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Extending the role and concept of Dryports

A response to the public consultation of "A sustainable future for transport: Towards an integrated, technology-led and user friendly system" by the "Dryport" project.

The role of dryports

Traditionally seaports have been regarded as the main trade interfaces and gateways that are served by their hinterland. Changes in demand patterns, logistics and supply chain management and intermodal concepts have allowed for expanding hinterlands. As one response inland hubs (e.g. ICD's, freight consolidation centres etc.) have been developing that consolidate, coordinate and manage transport flows in a multimodal and intermodal manner. The expansion of Dryports is a further concrete answer to these developments. Dryports serve a number of functions from a hinterland perspective they allow for the bundling of cargo flows making use of economies of scale and from a seaport perspective they alleviate pressures on port capacity in seaside locations among others.

Consequently, Dryports have become important resources for transshipments and hinterland access. It is important to recognize the function of Dryports in terms of what they can deliver to ensure an efficient, sustainable and effective transportation system. Dryports potentially allow for a reduction of overall tonne-kilometres through the channelling of cargo on high volume links and thus contribute to a strengthening of rail and waterborne transport, a reduction of emissions, and alleviation of congestion especially in seaport areas.

In order to strengthen the emerging potential of multimodal inland terminals and their Dryport functions, a certain degree of public involvement or intervention is desirable and might even be necessary.

Dryports can lead to a paradigm shift in terms of intermodal transport and modal split. Dryports, traditionally regarded as mere extension of ports, are allowing for an effective location splitting of ports where either 'side' of the 'dryport-seaport-system' supports the other in a reciprocal manner. In simple terms the Dryport creates a direct link to international



maritime trade corridors on the one hand and the seaport uses the dryport to maximise its performance (e.g. land use). However, it should be noted that the roles of Dryports are far more complex than just an “extension” to a seaport.

Trends and policy aspects

There are a number of aspects and trends related to Dryports that are worthy of extra attention as they may constitute a substantial potential for the future development of the European transportation system.

Firstly, the success of Dryports has been focused on the container market, but the development related to semi-trailers is far from reaching comparable levels. This is despite the fact that transport of semi-trailers is an important segment from a European perspective since intra-European transport flows to a large extent is based upon the load unit of semi-trailers. As a result the development in this segment should be stimulated by key policy measures. New, innovative and more-efficient handling techniques and rolling stocks are such examples. These possibilities, however, are not only related to technology breakthroughs but are also an issue of system-wide implementations. From our point of view, this is an area that would benefit greatly by policy measures and incentives from the European Commission.

Secondly, a trend that is threatening the efficiency of hinterland transport and Dryports are the development of ‘individual’ Dryport systems by individual ports. The long-term result of this might be local geographical monopolies surrounding Dryports. As a consequence, the entry barriers become immense as the construction of new dryports creates very unbalanced market situations. The risks also include inefficient infrastructure investments in the transportation system resulting in over-establishments of inland terminals and Dryports that may eliminate the economics of scale on high volume dryport-seaport corridors needed for cost-efficiency and ultimately modal shift. Moreover, the expansion of a seaport’s dryport in overlapping hinterlands will also affect competition between seaports in those hinterlands. From our perspective this calls for effective and coordinative governance and actions not only on the national level but on an EU level in correspondence to the transnational expansion of the ports’ hinterland systems. A key issue that needs to be considered that dryports can potentially have the same strategic function as a seaport and thus must be common-user facilities. One possibility for a policy instrument and incentive would be to offer support for infrastructure investments given that terminal operators offer transparent pricing strategies and third-party access. Preferable, the terminal operator should provide a separate and public income statement.

Dryport evolution

Following the development of transport networks the next phase in the lifecycle of Dryports is not to connect themselves with yet another seaport, but rather with other Dryports in an attempt to create more comprehensive and integrated networks. Consequently, creating integrated freight corridors between nodes.

Funding dryport development

Another possibility to stimulate the development of Dryports would be to include it as an eligible modal shift action for Marco Polo funding. Recognition for nodes as crucial part of the logistics system and as enabler of efficient intermodal transport solutions is critical and should be part of financial support directed to modal shift actions. As part of any financial support, demands for openness, transparency and third-party access could be included. Other possible changes to the Marco Polo framework for the enhancement of modal shift identified



by the Dryport project are: lower financial and volume-based thresholds, national transport solutions as eligible projects, and less restriction on the number of partners. Combined, the Marco Polo program would contribute more to the development of small-scale projects that could have a substantial long-term impact on the sustainability of the European transportation system.

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