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## **HALTON SUMMER MAGAZINE**

The Mersey Multimodal Gateway (3MG) is an innovative rail and road logistics hub based in Widnes.

The site offers customers an excellent base to locate a number of distribution centres to achieve efficient and cost-effective solutions for the storage and transportation of goods, using a combination of road, rail and sea freight modes.

3MG originally comprised of 750,000 sq. ft. of warehousing and is currently undergoing the first phases of a multi-million pound expansion which will provide 3.5 million sq. ft. of new warehousing, subject to planning permission, and in turn should create in the region of 5,000 new jobs.

Although the site will continue to be developed in the coming years, it already benefits from daily rail services and has high quality warehouse capacity available.

In February 2008, O'Connor, a division of the Stobart Group, completed works to expand the 3MG rail freight terminal. This six-month project increased the storage capability of the 3MG freight terminal by over 1,000 containers, providing an overall capacity of up to 6,000 containers.

The rail freight aspect of the site utilises the most recent crane technology and bespoke computerised systems, designed to enhance the efficiency of the terminal in terms of speed of rail side lifting operations, vehicle throughput and reliability of information.

The system is automatically updated after each individual container move, in real time, and systems are integrated with customers' own applications via specialist software to provide up to the minute container tracking. The site operates a vehicle turnaround target of just 15 minutes - compared with an industry standard of between one and two hours – giving an indication of the beneficial effect that the technological innovations can have on day to day operations.

Blakedown Landscape Operations started its eight-month programme to improve 3MG and its surroundings in May 2008. As well as structural landscaping work, improvements will be made to the fishing pond and its surroundings. The community of adjoining Halebank will also benefit, with the next phase of work scheduled for the redevelopment of the village Recreation Park.

This public park is a popular facility in the area and there are plans to provide a new skateboard park and make improvements to its play area and football pitch. New footpath and cycleway links will also be created.

In addition to this infrastructure work, a planning application for the development of a link road to the A5300 was submitted to Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Halton Borough Council in January - a decision is expected later in Summer 2008.

3MG is being delivered by a partnership comprising of Halton Borough Council and O'Connor - a division of the Stobart Group.

The development is endorsed and supported by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) and the Government Office for the North West and once completed, will strengthen the North West logistics sector.

Halton Borough Council, working in conjunction with skills partners, is developing a training initiative to ensure that they address the current skills shortage in the area and have the workforce in place ready to take up new jobs.

The O'Connor Group has provided container transport services in the Halton area for almost 40 years and now represents the specialist container handling and port operations arm of the Stobart Group. The Company operates the major intermodal container terminal and storage facility and also the Port of Weston on the Manchester Ship Canal, now re-branded as the Mersey Gateway Port. Recently, the Stobart Group has made major acquisitions in the area giving them a substantial interest in 3MG.

The Port of Weston is just a few miles from the 3MG Terminal and is in easy reach of the key North West conurbations as well as being in close proximity to the major M6-M62-M56

motorway hub, the West Coast Mainline and the Manchester Ship Canal. Steve O'Connor has been appointed Ports Director for the Stobart Group and is responsible for the 3MG site in Widnes and the Mersey Gateway Port in Runcorn.

**ENDS**