Feature by Liesl Venter and Ed Richardson

Copper volumes prompt route diversification

Rising copper production in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is accelerating the race to strengthen alternative trade corridors as the region prepares for a significant increase in cargo volumes.

While both economies are heavily dependent on copper, constrained by power shortages and seeking to diversify, their operating environments and logistics challenges differ substantially, according to Africa House partner Duncan Bonnett.

"On the surface, the issues are similar, but once you start digging down, each country has a completely different set of factors to take into account," he told *Freight News*.

With the copper-producing regions of both countries landlocked, and difficulties on the traditional export route through Durban creating additional risk and delays, cargo flows have already begun shifting across the region.

The DRC has focused strongly on developing a westward route through the Lobito Corridor, while Zambia has adopted a more diversified strategy, strengthening access to corridors running both east and west. Where copper traffic was once heavily concentrated on Durban, it is now spread more evenly across Dar es Salaam, Walvis Bay, Beira and Durban, along with some smaller volumes moving through Nacala and Lobito.

According to Bonnett, volumes on the Lobito corridor are expected to grow, particularly as the corridor offers a significantly shorter journey from the DRC. A truck round trip between Kolwezi and Durban can take 35 to 40 days or longer, compared with approximately 14 to 16 days between Kolwezi and Lobito. The western route also involves only one border crossing rather than several.

> "Ports are receiving as much attention as the road and rail networks feeding them.
> – Duncan Bonnett

He said Lobito and the Tazara Corridor to Dar es Salaam would be "game changers", as both are rail-based. Shifting bulk mineral cargo from road to rail would deliver substantial long-term benefits, although sufficient capacity and reliability would be critical.

"There is a lot more urgency across the region to unlock potential and remove bottlenecks from railways, roads and ports," said Bonnett. "There is no point in having excellent road and rail connections if the ports remain a shambles." Ports were therefore receiving as much attention as the road and rail networks feeding them, he added.

According to Bonnett, Zambia is entering this growth phase with some advantages over the DRC. Not only does it have stronger internal infrastructure, but also several competing trade routes, while its manufacturing base is also more developed than the DRC.

"The DRC has some big challenges to overcome, starting with it being a massive piece of real estate. Unlocking trade between Kinshasa and the Copperbelt is very difficult because you don't have adequate roads, rail or power. There is really very little interconnectivity in the country." LV

Mining investments on upward trajectory

Growing pressure on copper supplies due to vehicle electrification and the rise of data centres is attracting mining investment in Zambia.

"Copper is essential for the generation, transmission and use of electricity. But the demand for copper will outrun supply unless there is major adjustment across the copper supply system," warns an S&P Global study.

> "The demand for copper will outrun supply unless there is major adjustment across the copper supply system.
> – S&P GLOBAL STUDY

It sees copper demand driven by four "vectors" – core economic demand (appliances, computers, construction); energy transition and addition; the electrification of Africa and defence.

"Without meaningful expansion of supply, the result could be a 10 million metric ton shortfall by 2040," the study states.

There is competition for ownership and control of the Zambian minerals between the West and East.

China's foothold in the Copperbelt is being challenged by the United States and Europe.

According to Paul Nantulya of the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, China controls over half of global critical minerals production and an estimated 87% of processing and refining.

Mining remains the backbone of Zambia's economy, with rising global demand for critical minerals such as copper creating significant opportunities for growth.

Over 600 Chinese firms have invested more than $3.5 billion in Zambia's Copperbelt region, he says.

Chinese firms have pledged another $5bn in recent years to help Zambia achieve its target of producing three million tons of copper annually.

In a late response to the Chinese strategy, the US, EU and African Development Bank have collectively pledged more than $10bn for Lobito Corridor infrastructure, with US commitments alone exceeding $4bn by the end of 2024.

The EU's 2024 Critical Raw Materials Act and its 2023 Strategic Partnership Roadmap with the DRC, later extended to Zambia, Namibia and Rwanda, are seen as a coordinated Western push to reduce dependence on Chinese-controlled mineral supply chains.

Zambia's copper expansion has been powered by the revival of legacy mines and new greenfield projects, with Vedanta Resources relaunching Konkola Copper Mine with a $1.3bn investment in late 2024. ER

PROJECT / MINE	INVESTOR / COMPANY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT	TIMELINE STATUS	KEY DETAILS
Kansanshi S3 expansion	First quantum minerals (fqm)	$1.25bn	Completed/commissioned (2024–2025)	Increased milling capacity and recovery rates, boosting annual production.
Mingomba deep mine	Kobold metals / joint venture	$600 million initial (projected $3bn+ total)	Ongoing/projected to 2030	High-grade copper deposit targeting 300 000 tons of copper annually at full scale.
Kitumba project	Sinomine resource group	$600m	Active/under way (2025–2026)	Includes new mining operations and an integrated 50-megawatt solar plant.
Lumwana super pit	Barrick gold	$2bn (expansion phase)	Projected/ongoing (2025–2028)	Expansion expected to significantly extend mine life and ramp up annual output.
Mopani copper mines	Delta mining/ zccm-ih	$300m+ (injection)	Ongoing/active (2024–2026)	Operational stabilisation and deep-level shaft expansion following new ownership arrangements.
Konkola copper mines (kcm)	Vedanta resources	$1bn+ (commitment)	Projected/active (2025–2027)	Reviving underground development and upgrading processing infrastructure.

