ELBREPORT

THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR CUXHAVEN AND THE ELBE METROPOLITAN REGION

1–2026

FAST TURNAROUNDS AT THE QUAYSIDE

Efficiency and speed as the foundation of operational success

RHENUS CUXPORT AND THE EVOLVING DYNAMICS OF EUROPEAN AUTOMOTIVE HANDLING

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CONTENTS

S. 6
FAST TURNA-
ROUNDS AT
THE QUAYSIDE

S. 28
ENHANCING HEAVY-
LIFT CAPACITY

S. 22
A HOME PORT FOR
WIND ENERGY

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Holger Grabsch

Taking Responsibility Means Acknowledging Realities

Cuxhaven faces a series of consequential decisions in 2026. Their implications—economic, infrastructural, and political – frame this issue of Elbreport.

IN OUR OWN MATTERS

The forthcoming local election has already begun to shape the debate. The city will elect a mayor and, in doing so, define its political direction for the years ahead. At the same time, construction and investment continue apace. Cuxhaven is not observing these developments from the sidelines; it is engaged in shaping them.

The expansion of the German Offshore Industry Centre (DOIZ) illustrates this approach. Additional berths, expanded logistics areas for general cargo, and enhanced infrastructure are reinforcing the port's function as a hub for offshore wind energy. The new port access road will establish a central transport corridor for heavy cargo, capable of handling units of up to 5,000 tonnes. Without such infrastructure, industrial development would remain aspirational; with it, Cuxhaven assumes a role that extends beyond the city itself—to the Elbe metropolitan region and to Germany as an industrial location. This trajectory rests on continuity in planning, institutional cooperation, and a readiness to invest.

Against this backdrop, the debate surrounding the Alte Liebe warrants careful consideration. Several thousand signatures opposing a new structure point to the site's significance within the city's identity. This attachment is understandable. At the same time, responsibility requires a clear view of the constraints.

The structure, owing to its age, cannot be preserved indefinitely; the refurbishment undertaken in 1982 cannot be extended in technical terms. A new build will require substantial financial resources and time. It will, however, provide barrier-free access. A reconstruction in its current form, by contrast, would involve considerable cost, a multi-year construction period, and continued exclusion.

Public scrutiny is both legitimate and necessary. It should, however, be accompanied by proportion. Judgements formed at a distance risk overlooking the broader context: Cuxhaven is undergoing a process of renewal. The city is investing rather than deferring decisions. It is not relinquishing a historic site, but reconfiguring it in a manner that reflects present requirements.

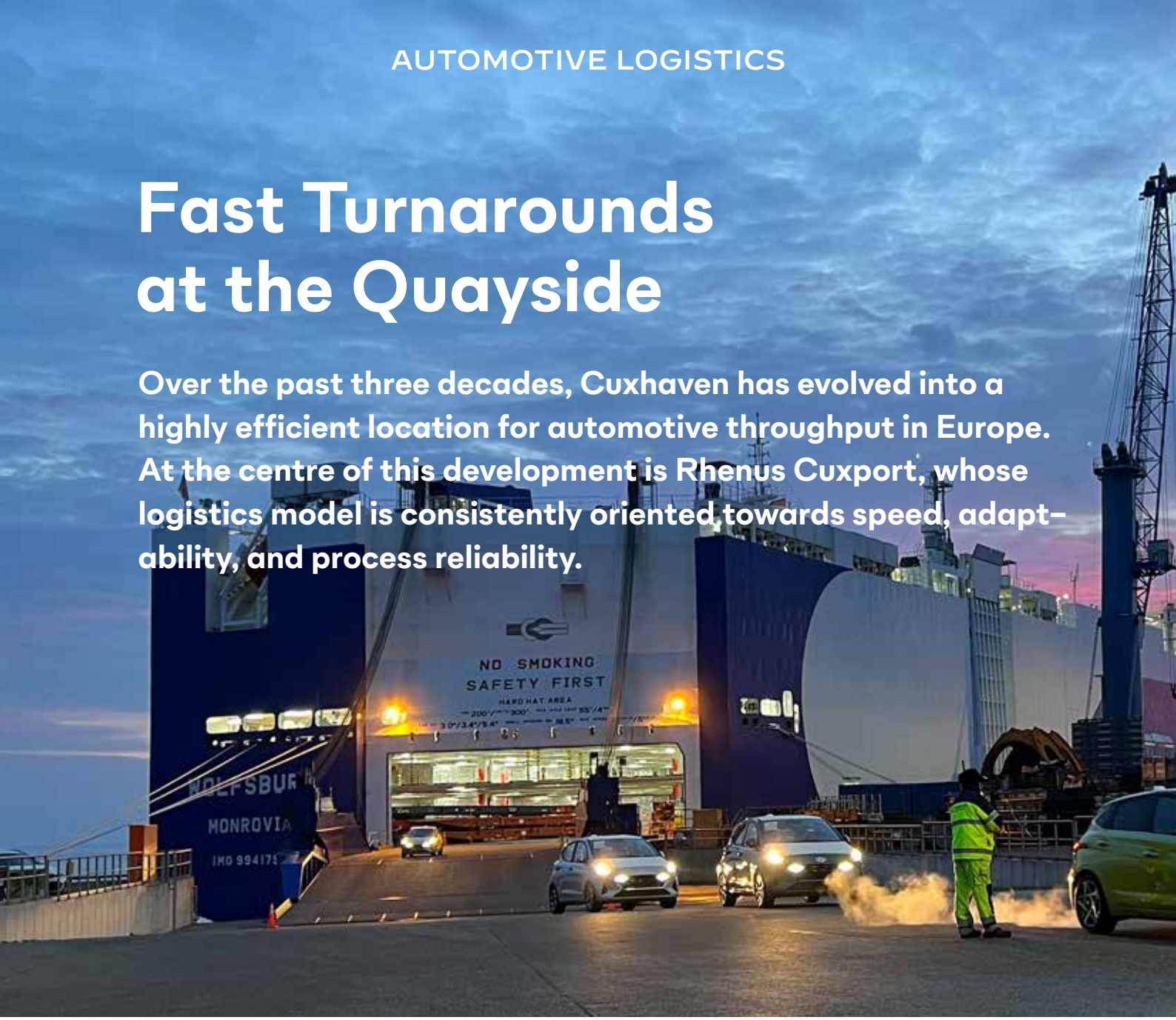
In many places, a freely accessible vantage point of this kind would no longer exist. Here, it remains—adapted, secure, and accessible. Cuxhaven has demonstrated resilience in more challenging circumstances. Preserving that disposition is essential, particularly in an election year. The course ahead will be determined not by the intensity of debate, but by the quality of decisions—and by a shared commitment to carry them forward.

Holger Grabsch

Publisher, Elbreport

Fast Turnarounds at the Quayside

Over the past three decades, Cuxhaven has evolved into a highly efficient location for automotive throughput in Europe. At the centre of this development is Rhenus Cuxport, whose logistics model is consistently oriented towards speed, adaptability, and process reliability.



The morning air is cool, carrying a trace of salt. A RoRo vessel lies alongside the quay as the first vehicle convoys move across the terminal. Arrival and onward dispatch follow in rapid succession—by rail, by road, or directly onto the next vessel. Idle time is rare. At the automotive terminal, operations are measured in hours, often in minutes. At the mouth of the Elbe, a logistics system has taken shape that privileges tempo, flexibility, and coordinated partnerships, and has become an integral element of the European automotive trade.

"Cuxhaven distinguishes itself through efficiency, flexibility, and its strategic location," says Claudius Schumacher, Managing Director of Rhenus Cuxport. Performance begins inland: proximity to European production sites allows for short lead times, with vehicles frequently arriving overnight. This is supported by robust road links and a rail network designed with redundancy in mind. Transport flows are no longer routed exclusively via Hamburg but also via Bremerhaven, contributing to system resilience. Even in the event of disruption, alternative routes remain available, maintaining continuity in supply chains.

Cuxport operates as a high-throughput port. Vehicles typically remain on site for one to two days before onward transport. The close integration of quay, rail, and road reduces handling times. At the same time, the terminal offers a range of value-added services—from pre-delivery inspections (PDI) to customs clearance. "Alongside throughput, we provide services such as automated washing and technical support, including underbody protection and minor repairs," explains Julian Brütt, Operations Manager and Port Facility Security Of-

Continuous handling of deep-sea RoRo imports supports high availability and operational continuity.

ficer. This combination of operational pace and service capability contributes to the site's appeal for manufacturers and importers.

A further advantage lies on the waterside. Cuxhaven is a lock-free deep-water port, with depths of up to 15.8 metres, short approach channels, and high operational availability. Flexible berth allocation supports stable processes. "This enables consistent and disruption-resistant operations, which are essential for shipping lines," Schumacher notes. Berth lengths allow for the handling of all relevant vessel classes; in the previous year, one of the largest RoRo cargo vessels in operation was processed at the terminal.

