Southern Africa's freightfeatures news

CORRIDORS

Feature by Liesl Venter and Ed Richardson

New multimodal corridor to link southern African countries

The African Development Bank is supporting the development of a multimodal transport corridor linking Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe through a deep-sea gateway of a new port at Techobanine, Mozambique.

Situated 70km south of Maputo, Techobanine will be designed to initially handle up to 200 million tons of diversified cargo a year.

The plan includes a heavy-haul railway line linking the three countries.

Feasibility studies funded by the AfDB and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) are expected to be completed by December 2029.

According to the request for proposal, the project will also consider the corridor's potential as a driver of regional economic and social development.

"The studies will include market analysis to identify business opportunities along the corridor, financial models, climate risk assessments, gender analysis and a green port assessment to evaluate the project's environmental sustainability and social impacts.

"This project is expected to facilitate trade, stimulate industrialisation and enhance regional integration. An initial prefeasibility study indicated potential for substantial economic returns.

"The project economics will, however, need to be revisited to bring on board wider expected benefits besides mining, which may not have been emphasised at the pre-feasibility stage, including potential of agriculture, manufacturing and tourism."

> "National Railways of Zimbabwe, Botswana Railways and CFM plan to invest $10m in upgrading the railway line between Chicualacuala, Dabuka and Bulawayo.

Plans for the corridor date back to 2011, when the three governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the development of a deep-sea port at Techobanine and a heavy-haul railway linking the three countries.

The MoU was renewed in April 2022, reaffirming the countries' commitment to the project.

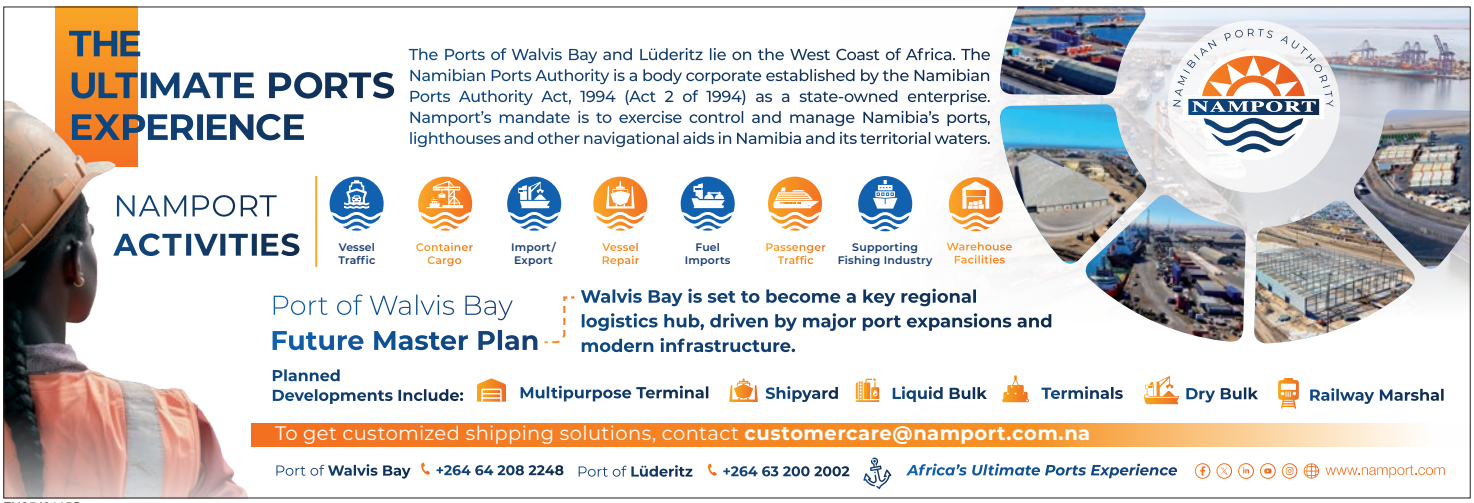
"The project gained significant momentum with the recent successful tripartite technical ministerial meeting held on August 2, 2024," according to the tender document.

