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Advancing Shore Power in UK Ports



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Shore power is beginning to be embraced by UK Ports as an alternative power source for visiting ships in the drive to encourage decarbonisation and clean air in ports by discouraging ships from burning heavy fuel. Shore power has already been established in some ports, such as Orkney and Southampton, with many ports preparing the installations, for example Portsmouth International Port and the Port of Aberdeen.

The Challenges

The move to shore power will be a massive push for the ports and harbours industry in order to allow the marine industry as a whole to reach its decarbonisation goals. However, there are hurdles that lie in the way, one of those being the cost of electricity. Uptake by ships using shore power has been slow due to the cost of plugging into the electricity, primarily because the National Grid are supplying electricity on a commercial rate meaning there is little regulation as to the rates at which the National Grid can sell the electricity. Currently, the cost of burning heavy fuel to run vessels while in port is cheaper than the cost of plugging in. However, the industry should be able to overcome this, and the take-up of shore power will increase.

The limited capacity of the National Grid is also causing delays in relation to the provision of shore power at many ports and harbours. Historically, towns have grown around ports and harbours as they have been a hub of the community and a fruitful source of jobs. However, this has resulted in there being large electricity and power demands in such towns. A port or harbour will usually use the same if not more, power than a town would and so requires a surplus of energy from the National Grid. This is a surplus of energy that the National Grid cannot yet supply. Although there are plans for this energy to come, there are delays while the infrastructure is developed to allow for this.

Another hurdle to overcome is in relation to the development and building of the infrastructure required to allow shore power to run through ports and harbours. Ports and harbours will need to obtain planning permission, but equally they need to ensure that they have the regulatory powers to provide shore power and to build the necessary infrastructure. This may require an update to regulatory powers for the port or harbour. An application to the Marine Management Organisation will be needed in order to do this. Currently, the MMO is working on a backlog, which means there are delays in granting these powers as well as related planning permission. This is hampering the industry's attempts to keep up with the required developments.

The Future of Shore Power

Despite these hurdles, which are already being confronted, there is a clear and exciting future for shore power within UK ports, and we look forward to seeing it grow from strength to strength. There are moves in the industry to push for interruptive power to be introduced. This allows for ships to be powered by electricity at times when there are low demands for power from the surrounding villages, towns and cities. However, when demand increases, for example, when everyone has returned home and is cooking dinner, the power will be diverted to address residential needs. During this time, ships will need to be powered by their generators. However, the shore power interruption period would be limited, and there would be an overall reduction in carbon emissions. This method could be particularly useful as a transitional solution while the capacity and connection of the National Grid are improved and will allow shore power to flourish further. Interruptive power is being used successfully in Europe and there are hopes that this can be introduced in the UK.

There are potential developments where ships might also be able to provide power to the port or local area when they have excess electricity. This would mean that the town could run off the power a ship generates. There are calls for this to be developed within the marine industry and even in relation to electric cars and individual homes.

The evolution of shore power is exciting, and we are keen to see how this will develop going forward and to assist our port and marina clients in the legal and regulatory help they need to establish shore power.

Need advice?

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