"New traffic patterns—for example, those of a manufacturer producing in Turkey and routing vehicles to Germany via Cuxport—illustrate the effectiveness of cooperation at the site," says Oliver Fuhljahn, Head of Business Development. Cuxhaven operates as part of an integrated network. While Cuxport provides infrastructure, partners such as the automotive logistics company Mosolf manage transport operations and maintain close links to the finished vehicle sector.

These cooperative models enable scaling in response to market dynamics and traffic volumes. Terminal areas are configured for multiple uses: in addition to vehicle handling, they accommodate wind energy projects, machinery, and plant logistics within the general cargo segment. "Our terminal layout is designed for multifunctionality. Short dwell times in automotive operations regularly create capacity for other projects," Fuhljahn explains. This approach to yard management supports both utilisation and operational flexibility.

In recent years, the balance has shifted from export to import. Vehicles from both neighbouring and more distant markets are gaining relevance. Brexit has contributed to this development: vehicles from the United Kingdom now require customs clearance within the EU, a process handled efficiently in Cuxhaven. "A significant share of UK imports is processed here and distributed across Germany," Fuhljahn notes. The development of an eleven-hectare project area within five months in 2023 reflects this changing demand.

The increasing share of electric vehicles introduces additional requirements. "Expanded charging infrastructure and clearly defined safety standards are among our customers' primary concerns," Schumacher says. Cuxport has responded with approximately 60 charging points and designated storage areas for electric vehicles. Internal mobility is also being adapted, with electrified shuttle systems planned and supported by photovoltaic installations. The company is further investing in software-based security frameworks, including the Trusted Information Security Assessment Exchange (TISAX), which sets standards for information security within the automotive industry.

A substantial portion of traffic is concentrated in short-sea shipping, that is, intra-European flows. "These services are generally less exposed to global disruptions,"

Schumacher observes. While geopolitical tensions continue to affect global supply chains, operations in Cuxhaven remain comparatively stable—an important factor in its role within the European automotive market.

Digitalisation is advancing in parallel. Cuxport is examining AI-supported demand planning and the use of autonomous systems in standardised processes, with the aim of improving efficiency while retaining operational flexibility. Despite technological progress, personnel remain central. "The management of complex automotive flows depends on the combination of qualified staff and targeted technological deployment," Schumacher emphasises.

Investment in workforce development has therefore been sustained over many years. Around 40 employees have completed their training at the site, primarily in port logistics, alongside commercial roles such as dispatchers and freight forwarding specialists. With the growing importance of electromobility, training has been expanded to include vehicle mechatronics. "Many trainees remain with the company, and some have moved into leadership positions," Brütt notes. Recruitment is supported through partnerships with schools, participation in career fairs, and digital outreach.

A defining moment in the site's development occurred on 13 January 2004, when the first rail wagons carrying new vehicles from a European manufacturer arrived in Cuxhaven. "We unloaded the vehicles and shipped them directly to England. That decision established the foundation for subsequent growth," Brütt recalls. Since then, development has proceeded incrementally, guided by consistency in quality and process reliability.

Terminal capacity has been expanded in line with operational requirements. Unlike containerised cargo, vehicles require surface area rather than vertical stacking. In 2011, a modern washing facility, additional unloading tracks, and further ramps were commissioned, alongside expanded berth capacity. Today, annual throughput ranges between 300,000 and 400,000 vehicles.

Cuxhaven has developed into a location where time functions as a critical parameter. Continuous investment in infrastructure, space, and processes has strengthened its position within Northern Europe's automotive logistics network. Maritime accessibility, flexible land use, and stable partnerships converge here to form an effective interface within the European automotive trade.

Future investment, however, depends on reliable framework conditions. "Commercial risk can be managed; political uncertainty cannot," Schumacher remarks, referring to the planned development of berths 5 to 7. Cuxport signals its willingness to commit further capital and assume entrepreneurial risk—on the condition that policy continuity supports long-term planning.

Otto Wulf

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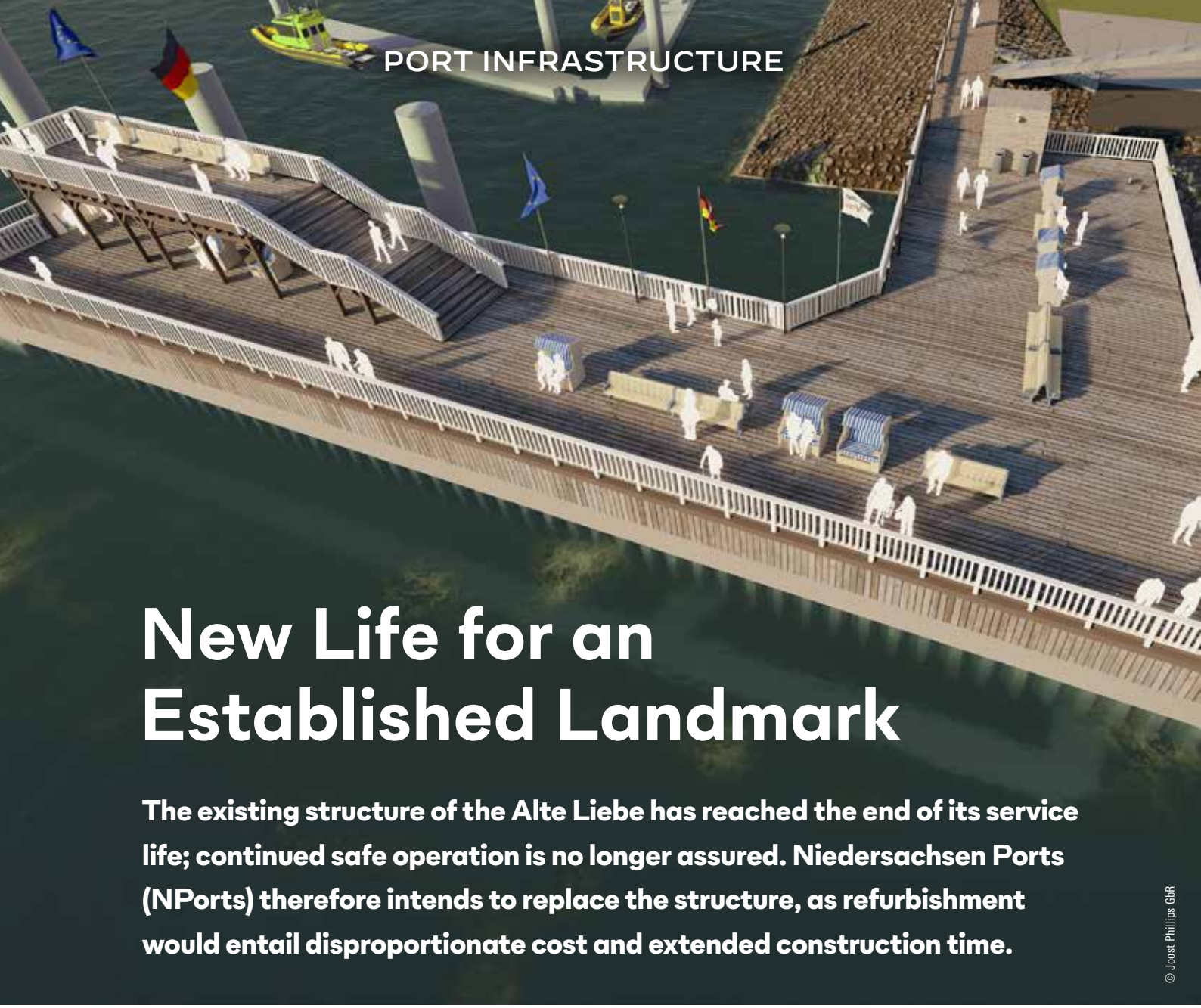

New Life for an Established Landmark

The existing structure of the Alte Liebe has reached the end of its service life; continued safe operation is no longer assured. Niedersachsen Ports (NPorts) therefore intends to replace the structure, as refurbishment would entail disproportionate cost and extended construction time.

An icy wind sweeps across the Elbe estuary. The North Sea presses against the piles on which one of Cuxhaven's most recognisable landmarks stands. The Alte Liebe is at once viewing platform, meeting place, and emblematic image—imbued with personal meaning for many residents. It is this attachment that lends the current debate its intensity. It is also the reason a clear assessment of the underlying conditions is required.

"The question is not one of design, but of structural integrity," says Alexandra Brandt, Deputy Head of NPorts Cuxhaven. Current surveys indicate extensive damage to the reinforced concrete substructure. "The Alte Liebe has reached the end of its structural lifespan and cannot be rehabilitated in its present form," adds Knut Kokkelink, Head of NPorts Cuxhaven. Regular flooding—particularly of the lower deck—combined with salt exposure, storm surges, and rising water levels has accelerated deterioration.