Growing emphasis on speed and predictability

Freight volumes into Zambia are rising significantly, with stronger demand evident in both cross-border loads and secondary distribution within the country.

According to Paul Cunliffe, managing director of 4PL, the company has recorded continued growth in its consolidated freight service to Zambia, while full-load container volumes have also increased substantially.

"The growth highlights the need for reliable and efficient services into Zambia, supported by domestic distribution capable of moving cargo beyond the primary delivery points," he told *Freight News*.

The company has extended its regional reach with the launch of a consolidated freight service into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), delivering as far as Kolwezi.

The expansion supports its strategy of using Zambia's central geographical position as a hub from which to grow its services within the country and across the wider region.

Driving the growth is an upswing in cargo volumes in both directions, accompanied by a shift in the corridors used to serve the Zambian market.

"The southern corridor is no longer the default option, with Walvis Bay becoming increasingly popular," said Cunliffe.

Mining and agricultural commodities are leading the increase. Agricultural volumes have benefited from good rainfall and improved electricity availability, while mining cargo has been supported by strong global demand for minerals required in the sustainable energy transition.

He said at the same time more and more companies were realising the importance of having their products delivered on time. "There is real value in a consignment delivered in four days rather than stock sitting on the road for a week because of delays and inefficiencies."

This growing emphasis on speed and predictability is also contributing to the increased demand for consolidated freight services as more customers adopt just-in-time delivery models.

"As long-term planning becomes more difficult, reliable just-in-time deliveries are becoming increasingly critical," said Cunliffe. "We believe this is one of the main factors driving growth in our consolidated service."

He said 4PL's focus on actively managing and safeguarding customers' cargo throughout the journey was particularly important on routes where delays could disrupt production or leave businesses without essential stock.

However, Cunliffe said operating the service was not without challenges. Poor road conditions remained problematic, while unpredictable border-crossing times affected transit times and ultimately increased costs.

"This remains the biggest challenge facing operators on the route," he said. "South African border posts are also not adequately equipped to handle the volume of traffic crossing them. Without meaningful government intervention and investment in infrastructure, border congestion will remain a significant obstacle."

Cunliffe said infrastructure upgrades and longer operating hours at critical border posts would significantly improve traffic flows and facilitate regional trade. However, he believes the economic potential of more efficient border crossings is being overlooked by governments.

The consequences extended beyond delayed cargo and higher logistics costs, he said, as drivers were frequently forced to spend several days in queues without adequate facilities.

"Those in authority should spend time living in a truck cab without ablution facilities or reliable access to clean water and food. Drivers are not on a camping trip. These are people who must endure these conditions for days at a time, and it is bordering on a humanitarian crisis."

Despite the challenges, Cunliffe said he remained cautiously optimistic about Zambia and the DRC. LV

> "The southern corridor is no longer the default option, with Walvis Bay becoming increasingly popular.
>
> – Paul Cunliffe

WBCG strengthens presence in DRC

Ongoing investment in the Port of Walvis Bay is positioning it as a reliable trade route for the DRC and Zambia. Photo: Walvis Bay Corridor Group

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's increasing focus on local mineral beneficiation and value addition is creating new freight opportunities along the Walvis Bay-Ndola-Lubumbashi Development Corridor (WBNLDC).

Jen Mbayo, Walvis Bay Corridor Group business development manager for the DRC, said more minerals were being processed domestically rather than being exported as concentrates. This was driving demand for imported production inputs, including sulphur, mining chemicals, equipment and industrial consumables, while also creating opportunities to support exports of refined mineral products.

The WBCG has continued to strengthen its presence in the DRC, with a particular focus on the Haut-Katanga, Lualaba and Tanganyika provinces.

"Through targeted engagement with mining companies, freight forwarders, transporters, clearing agents and other supply chain stakeholders, WBCG continues to promote the WBNLDC as a reliable and competitive trade route for the DRC mining sector," Mbayo told *Freight News*.

Freight volumes on the corridor are continuing to grow, driven primarily by sustained expansion in copper production, increased mining investment and ongoing exploration activities.

"Rising production of strategic minerals such as cobalt, zinc and lithium is expected to further stimulate demand for logistics services over the medium term," said Mbayo.

