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Hamburg states its case on barging

Hamburg reports a big increase in inland waterway traffic in 2019, but the port has declined to support a new Feeder Barge concept.



Barge transport at Hamburg was up 13% in 2019

The Port of Hamburg reports a big increase in the number of containers being moved to and from the port by barge. “Contrary to the nationwide result with a decline of 4.1%, the Port of Hamburg recorded an increase of 13 percent in container transport by inland waterway vessel with 145,078 TEU in 2019,” the port stated.

“This figure does not include the increased intra-port transshipment by barges in the Port of Hamburg. In 2019 that was more than 170,000 TEU. These container transports within the port replaced a total of around 120,000 truck transports and are a good example of a successful modal shift in freight transport in the Hanseatic city,” the port added.

As promising as that sounds, the increase is coming off a very low base. Currently, 25-30% of Hamburg’s annual container throughput of more than 9M TEU is moved within the port, and over 90% of the traffic is shifted by truck across the capacity-constrained Köhlbrand Bridge.

In a feature article in the February edition of World Cargo News, Dr Ulrich Malchow, a naval architect and academic, made the case that HHLA could address the environmental impact of inter-terminal transfers by supporting new concepts to shift more of the truck traffic to water. This would allow innovative new concepts like his own Port Feeder Barge (PFB) to compete with HHLA’s own intermodal options and terminal services.

For its part the Port of Hamburg emphasised it is working to improve barge logistics by integrating inland navigation into its port processes. “The Hamburg Vessel Coordination Center (HVCC) is also increasingly controlling the port rotations of barges in order to better coordinate them with the terminal procedures in Hamburg. The establishment of a barge platform opens further opportunities for coordinated action by all players involved in the port,” it said in a press release.

What Dr Malchow wants to see, however, is HHLA allow barge operators to move containers between terminals in Hamburg without having to use HHLA’s cranes and equipment to load and unload containers.