



Boudewijn Siemons

Boudewijn Siemons, newly-appointed CEO at Port of Rotterdam Authority, is embracing the energy transition and other critical challenges, as he seeks to future-proof Europe's biggest seaport and position it as a role model for the future

MARTIN CLARK

As the new head of Europe's busiest port in a rapidly-changing industry, Boudewijn Siemons brings a stabilising presence to his team and the community he serves. He brings with him a wealth of experience not only in the maritime sector, but also in infrastructure and energy — now among his priorities at Rotterdam.

As well as the energy and feedstock transition, and all its far-reaching consequences, he lists security of supply and the port's all-important societal role as stand-out challenges.

"Our energy transition has started, but our feedstock transition still has to take place. It's an enormous undertaking," he says.

A number of flagship energy projects are underway at the port. They include Europe's largest electrolyser; the backbone pipeline to the Dutch hydrogen network; various bio-refining projects; plus a huge carbon capture and storage project, Porthos.

Despite the complexity of these projects, Siemons is keen to position Rotterdam as frontrunner in the clean energy transition.

"Feedstock and energy transition is not only a technical matter, it deals with legislation, international supply chains, geopolitics — there's a lot that comes into it. In the end, getting everything together for commercial companies to take a positive Final Investment Decision on an upgrade or a new-build that supports the energy transition, that is a daunting task," he says.

"Here at Rotterdam, we're not waiting, we're showing the market it can be done."

Future-resilient ports

As the primary gateway into north-west Europe, Rotterdam plays an integral role in the smooth functioning of the European economy. It means resiliency

INTERVIEW BOUDEWIJN SIEMONS

and security of supply — navigating everything from shifting geopolitics and climate change to cyber attacks — are similarly high priorities.

Siemons also appreciates the societal role his port fulfils within the community.

"A lot is going to change and we can only face those changes if we have a licence to operate from the surrounding communities and if society understands the role we play as a port. That means explaining what we're doing, asking for input, and actually executing on that input. We should never take our licence to operate for granted, it is something we must take seriously."

At the same time, all ports must continue to provide the same core, traditional services — supporting the local economy, generating a healthy income, all underpinned by an unwavering commitment to safety — in the decades ahead.

"In 20-30 years from now, the port will look much the same, but under the hood it will be renewable. Some people might expect the port to be filled with solar panels, wind turbines, that it will make no noise and it will smell like roses — that will not happen. A bio refinery and a fossil fuel refinery look much the same, and yet one is part of the solution, the other is part of the problem.

"So in the end there will be industry, there will be logistics, there will be production, there will be different forms of energy, there will be some changes such as fewer oil tanks and more ammonia tanks, but on the whole, you will not be able to tell the difference."

The authority's own role could evolve in this time too, as it responds to changes and demands from its customers and community and as the port ecosystem evolves.

"We already invest up to €350 million annually in infrastructure, mostly

connecting infrastructure, whether it's quay walls for customers, which we can then lease back, or other infrastructure. For example, somebody's residual heat can be somebody else's process heat and I'm more than willing to put in a steam pipeline between the two and rent it out to them to make it possible for them to optimise their operations.

"In the end, we are an infrastructure partner and we will remain so. But, in the future, the infrastructure you invest in might differ from the infrastructure you used to invest in. So maybe that could mean investing in 5G networks, glass fibre or an ammonia pipeline system."

Climate action

The Port of Rotterdam is co-founder and active participant of the World Ports Climate Action Programme (WPCAP), with a variety of climate action-related projects, ranging from improving efficiency (Port Call Optimisation), to accelerating the transition, to clean shipping fuel (Port Readiness Level).

Siemons thinks the main achievement from the port's involvement has been in raising awareness.

"The fact that we work together with other major ports in the world, and that we align and exchange experiences, that's very important, because, just like in safety, there's no competition in the energy transition, it's something for the greater benefit."

In fact, he'd like to see ports work more closely together, when it comes to sharing best practice and experience. The upcoming integration of WPCAP in IAPH fits in perfectly with this.

"I think ports too often still have the idea they're competing with each other when they hardly ever are. We all have our own hinterlands, we all have our own rules and sometimes there's a bit of overlap. So I think if we were able to consolidate, there's room for greater traction and more productivity by working together smarter, and I think IAPH can play a role there." ■