The DRC logistics landscape is also increasingly characterised by trade corridor diversification. Mbayo said mining companies and logistics providers were looking beyond traditional routes for safer, more reliable and cost-effective options that could improve supply chain resilience and reduce congestion.

"There is also renewed interest in developing multimodal transport solutions, particularly rail-road integration, to improve efficiency, reduce transport costs and support the movement of increasing mining volumes," Mbayo said.

According to Mbayo, the continued development of the Walvis Bay-Kambimba-Kolwezi Corridor represents one of the most significant opportunities to strengthen regional logistics connectivity.

> Rising production of strategic minerals such as cobalt, zinc and lithium is expected to further stimulate demand for logistics services over the medium term.
> – Jen Mbayo

He said the corridor had the potential to reduce transit times, improve cargo security, lower logistics costs and increase cargo throughput through the Port of Walvis Bay.

"Investments in road infrastructure, rail connectivity, border modernisation, dry ports and One-Stop Border Posts will be critical in improving trade facilitation and supporting future mining growth," Mbayo told *Freight News*.

He said the outlook for the country remained positive.

"Continued growth in copper production, sustained mining investment and increasing domestic mineral processing are expected to drive strong demand for transport and logistics services, and the WBNLDC is well positioned to support this growth by providing a reliable, efficient, safe and cost-effective gateway through the Port of Walvis Bay." LV

Zambian youth positive about the future

Concern about employment among Zambian youth has fallen by 41 percentage points while confidence in national direction has risen by 32 percentage points in the latest African Youth Survey.

Commissioned by the Ichikowitz Family Foundation and conducted by PSB Insights, the survey draws from 4 901 interviews with young Africans aged 18 to 24 across 16 countries in March 2026.

Ghana, Ethiopia and Zambia have recorded major rebounds in confidence since 2024.

By contrast, youth in Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Chad and Nigeria are among the most pessimistic about national direction, the economy, security or the wider global outlook.

Youth in Rwanda (91%), Burkina Faso (83%), Somalia (82%) and Ghana (72%) were among the most optimistic about the direction their own country was taking.

The survey found Afro-optimism was at its strongest level since the pandemic, with 47% of young Africans saying their country was moving in the right direction, up from 30% in 2024, while 45% say the national economy is moving in the right direction, up from 26%.

The rising cost of living is named as the issue that has had the biggest impact on Africa over the past five years – ahead of political instability, deaths from infectious disease and the technological revolution.

It was a major issue for political parties and voters in the run-up to the Zambian national elections on August 13.

Zambia's annual inflation rate remained at 6.5% in July, unchanged from June, indicating stability in the pace of price increases, according to the Zambia Statistics Agency (Zamstats).

Average prices of food items increased by 6.7% between June 2025 and June 2026, and those of goods and services by 6.5% over the same period.

The rising cost of living is named as the single event or development that has had the biggest impact on Africa over the past five years, selected by 27% of respondents.

When asked what Africa most needs to progress, young Africans put creating new, well-paying jobs first at 27%, followed closely by reducing government corruption at 25%.

Making it easier to start a business was selected by 16%, up from 10% in 2020. ER

Operators fail to meet DRC local ownership deadline

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has pressed ahead with a contentious local ownership requirement for mining companies, despite ongoing concern about its potential impact on investment in one of the world's most important copper- and cobalt-producing regions.

Under provisions introduced into the Mining Code in 2018, mining companies must ensure that at least 10% of their equity is held by Congolese nationals. This includes 5% allocated to Congolese shareholders and a further 5% reserved for employees.

The government set July 31 as the deadline for companies to demonstrate compliance, warning that those failing to meet the requirement could face sanctions. Major operators, including the likes of Glencore and Ivanhoe Mines, have called for additional time and clarity.

Industry concerns have centred around how the shares will be transferred and financed, whether the requirement will apply retrospectively and which employees will qualify. At the time of going to press, no mining company had complied after the government reaffirmed the deadline in July.

Africa House partner Duncan Bonnett said while uncertainty surrounding local ownership levels and mining regulations remained a concern, such disputes were not unique to the DRC.

During periods of economic difficulty, governments frequently offered generous terms to attract investment, he said. When commodity prices rose, however, they often concluded that the country was not receiving a fair share of the resulting value.

This created a recurring tension between governments seeking greater benefits from their natural resources and mining companies warning that more onerous regulations could undermine profitability and future investment.

"The challenge is to find the balance between allowing companies to mine profitably while ensuring that government and the country receive their fair share," said Bonnett.

> "Beyond regulatory uncertainty, the continuing conflict in the eastern DRC remains a serious obstacle to the country's long-term stability and development.
>
> – Duncan Bonnett

Despite the regulatory concerns, he remains positive about the level of activity in the DRC.

