HINTERLAND CONNECTIVITY

New and innovative impulses for the Flemish hinterland / 6.11.2017
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1 INTRODUCTION

Flanders has the ambition to become ‘thé logistic hub of Europe’. Therefore, the current government already has taken different initiatives and more initiatives are being developed. Infrastructure is an essential condition, but only infrastructure is not sufficient to guarantee a good hinterland connectivity. Despite the planned and already established infrastructural projects, there are several factors that threaten the status of ‘Flanders as logistic hub of Europe’. Road transport is in this way still the most popular transport mode, despite the increasing congestion. The presumption is that the congestion will still increase in the future because of the growing demand for transport and heavy mobility projects as there is the Oosterweel link. Besides that, we see a relapse of the rail freight numbers and a stagnation of the barge numbers in the modal split figures.

The Flemish seaports are suffering too from those factors and the seaports are looking for new and innovative impulses to improve freight transport from and to the hinterland in an efficient and fluent way. The Flemish authorities and the port authorities therefore want to stimulate and support those impulses financially with this open Request for Proposals. The project proposals have to continue the modal shift and to improve the accessibility of the Flemish ports. A modal shift also contributes to the environmental objectives like the Europe 2020-strategy that is aiming at an 20%-decrease of emission of greenhouse gases compared to 1990. Those objectives can only be reached by choosing at very most for sustainable transport modes, also for freight transport.

2 OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Flemish authorities and the port authorities encourage the market to take initiatives aimed at raising the efficiency of existing and new transport of maritime freight by road, rail or barge (for example better collaboration, spreading or efficiency, so as to raise the load factor), and/or achieving a modal shift from road to rail or barge, with a positive effect on environment-friendliness.
In practical terms, the project proposals must have five main objectives:

1. To produce a positive impact on traffic flowing to, from and in the port;
2. To raise the efficiency of existing and new flows of goods (for example, by means of co-loading, avoiding empty trips, etc.);
3. To develop alternatives to ease the current congestion by focusing on a modal shift to rail/barge;
4. To develop innovative concepts to reinforce the logistic reputation of the region of Flanders and the Flemish seaports;
5. To produce a positive effect on environmental impacts.

With this open Request for Proposals the Flemish authorities and the port authorities seek to encourage all parties involved in the choice of transport and to give them the opportunity to implement new, sustainable mobility solutions or make improvements to existing solutions for land-side transport of maritime freight.

The Flemish authorities and the port authorities propose to offer temporary financial support to approximately twenty projects that make the greatest contribution to meeting the above objectives. With this open Request for Proposals, potential candidates are invited to submit a project proposal.

2.2 SCOPE OF THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Candidates are expected to submit a practical project proposal that clearly states the manner (period, maximum amount, any conditions, etc.) in which the objectives of the Request for Proposals will be attained (see section 2 above: Objectives and scope).

The support which the Flemish authorities and the port authorities are expected to provide must comply with the applicable regulations, in particular the EU regulations governing state support, in particular the “de minimis” regulation.1

If several project proposals are favourably judged and furthermore are complementary to one another and opportune, then it is possible that it will be decided to support more than twenty projects, up to a maximum of twenty-five. However, candidates who submit a proposal cannot infer any rights from this possibility (see also section 3.2 below).

3 ORGANISATION AND CONDITIONS

3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PROCEDURE

The procedure for the Request for Proposals is as follows:


- Deadline for candidates to submit questions by mail: 14 November 2017. If the questions are relevant for other parties too, the Flemish authorities will publish the questions and answers on the website mow.vlaanderen.be so that it is fully available. This is considered the most transparent way of making the information available.

- Deadline for the submission of project proposals: 27 November 2017, 12h00 at the latest.

- Analysis and selection of the project proposals submitted: 4 December 2017.

An agreement shall be made between the Flemish authorities, the concerned port authority and the candidates selected, laying down the definitive conditions and arrangements. The remaining candidates who have submitted proposals will be informed by the Flemish authorities and the concerned port authority, with reasons being given.

