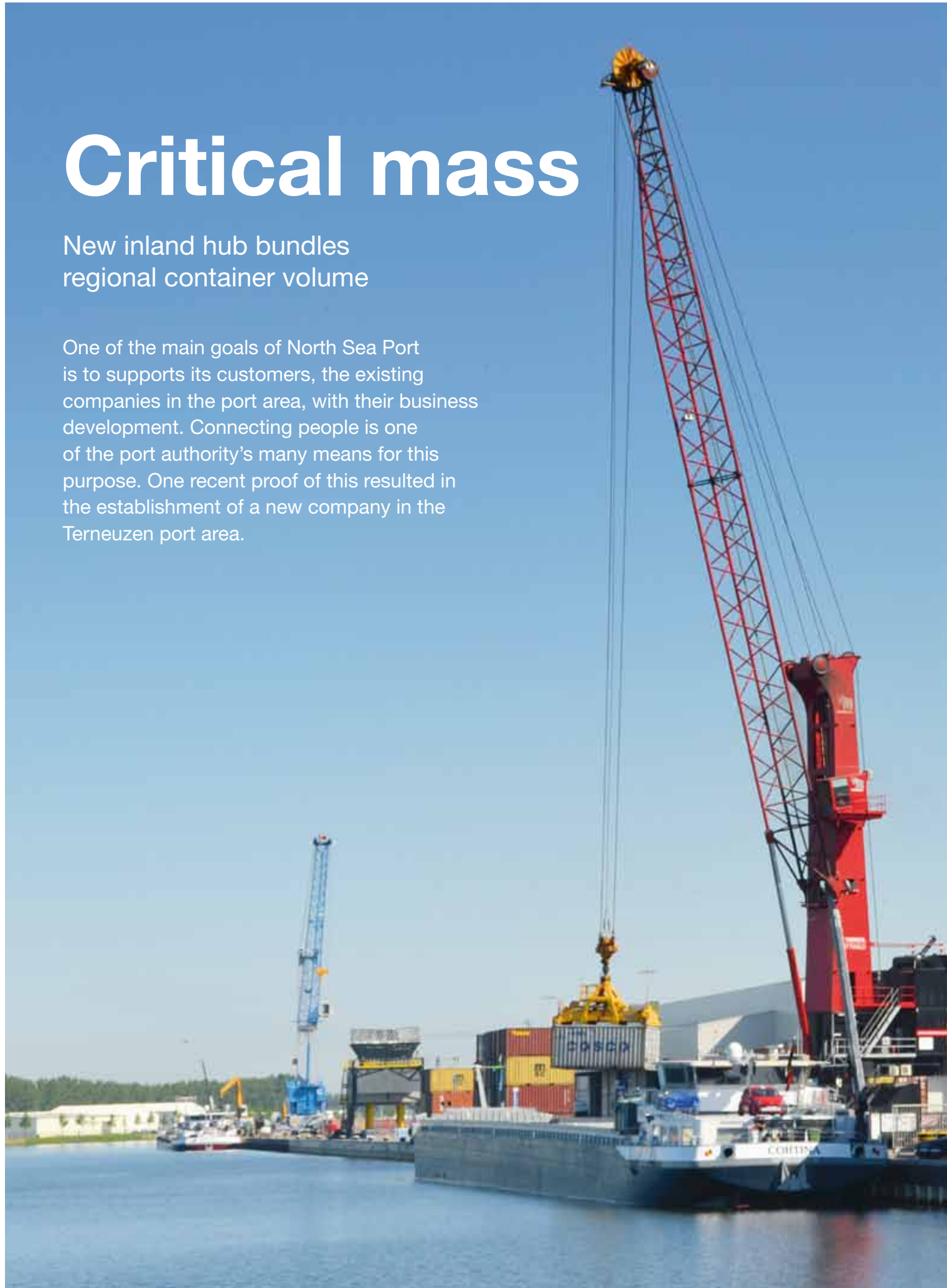


Critical mass

New inland hub bundles regional container volume

One of the main goals of North Sea Port is to support its customers, the existing companies in the port area, with their business development. Connecting people is one of the port authority's many means for this purpose. One recent proof of this resulted in the establishment of a new company in the Terneuzen port area.



"I was talking with one of the commercial managers of North Sea Port about the opportunities of the growing volume of container traffic," explains Mr Arno Swagemakers, Owner and Managing Director of Swagemakers Intermodaal Transport. "The Port Authority connected me with Mr Paul van den Broeck of Vlaeynatie." Mr van den Broeck, CEO at Vlaeynatie, continues, "As we already handle a lot of containers for our Zeeland Sugar Terminal and our fertilisers terminal, we had plans to realise container facilities on a terrain next to our terminal at the Axelse Vlakte in the Terneuzen port area." Both companies soon found each other in establishing a new company called Tri-Modal Containerterminal Terneuzen (3MCT).

Guaranteed service

Mr Swagemakers explains, "The ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp currently have to deal with a lot of congestion on the road and on the inland waterways that connect the ports with their hinterland. This issue has been going on for years now, without any chance of it being solved soon. With 3MCT, we can help to reduce the pressure and we have therefore

started a weekly barge service." Mr van den Broeck comments, "With container services, it is a chicken-and-egg situation. It is not profitable to start a service without sufficient volume, but without a service you will not be able to attract a profitable amount of containers. With 3MCT we were able to take the risk to start a service, as we have enough containers from both Vlaeynatie and Swagemakers."