"There are a lot of new mines being developed and existing mines being expanded," he said.

Investment was also flowing into power and water infrastructure required by mining operations, with some of this infrastructure benefiting surrounding communities.

Renewable energy projects, particularly solar installations with battery storage and hydropower developments, are gaining momentum as mines seek more reliable electricity supplies.

Bonnett said the continued investment indicated that the DRC's mineral potential remained compelling, despite the more complex regulatory environment.

He said beyond regulatory uncertainty, the continuing conflict in the eastern DRC remained a serious obstacle to the country's long-term stability and development.

Fighting involving the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group and Congolese forces has destabilised large parts in the east of the country. While the copper and cobalt operations are situated farther south, the persistent conflict and tension do impact investor confidence and complicate efforts to build an integrated national economy, said Bonnett.

He said the country's size and lack of internal connectivity made these challenges particularly difficult to address.

Resolving the conflict was critical not only from a security perspective but also to continue attracting sustained investment and developing transport corridors, he added. LV

Making it more taxing to do business

The Zambian government has instituted a number of measures that increase the cost of doing business in the country.

According to the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer fifth edition, the tax changes are perceived as contradicting the nation's long-term industrial objectives.

The introduction of a 1% Minimum Alternative Tax (MAT) in August 2025 via the Income Tax (Amendment) Act No 10 of 2025 raised the fiscal burden on diversified trade, according to the barometer.

The tax is a levy of 1%, charged on the total annual turnover by all large-scale companies and partnerships. Small-scale businesses with an annual turnover of K5 million ($255 661) or less are exempted.

Enacted via the Income Tax (Amendment) Act of 2024 and effective from January 1, 2025, the Zambian government also increased income tax rates on non-traditional exports and value addition to copper cathodes to 20% (up from 15%) as part of a medium-term goal to unify the corporate tax regime, according to PKF Financial Consulting Services Zambia.

Compliance challenges continue after the introduction of the mandatory Smart Invoice system, which, from July 1, 2024, required electronic invoices with fiscal signatures for all sales to combat VAT fraud and enhance revenue.

The system generates electronic invoices with a unique fiscal signature and QR code, transmitting data to the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) in real-time – when it is working.

In March, economist Kelvin Chisanga warned that system disruptions at the ZRA were creating operational challenges for businesses across the country.

"While Zambia has made progress in digitalising tax administration, this situation highlights the importance of strengthening system resilience and ensuring stable digital infrastructure within critical public institutions to support business continuity and efficient revenue administration," he said.

In another move, from January 1, 2025, ZRA levied a 15% advance income tax (AIT) on exports of goods and remittances of funds exceeding $2 000, targeting exporters without a valid Tax Clearance Certificate (TCC).

Other major changes introduced by the 2025 budget include a 1% turnover tax for companies with high revenue but low profitability, and higher rates on cigarettes, alcohol and non-alcoholic beverages, according to PwC.

They were enacted on August 19.

Cargo flows are being affected by the Zambia Border Development Strategy 2025–2029, launched in April 2025. It is a comprehensive roadmap launched by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry (MCTI) to transform Zambia into a regional logistics hub.

In its pilot project at the Nakonde border between Zambia and Tanzania, traffic has been affected by infrastructure upgrades and the installation of a modern X-ray cargo scanner. ER

More varied range of inbound cargo

Zambia's drive to diversify its economy is beginning to reshape its freight market, with growth in agriculture, infrastructure, construction, manufacturing and retail creating demand for an increasingly varied range of inbound cargo.

While mining remains the country's dominant economic driver, demand is broadening to include irrigation systems, fertiliser, food-processing machinery, steel, electrical equipment, piping, industrial machinery and FMCG goods.

"Zambia consistently stands out as one of Africa's markets with tremendous growth potential," said Natasha Lawrence-Ramiah, general manager at SACO Shipping South Africa.

"Its strategic location, strong mining sector, growing agricultural industry and continued investment in infrastructure make it a key destination for businesses looking to expand across the region."

To strengthen its service on the Zambia trade lane, SACO has appointed a dedicated road freight controller with specialist knowledge of the corridor's cross-border requirements, including border procedures, documentation and shipment coordination.

The appointment forms part of the company's broader investment in its Africa Gateway Team, which was launched earlier this year to improve the movement of cargo into African markets.

"The objective was to make logistics into Africa easier, more transparent and better connected for our customers," said Lawrence-Ramiah. "Since the launch, customers have benefited from quicker responses, improved communication, greater shipment visibility and closer coordination between our ocean freight and cross-border road freight teams."

She said this integrated approach provided continuous oversight of shipments from origin through to final delivery.