The transport ministers from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana endorsed a joint report to be presented to the Heads of State and Government.

The report outlines a collaboration between National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), Botswana Railways and CFM (Mozambique Ports and Railways) to invest $10 million in upgrading the railway line between Chicualacuala, Dabuka and Bulawayo (Limpopo Line).

"This marks a significant milestone in the collaborative efforts to upgrade existing railway infrastructure within the Ponta Techobanine Project framework," the document states.

The line was closed between January and May for extensive repairs. ER



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Zambia helping to strengthen regional connectivity

Zambia is positioning itself at the centre of southern Africa's transport network as investment gathers pace across several major corridor projects linking the country to ports on both the east and west coasts.

Speaking at the fifth Land-Linked Zambia conference in Lusaka recently, Africast chief executive and conference organiser Chimwemwe Nyirenda said Zambia should no longer be viewed as a landlocked country but rather as a "land-linked" nation connected by six strategic transport corridors.

"It is fair to say that Zambia is at the centre of transport corridor development in the region," he said. "We are at the centre of the $1.4 billion TAZARA revitalisation project and the Lobito Corridor project. We also have developments around the Beira, Nacala and North-South corridors, and, of course, the Walvis Bay-Ndola-Lubumbashi Corridor."

Nyirenda said several major infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening regional connectivity reflected Zambia's commitment to developing its transport corridors. Among them is the upgrade of the TAZARA railway, the 1 860km line linking the Port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania with Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia. The project includes the rehabilitation of track, stations, tunnels and bridges, as well as the construction of additional infrastructure along the corridor.

> "Zambia should no longer be viewed as a landlocked country but rather as a 'land-linked' nation connected by six strategic transport corridors.
> – **Chimwemwe Nyirenda**

Once completed, the upgrade is expected to increase annual freight volumes on the railway to 2.4 million tonnes from the current 100 000 tonnes.

He also pointed to improvements around the Kazungula Bridge, which spans the Zambezi River between Zambia and Botswana and has strengthened one of the region's key freight routes, as well as the proposed $2bn Kafue-Lion's Den railway. In April this year, the governments of Zambia and Zimbabwe signed a memorandum of understanding to construct the 311km railway line linking Kafue in Zambia with Lion's Den in Zimbabwe.

According to Nyirenda, these and other investments are critical if Zambia is to achieve the government's ambitious production targets of three million tonnes of copper a year by 2031, alongside annual production of 10 million tonnes of maize, one million tonnes of wheat and one million tonnes of soya beans.

"The transport corridors that are bringing in people and exporting minerals as well as commodities should be ready with technology, capacity and, of course, efficiency," he said.

Nyirenda also pointed to the opportunities presented by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which, citing World Economic Forum estimates, is expected to increase intra-African freight demand by 28%. He said this would create demand for an additional two million trucks, 100 000 rail wagons, 250 aircraft and more than 100 vessels, while significantly expanding the continent's logistics market. LV

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Major investments will streamline cargo flow

Millions are being invested in southern African freight corridors, funded by both government and the private sector through public-private partnerships.

Major investments include $1.4 billion on the Maputo corridor to Gauteng and $6bn on the Lobito rail and port project.

Three of the biggest projects are in Mozambique.

The multimodal Maputo Logistics Corridor connects Maputo port to the Kingdom of Eswatini and the South African provinces of Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Gauteng.

It is one of the focus areas of the 2022 Maputo Port Masterplan, which sees volumes growing to 42 million tons a year in 2033, and 54m by 2043.

Investment in the port includes the expansion of the bulk terminal to 16 million tons, ongoing investment in the DP World container terminal to handle 530 000 TEUs a year, capacity expansion works at Grindrod's magnetite and coal terminal to 12 million tons, and the progressive improvement of efficiency along the logistics corridor through coordinated interventions at key nodes such as Km4, Kudumba and Trans African Concession, which manages the N4 Toll Route on the Maputo Corridor.

