

Transnet boosts Cape Town port efficiency with new gantry cranes

South Africa's container trade received a major boost this week as Transnet officially launched nine new rubber-tyred gantry (RTG) cranes at the Port of Cape Town.



Source: Transnet

The launch marks the first phase of a broader programme that will see 28 cranes deployed across South Africa's terminals, enhancing operational capacity and efficiency.

Advanced equipment to improve port operations

The new cranes, supplied by Liebherr, feature an anti-sway system and video cameras that provide a clear 3D view to assist operators with load and spreader handling.

They allow safe operation in wind speeds of up to 90 km/h. The diesel-electric hybrid system is more environmentally friendly, with Tier Three engines. The equipment upgrade is expected to reduce operational disruptions, improve turnaround times, and increase reliability for shipping lines and customers.

"This investment is a clear demonstration of Transnet's commitment to restoring South Africa's port competitiveness," said Dr Juanita Maree, CEO of the Southern African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF).

The strategic importance of containers

Containers remain central to South Africa's trading economy. According to SAAFF, a single TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) carries goods worth an average of R387,000, and containerised cargo accounts for nearly half of port trade value. Recent throughput data shows Cape Town handled 103,086 TEUs in the first week of September, with a 16% increase at the Cape Town terminal compared to the previous week.

"The sector's growth trajectory shows the urgency and value of modernised equipment. The new cranes will directly support efficiency and capacity," said Dr Maree.

Public-private collaboration celebrated

The launch was applauded by freight forwarders, shipping lines, the agricultural export community and business chambers. SAAFF highlighted that collaborative efforts between government and the private sector remain critical to improving logistics performance and supporting South Africa's global trade competitiveness.

Jabu Mdaki, CEO of Transnet Port Terminals, led the official handover and tour, stating: "What once appeared impossible can indeed be achieved. Creating 'hope-in-action' is at the heart of our operations, enabling good results across the terminal."

Early results and operational improvements

The effectiveness of the new cranes is already evident. Transnet reports that refrigerated container volumes at CTCT have increased by 32%, and overall export volumes are up by 24% compared to year. During the recent citrus fruit season, all consignments were dispatched on time, with no vessel backlogs reported.

"Where there is a will, there is a way. This milestone demonstrates the tangible benefits of visionary leadership and investment," Dr Maree added.

Transnet, SAAFF, and key freight and shipping stakeholders note that the new cranes will improve container handling efficiency, reduce bottlenecks, and enhance the reliability of South African ports on the global trade network.

City of Cape Town welcomes port upgrades

Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis welcomed Transnet's investment in new cranes at the Port of Cape Town, highlighting the economic potential and urging swift private sector involvement.

"An efficient port is essential for job-creating growth, and the City is optimistic of an economic boost from improved port operations thanks to this new crane equipment, which forms part of Transnet's R3.4bn capital investment," said Mayor Hill-Lewis.

Alderman James Vos, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Growth, emphasised the impact of the new anti-sway technology on port efficiency, noting that the cranes can now operate in wind speeds of up to 90 km/h, reducing delays for exporters.

He added that improved operations could create 20,000 jobs, add R6bn in exports, and generate R1.6bn in new tax revenue for the province.

The broader programme will see another 19 cranes delivered in the coming months, part of a continuous R3.4bn / R3.5bn investment in port infrastructure.

Transnet has also added a fourth shift for employees, introduced a performance-based incentive scheme, and implemented real-time performance monitoring to further improve operational efficiency.

SAAFF confirmed its ongoing commitment to support Transnet, shipping lines, and government initiatives to unlock efficiencies, safeguard jobs, and strengthen South Africa's trade competitiveness.



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