

THALES GEODIS FREIGHT AND LOGISTICS (TGFL)

TRUSTED TRANSPORTATION





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Thales Geodis Freight and Logistics (TGFL)'s role in bringing the ALMA astronomical observatory project to life was one of the more complex and demanding of the whole undertaking

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TGFL, in existence for more than 50 years, became a joint venture between the Thales and Geodis groups in 2002. Thales Geodis Freight and Logistics has since become a dedicated and well-respected supplier of logistical requirements and specialised freight forwarding operations for the aerospace and defence sectors.

Since its formation TGFL has prided itself on its competitiveness, flexibility, adaptability and quality of service, traits that truly put to the test in one of its more recent undertakings, that being its support of Thales Alenia Space – Italy (TAS – I) and its work on the Atacama Large Millimeter/Sub-millimeter Array (ALMA) astronomical observatory in northern Chile.

TGFL's primary role involved being entrusted with the transportation of the subsystems for 25 of the antennas that would eventually go on to make up the ALMA project. These subsystems included the antennas' individual Back Up Structures (BUS), made of carbon fibre, the reflector panels and all manner of spare parts and associated tools. To give a scale of the work involved, each BUS has a diameter of 12 metres and is carried in two parts, each with a length of 12 metres and a width of six metres, a height of four metres and a weight of some six tonnes.

“The scope of the contract itself,” explains Gilbert Caramelle, Managing Director of TGFL, “called for a number of detailed, complex tasks to be performed, beginning with the design, development, conception and manufacturing of specific handling and transportation tools for the BUS, dubbed jigs,

that have been performed with an expert partner company by the name of ACMH.”

The next phase of the contract called upon TGFL to organise oversize road transportation of the subsystems from their loading point in Massieux, France, to Antwerp, which represents a journey of some 800 kilometres, where they were loaded onto freight vessels. Each transportation also required the presence of at least ten escort vehicles. From

here they would travel across the ocean to arrive in Puerto Angamos, Chile, where it again fell upon TGFL to ensure their safe and efficient transportation, supported by its sister company GEODIS WILSON, to their assembled site at San Pedro de Atacama, at the altitude of nearly 3,000 metres above sea level. Last, but not least, the jigs were to be brought back to Europe.

“The first documents of the contract

“TGFL’S PRIMARY ROLE INVOLVED BEING ENTRUSTED WITH THE TRANSPORTATION OF THE SUBSYSTEMS FOR 25 OF THE ANTENNAS”



Parking at Antwerp



Loading at Antwerp

were signed in 2007,” Caramelle continues, “at which point we commenced with a preparation phase that involved carrying out a number of studies over the space of nearly two years, during which time we also went about identifying reliable expert partners and preparing our own organisation to manage and pilot the project. The contract was finalised in November 2008, with the first antenna being transported to Chile in May 2009 and the last arriving in December 2012.”

As Caramelle highlights, TGFL’s approach saw it initially embark upon selecting expert partners for every task of the contract and establishing an internal team of experience managers to coordinate, pilot and control the operation. In order for this to succeed

this internal team would have to ensure the correct training was given to every employee involved throughout the operation, be it truck drivers, crane pilots or vessel crew, utilising the expertise of marine surveyors, and that they were each aware of the sensitivity of the contract itself. Furthermore, it was the team’s job to control the execution of each operation, by attending to each and calling upon the support of experts, to build up a comprehensive back up plan for every task and to build up a trustful relationship with the customer and all other partners.

“Proper planning was of prime importance going into this project,” explains Finance Director, Daniel Bouly, “as was the proper coordination of all suppliers. This was primarily due to the fact that we only had four



Unloading at Puerto Angamos



Road transportation in Chile



Arrival at the Operators Port Facility

“WE DECIDED TO APPROACH EACH PIECE OF EQUIPMENT INDIVIDUALLY AND AS IF IT WAS THE FIRST TO LEAVE THE MANUFACTURERS FACILITY”

pairs of specially developed jigs to utilise and that we had to use these in an ever-changing ocean freight environment that can present all number of issues.”

Average transportation time for one antenna was typically between one and two months, with over half of this occurring during the overseas transportation phase. It goes without saying then that with such a challenging project the logistical demands

were massive and required every stage of work to come complete with suitable contingency plans.

“We never once had the same experience when handling any of the 25 antennas,” Bouly reveals. “This is something we anticipated being the case and thus we decided to approach each piece of equipment individually and as if it was the first to leave the manufacturer’s facility. This allowed us to

never become complacent and helped ensure that we constantly re-evaluated our backup solutions, sometimes on an hourly basis to try and account for any eventualities.”

The contract with TAS-I has without doubt been one of the longest and challenging that TGFL has ever faced, yet by adopting an approach to its work that saw it willing and able to adjust any aspect of the project at any given time if necessary, it was able to achieve all of its long-term objectives.

“This project,” Bouly states, “has allowed us to not only build on our existing expertise in the fields of transport and logistics, but also enlarge our experience from a technical point of view, primarily when it comes to using specific handling and transportation tools.”

As others in the company are quick to point out, the contract with TAS – I has also helped to cement some of the other positive traits that TGFL has long been proud of having. “This was a project,” concludes ALMA Contract Manager, René Bouliere, “that really highlighted the strong motivation that the TGFL team possesses. The vast majority of people here will tell you that in many ways this was a dream project to be a part of and I think this contributed to the level of involvement and engagement that I believe was extremely unique to this contract.” **BE**

For more information about Thales Geodis Freight and Logistics (TGFL) visit: www.tgflog.com



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