> "Zambia consistently stands out as one of Africa's markets with tremendous growth potential.
>
> – Natasha Lawrence-Ramiah

"Having a specialist overseeing the corridor means our customers benefit from someone who understands the complexities of Zambia's cross-border logistics – from border procedures and documentation to keeping shipments moving and customers informed every step of the way."

According to Lawrence-Ramiah, the Africa Gateway Team has been one of SACO's biggest successes this year. Together with the company's dedicated Zambia specialist, it supports the movement of both less-than-container-load (LCL) and full-container-load (FCL) cargo from the Port of Durban to destinations across Zambia.

"As a neutral NVOCC, we are well positioned to support freight forwarders by connecting our ocean freight offering with cross-border road services," she said. "Our teams manage the transition from the port through to the final destination, while providing customers with proactive communication and consistent shipment visibility."

Lawrence-Ramiah said logistics services would need to continue evolving in step with Africa's growth.

"Zambia is one of the region's most promising markets and we are investing in the people, expertise and partnerships needed to support customers as they pursue opportunities in the country." LV

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Future lies in integrated multimodal corridors

Zambia is emerging as an increasingly important player on the Central Corridor, accounting for around 3.5 million tonnes of cargo throughput in 2025 as the regional trade route continues to record strong growth.

Central Corridor volumes reached 32 million tonnes last year, up from 25 million tonnes in 2024, while throughput is expected to exceed 40 million tonnes this year.

According to Advocate Flory Okonge, executive secretary of the Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency, the figures demonstrate Zambia's growing importance to the corridor and the opportunity for the country to establish itself as a strategic gateway linking South-Eastern and Central Africa.

"With the right investment, policies and partnerships, Zambia can indeed become a true gateway linking South-Eastern and Central Africa," he said at the Land-Linked Zambia conference.

Zambia joined the Central Corridor in 2024, a move Okonge described as a deliberate step towards integrating the country more closely into regional transport networks and supporting its ambition to transition from landlocked to land-linked.

He said this was about more than simply connecting Zambia to additional corridors.

"It reflects a clear strategy not only to connect to corridors, but to shape and benefit from them as a competitive regional logistics hub."

The Central Corridor connects the Indian Ocean ports of Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Mtwara with markets and production centres across the African interior through road, rail, inland waterways, pipelines and aviation.

> "With the right investment, policies and partnerships, Zambia can become a true gateway linking South-Eastern and Central Africa.
>
> – Advocate Flory Okonge

According to Okonge, one of the most important lessons from more than two decades of coordinating transport and trade along the corridor was that infrastructure alone was no longer enough to determine the competitiveness of a trade route.

"Corridors are no longer just physical infrastructure; they are economic ecosystems," he said.

Their success is increasingly determined by how efficiently cargo is moved, how seamlessly borders operate and how effectively the different transport systems are integrated.

"Integration is the new currency of competition," he said. "Africa can no longer afford fragmented systems."

He said the future lay in fully integrated multimodal corridors connecting ports, railways, roads, inland waterways and production zones into a single logistics ecosystem.

This was particularly important as corridors increasingly moved beyond their traditional function of transporting cargo between two points.

"The Central Corridor is not merely about moving goods from point A to B. It is about transforming economies."

The corridor is therefore increasingly being developed around regional value chains, production, industrialisation, trade and investment rather than transport infrastructure in isolation.

A market assessment undertaken in collaboration with the Zambian government highlighted opportunities to strengthen Zambia's connectivity and handle growing regional trade flows, particularly minerals and agricultural products.

Okonge said targeted investment and modernisation could further strengthen Zambia's access to regional and global markets and reinforce its role as an anchor for regional trade.

Innovation and partnerships would be equally important, particularly as corridors sought to become more efficient and climate resilient.

"No single institution can achieve this alone," he said. "It requires strong cooperation between governments, development partners, corridor management institutions and the private sector."

For Zambia, he said, geography should increasingly be viewed as an advantage rather than a constraint.

"Zambia is uniquely positioned, not at the centre of concern, but at the centre of opportunity."

Its ambition to move from landlocked to land-linked therefore represents more than a change in terminology.

"Let us move from fragmentation to integration, from delays to efficiency and from potential to prosperity," said Okonge. "Let us build corridors that do not only move goods, but transform economies." LV

Drought dries up business confidence

Drought in 2024 contributed to a drop in business confidence, with Zambia dropping from eighth to tenth in the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB).

Some 29% of the business leaders polled in 2025 were pessimistic compared to 24% in August 2024.

"This pessimism may, in part, be due to the lingering impact of the unprecedented 2023–2024 El Niño drought, which led to severe power outages that persisted into early to mid-2025, subjecting businesses to between 12 and 21 hours of load shedding per day," according to the report authors.

There could be a repeat in 2026 if the predictions of a "Super El Niño" drought are accurate.

The impact of the drought was one of the themes running through the 2026 budget address by Situmbeko Musokotwane, minister of finance and national planning.