Absent comprehensive renewal, closure would be unavoidable in the foreseeable future. Continued operation under present conditions would be neither economically viable nor acceptable in terms of safety. "This is not a discretionary project; it is a necessary measure to preserve the structure," Kokkelink notes. The debate therefore turns on the balance between the current state and a sustainable long-term solution.

Restoration of the existing structure, including the upper deck, is technically constrained. "The load-bearing capacity of the existing piles is limited," Kokkelink explains. Any additional construction would require a substantially heavier concrete base—approximately 1.2 metres of additional material. Without new piles,

structural stability could not be ensured; their installation, in turn, would extend construction time and increase costs considerably, as Brandt points out.

A central aspect of the discussion is often overlooked: the Alte Liebe is not owned by the city but by the state-owned port operator NPorts. As owner, NPorts carries full responsibility for operation, safety, maintenance, and financing. It is therefore required to mitigate risk and act with a long-term perspective. At the same time, the structure has remained freely accessible for decades, without admission fees or direct revenue. “We presented the plans to the Port, Economy and Tourism Committee, where they received broad support,” Brandt notes.

Current planning provides for a single-level structure built on the existing piles, with weather-protected access. The design emphasises a lighter construction and a higher elevation above the waterline, reducing exposure to flooding and lowering maintenance requirements. “Estimated costs are in the region of five million euros, with a construction period of approximately one year,” Kokkelink says. A reconstruction of the existing configuration, including the upper deck, would involve roughly double the expenditure and a construction period of two to three years. The proposed approach also avoids a prolonged closure during which the site would be inaccessible to both residents and visitors.

Accessibility forms a further consideration—not only in relation to public use, but also to operational safety and maintenance. In its current state, neither small vehicles nor contemporary equipment can be deployed; even routine work must be carried out manually. Renewal will enable maintenance processes that meet current standards, improving access, reducing operational strain, and lowering annual upkeep costs, which presently reach up to €150,000, including labour.

The intensity of the public response, including a petition with several thousand signatures, reflects a political dimension. In the lead-up to the Lower Saxony local elections, the issue has acquired additional visibility. Social media has contributed to the circulation of inaccurate claims—for example, that the Alte Liebe is to be removed entirely. In fact, the objective is its continued existence, secured through necessary renewal. Construction is scheduled to begin in October 2026, with a build time of less than one year.

“The Alte Liebe has never been static,” Kokkelink observes, referring to historical records. Over the decades, it has been repeatedly adapted and reconstructed; the current form dates to the early 1980s. The proposed design draws on earlier configurations while allowing for measured functional additions, including sheltered areas and flexible use of space. The intention is not replacement in the abstract, but continuation under changed conditions.

From Port Logistics Provider to an Industrial and Offshore Partner

The offshore supply vessel Coastal Liberty operates with a hydrogen-based hybrid propulsion system, supporting reduced-emission deployment.

© Philip Koschel/Entec

Entec Industrial Services combines established handling expertise with contemporary logistics, hazardous goods management, and an increasing focus on sustainable technologies.

In recent years, the company has repositioned itself from a conventional port logistics provider to an integrated partner for complex industrial and offshore projects. At its Cuxhaven site, Entec operates at the interface between land and sea, offering a service portfolio that extends beyond traditional general cargo throughput. Storage and handling, technical services, hazardous goods management, and flexible logistics are coordinated within a single operational framework.

This development reflects a deliberate shift in perspective. "We no longer see ourselves solely as a service provider, but as a partner to our customers," says Managing Director and owner Hartmut Obst. The distinction becomes particularly relevant where standardised solutions no longer suffice.

Whether sourcing specialised components at short notice or coordinating offshore logistics under time constraints, the company draws on an established partner network alongside its own infrastructure. "We are often engaged when projects encounter unforeseen challenges," explains Managing Partner Jochen Kaufhold. In offshore operations—where delays can entail considerable cost—this capacity for rapid adjustment is a material advantage.

At the same time, Entec maintains substantial in-house capabilities: mobile cranes with lifting capacities of up to 160 tonnes, a versatile fleet for container and specialised transport, and a broad range of handling equipment enable independent operations. Rather than maintaining cost-intensive excess capacity, the company integrates external partners for particu-

larly heavy loads. This hybrid model supports both responsiveness and cost discipline.

The company's adaptability is also reflected in its contribution to the Coastal Liberty project. Since 2024, this offshore supply vessel has operated with a hydrogen-based hybrid propulsion system, representing a step towards lower-emission maritime logistics. Entec was involved in its implementation and now manages key elements of the onshore logistics infrastructure. At the Cuxhaven site, the company oversees handling, storage, and provision of the transported hydrogen. Two fuel cells, each with an output of 200 kW, support largely emission-reduced operations.

As part of a regional innovation network, the vessel contributes to reducing environmental impact in the sensitive Wadden Sea ecosystem. At the same time, it illustrates how offshore supply concepts can be adapted through alternative propulsion technologies. "Projects of this kind show that we do not simply accompany developments, but contribute to shaping them," Obst notes. The Coastal Liberty thus reflects both technological transition within the sector and Cuxhaven's emerging role in hydrogen-based value chains.

Alongside technological development, organisational approaches are gaining importance. A proprietary training concept brings together participants across the logistics chain—from shippers and freight forwarders to offshore personnel—with the aim of establishing a shared understanding of processes, interfaces, and risks. "The effectiveness of the chain depends on each individual link," says Obst. Training is conducted both onshore and in operational environments, including vessels and offshore installations.

The handling of hazardous goods, heavy cargo, and specialised loads forms part of daily operations. Requirements in hazardous goods management have become more stringent; most sites now include designated areas for the storage and handling of water-polluting substances, in accordance with AwSV regulations. To meet these standards, Entec employs dedicated hazardous goods officers and conducts regular training in ADR and under the IMDG Code, which governs maritime transport. Three such officers oversee compliance as a routine element of operations.

In parallel, the company is expanding its infrastructure. On a site of approximately 30,000 square metres, additional storage and handling areas are under development, including halls with differentiated climate zones, heavy-load surfaces, and flexible open storage. This expansion responds to increasing demand, particularly from the offshore wind sector.

Despite this growth, organisational structures remain streamlined, enabling short decision paths. "We are able to respond quickly and flexibly to customer requirements," Kaufhold observes. At the same time, Entec continues to invest in workforce qualification—from crane operators to hazardous goods specialists—in order to meet the demands of an increasingly specialised market environment. In doing so, the company positions itself as a flexible interface between industry, logistics, and the evolving energy landscape.

A video-monitored open storage area with direct quay access is available for oversized equipment and heavy components.

© Philipp Koschel/Entec

“My Principal Is the Public”

Cuxhaven’s mayor, Uwe Santjer, will stand for re-election in September. In this interview, he sets out his approach to economic policy, infrastructure, urban development, and social cohesion. His premise is straightforward: only those who command public trust can guide the city’s development in a credible and durable way.

What economic and location-policy objectives are you pursuing in the municipal election?

My primary objective is to consolidate Cuxhaven’s position as a growing city and a sustainable place to do business. In recent years, the number of jobs subject to social security contributions has increased, and the projected population decline has been offset. Rather than continuing to contract, the population has stabilised. That provides a basis on which we can build.

Where are you setting your priorities?

We are focusing on the continued development of the port and the broader business environment—for example, through the acquisition and preparation of commercial land. This creates the conditions for new enterprises and secure employment. At the same time, economic indicators alone are not sufficient. The decisive factor is whether people find the city a place in which they can live well. Employment prospects, planning certainty, and the possibility of building a life locally are central considerations. The fact that people—particularly young families—are returning to Cuxhaven suggests that this approach is taking effect.

What further objectives do you have?

We intend to advance Cuxhaven as a “climate city”. This encompasses both climate protection and the energy transition, but also a social dimension: cohesive communities, viable neighbourhoods, and favourable conditions for families. For me, economic development, housing, childcare, and social cohesion are closely connected. The aim is a city that acts responsibly in environmental terms while offering stable living conditions.

Which measures have made a measurable contribution to Cuxhaven’s development in recent years?

Cuxhaven benefits from a strong civic culture: more than 40 per cent of residents are engaged in voluntary work. This forms the basis of an active urban society. Port operations, offshore industry, fisheries, and tourism coexist with relatively few points of friction, supported by a stable administrative framework, a resilient SME sector, and innovative companies—for example in human and veterinary medicine. This diversity contributes to stability. Progress has also been made in social infrastructure, including childcare provision, which is now widely available and continues to expand. My intention is to sustain this trajectory.

Have there been areas that have fallen short of your expectations?

Overall, developments have tended to exceed rather than fall short of expectations. One reason is a growing sense of confidence within the city: projects are implemented with consistency, and cooperation between the municipality, business, and state and federal actors has become more reliable. When objectives are defined, they are generally pursued with discipline.

Can you give concrete examples?

Examples can be found across several sectors. One is the financing and implementation of major infrastructure projects under challenging initial conditions—a principle that also informs smaller municipal initiatives. Another is the development of the cultural sector: the city has broadened its programme and attracted recognised artists, increasing its visibility beyond the region. This contributes to its attractiveness as a place to live.

