



Motorways of the sea

## EU SUPPORT ENHANCES CREDIBILITY

### Ro-Ro Past France

“European Union support is important for us and sends a powerful signal to the market that our project has a European dimension.” For Karel Van Zijl from the lead company, Spliethoff’s Bevrachtingskantoor of Amsterdam, this is one of the big benefits of the Marco Polo programme.

As its name indicates, this project provides a motorway-of-the-sea alternative to get freight off the congested international road transit corridor across France. Ro-Ro Past France initially offered three sailings a week (rising to five in September 2009) in each direction between Bilbao in northern Spain and the Belgian port of Zeebrugge. Each vessel carries up to 200 unaccompanied road trailers.

At the Spanish end, trucks deliver trailers to Bilbao destined for the Benelux, north Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden. Trailers for the UK and Sweden are transhipped to another ferry at Zeebrugge. Other trailers continue by road to their final destination. Southbound freight does the same in reverse.

“We encountered a number of problems at the outset”, says Van Zijl. “First, we had to convince customers we were serious. Other operators had promised similar services but never delivered on

them. Then many trailers did not have ferry eyes (fixture points) for lashing them on board the vessel. In addition, some operators were not familiar with unaccompanied transport (trailers without the driving unit and driver). We spent time helping hauliers from Spain and Portugal and those from the northern end of the link to sort out how they could provide driving units for each other’s trailers.”

“We expected to break even after year one; but the economic crisis came along. Volumes are rising again and we are confident for the future. We trust the EU subsidy will partly compensate us for what we have invested in this service,” says Van Zijl.

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**KAREL VAN ZIJL,  
SPLIETHOFF’S BEVRACHTINGSKANTOOR,  
AMSTERDAM**

#### Project name:

Ro-Ro Past France

#### Size of Marco Polo grant:

€6 800 000

#### Duration of project grant:

September 2007 to December 2011

#### Lead partner:

Spliethoff’s Bevrachtingskantoor,  
Amsterdam (Netherlands)

#### Other partners:

Transfennica Iberia S.L (Spain),  
Transfennica Belgium BVBA (Belgium),  
Oy Transfennica AB (Finland)

#### Volume of goods shifted off the road:

8.4 billion tonne-kilometres  
(4.3-year estimate)

#### Estimated environmental benefit:

€211m (over 4.3 years)

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