3.2 MAIN ASPECTS OF THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The fact of the open Request for Proposals being issued does not imply any rights that may be claimed on the part of the candidates (or potential candidates). The Flemish authorities or the port authority may decide at any moment to halt the procedure, without this giving rise to any form of compensation; the Flemish authorities and the port authority are not obliged to make any adjudication decision. The Flemish authorities and the port authorities retain the right to issue a new Request for Proposals at a later date, which may or may not have different conditions or procedures. The support offered under the terms of the Request for Proposals is not exclusive in nature. Candidates bear full responsibility for their project proposals. The Flemish authorities and the port authorities cannot be held liable in any way for the project proposals submitted.
3.3 SUBMISSION OF PROJECT PROPOSALS

Each candidate may submit only one project proposal. The project proposals must be submitted by mail, at the latest by 27 November 2017 at 12h00, send to the contact person of the concerned port authority and to the Port Commissioner (jan.blomme@mow.vlaanderen.be):

- Port of Ostend – jan.allaert@portofoostende.be
- Port of Antwerp – pascale.pasmans@portofantwerp.com
- Port of Ghent – frederic.devreese@havengent.be
- Port of Zeebrugge – ja@mbz.be and pvc@mbz.be

The project proposals must include at least the following information and documents:

- A detailed proposal comprising among other things a financial plan, an implementation plan with a definite time path, and an explanation of the way in which support is expected;
- An explanation of the added value that the project proposal offers to the concerned port and its users;
- A signed declaration (see annex 1) to the effect that the candidate has not received any state support under the "de minimis" regulation\(^2\) during the current and past two tax years (or, if such support has been received, the cumulative amount thereof), and where applicable a declaration of any other form of state support received for the project submitted, mentioning the government or authority which has granted the support and the amount thereof\(^3\);
- A list of references attesting the candidate’s competency, experience and familiarity with truck transport and/or rail and barge transport;
- All information necessary for assessment of the minimum conditions and the adjudication criteria (see below).

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\(^3\)
The port authority or the Flemish authorities reserve the right to reject any project proposal without further examination if one or more of the above-mentioned documents or items of information are missing. Conversely, the port authority or the Flemish authorities may ask one or more of the candidates for additional information or questions about the project proposal submitted, and on this basis permit the candidates concerned to add the missing documents.

If a project proposal is submitted by more than one natural or artificial person (consortium), then it must include a declaration signed by all of them, stating which of them is entitled to represent the consortium in dealings with the port authority and the Flemish authorities. All members of the consortium shall be held severally liable for their engagements and commitments towards the port authority and the Flemish authorities.
4 MINIMUM CONDITIONS AND ADJUDICATION CRITERIA

4.1 MINIMUM CONDITIONS

To qualify for support, the submitted project proposals must meet the following minimum conditions:

- The project proposal must offer new or improved mobility solutions for freight transport, an improvement in the efficiency of road, rail or barge transport flows, and/or achieving a modal shift to rail or barge.
- The proposal must concentrate on traffic flows to, from and in a Flemish sea port.
- The mobility solution must be an "open access" service, open to all potential customers in a non-discriminatory way.
- The proposed project must be profitable in the medium term (within three years).

Project proposals must be accompanied by all the necessary documents and information showing that the minimum conditions are met. By submitting a project proposal, candidates declare on their honour (declaration to be included as an attachment), that they are not in a condition that would lead to their exclusion, such as:

