Transforming Croatia’s Rijeka Port and City

Vanja Frajtic, Communications Associate in the Zagreb Office, offers this story.

From Rijeka’s waterfront, you can see large container vessels steaming along the horizon like dots on the Adriatic. To attract those ships to this deep water Croatian port while improving the city’s waterfront, major investments in terminals, docks, and roads are being made.

Rijeka has been an important port over the centuries, changing hands as it changed rulers, and cycling through boom and bust. In the past decade, Rijeka has been in need of an economic boost, and is getting one thanks to a public-private partnership involving government authorities and one of the largest private terminal operators in the world, International Container Terminal Services (ICTSI).

The long term plan is to make the port—a gateway to Central Europe—competitive to container and other maritime traffic, while making the city more livable for its citizens and more attractive to tourists.

The ambitious and massive overhaul of Rijeka’s port is a project of the government—through the state run port authority and the roads company—and the municipality of Rijeka, with close support from the World Bank.

The existing container terminal in Brajdica is the first to be upgraded. New equipment and more workers are already speeding up offloading of ships. Expansion of the terminal is underway. Once completed, traffic could potentially triple. That is the business objective of ICTSI, which will operate this terminal for 30 years.

"By 2016, the Brajdica terminal will be able to handle half a million containers per year. Today it only handles 140,000," says Antonio Passaro of ICTSI. ICTSI became a majority shareholder in the concessionaire in early 2011, following one of the first successful public private partnerships in the sector in Croatia.

As the port is reconfigured, some industrial operations are being moved off the waterfront, making room for citizens, tourists, and businesses.

A new passenger terminal, big enough for cruise ships with 500 passengers to dock, allows easy passage from sea to land, and reopens the waterfront.

Having ICTSI at the helm of the concessionaire saves the government from having to finance most of the upgrading of the equipment and of the terminal platform, while improving its revenue to reimburse the initial infrastructure.

"They have planned an investment of EUR 70 million in the next five years, and we believe that number will be much bigger over the concession period. From this one terminal alone, revenue for the port will be EUR 17 million a year. With this money we can make new investments, hire more people and improve the living conditions in the city," says Denis Vukorepa, Director of Luka Rijeka, the...
Living conditions are already better thanks to a new connector road and bypass from the container terminal to the highway. Noisy trucks no longer rumble through narrow and crowded Rijeka city streets belching fumes ferrying containers from port to suburbs or final destination city. There is less traffic and less pollution.

"According to data, 60,000 vehicles enter the city every day when people go to work. It is good that we have a road like this that will get rid of the heavy traffic in the city," says one citizen.

It also gets goods off the docks and on their way faster and cheaper.

"Early data show a 50% savings in time. This means that the entire process before opening this road lasted an hour to get to the motorway to Zagreb, but now it is done in a half an hour," says Ante Buneta, who manages the terminal where containers are offloaded for further transport by rail or road.

And it means the way is paved for more container traffic in the future.