"Zambia and our region experienced the worst drought in 2024, never seen in our living memory," he said.

The Bank of Zambia supported business through a K5 billion (R4.3bn) Stability and Resilience facility.

"Demand on the facility has been overwhelming, with approximately K4.7bn (R4.2bn) approved mainly to the agriculture, manufacturing and energy sectors," he said.

Another measure taken to improve climate resilience is the development of drought-resistant crop varieties for maize, millet, sorghum, cowpea and cassava.

Despite the drought, Zambia experienced the largest real GDP growth improvement among surveyed countries, with real GDP growth increasing to 5.1% in 2025, compared to 4% in 2024, according to the SB ATB.

The barometer focuses on Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The Zambian GDP recovery was driven by several key factors.

"First, agricultural output rebounded strongly following the severe drought of 2024, as adequate rainfall returned in 2025 and enabled farmers to restore production levels.

"Second, copper mining production surged, with output rising by 30% as early as the first quarter of 2025, boosting export revenues, a critical contributor to Zambia's GDP given that copper is the country's primary export.

"Third, the economy benefited from stable fiscal policy underpinned by the IMF's Extended Credit Facility programme." ER

Walvis Bay port efficiency attracts growing volumes

Cargo volumes along the Walvis Bay-Ndola-Lubumbashi Development Corridor (WBNLDC) increased significantly during the second quarter of 2026, following a relatively stable first quarter.

According to James Kaposa, business development manager for Zambia and Malawi at the Walvis Bay Corridor Group (WBCG), growth was driven by higher import volumes of fertiliser, sulphur, ammonium nitrate, wheat, solar equipment and mining inputs.

Importers and exporters were also rerouting cargo through the Port of Walvis Bay because of its "operational efficiency, reliability and competitive transit times", he said.

Zambia's mining sector continued to drive growth along the corridor, with increased production at Kansanshi, Lumwana, Mopani and Konkola Copper Mines, contributing to higher copper exports through Walvis Bay.

"Annual copper production rose by 6.8%, from 802 000 tonnes in 2024 to 856 000 tonnes in 2025," Kaposa told *Freight News*.

He said the development of the Mingomba Copper Mine was expected to boost export volumes further and support Zambia's target of producing three million tonnes of copper annually by 2030.

New cargo opportunities were also emerging outside the mining sector.

"Pilot avocado exports to Europe via Walvis Bay and the commissioning of a major fertiliser manufacturing plant are creating new cargo opportunities, strengthening both northbound and southbound trade along the corridor."

Kaposa said ongoing transport infrastructure investment in Zambia and Namibia was further supporting freight growth along the corridor.

The ongoing construction of the Lusaka–Copperbelt dual carriageway and the planned rehabilitation of the Livingstone-Sesheke road are key government infrastructure projects that will enhance road safety, reduce transit times, improve cross-border connectivity and facilitate more efficient freight movement along the Walvis Bay corridors," he said.

Investment is also continuing at the Port of Walvis Bay, where the 10-kilometre access channel is being deepened from 14.4 metres to 16.8 metres and widened from 130 metres to 200 metres.

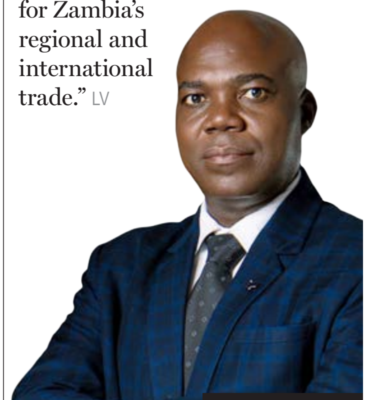
Kaposa said the work had significantly enhanced the port's capacity to accommodate larger vessels and growing cargo volumes.

"Collectively, these investments further strengthen the WBNLDC as a reliable and efficient trade route for Zambia's international and regional trade," he said.

Looking ahead, Kaposa remains positive about the Zambian market over the next 12 months.

"Continued investment in mining, coupled with the government's ambition to increase copper production to three million tonnes annually by 2030, is expected to drive sustained demand for logistics services," he said.

"Growth in commercial agriculture, fertiliser production and non-traditional exports will further diversify cargo flows, positioning the Walvis Bay-Ndola-Lubumbashi Development Corridor as a strategic route for Zambia's regional and international trade." LV



James Kaposa

Keeping the lights switched on

Zambia is addressing a significant energy shortage due to historical underinvestment in the sector, which contributed to extended blackouts during the 2024 drought.

"The current installed capacity for generating electricity could have been adequate with sufficient water in the dams, but clearly this is not the case," said finance and national planning minister Situmbeko Musokotwane in his 2026 budget speech.

"The rising activities in the mining sector are increasing the demand for electricity. The current installed capacity will soon, therefore, become inadequate even with sufficient water resources."