- Participation in a criminal organisation as defined in art. 324bis of the Criminal Code;
- Bribery, as defined in arts. 246 and 250 of the Criminal Code;
- Fraud, as defined in art. 1 of the agreement concerning the protection of the financial interests of the Community, ratified by the Act of 17 February 2002;
- Money laundering, as defined in art. 5 of the Act of 11 January 1993 for the prevention of the use of the financial system for laundering money and financing terrorism;
- Bankruptcy or composition with creditors, or having ceased trading, or being subject to court-imposed reorganisation, or in a similar condition as a result of an analogous procedure in another national jurisdiction;
- Having declared bankruptcy, being subject to a procedure of composition or court-ordered reorganisation, or a similar procedure in other national jurisdictions;
– Condemnation for an offense that impacts their professional integrity, by a final court decision;
– Guilty of serious professional misconduct;
– Failure to have complied fully with social security payment obligations;
– Default of payment of taxes under Belgian law or the law of the country of establishment;
– Making false statements in providing information requested under the terms of the present Request for Proposals, or failure to provide such information, to a serious degree.

The Flemish authorities and the concerned port authority may reject a project proposal at any stage of the procedure if the candidate is found to be in any of these categories.

4.2 ADJUDICATION CRITERIA

The concerned port authority and the Flemish authorities shall assess the project proposals submitted on the basis of the following adjudication criteria:

1. Added value and quality of the proposed service (30/100)

The Flemish authorities and the port authorities wish to support projects that offer maximum added value for the concerned port and for the port users, according to the principle of equality among users. In this respect projects with more maritime cargo will be valued more highly than those with less. The proposed mobility solutions should offer shippers an efficient, reliable and price-competitive alternative, and should be capable of being operated sustainably alongside existing services. Project proposals that take a higher number of trucks off the road to/from the concerned port will be judged more favourably. The project to which the candidate commits, should strengthen the position of the concerned port and of the region of Flanders as logistic region.
2. Quality of the project proposal (30/100)

Candidates are expected to present a complete and detailed project proposal. The project proposal should include among other things a realistic business plan that will be profitable in the medium term (within a maximum period of three years) and will continue to operate thereafter. The project proposal must also include a sufficiently detailed implementation plan (including commercialisation, timing, organisation, promotion etc.).

3. Sustainability (20/100)

Project proposals will be assessed more favourably for this criterion to the extent that they take greater account of sustainability aspects.

4. Competency, experience and familiarity with the transport mode involved, as well with mobility solutions for freight traffic (20/100)

Candidates are required to demonstrate their competency and experience in the intermodal transport method involved (road, rail or barge). They should preferably also demonstrate their familiarity with the concerned port. Candidates may call upon the competency, knowledge and experience of other persons (including artificial persons) if shown to be necessary for putting the project into practice. In such a case candidates must present evidence of the obligations that enable them to call upon such third parties for putting the project into practice.

The support expected from the Flemish authorities and the port authority must be employed as efficiently as possible in order to meet the objectives outlined above. In this connection, candidates must explain clearly what support is expected, and to what extent, specifying e.g. the period, any modalities, etc. To repeat: the support is offered for a maximum period of three years and is limited to a maximum of € 200,000 per project. It is further emphasised that the support must always comply with the applicable regulations, in particular the EU regulations concerning state support. The concerned port authority and the Flemish authorities will monitor the implementation of the project in detail, on the basis of the clear objectives and measurable criteria laid down in the agreements that shall be drawn up.
5 CONTACT AND INFORMATION

Questions concerning the present Request for Proposals should be sent, by 14 November 2017 at the latest, to the contact person of the concerned port and to the Port Commissioner:

Port of Ostend – jan.allaert@portofoostende.be
Port of Antwerp – pascale.pasmans@portofantwerp.com
Port of Ghent – frederic.devreese@havengent.be
Port of Zeebrugge – ja@mbz.be and pvc@mbz.be
Port Commissioner – jan.blomme@mow.vlaanderen.be

The Flemish authorities and the port authorities reserve, under the principles of equal treatment and transparency, the right to make information supplied by it, in response to questions from any particular party and if relevant for the other parties, also available for those other parties responding to this Request for Proposals, by publishing it on the website mow.vlaanderen.be after 14 November 2017.