

## ACL to expand its Liverpool workforce

LIVERPOOL'S ambitions to establish a sizeable maritime cluster have received a strong vote of support from Atlantic Container Line, which is planning to enlarge its local workforce, writes Janet Porter.

The **Grimaldi** subsidiary may even buy an office building on Merseyside as it prepares to take on more back office activities for the Italian group.

The transatlantic specialist employs around 70 people in Liverpool, but that number could eventually go up to more than 100, according to ACL chief executive Andrew Abbott.

Rather than outsourcing jobs, he wants to transfer documentation work from other parts of Europe. Local UK staff are both cheaper to employ and also more productive, he said.

ACL has had a presence in the city since 1978. Liverpool is one of the ports of call in its North Atlantic service, but it is the skills base and local maritime know-how that is attracting other global carriers that do not necessarily have any Liverpool ship calls. Maersk, CMA CGM and CSAV are among the big international ship operators that have their UK headquarters on Merseyside.

The expansion plans come at a time when ACL is preparing a major fleet upgrade programme to replace its existing fleet of elderly multipurpose ro-ros.

The line expects to sign a letter

of intent next month for five groundbreaking ro-ro ships that will be the biggest of their class built to date. Four shortlisted South Korean and Chinese yards are now finalising bids, with ACL expecting to place a firm order in October, with 2013 delivery dates.

With **Grimaldi** one of the few international shipowners to make a profit even during the worst of the 2009 slump, and ACL's transatlantic business currently doing very well, Mr Abbott said he does not expect financing to be an issue.

Although eastbound traffic has weakened in recent months despite the strength of the euro, European exports to the US are booming. "If I had more capacity, I could fill it," said Mr Abbott.

In particular, the ro-ro decks are all full, with construction equipment now in strong demand in the US as infrastructure improvements funded by the stimulus money that was injected into the flagging US economy finally get started.

ACL has had a presence in Liverpool for many years, but others are more recent arrivals.

Maersk Line moved its UK head office from London a couple of years ago, citing the city's vibrant maritime community and strong skills base. Israeli line Zim is another relative newcomer, moving its UK headquarters to Merseyside five years ago. ■

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## Liverpool supporter

BRITAIN has suffered some dreadful publicity around the world over the past couple of weeks, after London and a number of other English cities were hit by a wave of looting and rioting.

So it is good to hear some positive news, with Atlantic Container Line planning to expand its presence in Liverpool and increase the size of the local workforce.

The **Grimaldi** subsidiary has found that its Liverpool personnel are not just cheaper to employ than their Continental counterparts, but are also more productive. ACL is keen to transfer more back-office work from other parts of Europe to Merseyside over time, and may even buy a local office building to house staff.

A number of global lines now run their UK operations from Liverpool, including Maersk and CMA CGM. This is not necessarily because of proximity to the port. Local support for a maritime cluster has been a key driver.

ACL chief executive Andrew Abbott, an American who has been a regular visitor to Liverpool for many years, says he has seen the changes from a rundown city to one that is now proud of its heritage and able to compete in terms of its skills base.

So, for once, it is not a question of jobs being outsourced, but quite the opposite. ACL already handles documentary work for its parent company in Liverpool and is prepared to take on more.

After all the grim reports about the problems of the UK's inner cities, how refreshing to know it is not all bad. ■

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