Government interventions include diversifying the energy mix, improving the regulatory framework and introducing flexibility in the tariff structures.

"Government has created an environment that enables the private sector to be active players in the energy sector, from generation to distribution, including importing and exporting.

"Today, Zambia is considered by peers as one of the leading reformers in Africa. The coming on board of the private sector is positive to our local market because it complements the efforts of existing players like ZESCO," he said.

According to the Ministry of Information and Media, the country's installed generation capacity is 4 576 MW (up from 3 100 MW in 2021), 84% of which is generated by hydropower, 9% by coal, 5% by heavy fuel oil and 3% by solar photovoltaic (PV).

"The growth in demand is estimated to be between 150 MW and 200 MW per annum, presenting an opportunity for investment in electricity generation," says the Zambia Development Agency.

Incentives are in place for private sector investors to help the government achieve its target of generating 10 000 MW by 2031.

Major reforms introduced to attract investment include Electricity Open Access Regulations, an Energy Single Licensing System, an Electricity Net Metering Programme and Zambia's first Integrated Resource Plan (IRP).

In June, the government announced the launch of a 15-year $275 million grid resilience programme, which "will leverage the integration of renewable energy projects, including solar generation and battery storage systems, thereby advancing Zambia's transition towards a more diversified and climate-resilient energy mix", according to Felix Nkulukusa, secretary to the Treasury.

"By modernising distribution infrastructure, the country will be better positioned to manage future supply shocks, better facilitate regional power trading within the Southern African Power Pool and optimise electricity imports and exports when necessary," he added.

Zambia is also investing in mini-grids to connect 100% of households and businesses to the grid.

Access to electricity in Zambia has risen from 30% in 2017 to currently nearly 50%.

In collaboration with the World Bank, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Africa Minigrid Development Association (AMDA) and other partners, the Government of Zambia is redoubling its efforts to invest in off-grid solar energy throughout the country to connect all Zambians.

"Our target is to have at least 200 solar mini-grids operational by 2030, ensuring that every rural district in Zambia has access to clean, affordable and reliable electricity," said Zambian energy minister Makozo Chikote in a statement. ER

Strong push to expand airline connectivity

Air connectivity has become an increasingly important part of Zambia's broader economic and logistics ambitions, and closing gaps in the country's regional and international network is now a strategic priority.

The country, which increasingly describes itself as land-linked rather than landlocked, is seeking to strengthen its position as a regional trade and logistics hub. The ability to move people and cargo efficiently into key markets is therefore critical. Yet significant gaps remain.

According to Khetiwe Lubinga-Nyirenda, director of corporate planning and strategy at Zambia Airports Corporation (ZAC), 16 airlines currently serve the country – 14 international and two domestic – providing connections to destinations including Johannesburg, Kigali, Dar es Salaam, Addis Ababa and Dubai.

"We do have connectivity, but when you look at the network there is still a significant reliance on hubs," she said at the annual Land-Linked Zambia conference earlier this year. "That adds both cost and time to travel."

The Lusaka-Johannesburg route remains one of the country's busiest and most competitive, with four airlines operating on the route, while services through major hubs such as Addis Ababa and Dubai provide Zambia with onward international connectivity.

But the limitations of the existing network become apparent when travelling between certain African markets.

> "Air access project takes a coordinated approach to attracting additional airlines and routes into Zambia.
>
> – Khetiwe Lubinga-Nyirenda

"If you want to fly from Lusaka to Kinshasa, for example, you may have to travel via Nairobi first," said Lubinga-Nyirenda. "Those are very real connectivity gaps."

In some cases, the journey is even more circuitous. Travelling from Lusaka to destinations such as Marrakech can involve flying via Addis Ababa and then Europe before returning to Africa, while some regional journeys similarly require connections through Johannesburg.

Addressing these gaps, however, is not simply a matter of identifying destinations without direct flights.

"When we prioritise routes for expansion, it is not just about distance. There must be justification for the route," she said. "What are the volumes? What economic activity exists between the two markets? Is it trade, business or investment?"

Improved air connectivity is key to Zambia's ambition to position itself as a land-linked rather than landlocked country. Expanding regional and international routes will strengthen trade.

Previous efforts to approach individual airlines and encourage them to introduce new services have delivered limited results, prompting Zambia to rethink its strategy.

This has resulted in the establishment of the air access project, bringing together government and industry in a coordinated effort to improve the country's connectivity. The initiative operates at a high level under the minister of transport, with several other ministers represented on its steering committee.

Lubinga-Nyirenda said the approach was based on developing a comprehensive business case for priority routes rather than simply asking airlines to enter the market.

