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MARCH 2013

portstrategy

Vol. 1013 Issue 2

Insight for Port Executives



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SQUEEZE IN: is there a place for geared barges in today's ports?

Hamburg's 'cold feet' on shuttle crane barge

ROTTERDAM REMAINS A pioneer. It already has a shuttle crane barge, the *Mercurius*, providing intra-terminal transport of containers, obviating the need to reposition them using road haulage vehicles. The original concept, which had been developed for the Port of Amsterdam, became a reality at Rotterdam in 2008 and has since generated a second vessel.

In the Port of Hamburg, similar plans are at an advanced stage, which should eventually result in the launch of the Port Feeder Barge (PFB) project, whose detailed design has already been completed. However, while an initial agreement had been reached by all local terminal operators, HHLA is reported to have cold feet, despite its initial support and insistence that it is committed to the development of green as well as smart port logistics.

The international patents and

design rights belong to PortFeederBarge GmbH whose managing director Ulrich Malchow confirms his company's interest in participating in the local operation in Hamburg.

"We are also keen to give licenses for applications at other places," he says.

The PFB concept is centred around a 168 teu self-propelled barge-type vessel equipped with a 40 tonne container crane, which would be deployed in major container ports where boxes are distributed among several terminals, resulting in significant movements of intra-port container traffic. It was also designed for those ports lacking adequate handling facilities for inland container barges.

"The concept is very well suited for minor ports or for ports which suffer from insufficient water depth and/or insufficient container handling facilities to accommodate

full size container vessels. Here, the PFB could serve the container vessels directly when they are anchored midstream or using berthing dolphins, including shuttling the boxes between the anchorage and places ashore where deep sea vessels cannot berth," says Prof Malchow, who lectures at Bremen University of Applied Sciences.

He stresses that such a port would no longer require ownership of a container crane to handle containers. For many ports in developing countries, therefore, the PFB might prove an attractive option as it is quicker and less costly to put in place as well as being much more flexible than a quay-based solution.

In terms of midstream deployment to serve deep sea vessels, Prof Malchow believes that this might be also applicable in ports like Hong Kong where such mode of operation has already a substantial stake. Other major ports might consider using the PFB to improve intra-port logistics without necessarily having to build expensive new infrastructure.



“The concept is very well suited for minor ports or for ports which suffer from insufficient water depth and/or insufficient container handling facilities”

Ulrich Malchow, PortFeederBarge