Focus on Vessels in the Port of Rotterdam

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY THROUGH PLANNING AND COOPERATION

The Port of Rotterdam is expanding, ship traffic is increasing and competition between ports is intensifying. In order to be the best and most efficient port in Europe, the nautical partners at Rotterdam are strengthening their partnership. Together, they ensure that vessels can sail quickly, easily and safely to and from the port so that shipping companies and cargo owners will continue to choose the Port of Rotterdam in the future.

The partnership is about sharing information about the vessel and its journey. It is about who is responsible for what at each stage of the vessel’s movements. This cooperation, initiated by the Harbour Master, results in the project ‘Focus on Vessels’ that will be completed in 2015.
The need for efficiency improvements is widely recognized

Everyone agrees that shipping delays create knock-on delays in the chain. This might involve planning the navigation channel, planning services for the vessel, or lack of clarity about the availability of quays. These are all problems that can be prevented.

Marius Mersie (Maersk), on behalf of VRC (container agents):
“The reliability of planning agreements between terminals, agents and the harbour coordination centre is vitally important for the efficiency of the Port of Rotterdam as a whole, including the service suppliers in the chain. This also applies to communications about departure and arrival times. Updates in this respect sometimes leave a lot to be desired.”

Daan Verbeek (ILC), on behalf of VRC (agent chemicals tankers):
“As an agent, we are engaged 24/7 in optimizing port visits by our vessels. In doing so we regularly reach the boundaries of our own possibilities. Sometimes, three or four vessels are moored in the Botlek waiting for each other’s berths.”

André van der Kaaij, Smit Towage NW Europe:
“Sometimes we are called up and then find that the vessel isn’t ready, or it’s been decided not to use a tug after all. Better planning and above all communication by all parties involved would help prevent this.”

Jan Hilberding (MOT), on behalf of Committee Wet Bulk Terminals:
“At the moment, the downtime for our terminal between two ships is six hours. That’s because the pilot for the vessel anchored outside the port is ordered at the same time as the pilot for the departing vessel. That may keep the berth occupied unnecessarily.”

Stefan de Graaf, Roeiers Vereeniging Eendracht (boatmen):
“The information we receive is not always reliable. We’d like to know the current plans of others involved, so that we can coordinate our planning activities. A more accurate ETD would reduce waiting times considerably. We are at the end of the chain, so we immediately experience the impact of a delay elsewhere in the chain.”

Philip Beesemer (ECT), on behalf of Society of Rotterdam Terminal Operators (VRTO):
“The terminal is not included in the communication network. We don’t know exactly when a vessel will come in until the last moment. That has a negative impact on the planning of the other vessels moored nearby.”

Ton van der Knaap (EBS), on behalf of Society of Rotterdamse Machinale Overslagbedrijven (VRMO):
“If a vessel doesn’t move to its berth at the last moment, this results not only in unplanned costs for both the vessel, the terminal and recipients, but irritation for all involved.”

Joost Leenhouts, Regional Pilot Association Rotterdam-Rijnmond:
“Planning is difficult. Sometimes it’s not clear when a vessel will moor. And on departure, loading often takes longer and the pilot has to wait.”

René de Vries, (State) Harbour Master of Rotterdam-Rijnmond:
“Let’s be clear, safety is never at risk. But if we continue to work in the same ad hoc way, efficiency will be in danger as the port becomes busier. That’s why we are now working on streamlining the work processes.”

Response from a client of the Port of Rotterdam

Leendert van den Ende, Maritime Efficiency Manager, Shell Europe & Africa:
“As a shipping company, charterer and cargo owner, we are big users of the Port of Rotterdam. The often unnecessary waiting times involve extra costs, but can also create unsafe situations in crowded anchorages and lay by berths.”

Most efficient port

In order to be the most efficient port in Europe, Rotterdam needs reliable traffic planning. The various groups working in the port all have their own planning information. The timely sharing of this information will prevent unnecessary delays for vessels in the port. That benefits both the vessel’s owners, associated service industries and the Port of Rotterdam as a whole. Furthermore, efficient shipping also makes an important contribution to reducing CO₂ emissions and keeping costs down for the shipping industry.
Working together on joint planning

The Port of Rotterdam can only become the most efficient port in Europe if all those involved think and work together. On February 14, 2013 a large number of interested parties agreed on how they would improve cooperation and what initiatives they would jointly support. These included improving the planning of shipping movements, making information more reliable and designating coordination tasks. The Rotterdam Harbour Master led the way in establishing this partnership.