Do you see yourself as the right candidate to guide the next phase of development?

I regard the election primarily as a form of feedback from the public on whether the current course should continue. For me, it is essential to act with clear pub-

Uwe Santjer
Mayor of Cuxhaven

lic support—both locally and in negotiations with partners at state and federal level. The election provides an indication of that support. If the majority endorses the current direction, it offers a mandate to proceed. If not, that outcome must be accepted.

Are there already opposing candidates, and how do you assess the campaign so far?

At present, it is not yet clear who will stand as opposing candidates. A full campaign has not begun. Irrespective of this, I view my role as one of ongoing dialogue. Regular consultation hours and formats such as "Santjer's Schnack" in the districts allow for direct exchange. This proximity is important to me. Engagement with the public should not be limited to election periods; it is a continuous process—because ultimately, they are my principal.

"There is a clear need to address transport infrastructure: the A27 requires urgent upgrading, particularly to strengthen hinterland connections to the port."

UWE SANTJER, Mayor of Cuxhaven

How do you respond to criticism of your work?

Holding this office is a responsibility I value. At the same time, it is evident that not all expectations have been met. Some decisions have prompted criticism or disappointment. The election therefore provides an opportunity for a candid assessment.

Which projects would you prioritise in a further term?

I intend to continue the course already set. This includes advancing major projects and further developing the city, even where this entails visible change. One focus will be to strengthen the role of the Bundeswehr as a training location, contributing to broader responsibilities in the field of security. At the same time, the emphasis remains on providing tangible prospects—through employment, education, and living conditions. The concept of a "city of good neighbourhoods" is central: a city characterised by social cohesion and inclusion.

Which districts will be a particular focus?

Urban development will continue to prioritise the upgrading of existing neighbourhoods, particularly where social disadvantage or structural deficiencies are present. In parallel, a new district is planned, with more than 400 apartments for over 1,000 residents. The concept combines contemporary housing, sustainable mobility, and social integration—for example, targeted support for single parents and young professionals.

How important are efficiency and service orientation in public administration?

In recent years, the administration has been repositioned more clearly as a service-oriented organisation. The objective is to accelerate processes, expand digital services, and provide reliable support. A key factor is the commitment of employees. Effective internal cooperation is essential to sustaining this shift. It is also important that staff experience their work as meaningful.

Where do you see the most urgent need for action in transport infrastructure?

There is a clear need for investment. The A27 requires upgrading, particularly in relation to port hinterland connections. Rail electrification towards Hamburg and Bremen must also be advanced to improve both passenger and freight transport; an ICE connection would be a longer-term objective. The Elbe as a waterway requires ongoing dredging to maintain navigable depths, which entails balancing environmental considerations with economic requirements. At the municipal level, cycle paths, roads, and social infrastructure—particularly for children and young people—also remain priorities, subject to available funding.

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Efficiency Instead of Expansion

Siemens Gamesa is undertaking a comprehensive realignment of its logistics structures. The emphasis lies on the systematic optimisation of existing capacities, supported by an investment in the mid double-digit million euro range.

The Cuxhaven offshore wind energy site occupies a central position within Siemens Gamesa's global production network. As a lead factory within Siemens Energy, the plant accounts for a substantial share of offshore nacelle production and serves as a reference point for process and quality standards across the network. "Cuxhaven is our central offshore nacelle facility. A significant proportion of nacelles for offshore installations is manufactured here," says Niklas Schuler, Head of Logistics.

Following full integration into Siemens Energy and the appointment of new plant management, it became evident that the existing infrastructure—shaped over time—no longer aligns with the demands of global supply chains. "We have fundamentally reviewed our logistics and quality framework. The outcome is clear: advancing the industrialisation of our products requires a more efficient structure," Schuler explains. The planned investment is thus the result of a consistent focus on efficiency.

A particular constraint has been the limited availability of storage capacity. Supplier components are partly held in external warehouses, while completed nacelles are temporarily stored on leased port areas in Cuxhaven. This fragmentation has generated considerable cost. "Over the years, expenditure for external logistics has accumulated to a high double-digit million euro figure," Schuler notes.

The highlighted area indicates the planned 55,000-square-metre outdoor storage site; the new warehouse will be constructed on the right-hand side of the image.

The response is a targeted investment in two core infrastructure elements: a new warehouse facility—approximately 13 metres in height, column-free, and offering around 17,000 square metres of space—and an additional outdoor storage area of roughly 55,000 square metres. The objective is to consolidate logistics processes at the site and reduce reliance on external solutions. "We are replacing recurring expenditure with a one-off investment while establishing more efficient processes," Schuler says.

The warehouse, scheduled to become operational in spring 2027, is designed for flexibility. It will accommodate a broad spectrum of components, from small parts and palletised goods to large-scale elements, depending on demand. This improves supply security and enhances the ability to respond to fluctuations in global supply chains. Given transport lead times of up to twelve weeks, maintaining adequate buffer stock becomes a critical factor.

A further focus lies in reducing internal transport distances. To date, supplier components have often been moved multiple times—from arrival in Cuxhaven to external storage and back into production. "Between our sites alone, this results in approximately 1.5 million truck kilometres each year—the equivalent of around 38 circumnavigations of the globe. From both an economic and an environmental perspective, this is not viable," Schuler observes. Centralisation is expected to eliminate a large share of these flows, reducing costs, risks such as transport damage or delays, and CO_2 emissions.

NIKLAS SCHULER
Head of Logistics at Siemens Gamesa

The concept is complemented by a new outdoor storage area for completed nacelles, with a capacity of up to 99 units. Here, too, the emphasis is on operational efficiency: shorter distances for self-propelled modular transporters (SPMTs) enable time and fuel savings, fewer handling steps, and more precise coordination of outbound logistics. "We are consolidating the value chain at the site. This increases both autonomy and responsiveness," Schuler notes.

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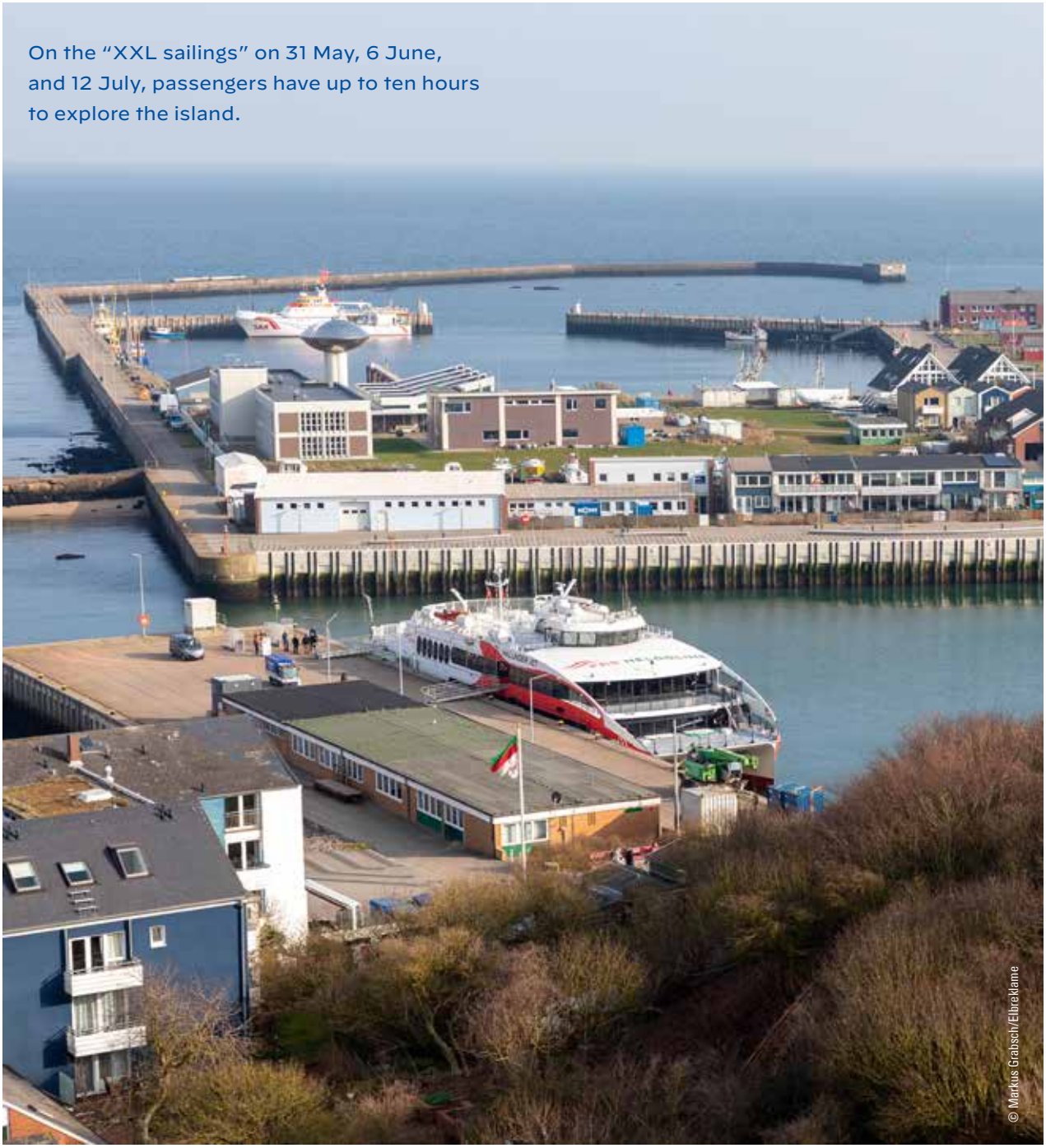
>
> **NIKLAS SCHULER**
> **Head of Logistics at Siemens Gamesa**

According to current internal calculations, the investment is expected to amortise within approximately five years, based on previous expenditure for external storage and logistics. "The project strengthens the competitiveness of the site in a sustainable manner," Schuler says. In the near term, inbound logistics will continue to rely on established transport routes, with the prospect of a dedicated heavy-load bridge connecting the plant directly to federal road B73, further streamlining traffic flows.

