

Shannon Foynes Port Company on the right track – says key EU figure

Brexit will have greater implications for UK than Europe, including Ireland says Professor Péter Balázs



Monday 3 April 2017: A leading representative for the European Commission’s programme that funds major EU transport infrastructure projects has said that Shannon Foynes Port Company’s current investment programme (SFPC) is taking it in the right direction in a post-Brexit EU.

Professor Péter Balázs, European Coordinator for the North Sea-Mediterranean Core Network Corridor, was speaking in Foynes today to get an update on the company’s record programme of investment, which is part-funded by the Corridor. He was welcomed at Foynes by SFPC CEO Pat Keating, Minister of State for Tourism and Sport Patrick O’Donovan, MEP Deirdre Clune, while MEP Sean Kelly was also represented by his PA Honor Hughes.

Two years ago SFPC successfully applied for and received €3million grant aid from the ‘North Med’ Corridor for two projects - €2.2m for the East Jetty Infill Programme at Foynes Port and a further €800,000 for a feasibility study for the regeneration of the rail link between Limerick and the port.

It is now applying for funding under the 2017 CEF ‘Blended Call’ to join existing jetties at Foynes, infill an area behind these jetties and also develop 90 acres of lands for ancillary port storage and port related activities, at a total cost of €25million.

Referencing Shannon Foynes Port Company’s progress, Professor Balázs said: “I am impressed by the developments. I can see since my first visit here more than two years ago the progress and I am convinced that Shannon Foynes has obvious opportunities.

“One is the deep water access, which is a privilege for a seaport to have. The deep water is important because of the growing size of ships. Shannon has a natural advantage because many other ports within the corridor I am in charge of are investing big amounts in deepening their waters. Shannon has it natural so it has to be very pleased with that.

“Another advantage for Shannon is the very high market share of this port in Ireland. A third advantage is the long term strategy of the port as it has concrete plans out to 2041. This is an excellent idea to get political support and the confidence from business circles and, of course, co-financing from the European Union.”

Speaking of the Brexit implications for transport, he said: “The situation will change because of Brexit and we don’t know yet at this very early stage what will be the framework conditions for the United Kingdom. But I am confident that any form of free trade arrangement between the UK and the rest of the EU would not affect the trade for here.

“It will have a serious impact on trade with the outside world, mostly for the UK, much less for Europe. A lot of new agreements will be concluded but for trade (to happen) between the UK and the rest of the EU, including Ireland, transport will be needed and I think that Shannon Foynes is going in the right direction, in a nutshell.”

Professor Balázs said that while it is too early to predict what will flow from Brexit discussions, there will be some changes in financing. “I can only hope that we can maintain the integrity of the existing North Sea Mediterranean Corridor, which had included for the first time in history the UK into an EU based transport project. Of course some conditions of co-finance will change for the UK, not for Ireland. But this is a good opportunity to reconsider some fundamental questions, including the corridor alignment for the Irish territory and I would be very much in favour of extending the scope of the corridor in Ireland. This depends on the approval of all the EU member states and institutions but we can take some initial steps in that direction.”

Said SFPC CEO Pat Keating, “This is Mr Balázs second visit to Foynes in three years and he very much sees the opportunity that exists, an opportunity of significance from a regional perspective here in Ireland but also of significance from a European perspective.

“The port authority facilitates €7.6bn of trade on this part of the island of Ireland and is one of only three ports in the country designated as a Trans-European Transport Networks EU (Ten-T) status. But given our location at the gateway to the world’s busiest shipping lane and the natural depths of the estuary, which can handle the largest ships in the world, SFPC has opportunity on an international scale.

“That’s why we have been able to win investment from the European Commission’s programme and why we are applying again for funding for the continuation of the ongoing programme. Having Mr Balázs for this visit is very important and he was certainly pleased with the progress to date. We are still very much in expansion mode, with a very strong eye on the future and today was a great opportunity to show Mr Balázs how well money from his programme is being spent here.”

The North Sea-Mediterranean Core Network Corridor stretches from Ireland and the North of the UK through the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg and onto the Mediterranean Sea in the south of France.

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