued as part of its involvement in this initiative. Mr van den Ende says there have been discussions with several barge operators and studies have shown that companies can make savings by putting containers on to barges.

The Dutch towns of Emmen and Coevorden are also pursuing 'hub' ambitions as partners in the Dryport project. Located on the Dutch-German border, on the E233 highway linking Rotterdam and Hamburg, the two municipalities are looking to build on existing dryport operations and want to see the E233 designated as a TEN-T route and 'Green Corridor'.

"That would really put us on the map and would be a big boost to our dryport ambitions," says Emmen business development officer Henk de Jong. "We are proposing a Green Corridor where the use of biofuels, natural gas and electric-powered vehicles is promoted."

Coevorden already has the Europark cross-border industrial site, with the Euroterminal accessible by road, rail and water. The partners want to expand and promote this operation and develop a complementary dryport at Emmen. This would make the most of rail links already in place at the Emmtec Services plant, and there is funding in place for rail upgrades when volumes justify this. ■