For Siemens Gamesa, these measures represent structural consolidation within the existing footprint rather than spatial expansion. "We are particularly grateful for the constructive support of the local authorities, which has enabled timely implementation," Schuler emphasises. In a demanding market environment, efficiency assumes a central role. For the Cuxhaven site, this translates into reduced complexity, lower operating costs, and a more stable position within the global production network.

The Return of the Connection

Longer stays and curated occasions are bringing Heligoland more distinctly into focus as a destination in its own right. With the start of the season, the Halunder Jet, operated by FRS Helgoline, has resumed service.



On the "XXL sailings" on 31 May, 6 June, and 12 July, passengers have up to ten hours to explore the island.

Since 19 March, Heligoland has once again been regularly accessible—not in any geographical sense, but through the restoration of its connection to the mainland. On that day, the high-speed catamaran Halunder Jet departed for its first voyage of the year, carrying around 350 passengers from Hamburg and Cuxhaven to the island. The pattern is familiar, recurring each spring; yet it marks a moment of transition, as the winter hiatus gives way to a renewed rhythm of movement.

Until early November, the vessel operates daily between Hamburg and Cuxhaven, supplemented by several weekly departures from Brunsbüttel. The route itself is well established, forming part of the infrastructure of tourism in the German Bight. It serves both day visitors and those who choose to remain longer.

This season, however, introduces a subtle shift in emphasis. Time on the island is being extended, in some cases significantly. On designated "XXL sailings"—scheduled for 31 May, 6 June, and 12 July—passengers are given up to ten hours ashore. This adjustment alters the established pattern of the day trip. Heligoland does not readily lend itself to brief inspection; it requires a more measured engagement, allowing for pauses and for the experience of the landscape itself. Longer stays are therefore linked to events and activities originating on the island, aligning travel more closely with local context.

The calendar for 2026 provides a framework for this approach. Heligoland marks 200 years as a North Sea spa resort, a milestone that reflects both its historical development and its present function as a destination. The year also commemorates the centenary of the writer James Krüss, whose work has shaped the island's cultural profile beyond its geographic boundaries. His legacy is reflected not only in exhibitions on the island, but also in the crossing itself, through readings and smaller-scale programmes that engage a broader audience. The intention is to connect travel and cultural reference without conflating the two.

Other formats place greater emphasis on the journey as an experience in its own right. A music event scheduled for September, for example, combines the crossing with a concert, creating a shared setting that extends beyond arrival. During Hamburg Harbour Birthday, the vessel again serves as a vantage point from which activity on the Elbe can be observed, offering a change in perspective on a familiar occasion. Alongside these elements, the operational structure on board remains consistent. There are targeted offers for families, reduced fares for older travellers, and themed days that provide orientation. Practical provisions—expanded catering, additional services, and organised luggage transport on the island—support a more predictable and accessible travel experience.

The resumption of service each spring is more than a logistical routine. For Heligoland, it signals the beginning of the tourist season and the return of visitors, with direct implications for the island's economic activity. Accessibility remains a determining factor, particularly for short visits. At the same time, the current season suggests a gradual shift in emphasis: not solely on the number of arrivals, but on the conditions that encourage visitors to remain.

"HALUNDER JET"

The high-speed catamaran Halunder Jet, operated by FRS Helgoline, runs from March to November on the Hamburg–Cuxhaven–Heligoland route, with additional calls at Brunsbüttel on selected days. The vessel measures 56.4 metres in length and 14 metres in width and is powered by four diesel engines with a combined output of 12,182 hp. It reaches speeds of up to 36 knots (approximately 67 km/h) and accommodates up to 690 passengers across four seating categories. Large panoramic windows and open deck areas offer unobstructed views of the Elbe and the North Sea. The name combines "Jet", indicating speed, with "Halunder", the Heligoland dialect. The crossing from Hamburg takes approximately three hours and 45 minutes.

Home Port of Wind Energy

The F90 area in Cuxhaven, covering approximately 136 hectares, is emerging as a focal point of Germany's offshore industry. The development of heavy-duty commercial land and expanded port infrastructure is reinforcing both industrial capacity and the conditions required for the energy transition.

The site is assuming a central role in the region's economic and infrastructural development. Its direct integration with port facilities links industrial settlement to maritime logistics, thereby supporting the continued expansion of the German Offshore Industry Centre (DOIZ). "This project creates opportunities to attract innovative companies and to strengthen the region over the long term," says Mayor Uwe Santjer.

The scale of the undertaking is reflected in the planned investment. Around €300 million in funding—from federal and state sources as well as private investors—has been allocated to the expansion of port infrastructure. This includes an extension of quay installations by approximately 1.2 kilometres and the creation of additional handling capacity for heavy cargo.

Beyond physical expansion, the F90 areas address increasing demand for industrial and logistics space. They allow for the consolidation of production and logistics processes and, over time, provide capacity across the value chain—from manufacturing and pre-assembly to supplier activities. "From the outset, the objective has been to develop the DOIZ through the F90 areas and to establish a presence that extends beyond the regional level," explains Peter Miesner, Managing Director of the Cuxhaven Port Development Company.

The strategic significance of the site lies in its proximity to the planned berths 5 to 7, combined with heavy-duty infrastructure and short transport distances. These factors strengthen the location as a logistics interface for offshore wind energy and related sectors. The industry's requirements—large com-


F90
Logistikpark
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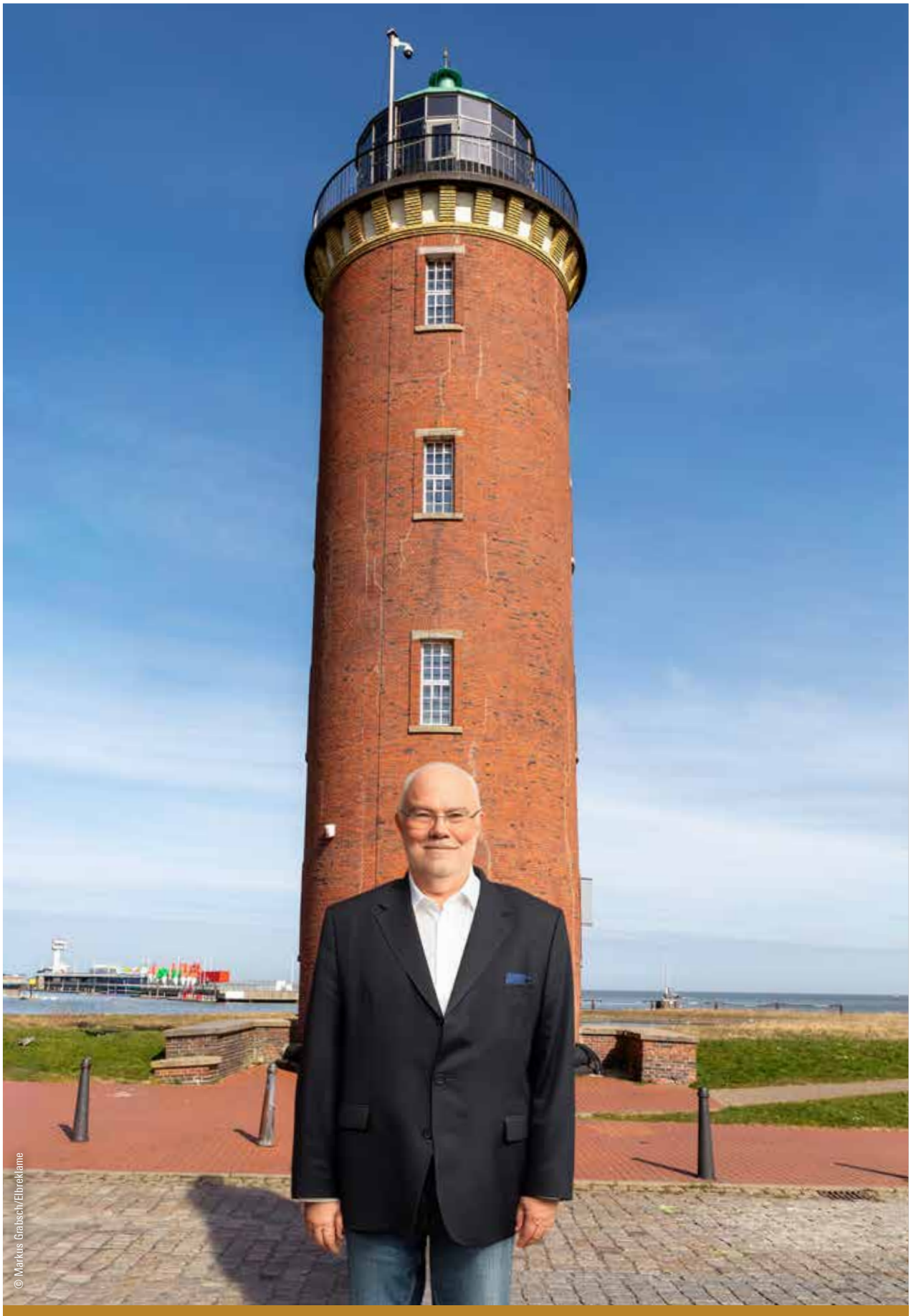

