

# Flanders...A leading logistics location just across the Channel



Alex Van Breedam

For the second year running, Belgium has been ranked Europe's leading distribution centre by the annual Cushman & Wakefield Healey & Baker Distribution Report. And, in a second study, the company has ranked the Belgian region of Flanders the best European region for logistics operations. Everyone has heard about Flemish ports such as Antwerp and Zeebrugge, but what else is behind this rise to the top?

For centuries, Flanders has occupied a strategic position right at the crossroads of European trade. Situated at the geographical point where the Anglo-Saxon, Latin and Germanic cultures meet, this northern region of Belgium has offered traders the location, the flexibility, the languages, the business skills and the enterprise culture they have needed throughout the ages. It scores in the top five in low road congestion, rail density, sea freight, population density, new units built, and land supply.

## Along the coast, Flanders offers three of Europe's major seaports – Antwerp, Ghent and Zeebrugge – as well as the smaller port of Ostend

For Professor Alex Van Breedam, director of the Flanders Institute for Logistics, the high rankings achieved by Flanders comes as no surprise. "We are right at the centre of consumer and industrial purchasing power in the EU," he explains, "But, in addition to this and also as a consequence of it, we are able to offer high added value in the critical final phase of the supply chain immediately prior to customer delivery – that is, customising products, postponed assembly and manufacturing, and the like."

### ADVANCED INFRASTRUCTURE

#### By Sea Port

There are more than 180 European distribution centres already located in Flanders. These range from in-house operations to third-party suppliers, all of whom benefit from an advanced and efficient transport, communications and IT infrastructure. Along the coast, Flanders offers three of Europe's major seaports – Antwerp, Ghent and Zeebrugge – as well as the smaller port of Ostend. The Port of Antwerp is consistently ranked among the world's top five ports based on overall international cargo traffic and is Europe's largest petrochemical centre.

From the ports, the road network in Flanders provides fast links with markets and suppliers. The region features one of the world's highest road densities, and its motorways connect directly with those of France, Germany and the Netherlands. In fact, logistics and distribution operations are able to move goods from Flanders to most major European markets within 24 hours by road. With some 2,160 miles of track, Flanders has the second highest density of railways in the world. The region's waterways are also on the rise, with traffic increasing every year.

#### By Air

For time-sensitive industries, Brussels international airport features Brucargo as a 268-acre 'cargo city' grouping some 100 cargo agencies. With Europe's largest freeway interchange just half a mile away and the close proximity of rail, sea and waterway stations and ports, Brucargo has seen rapid growth since it began operations in 1980. Ostend Airport, on the other hand, is mainly specialised in oversized cargo, perishables and livestock. Brussels,

capital of Flanders as well as Belgium, has been ranked sixth in the top 10 worldwide Internet hub cities and the Amsterdam-Brussels and Brussels-London Internet backbones are among the world's leading routes.

#### Education & support

Backing up this infrastructure is a productive and multi-lingual workforce, and an education system that meets the needs of a modern, competitive, knowledge-based economy. As a result of the rising influence of logistics in the region's economy, the Flemish Regional Government and the logistics industry last year established the Flanders Institute for Logistics.

The institute acts as a centre of expertise for the industry and conceives, translates, validates and implements innovations using the best available research teams. In addition, it has been tasked with monitoring and disseminating general information relating to logistics. Flanders not only offers logistics companies an ideal location in today's Europe, it also welcomes businesses to its shores. ☀

#### Prince Philippe to lead Belgium delegation to India

A high-profile trade and official delegation from Belgium, headed by Crown Prince Philippe, will visit India (New Delhi, Bangalore, Pune and Mumbai) from March 12 to 19, 2005. The aim of the mission is to highlight the achievements and expertise available in different spheres of industrial and economic activities of Belgium and attract investments.

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