

Managing challenges by investing in the future

by Jaana Niemi

Things are certainly looking up for the Port of Turku, and the post-pandemic comeback has begun satisfyingly. The daily passenger traffic has returned to its normal level after two difficult COVID-19-strained years. The new climate-smart cruise ferry *Viking Glory*, put onto the Turku-Stockholm service by Viking Line last winter, has brought an applauded boost to the passenger volumes with her daily calls. The passenger capacity increased by 10% when the newbuild replaced *Amorella*; additionally, the new vessel transports 60% more cargo than her predecessor. With the post-pandemic bottled-up demand for travelling and the lifting of the previously rapidly changing travel restrictions, the number of passengers travelling through the port is back to a satisfying level.

The outlook for international cruise traffic is also positive. Altogether 22 cruise ship visits have been booked for this summer, more than twice the number seen in the best pre-corona years. Among the ten or so shipping companies that have announced vessel calls for the summer, there are several cruise lines whose vessels are visiting Turku for the first time.

The positively launched cruise summer is also set to continue in the coming years. Bookings have already been made for 2023 and 2024, adding to the Port of Turku's future confidence. Cruise companies and tourists are attracted by the beauty of Turku and the archipelago – visits made possible thanks to an efficient port that can serve the traffic.

The art of future

Passenger traffic has always been a crucial part of Turku's port operations. That is why the City of Turku and the port authority are willing to invest strongly in keeping it so in the future. An extensive project has been initiated to provide the ferry lines with a brand-new, modern joint terminal. This investment is part of the city's plan to improve the port infrastructure, reconstruct the historical area around the castle, and bring the city's maritime component closer to the centre, thus making it more accessible for the local citizens to enjoy.

PES-Architects have won the competition with their Origami concept, becoming

the principal architectural designer for the new Ferry Terminal Turku. While the jury unanimously chose the proposal, they commended the two other final stage proposals for their high-quality designs. Clear functionality and expressive architecture stand behind Origami's success. The work will continue with a development phase in cooperation with other parties; it will commence in late summer 2022, extending to spring next year, when the project will shift to the implementation stage.

However, parts of the construction project have been rescheduled due to the spike in the cost of construction materials. The start of the quay investment related to the passenger travel port will be postponed by one year, and the lease for the field areas used for port traffic will be extended until 2026-end. By changing the schedules, Turku wants to ensure that the new passenger terminal, port structures, and the construction of the Museum of History and the Future stay within budget.

Notwithstanding the new situation, planning all projects in the city centre and the port will continue uninterrupted. The City of Turku, the port, the project management team and involved partners are determined to begin the construction work in 2023. Initially planned for completion in 2026, the terminal building will now be commissioned in 2027.

"We are aiming to build a modern terminal that is highly efficient and where the passenger flows move without delays. The

visit to the terminal is an integral part of the maritime voyage, and we want the experience to have an equally high standard all through the journey," says Erik Söderholm, the Port of Turku's Managing Director. He furthers, "Turku has a long history within the maritime industry and the connection between Turku, Mariehamn and Stockholm is not only very important and vital to the citizens and export & import business, but we are also well known as a maritime city all over the world. This will be an important and historical landmark for our city that will stand here for many years to come."

Better infrastructure = less pollution

The Turku-Helsinki railway is a part of the European TEN-T network, with the connection between the main railway stations in Turku and Pasila in Helsinki, a piece of the Core Network.

In spring 2022, the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications proposed to the European Commission that the railway leading to the Port of Turku should be included in the TEN-T Comprehensive Network. A proposal was brought to the Turku City Council at the beginning of June this year that the railroad should be brought from the central railway station to the passenger terminal's direct vicinity from the port's north side. The City Council decided that Turku would start negotiations with the Finnish Transport and Infrastructure Agency about shifting the port rail line from its current location.



Photo: Jarmo Piironen/Port of Turku



Photo: Jouni Saaristo/Port of Turku



Photo: PES-Architects

Postponing the schedule will give time for implementing the newly electrified passenger railway from the Muhkuri rail yard to the port.

Renewing the infrastructure by building a new rail connection and a road network that bypasses the city centre and the historical castle area is a step towards a cleaner city with less air and noise pollution. Naturally, the goal is also to make the connections to the port more comfortable, sustainable and efficient for travellers.

From sea to land: building flats on waste

The above actions strongly support the city's goal of becoming climate-neutral by 2029. Sustainability and environmental awareness are essential in developing the city and its port.

Among many, the two decided in 2018 to stop sea disposal of dredged masses and instead move to land depositions. In the same year, the CircVol project was launched,

during which the goal for Turku Science Park was to find ways to utilise dredged masses and other excess soil and industrial surplus products in earthworks. The first concrete location to dispose of clay soil is the Lauttaranta district in Turku, a residential construction area. By placing the dredging sediments in embankment pools to be built on the current alluvial land, it is possible to erect a new district with blocks of flats on the seaside in the Latokari area.

Wind of change

The Port of Turku is very relieved of how well it has recovered from the pandemic and is looking forward to a busy and bright future with many exciting projects and changes.

The port authority is working hard to expand Turku's traffic towards central Europe – and the 'hot topic' here has lately been a possible shipping line between Turku and the Port of Gdynia. The negotiations are ongoing – the Port of Turku is working on

finding the right shipping company to open this new connection.

Söderholm highlights, "For Turku, the new direct regular liner ship connection to Poland would mean a new fast route to continental Europe that would support the business life of the whole of western Finland. In addition to Poland, with strong economic growth, the connection would act as a gateway to the markets of central and southern Europe in terms of both exports and imports. Based on our discussions, there is interest on the market in a new line that would provide a cost-efficient option for truck transports through Via Baltica. After a sea voyage of just 24 hours, the trucks can get on the road in Turku at best in ten minutes, which means considerable time savings for time-sensitive transports."

There is no question that the wind of change is blowing over Turku – the place to follow in the coming years for anyone interested in the shipping and port industries! ■