Peter Miesner, Managing Director of Cuxhavener Hafen Entwicklungsgesellschaft

ponents, complex handling processes, and time-sensitive transport—make such conditions a prerequisite for efficient operations. "We are able to offer long-term planning certainty and enable companies to organise their production and logistics accordingly," Santjer adds. The areas are also intended to accommodate onshore wind energy logistics, allowing a substantial share of turbines installed in Germany to be handled via Cuxhaven.

A central infrastructure element is the planned heavy-duty bridge, with a direct connection to port access roads and construction scheduled to begin in early 2027. This link will carry significant volumes of heavy transport between industrial zones and port facilities, as well as incoming components. In parallel, staging areas are being developed for the positioning and temporary storage of offshore wind installations and their components. The commercial areas themselves will be developed in phases, enabling early access for companies. According to current planning, initial construction activity could begin in the second half of 2028, with operations commencing by the end of 2029.

The project forms part of a longer process that began in 2015 with the acquisition of the first parcels of land. Despite the sensitivities associated with previous ownership structures, all required areas were secured through coordinated action by public authorities and the port development company. Today, cooperation between the city and the development company is described as closely aligned, with a shared focus on planning and marketing. Public acceptance has also played a role: residents broadly recognise the significance of the F90 areas for employment, urban development, and the energy transition.

Environmental considerations are integrated into the planning framework. According to those responsible, development adheres to defined environmental standards, including measures to protect neighbouring districts. "Cuxhaven has committed itself to the concept of a climate-oriented city and is incorporating the corresponding requirements into its energy systems in cooperation with companies locating here," Miesner explains. In this context, hydrogen infrastructure is being established at the port to supply vessels, heavy vehicles, and passenger cars. Since November 2023, a two-megawatt electrolysis plant has been producing hydrogen from renewable electricity near the offshore berths. It is operated by Turneo. The transition is also reflected in municipal operations, where hydrogen-powered vehicles are being introduced into service.

The implementation of the project depends on coordinated action across administrative levels. Given ongoing budgetary constraints, investments of this scale rely on federal and state support. The state of Lower Saxony plays a central role in advancing port development, working alongside the city and the port development company. "The project is based on a shared understanding that its success depends on cooperation," Santjer notes, referring to the alignment between municipal, regional, and state actors.

"Cuxhaven has committed itself to the concept of a climate-oriented city and is incorporating the corresponding requirements into its energy systems in cooperation with companies locating here,"

PETER MIESNER, Managing Director of Cuxhavener Hafen Entwicklungsgesellschaft

A further element of the location strategy is the structured support offered to companies considering investment. Through a "one-stop agency" approach, firms are provided with coordinated access to administrative processes, funding instruments, and local infrastructure—from housing and childcare to workforce integration. "Companies benefit from short decision paths and coordinated support structures that allow them to establish operations within a predictable framework," Miesner explains.

The F90 areas therefore extend beyond the definition of an industrial zone. They constitute a framework in which infrastructure development, industrial policy, and energy transition objectives converge. By aligning spatial planning, logistics capacity, environmental considerations, and institutional cooperation, Cuxhaven is positioning itself within a broader national and European context as a site shaped by long-term structural change.

Otto Wulf Focuses on Versatile Specialised Vessels

With the buoy-laying vessel Elvstrom and the oil recovery and multipurpose vessel Lütt Matten, the Cuxhaven-based shipping company Otto Wulf is expanding its fleet and refining its operational profile—across military training, offshore services, and research support.

A helicopter hovers above the North Sea, its rotor wash breaking the surface below. A soldier drifts in the water. Moments later, he is secured to a line and lifted aboard, before being set down again in a controlled manoeuvre on the deck of a vessel. Such exercises form part of regular operations off the German coast—and frequently involve the Elvstrom, a buoy-laying vessel operated by the Cuxhaven-based tug and transport company Otto Wulf. Designed for the deployment, maintenance, and recovery of navigation buoys in coastal and offshore environments, the vessel replaces the older Taifun, which has since been sold.

Measuring 38 metres in length, with a shallow draught of between 1.4 and 1.7 metres, approximately 110 square metres of open deck space, and a deck crane with a lifting capacity of up to 7.5 tonnes, the Elvstrom combines compact dimensions with operational flexibility. Originally part of a Dutch state fleet, the vessel has undergone targeted modernisation. "We expect to operate this vessel over an extended period," says Andreas Wulf, who manages the family business together with his cousin Sören Wulf in the fourth generation.

The decision to invest was guided not only by technical considerations but also by strategic positioning. Otto Wulf focuses on niche segments in which a medium-sized operator can deploy its capabilities effectively. "Our approach depends on identifying areas where we can apply our strengths with precision," Sören Wulf explains. The company's entry into buoy-laying began with the Taifun; experience in this segment has demonstrated consistent demand, particularly for adaptable vessels.

Accordingly, the Elvstrom has been configured as a multi-purpose platform. One of its principal clients is the German armed forces. The vessel is used regularly in training exercises conducted by naval operational units, particularly in the field of "survival at sea". These scenarios simulate emergency conditions: personnel enter the water, are recovered by helicopter, and are then winched back onto the vessel. They also practise detaching themselves from equipment, replicating parachute water landings.

Previously, such exercises were conducted using tugboats from the company's existing fleet, which limited availability for other assignments. "A dedicated vessel allows us to maintain flexibility in our core operations," the management notes. The Bundeswehr currently deploys the Elvstrom approximately twice a week, amounting to around 60 operations annually. While this provides a stable baseline, it does not fully utilise capacity. "Two days a week are not sufficient to operate a vessel economically," Andreas Wulf observes. "Additional fields of application are therefore essential," adds Sören Wulf.

These fields are found primarily in offshore services. The Elvstrom supports underwater ordnance disposal (UXO), including the detection of legacy munitions using technologies such as side-scan sonar. This method employs lateral acoustic signals to map the seabed, identify objects, and generate detailed spatial models. Comparable techniques are used in three-dimensional seabed surveys.

The Elvstrom is equipped with a diesel-electric propulsion system and draws shore power while in port.

© Otto Wulf

The vessel is also engaged in the monitoring of subsea cables and in the supply of offshore research platforms, including FINO1 and FINO3, providing materials, fuel, and spare parts. Research institutions such as Fraunhofer Society and Alfred Wegener Institute rely on such support for measurement campaigns, seabed analysis, and aquaculture projects. "We accompany these operations and collect samples where required," the management explains.

At present, the Elvstrom is deployed in connection with the SuedLink Elbe crossing, an infrastructure project involving the construction of a tunnel beneath the river. The vessel's role includes buoy deployment and the monitoring of restricted and hazard zones along the route. This forms part of a transmission system designed to transport wind-generated electricity from northern to southern Germany. Comparable assignments are carried out in offshore wind farms and at designated test sites.

Prior to commissioning under the German flag, the vessel underwent further investment beyond its acquisition cost. In addition to technical modifications, a dedicated training platform for military exercises was installed. Environmental considerations also informed the refit: the Elvstrom is equipped with a diesel-electric propulsion system, enabling demand-based operation. While in port, it uses shore power, partly supplied by onboard photovoltaic systems.

Alongside the Elvstrom, Otto Wulf has introduced the Lütt Matten, an oil recovery and multipurpose workboat. The vessel, measuring 23.33 metres in length and equipped with a crane, towing winch, and lifting system, is assigned to the Cuxhaven emergency command centre, which coordinates maritime response operations in the Baltic Sea region. It is required to be operational within two hours. Using lateral recovery arms, it can collect oil from the water surface and store it in onboard tanks.

