



# Magdeburg port is freight hub for large-scale flows of goods

Walter Schauer is steering the 'Seebär' ice breaker in the port of Magdeburg. After the river Elbe had been completely closed to shipping traffic for 15 days because of the frost and ice, things slowly started once again at the end of February. And Walter Schauer is helping out with the 300 HP 'Seebär'. He cuts into the ice with a loud roar in order to create a shipping lane. The 'Seebär' breaks up ice sheets that have a thickness of up to 20 centimetres. The 56-year-old, who has been working as a skipper since 1979, describes the past winter as being normal. For the port company, however, the ice represents an interruption to the normal port operations.

Pusher tugs normally meet twice a week in Magdeburg. The Elbe Container Line which belongs to the inland shipping line Deutsche Binnenreederei AG uses Magdeburg as a freight hub. It arrives in Magdeburg with extended tugs, where it then distributes the cargoes. In these icy times, many customers have decided to change over to the roads or railways. The port authority is therefore bracing itself for falls in turnover of 30 to 35 percent. On a trip along the Elbe on the 'Seebär', Ulf Möbius, who is External District Manager at the Waterways and Shipping Management Magdeburg, describes the traffic at the port of Magdeburg. He explains how over the course of the last year, 2,777 goods vessels passed through Magdeburg. This was roughly 500 more than two years ago. With 13,850 containers, the 2009 figures were exceeded by more than 3,400. At the moment, the handling volume at the port areas of Magdeburg totals roughly three million tonnes per year. And the trend is upwards, explains Möbius. He hopes more and more companies will make use of canals - which are an environmentally friendly transport method - in the future. As an example, he discusses a waste incineration plant that is located in the harbour area. The waste comes from many local towns and cities, some of which are even on the Elbe. "Yet not one single tonne is delivered by ship", says Möbius with regret, highlighting another expansion option.

The port of Magdeburg is the most important inland port and hub in and for central Germany. It consists of three port areas. A total of 655 hectares are available in the industrial port and canal port areas for port, commercial and industrial operations. In 2006, with the new 'Hansehafen' container terminal, a further 40 hectares were added. The Hansehafen goods transport centre is used for handling containers and heavy loads, and has an annual capacity of 33,000 containers. A further 100 hectares are also available for use in immediate proximity to the port.

The port focuses on three areas. In addition to traditional port business such as handling, storage and distribution, it also boasts an important logistics area. It has also created an infrastructure which incorporates the letting of commercial space and the establishment of companies. Since the completion of the Hansehafen goods transport centre, the port of Magdeburg also offers space for industrial and logistics companies. Companies have settled there, especially from the mineral oil, grain and foodstuffs sectors. The biggest producer of wind power systems, Enercon GmbH, is located next door to the port. Enercon transports many of its large-scale wind power systems, tower sections for instance, by ship. In this way, the port of Magdeburg has gradually developed from being a classic port to a logistics partner and systems service provider for multi-mode transport chains. It has a rail network that extends over 54 kilometres and a container terminal for combined transport. While the freight hub at Leipzig/Halle Airport in the south of Saxony-Anhalt largely handles smaller-scale flows of goods, the port sees itself as being a freight hub for larger-volume flows of goods.

The port has also been benefitting from the upgrading of the transport infrastructure in the former East Germany subsequent to reunification. In this context, the German Unity No. 17 transport project is focusing on developing the canal links between Hanover, Magdeburg and Berlin. This includes the construction of a canal bridge over the river Elbe that is nearly one kilometre in length. It will connect the Mittelland canal with the Elbe-Havel canal. The level difference of 18 meters is to be overcome with a double chamber lock, explains Möbius, who has specialist knowledge of water engineering, adding that the ship lifting facility in Magdeburg-Rothensee was replaced with a superior thrift lock which will be able to service bigger inland vessels and pusher tugs.

The engineer talks enthusiastically of the low water lock which is being built in the Rothensee connecting canal and which is to begin operating in the summer. It is being constructed by the German road administration. The lock will be able to provide a water-level independent connection between the port areas of Magdeburg and the canal network, says Möbius, explaining how its hydraulic structure will work. By building the low water lock, the water depth in the port of Magdeburg will remain at four meters, 365 days per year, irrespective of the changing water levels of the river Elbe. When it comes to thick ice there isn't so much that can be done, however, which means Walter Schauer and his crew are certain to take to the waters of the port of Magdeburg on the Seebär in many a cold winter to come!

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