"Our focus remains on building a competitive, integrated and sustainable corridor that supports Mozambique's long-term economic development," said Osório Lucas, chief executive officer of MPDC when announcing that the port had handled record volumes in 2025.

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> – Osório Lucas

To the north of Mozambique, investment in the Beira Corridor includes ongoing dredging of the port and access channel, rebuilding of the Machipanda railway line and the rehabilitation of the N6 road.

A consortium of private companies is investing $160m in the construction of an access road to the Port of Beira and the Dondo Logistics Terminal through a public-private partnership, according to a government statement.

Developments on the Nacala Corridor, which runs through Malawi to Zambia, include extensive upgrades to the Port of Nacala and the shared rail line.

Initially built to move coal, the line is now used for agricultural imports and exports as well through the establishment of a logistics park.

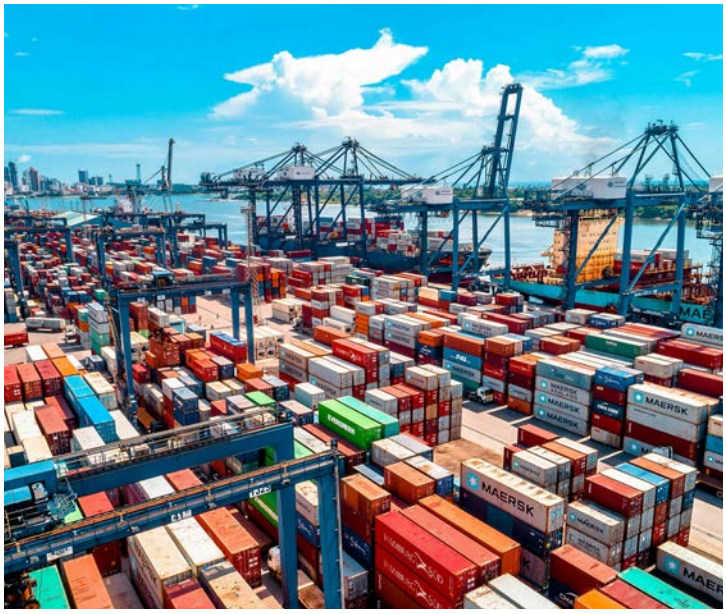
In February 2026, the Mozambican government announced plans to concession the expansion and development of the port.

South African corridors include North-South, linking Durban with the rest of Africa; the Musina Corridor through Beitbridge to Zimbabwe; and the Eastern Cape corridor between the deep-sea port of Ngqura and Gauteng.

Developments on the Durban-Johannesburg corridor include a number of logistics parks and multimodal transfer facilities.

The Musina Makhado Special Economic Zone is being developed as a logistics and processing hub on the South Africa/Zimbabwe border at Beitbridge.

Plans to upgrade the rail link between Ngqura and Gauteng have been on the drawing board for some time. ER



Container terminals across southern Africa are expanding capacity as governments and the private sector invest in more efficient regional freight corridors.

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Maputo making inroads in rail growth plan

A plan is coming together for the Maputo Port Development Company, which increased rail volumes from 9.7 million tons in 2024 to 11.7 million tons in 2025 – a 17% growth.

There have been three years of sustained growth in rail volumes – 8% year on year in 2023, and 7% between 2023 and 2024.

The company describes rail as "a central pillar of the Port of Maputo's sustainability strategy".

In 2024, the African Development Bank (AfDB) made a $40m corporate loan to the state-owned enterprise Portos e Caminhos de Ferro de Moçambique EP (CFM), the Mozambique rail and port authority, for the purchase of rolling stock and locomotives for the Ressano Garcia rail link between Maputo port and South Africa.

This has supported growth on the corridor.

In 2025, MPDC's direct operations also reached a record level, with 15.2 million tons handled, representing 6.4% year-on-year growth.