The containers of Vlaeynatie (fertilisers and sugar) and Swagemakers (third party cargo) formed the basis of the new liner service that began its first trip in Spring 2016. Mr Swagemakers adds, "With this service, we offered customers certainty with a guaranteed service to Antwerp, no matter how many containers were on board. For the service, operated by one of our logistic partners, we use a fixed schedule so that everyone knows what they can rely on." At the start of the service, the financial risk was for 3MCT, as success was not self-evident. But soon after the start with one barge traveling two times per week, the service was doubled to four trips a week and barges with doubled capacity. "We offer our customers just in time delivery, Mr van den Broeck states. "With

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Photo courtesy of Swagemakers Intermodaal Transport.

THE CONTAINERS OF VLAEYNATIE (FERTILISERS AND SUGAR) AND SWAGEMAKERS (THIRD PARTY CARGO) FORMED THE BASIS OF THE NEW LINER SERVICE.



Photo courtesy of Swagemakers Intermodaal Transport.

MANAGING DIRECTOR
AT SWAGEMAKERS
INTERMODAAL TRANSPORT:
“AFTER A MODEST
START THINGS START TO
ACCELERATE.”



Photo courtesy of Swagemakers Intermodaal Transport.

fixed schedules, this will reduce cost for storage and handling and it avoids piling of containers on terminals and traffic jams of barges waiting in a port area.”

Collaboration

Now that the barge service is up and running, 3MCT is working on the next step. Mr van den Broeck explains, “Next to the Zeeland Sugar Terminal, we have 3.3ha of land available to realise a container hub. We can hereby expand the services to our existing and new customers. We can collect a considerable volume of container cargo from the cross border region on this location. Apart from this physical aspect of our service, we are also working on a dedicated logistic software program via which we can further optimise and control logistic processes.” When everything goes according to plan, the hub will be fully operational in September of this year. 3MCT is working closely together with Mammoet on the loading and unloading of containers. “We really believe in collaboration,” Mr Swagemakers says. “It is not our intention to keep everything in our own hands. For the high quality service that we are aiming for, we prefer to work together with others. Mammoet is an expert in lifting and handling cargo and there are plenty of specialised barge operators in the market. It is our job to search the market for container



TRI-MODAL CONTAINER TERMINAL TERNEUZEN

volume and to take care of the administrative workflow. This is the only way that this project can grow into a huge success.” Collaboration is also a opportunity in other aspects, as there is ample container volume available in the region that could be perfectly streamlined into combined shipments. Mr van den Broeck states, “For this purpose it would be great to work together with other terminals in our port area. It is obvious that for companies competing in one market, collaborating may not always makes sense, but in this case it would work out fine. Combining containers will lead to a profitable critical mass from which everyone can profit. Joining forces will also strengthen our position towards the big ship owners that are not interested in visiting our port for just a few containers.”

MR VAN DEN BROECK, CEO AT VLAEYNATIE:
“COMBINING CONTAINERS WILL LEAD TO A
PROFITABLE CRITICAL MASS FROM WHICH
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Photo courtesy of Scherpf! Fotografie.

“When everything goes according to plan, the hub will be fully operational in September of this year.

A favourable position

So far, the company is aiming at Antwerp and Rotterdam, but 3MCT sees other opportunities for the Terneuzen terminal in the hinterland. “Not many people realise that the Axelse Vlakte is very centrally located for many customers. Take for instance Paris. With the long-expected Seine Nord connection, barges from our port can easily reach this metropolis.” And it is not just the waterway connections that put this location in a favourable position. The current doubling of the Tractaatweg will result in a modern and fast route for trucks going north to Vlissingen and Rotterdam and south towards Ghent and beyond. The new hub can make use of a direct railway connection that was recently established for the Zeeland Sugar Terminal. Rail transport will improve even more once the much desired Axel-Zelzate connection is realised. Mr Swagemakers comments, “Although we are connected by rail, the situation is far from ideal as trains first need to cross the Ghent-Terneuzen canal. For this, they have to make a de-tour. We have, together with other companies on the Axelse Vlakte, been promoting a shorter, faster and thus cheaper and more environmental-friendly rail connection on this side of the canal for years. With this new piece of railroad, we will have a direct connection to the Belgium railway system towards, for instance, Germany and

France. It is good to know that we receive ample support from North Sea Port in our lobby towards the decision makers.”

Neck on the line

With connections via waterways, road, rail, and sea, and the excellent facilities offered by company, 3MCT will most likely become an important logistic container hub for the gathering and efficient transshipment of containerised cargo from the region to the hinterland. “We put our neck on the line in 2016, as we were convinced of the opportunities,” Mr van den Broeck says. “Of course there was a certain risk of barges sailing to Antwerp with only a few containers, but it soon became clear that we were filling a gap in the logistic chain.” “After a modest start,” Mr Swagemakers adds, “things start to accelerate, supported by our further investments in the project. We are looking forward to the future with confidence, as congestion issues will not improve and we can play a relevant role in relieving the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam.”

1. WWW.VLAEYNATIE.EU

1. WWW.SWAGEMAKERS.NL