Beyond emergency response, the Lütt Matten is deployed for towing, salvage, and supply operations. This reflects a broader strategic principle: vessels are not confined to single functions but are adapted for multiple uses. "This versatility defines our position as a medium-sized operator," Sören Wulf notes. "We take vessels designed for specific purposes and develop additional applications in order to maintain utilisation and secure employment," Andreas Wulf adds.

Power at the Waterfront

With the commissioning of a new LHM 800 heavy-lift crane, Blue Water BREB is expanding both capacity and operational flexibility at its Cuxhaven terminal. The investment reflects the increasing demands of project cargo and offshore logistics.

At its site at the mouth of the Elbe, the company has aligned its handling capabilities with the requirements of a market characterised by larger components and more complex transport chains. The addition of the LHM 800, a mobile harbour crane manufactured by Liebherr, extends the terminal's ability to manage heavy wind turbine components and other cargo within the heavy-lift segment under controlled conditions.

The commissioning of the crane marks a further step in the development of the site's infrastructure and contributes to the role of Cuxhaven as a logistics location. The LHM 800 is being deployed in a German port for the first time, introducing a new configuration of handling capacity within the national context.

At its site at the mouth of the Elbe, the company has aligned its handling capabilities with the requirements of a market characterised by larger components and more complex transport chains.

The decision to invest is closely linked to developments in the offshore wind sector. In recent years, both the dimensions and individual weights of key components—such as nacelles, hubs, and associated structures—have increased. Vessel sizes have followed a similar trajectory. "We have observed a consistent shift towards larger formats in both production and transport," says Captain Arne Ehlers, Managing Director of Blue Water BREB. "If terminal infrastructure is to remain aligned with these developments, it must be adapted accordingly. The LHM 800 forms part of that adjustment."

Components reach Cuxhaven by heavy-lift vessel, either directly from Asia or via European ports, and are then transferred inland by barge. This combination of larger cargo units and increasing vessel dimensions places additional demands on handling equipment. Previously, the terminal operated two mobile harbour cranes—an LHM 550 and an LHM 600—which were largely engaged in the serial handling of rotor blades. During periods of high utilisation, this led to capacity constraints between ongoing operations and project cargo requirements. "The baseline utilisation of existing equipment has been high," Ehlers notes. "The additional crane allows us to separate workflows and improve planning reliability."

With a maximum lifting capacity of 308 tonnes and an outreach of up to 64 metres, the LHM 800 is designed for operations that would otherwise require more complex configurations. Its extended reach enables single lifts in cases where tandem operations were previously necessary, reducing coordination requirements, personnel deployment, and associated risk.

Beyond lifting capacity, the crane's technical characteristics support precision handling. A hydrostatic drive

FACTS: LHM 800

The LHM 800, produced by Liebherr, is a mobile harbour crane designed for heavy-lift and bulk operations. It is capable of serving bulk carriers with up to 23 container rows and offers a maximum lifting capacity of 308 tonnes, with lifting heights of up to 54 metres. In bulk handling, throughput can reach approximately 1,500 tonnes per hour. The crane is equipped with a rope-luffing jib, hydrostatic drive, and a rubber-tyred undercarriage enabling full rotational mobility. Features such as LED lighting, X-shaped outriggers, and an ergonomically designed operator cabin support safe and controlled operation.

system allows for controlled movement under load, while 360-degree mobility on rubber tyres enables flexible positioning along the quay. The operator's cabin, with extensive glazing, provides clear sightlines across the working area.

"In combination with the crane resources of neighbouring operators, Cuxhaven forms a port infrastructure whose mobile crane capacity ranks among the more substantial in Germany."

CAPTAIN ARNE EHLERS
Managing Director, Blue Water BREB

Additional features—including synchronised four-rope control, X-shaped outriggers, and hydraulic three-point axle suspension—contribute to stability and protect terminal infrastructure. These systems allow complex heavy-lift operations to be conducted in a controlled manner.

"In combination with the crane capacities of neighbouring operators, Cuxhaven now offers a level of mo-

bile harbour crane capability that broadens the range of vessels and cargo configurations that can be handled," Ehlers observes. This expanded capacity allows larger vessels with mixed cargo profiles to be processed more efficiently, reducing the need for transshipment via alternative ports and supporting more direct logistics chains.

The introduction of the LHM 800 also extends the terminal's operational scope. Project cargo, bulk goods, general cargo, and containers can be handled in parallel, allowing for more flexible scheduling and improved utilisation of terminal resources.

For the operator, the investment is less a singular technical upgrade than part of a broader adjustment of the site's operational framework. "The objective is to maintain reliability in handling processes and to adapt to changing requirements," Ehlers says. In a market shaped by fluctuating supply chains and increasing cargo complexity, such adjustments form part of long-term site development.

The deployment of the LHM 800 in a German port marks a notable development in national port logistics.

New Trade Momentum for Cuxhaven

The arrival of Kaufland, Netto, and other retailers signals a shift in the city's economic trajectory—one that extends beyond the retail sector and reflects broader structural change.

Cuxhaven is undergoing a phase of economic consolidation that, only a few years ago, would have appeared uncertain. The city is gaining in profile, stabilising demographically, and re-emerging as a location of interest for investment. That this development is now visible in the retail sector is not incidental. The redevelopment of the former Real site by Kaufland, the establishment of Netto Marken-Discount, and further investments illustrate a momentum generated by port expansion, the energy transition, tourism, and coordinated urban planning—factors that increasingly shape the urban economy as a whole.

"These investments should not be understood as isolated events," notes Mayor Uwe Santjer. Rather, they form part of a longer-term structural adjustment. Retail development, in this context, is an outcome rather than a starting point. Earlier investment in port infrastructure, industrial sites, and energy projects has contributed to employment growth and, with it, rising purchasing power. Retail follows these dynamics.

Recent data supports this assessment. After a prolonged period of demographic decline, Cuxhaven's population has stabilised at close to 50,000 inhabitants, making it one of the few municipalities in Lower Saxony to record recent growth. At the same time, employment subject to social security contributions has increased, particularly among skilled and specialised workers—an important factor in sustaining local demand.

A visible expression of this renewed confidence is the establishment of Kaufland at the former Real site. "This is not merely a case of reuse," says Hilke von der Reith, Head of Economic Development. Kaufland has acquired the property itself, indicating a long-term commitment to the location. The closure of the former Real market is less indicative of local conditions than of internal restructuring within that retail group. Against this background, Kaufland's decision to invest in the site—situated between the port and the city centre—acquires additional significance.

The site has undergone extensive modernisation, supported by substantial investment in buildings and technology. Its economic effects extend beyond the retail offer itself. Around 100 jobs have been created, broadly compensating for those lost with the previous tenant. "The strong response to advertised vacancies is notable," says Kai Sawischlewski, Deputy Head of Economic Development. Recruitment has proceeded without significant difficulty, suggesting improved labour market conditions.

Regional economic effects are also evident. Local firms were involved in the conversion and refurbishment works, ensuring that a considerable share of value creation remains within the region. One objective of location policy is precisely this: to generate purchasing power and retain it locally. For many years, Cuxhaven experienced leakage of purchasing power to neighbouring centres and to online retail. Physical retail can regain ground where locations are modern, accessible, and integrated into the urban fabric.

The opening of the Weingärtner garden centre in 2025 adds an experience-oriented component to the retail landscape, combining gardening, home, and design offerings. At the same time, urban design projects contribute to the quality of public space. The so-called

At the slipway, a barrier-free path with ramps will replace the existing bridge, improving access to the dyke.

"Dyke Window", for example, creates new visual connections to the water, integrates into the restored dyke structure, and introduces open areas that enhance the experience of place.
Tourism remains a significant factor. With more than four million overnight stays annually, Cuxhaven accommodates a population that regularly exceeds its resident base. Retail and hospitality sectors benefit directly from this additional demand. Efforts to stabilise visitor numbers throughout the year are increasingly relevant, as they support more consistent revenue patterns beyond the summer months.

"We now approach retail development with greater strategic coordination," von der Reith explains. The aim is to align large-format retail with a functioning city centre. While major operators provide a draw, the role of smaller specialist retailers and gastronomy in maintaining urban vitality remains essential.

A central project in this context is the "Dyke Belt", which will connect the city centre with the dyke area, Deichstraße, the Lotsenviertel, and the Grimmershörnbucht promenade. The intention is to create a continuous urban sequence, improving accessibility, strengthening spatial links, and integrating retail, residential, and tourism functions. With an investment volume exceeding five million euros, the project is intended to stimulate further private investment. It is supported by the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building under the "National Urban Development Projects" programme.