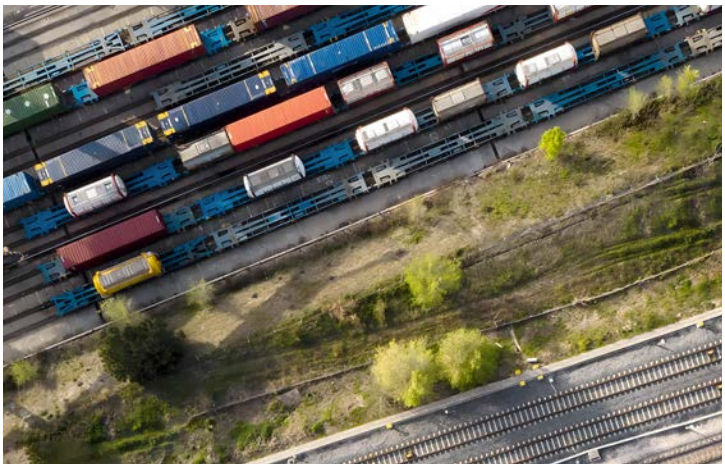
"This result reflects the impact of sustained investments in infrastructure, systems and human capital, as well as ongoing improvements in operational efficiency," according to a company statement.

> "The goal is for rail to transport 45% of the cargo moving through the port and road 55%, which reflects increased volumes through the container terminal.

The goal is for rail to transport 45% of the cargo moving through the port and road 55%, which reflects increased volumes through the container terminal.

In May 2025, DP World initiated a $165m project to double the capacity of the Maputo Container Terminal.

DP World describes the investment as part of a long-term strategy to meet global trade demands, create thousands of new jobs and contribute to Mozambique's economic growth.



Moving more freight from road to rail is gaining momentum as countries like Mozambique invest in transport infrastructure.

"The project will significantly enhance capabilities of the port, positioning Maputo as a trade and logistics hub for southern Africa and opening a gateway for larger container ships," according to a statement issued at the sod-turning ceremony.

Mohammed Akoojee, DP World CEO and managing director for Sub-Saharan Africa, said: "The container terminal expansion signifies our intent to strengthen Mozambique's economic growth, together with the Government of Mozambique and our partners in the MPDC.

"The Port of Maputo is at the heart of transforming trade on the African continent, as it has the potential to connect the land-locked countries of southern Africa to the rest of the world.

"This investment reinforces Mozambique's role as a key cargo gateway, improves its global competitiveness and positions the country as a dynamic business hub. By working hand-in-hand with our partners, we are committed to developing innovative end-to-end logistics solutions that reinvent trade on the south-eastern coast of Africa." ER

Road still king on N3 corridor

Private operators of the Durban-Johannesburg rail corridor will have their work cut out to reverse the dominance of road.

The trend is for freight on the N3 corridor to move from rail to road, which now has an estimated 87% share of the volumes.

In addition to delays caused by theft, lack of maintenance and ageing rolling stock and locomotives, the line has structural challenges.

The rail route is 690km, or 140km (25%) longer than the 550km road link.

While investment in rail has stagnated, the road has been steadily upgraded.

However, with 8 500 to 13 500 vehicles a day on the route, around half of which are heavy trucks, there are frequent delays due to congestion and accidents.

Further strain will be put on the corridor as global e-commerce platforms such as Shein, Amazon and Temu move distribution from air to ocean freight.

According to operators, it takes an average of one to three days to move a container between the port and Gauteng, while for rail it is three to five days.

> "87%
> The current share of road freight on the N3 corridor.

The advantage of rail is that it is "significantly cheaper for large volumes", according to V&S Freight.

This excludes the additional costs and time to move the freight from the rail terminal at City Deep to the final destination.

Gavin Kelly, chief executive officer of the Road Freight Association, does not see the trend being reversed any time soon.