"We realised that just talking to airlines and trying to bring them in was not working. We needed a new approach," she said. "Through the air access project, we are putting together the business case and taking a much more coordinated approach to attracting additional airlines and routes into Zambia." LV

Anticipated mining bonanza poses logistics challenge

How Zambia will transport three million tonnes of copper a year has emerged as one of the critical questions as the country ramps up production towards its ambitious 2031 target.

With production already approaching one million tonnes annually, the scale of the logistics challenge will extend well beyond simply moving additional copper out of the country, according to Bruno Ching'andu, managing director of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA).

"The three million tonnes of copper is an invitation and a challenge at the same time," he told *Freight News* on the sidelines of the Land-Linked Zambia conference held earlier this year.

One of the biggest concerns, he said, was that mining and transport infrastructure planning had traditionally taken place in silos.

"The miners are sitting there, they see this beautiful rock and they know how to get it out of the ground. Their mindset is on mining it," he said. "They don't necessarily invite TAZARA or Zambia Railways to the table."

The result, he said, was that transport operators could find themselves having to respond to increased production.

"When we start looking for the equipment to move these increased volumes, we don't have it. Readiness is going to be a challenge," he added.

He said greater coordination was therefore needed now to determine what infrastructure and equipment would be required as production increased and, importantly, how these investments would be financed.

> "One of the biggest concerns is that mining and transport infrastructure planning has traditionally taken place in silos.
> – **Bruno Ching'andu**

The challenge is particularly significant because three million tonnes of copper production will generate freight demand far beyond the movement of the finished metal.

According to Phesto Musonda, chairperson of ZCCM-IH, for every tonne of copper produced, mines require approximately three tonnes of lime as well as another tonne of sulphur, among other inputs.

This means the logistics requirement associated with three million tonnes of copper production could run to between 10 million and 12 million tonnes of commodities that need to be transported into and out of the mining regions.

Rail will inevitably have to carry a significant share of these volumes, raising concerns about the region's continued over-reliance on road freight.

Across southern Africa, governments and rail operators are investing heavily in rail infrastructure and rolling stock as they seek to shift more bulk cargo from road to rail. For Zambia, the anticipated growth in copper production makes that transition increasingly urgent.

TAZARA itself is set for a full rehabilitation. Construction work on the new TAZARA Training Centre and a modern operations control centre in Dar es Salaam started in July this year, marking one of the first major physical developments under the TAZARA Railway Revitalisation Project.

According to Musonda, it is not just physical infrastructure that has to be addressed. Customs, security and other processes will also have to operate efficiently if substantially higher freight volumes are to move seamlessly across borders.

An intermodal approach will be essential, with road and rail working together rather than competing for cargo.

"The opportunity is here. Whatever happens, the copper is going to have to be moved," he said.

The difficulty is ensuring investment in transport capacity takes place ahead of the anticipated increase in production rather than once the additional copper is already coming out of the ground.

Financiers and investors were unlikely to simply fund infrastructure today in the expectation that Zambia would produce three million tonnes of copper in 2031, said Ching'andu.

This meant capacity would probably have to be developed incrementally, said Lester Anderson, head of trade development at Standard Bank. LV

Giving business and citizens a smart edge

Digitisation of service delivery to citizens by the Zambian government is making it easier to do business in the country.

The National Digital Strategy 2023-27 has identified five pillars under which the country will transform, namely digital infrastructure, digital platforms, digital services, digital literacy and skills and digital innovation and entrepreneurship.

"Over the past few years, the Government of Zambia has made significant progress in laying the foundations of its digital transformation," says Paul Ndungutse, senior digital specialist at the World Bank, who has been assisting government departments.

"Through the Government e-services Portal (ZamPortal), citizens can now access a growing range of digital services such as road fitness certificates, immigration services and land and deeds services, among others.

"We have seen firsthand how integrating digital payments, data exchange and identity verification is transforming how government delivers services faster, more transparently and inclusively," he says.

In April 2026, the Presidential Delivery Unit issued a statement: "Zambia's digital transformation is no longer a policy ambition; it is a delivery story.

"Expanded infrastructure, improved network quality and a growing number of citizens coming online are evidence of what coordinated effort among government, regulators and industry can achieve.

"The progress is measurable and the opportunity it creates for investment and innovation is real."

According to the statement, average population coverage by mobile network operators reached 95% between 2022 and 2025.

Internet subscriptions rose from 10.4 million in 2021 to 14.7m in 2025, meaning more Zambians are not only within network range but are actively using digital services in their daily lives.

"The economic contribution is equally telling. The ICT sector accounted for 1.8% of Zambia's 4% GDP growth in 2024, demonstrating that infrastructure investment is translating into tangible economic output," the statement points out.

To support growth, the World Bank-funded $100m Zambia Skills Training for Resilience and Industry Valued Employment (STRIVE) project aligns digital skills with occupational training in priority sectors. ER