Signatories to the letter of intent

What does the partnership involve?

Information exchange
The growth of the port means that information exchange is increasingly important. Improvements in methods of sharing information between different systems increases the reliability of the information. Rotterdam is developing a Harbour Master Management Information System (HaMIS) which will help harmonise processes in the Port of Rotterdam between institutions, companies, pilots and other stakeholders.

Agreements
Agreements are aimed at preventing unnecessary delays for vessels in the port. It is helpful to limit the number of rules and regulations, and those that exist must be clear. That makes it easier to work together and clarifies everybody’s roles and responsibilities in the whole process. For example, agreement has been reached for an exact definition of ETAs (Estimated Time of Arrival) and ETDs (Estimated Time of Departure). By clarifying these terms, vessel owners receive more reliable information about the duration of their vessel’s visit.

Monitoring
The traffic planning process is under close scrutiny to see where things work well and where there is room for improvement.

Sharing static information
The partnership is largely about sharing dynamic information. However, static information, for example available water depth, is also essential for planning voyages efficiently. Rotterdam is the first port to have this information available, through a system known as Avanti.

Avanti allows static information to be made available to the port community and its clients. Avanti is the result of close cooperation with the UK Hydrographic Office, the International Harbour Master Association, the Oil Companies International Marine Forum and other international maritime organisations.
What advantages will Focus on Vessels bring to the individual partners in the chain?

Marius Mersie (Maersk), on behalf of VRC (container agents):
“Container vessels are increasing in size, and the efficiency of loading and unloading is improving, particularly at Maasvlakte 2. Transparent and reliable communication between all parties involved is crucial for guaranteeing the smooth flow of shipping and bunker handling during port stay.”

Daan Verbeek (ILC), on behalf of VRC (chemical tanker agents):
“The project Focus on Vessels is a unique opportunity to reduce waiting times across the various company boundaries, and shorten the port visit through integral coordination. This will raise the quality ship of handling in Rotterdam to a higher level in 2015. We obviously want to play a big part.”

André van der Kaaij, on behalf of Smit Towage NW Europe:
“Planning the deployment of tugs is very important for our business operations. Always being on time and supplying the required number of tugs improves our image and impresses our clients.”

Jan Hilberding (MOT), on behalf of Committee Wet Bulk Terminals:
“We expect that better communication will halve terminal downtime between vessels in 2015.”

Stefan de Graaf, Roeiers Vereeniging Eendracht (boatmen):
“We hope that in 18 months to two years’ time, the departure times of ships will be reliable and that the continuity of datainformation will be guaranteed by a back-up system.”

Philip Beesemer (ECT), on behalf of Society of Rotterdam Terminal Operators (VRTO):
“With regard to the occupation of berths and planning, we want to see improvements in terms of efficiency and turnover. We want to seize that opportunity.”

Joost Leenhouts, Regional Pilot Association Rotterdam-Rijnmond:
“Pilots ensure efficient handling of shipping to and from the port. In addition, we guarantee safety and protect the environment. Focus on Vessels is totally in line with our work.”

Ton van der Knaap (EBS), on behalf of the Society of Rotterdamse Machinale Overslagbedrijven (VRMO):
“The better we can plan loading, unloading, storage and transshipment, the more attractive our services are for our clients.”

René de Vries, (State) Harbour Master of Rotterdam-Rijnmond:
“Clients of the Port of Rotterdam are setting increasingly higher standards, which is logical, because competition between the ports is fierce. By working together and really focusing on the vessel, we can be the best port in Europe for years to come.”

Response from a client of the Port of Rotterdam

Leendert van den Ende, Maritime Efficiency Manager, Shell Europe & Africa:
“The project Focus on Vessels is a great starting point for us as a shipping company, charterer and cargo owner, as well as for our clients. With a more efficient operation, vessels will be handled more quickly and safely and products will be delivered to the client on schedule. What’s more, fewer emissions will be generated.”

Where will we be in 2015?
Focus on Vessels means that both ship and cargo owner can rely on optimal planning when vessels visit the Port of Rotterdam. Partners in nautical expertise work together to ensure that delays are reduced to an absolute minimum. As a result, Rotterdam continues to be one of the world’s most attractive ports.

Colophon

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