"The first important concept to understand is that the customer (cargo owner) decides what mode of transport (air, rail, road or sea) will be used," he told *Freight News*.

"The decision is based on service (transport) reliability, efficiency, consistency, applicability, security and cost.

"Until rail can effectively offer an alternative to road that consistently 'ticks' the above requirements in a freight logistics system, rail will be shunned and cargo owners (customers) will decide what suits their needs best.

"Road freight transporters (operators) do not decide which mode of transport is used – but through their calibre of services offered, they ensure customers choose road freight again and again." ER

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Lobito transforming regional mineral trade

It is over a decade since a *Freight News* team overheard a conversation in a Lusaka hotel about plans to revive the 1 739-kilometre rail link between the Copperbelt and the Port of Lobito.

Naturally, we introduced ourselves and since then have been following developments with interest.

Today, the Lobito Corridor is living up to the vision of transforming regional mineral trade.

The figures show it is diverting copper and cobalt exports from the traditional eastern and southern African ports to Angola's Atlantic port.

Volumes are projected to increase from 265 000 tons in 2025 to 1.5 million tons by 2030, and ultimately 4.6 million tons a year, proving the sceptics wrong.

To be fair, the early stages of the revitalisation of Lobito and the railway were not made public.

In 2006, China provided funding (and the construction company, labour, etc) for the reconstruction of the Benguela Railway line through an agreement with the Angolan government.

Quay rehabilitation and extension to 1 122 metres was done between 2008 and 2010, followed by extension of the container terminal and dredging to 14.7m.

Things started happening in 2022, when the Angolan government awarded a 30-year concession to the Lobito Atlantic Railway Consortium (LAR), consisting of Mota-Engil, Trafigura and Vecturis.

It was signed in July 2023, and the first "experimental" train carried 960 tons of copper from Kolwezi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Lobito in January 2024.

LAR secured $753m in financing from the US International Development Financial Corporation (DFC) and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA).

The corridor now has strategic importance, providing Western countries with access to the cobalt and copper needed for electric vehicles and batteries in competition with China, which has largely secured the routes to the eastern seaboard.

The United States has mobilised over $4 billion toward the Lobito Corridor infrastructure projects, which includes a direct $553m loan for the railway.

The European Union has separately mobilised approximately €2bn in funding and support for the corridor, bringing total investments by key international players to over $6bn.

The DBSA will contribute another $200m.

Funding is needed to handle projected growth in volumes, with plans for a greenfields Zambian rail link and extension into the DRC well advanced.

For cargo owners, the maths is simple – it offers a seven- to eight-day transit time compared to 25-50 days to Durban, with fewer border delays, and it is less than half the distance, all of which adds up to an estimated 30% to 40% cost saving. ER

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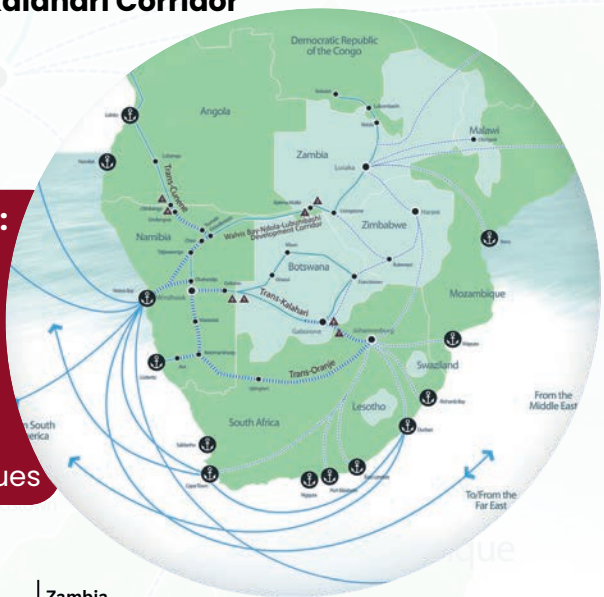

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