



**Dennis Olesen (left) and Robert Walter: APM Zeebrugge wants to facilitate rail, barge and truck connections**

Despite the downturn that has halted growth, MD Dennis Olesen said APM Zeebrugge will be looking for new business in the Far East this year.

**A strong natural position**

It was a very busy end-of-year period for the operator and Olesen admitted: "We don't know what the [market's] next step will be – are vessels going to get bigger or not?"

But he is confident: "Our natural position here is very strong: our value proposition will be maintained through our geographical location as a deepsea port, our hinterland connections and cost-competitive services."

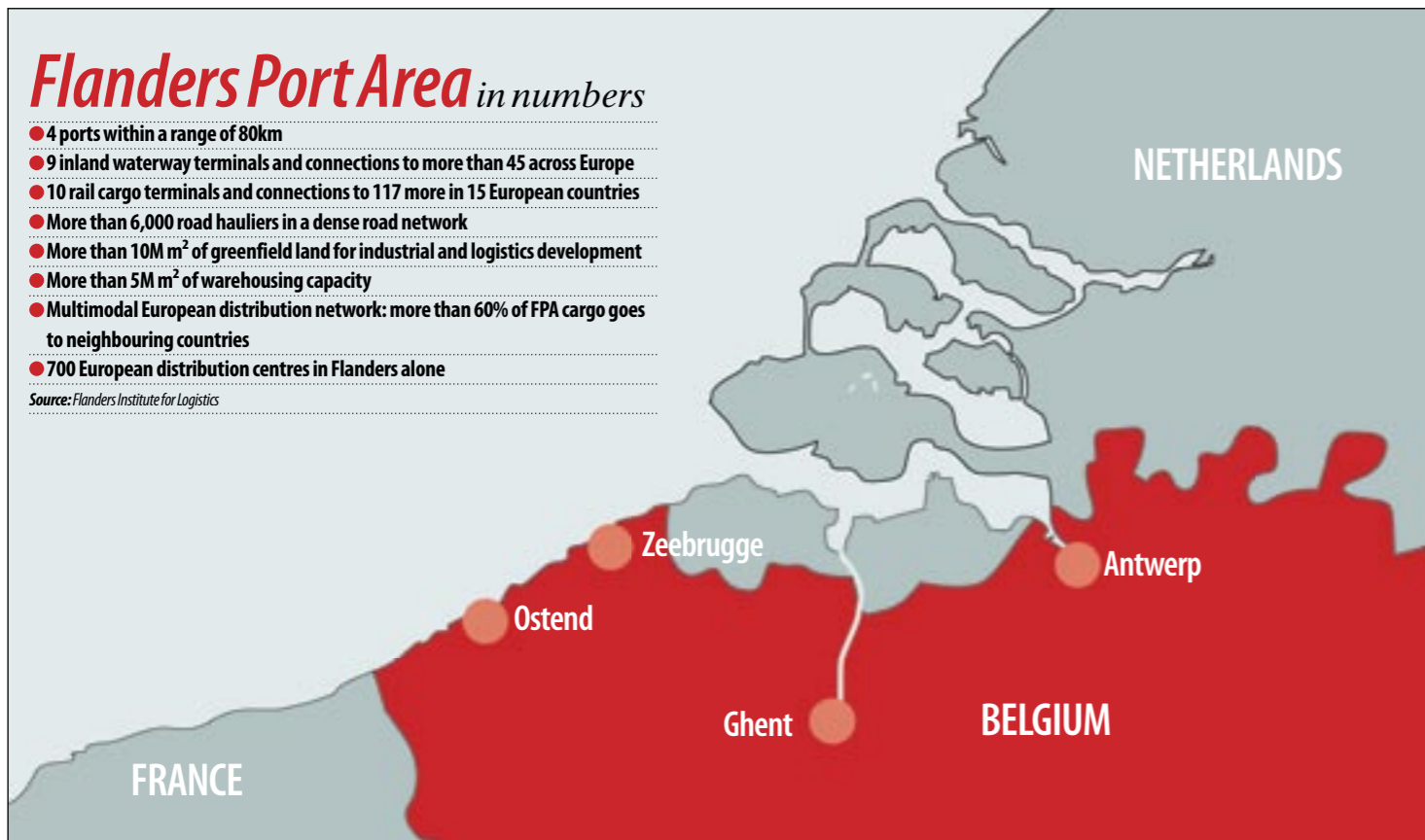
Building on this foundation, APM wants to trump its competition by offering added-value services to facilitate rail, barge or truck connections and alliances into the hinterland. "Rotterdam's

# Friendly competition

Flemish ports are beginning to take advantage of their geographical proximity to think as one to bring added value to the whole region

APM Terminals moved into its 36-year concession at Zeebrugge's Albert II Dock South in May 2006. The 47ha terminal behind 900m of quayside can handle

more than 1M teu, but this is expected to increase to 2M teu in a second development phase that will see the quay increased to 1,300m, with a total projected yard area of 85ha.



Maasvlakte II will only come onstream between 2014 and 2015," added director of marketing and sales Robert Walter. "Until then you'll still have a lot of service delivery and congestion issues when the market does pick up again. We want to jump in there, make ourselves very visible and grab that market."

Such a grab is no longer necessarily made in isolation either. Under the umbrella of the Flanders Port Area initiative (see box), Flemish ports are slowly beginning to think as one. "We here in Zeebrugge are complementary to Antwerp, and together we give added value to the whole region," said Olesen. "The strength of Belgium as a whole is the very fact that geographically these ports are so close together."

The impact of the financial meltdown, however, has sharpened the friendly

competition. So far, said Olesen, Antwerp has lost four services and Zeebrugge has won two, but in the past Antwerp would always be the one to come out on top. Zeebrugge won it, according to Walter, because of the savings on bunkering costs that lines can

achieve by calling at the sea port instead of an inland one.

Furthermore, high productivity levels, lower port disbursement charges and cheaper handling costs combine to offer an attractive congestion-free port, concluded Walter. ■

## Flanders Port Area

Decades of squabbling over the allocation of government investments and tense competition between Antwerp, Zeebrugge, Ghent and Ostend meant it was each to their own in Flanders. Until recently that is. Belgium's four main ports joined forces in 2007 to create a more united front in the face of foreign competition. Supported by the Flemish government, the Flanders Port Area initiative was set up to promote co-operative projects between the ports. Its main focus lies in establishing a common regulatory and procedural framework, as well as hinterland strategy.

For 2007 and 2008 the initiative received €1M from the Flemish government to set up a common platform for port logistics and technology, a Flemish cargo community system and a forum for port training schemes.

In early 2008, the ports completed a structural consultation to set up complementary promotional activities, which also include the government agency Flanders Investment & Trade, the Flemish Institute for Logistics and project group Shortsea Promotion Centre Flanders. The ports also signed a code of conduct to ensure fair competition – and a new direction for the region. It is a competitive strategy that plays on the combined strength of four ports located close together.

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