Looking ahead, both the city administration and economic development agencies identify potential for specialist retail and quality-oriented city-centre concepts. Elements such as personal advice, atmosphere, and immediacy remain difficult to replicate in digital formats. At the same time, certain gaps persist. In the Döse district, additional local provision is required; for peripheral areas, more flexible models are under consideration, including concepts similar to CAP markets operated in cooperation with social enterprises and established retailers such as Edeka.

The current trajectory therefore extends beyond individual investments. It reflects a broader shift from structural contraction to a more differentiated pattern of growth. Retail development serves as a visible indicator of this transition, in which port activity, energy policy, tourism, and urban planning are increasingly interlinked. In this process, Cuxhaven is not only expanding its economic base, but also redefining its role as a location.

A Port Meant to Be More Than a Port

© Markus Grabsch/Elbrekame

OLAF LIES, Minister-President of Lower Saxony

In Cuxhaven, construction defines the present: dredging, piling, assembly. The immediate focus is on new berths, offshore wind, and industrial capacity. Beneath this lies a broader question—whether Germany's energy transition still follows a coherent course as a long-term project.

At nine o'clock on a morning at Hermann-Honnef-Straße, the site conveys what currently characterises the city. Earthworks, steel structures, sand, and heavy equipment mark visible progress. Less visible, but no less significant, is the intention behind it: to position the port not merely as infrastructure, but as a locus of industrial value creation, supply security, and energy policy.

Niedersachsen Ports (NPorts) had invited visitors to review construction progress at berths 5 to 7. The visit, formally framed as "Port Development and Wind Energy", pointed to a wider context: the economic trajectory of the port, its role within the region, and the conditions under which Lower Saxony seeks to maintain direction in a period marked by uncertainty.

Following the pile-driving works, sand nourishment commenced in the spring, carried out by trailing suction hopper dredgers.

Along the quay, approximately 1.2 kilometres of new berths are taking shape, accompanied by extensive hinterland connections. The scale is considerable. Knut Kokkelink, head of the NPorts branch in Cuxhaven, refers to the installation of thousands of tonnes of steel, the driving of piles, and the movement of millions of cubic metres of sand. Such figures are typical of large infrastructure projects; here, they also signal the extent of the underlying ambition.

Set against this is a less tangible dimension: uncertainty. References are made to inconsistent political signals that affect investment decisions. Uwe Santjer points to divergent impulses at both European and federal levels. Captain Arne Ehlers is more direct, citing diminished confidence, limited planning reliability, and increasing regulatory pressure. In his assessment, the offshore sector is constrained less by technical capacity than by the absence of a stable political framework.

Olaf Lies extends this argument beyond the regional context. For him, the issue is not confined to Cuxhaven but reflects a broader condition. Democratic systems, he suggests, are perceived as effective when they reach and maintain decisions. What is often lacking is not insight, but confidence in continuity at decisive moments. The observation reaches beyond the port itself.

Lies frames the expansion of renewable energy primarily as an industrial policy question. Large-scale investments, once initiated, should not be repeatedly subjected to public doubt, as this risks undermining confidence in the chosen direction. He is particularly critical of recurring debates on renewed nuclear options, which he regards less as a practical alternative than as a political diversion without near-term viability.

In Cuxhaven, the discussion therefore touches on more than regional development. It reflects an attempt to reconcile industrial modernisation, climate policy, and the state's capacity to act. The extent to which such projects depend on trust becomes evident: trust in permitting processes, in infrastructure delivery, and in the durability of political commitments beyond electoral cycles.

The city nevertheless benefits from specific locational conditions. Available space, port infrastructure, an established industrial base, and political alignment create a coherent framework. The geographic and strategic position is favourable. The current phase offers momentum; whether it is sustained depends on subsequent decisions.

The expansion of berths 5 to 7, the development of adjacent sites, and the planned infrastructure links therefore extend beyond municipal planning. They raise a broader question: whether Germany can translate its industrial and energy policy objectives into operational reality in places such as this. Cuxhaven has advanced its position. Whether this is matched by consistent policy at higher levels remains open.

Cpt. Arne Ehlers, Knut Kokkelink, Alexandra Brandt, Uwe Santjer, Olaf Lies, Holger Banik, Claudius Schumacher (from left).

Between Wind, Waves and Defence Technology

The maritime summit of the Nautical Association Cuxhaven Mitte illustrates the extent to which maritime infrastructure, military presence, and offshore activity have become interdependent.

Security, infrastructure, offshore wind—and the vulnerabilities inherent in such complex systems—formed the core of the discussion held at the Kugelbake Hall. One conclusion emerged clearly: questions of energy policy now extend beyond regional concerns. They intersect with issues of security and the resilience of critical infrastructure, requiring coordinated and decisive public action. The exchange made evident how closely maritime industry, security policy, and energy supply are now linked.

"The coast is no longer a clearly defined economic space, but part of a strategic architecture in which economic performance, energy supply, and security are closely interwoven."

CAPTAIN ARNE EHLERS, Chairman of the Nautical Association Cuxhaven

Representatives from the Bundeswehr, the navy, political institutions, and the port industry engaged in a structured dialogue. Their shared assessment: coastal regions are evolving into zones of overlapping interests, where economic, military, and energy policy considerations must be managed simultaneously.

The immediate catalyst for the security debate was a series of drone sightings near port facilities and military installations. In this context, what might appear peripheral elsewhere is treated as a systemic issue. Claus Seebeck, a CDU member of the Lower Saxony state parliament, referred to ongoing discussions regarding adjustments to the legal framework.

Current divisions of responsibility between state police, federal police, and the Bundeswehr reveal limitations in practice. Drones operate independently of administrative boundaries, exposing gaps between detection and response. This vulnerability affects not only military sites, but also energy infrastructure, port operations, and logistics chains. In this context, resilience extends beyond protection; it encompasses the capacity to maintain operational continuity under adverse conditions. "Detecting a drone is one matter; intercepting it or identifying its operator is another." — Brigadier General Gerald Funke, Commander of the Bundeswehr Support Command in Bonn.

The intensity of the debate in Cuxhaven reflects the region's strategic concentration of maritime infrastructure, military presence, and energy-related assets. Proximity to major ports, offshore installations, and transport corridors increases both relevance and exposure. There is broad agreement that functioning port infrastructure is essential in crisis scenarios—for deployment, supply, and logistical stability. This includes the need for redundancy, maintaining multiple operational locations in parallel. "What role port locations will assume in future security policy—and where responsibility will lie in an emergency—remains an open question," notes Claudius Schumacher of Rhenus Cuxport.

Frigate Captain Klaus Lund, Officer of the German Navy.

From a municipal perspective, Mayor Uwe Santjer underlined the importance of continued investment. An additional €25 million is to be allocated to port access infrastructure, bringing total secured funding to €55 million for a project volume of €87 million. This is presented not only as an infrastructure measure, but as an element of industrial policy. Improved connectivity is positioned as a prerequisite for offshore development. The underlying argument is clear: the energy transition depends on maritime capacity and on locations such as Cuxhaven.

At the same time, the city has developed into a central node for offshore activity. The scale of components handled, the infrastructure in place, and the availability of space influence the pace of expansion. Investments in berths, terminal areas, and hinterland connections reflect this trajectory.

Santjer also referred to the role of Niedersachsen Ports, whose earlier investments have established the basis for current growth. The implication is that the energy transition is not an abstract policy objective, but an industrial process dependent on physical infrastructure.

A further development concerns the naval aviation base at Nordholz. Frigate Captain Klaus Lund of the German Navy outlined planned investments in the high three-digit million euro range. These are directed towards the modernisation of systems, including new helicopters and maritime reconnaissance capabilities, as well as the associated infrastructure—maintenance facilities, simulators, and training environments. The expected economic effects for the region are substantial.

“This is where the new reality becomes evident: energy policy, security, and economic development must be organised in parallel.”

Nordholz thus assumes a dual role: as a security asset and as an economic factor. The expansion also brings competing interests into focus. The debate

Lieutenant General Gerald Funke, Commander of the Bundeswehr Joint Support and Enabling Service.

surrounding additional wind turbines in the surrounding area illustrates the interaction between energy policy and operational requirements of flight activity. As Lund emphasised, such issues require complex balancing rather than simple compromise, as flight safety, radar systems, and operational readiness impose specific constraints.

Such issues require complex balancing rather than simple compromise, as flight safety, radar systems, and operational readiness impose specific constraints.

The discussion extends to civil protection and crisis preparedness. Public authorities are increasingly addressing scenarios involving large-scale disruptions to supply chains, as noted by District Administrator Thorsten Krüger. While comprehensive planning is not always possible, resilience can be developed through preparation and coordination. Lieutenant General Gerald Funke emphasised that crisis management cannot be understood solely as a state function; it requires the involvement of businesses, infrastructure operators, and the wider population.

Cuxhaven thus emerges as a multi-layered node in which economic activity, energy systems, security considerations, and infrastructure converge. The maritime summit serves as a forum for strategic reflection. It positions the city not only as an offshore and industrial location, but also as part of a broader network shaped by interdependence, risk, and the need for coordinated action.

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