Industry gets behind new Transnet chief, Portia Derby

Eugene Goddard

The appointment of Portia Derby as new group executive of Transnet has been met with equal parts enthusiasm, support, and cautious reservation by several representatives of the freight industry.

Bruce Lovemore, joint CEO of machine moving and rigging company, Lovemore Bros, referred to the announcement late last Friday as a “blessing in disguise”.

Unfazed by the fact that Derby was married to Brian Molefe, disgraced former CEO of the freight and rail parastatal who has been implicated as a principal corruptor who colluded with the Gupta brothers, Lovemore said it was her credentials and integrity that mattered most.

“It’s encouraging to see that they have appointed someone who has experience in the industry.”

She was previously director-general of the Department of Public Enterprises, and is therefore perceived to have the right credentials.

“One of the fundamental flaws that we have seen over the last few years is the loss of experienced people. We lost people with good technical and executive skills and it’s been a terrible mistake.

“Thankfully, with the appointment of Andre de Ruyter taking over at Eskom and people like Shamila Batohi heading up the National Prosecuting Authority, we are increasingly seeing the right people filling key positions – and it’s happening across the board.”

Peter Besnard, CEO of the South Africa Association of Ship Operators and Agents (Saasoa), was a little more circumspect.

“I don’t know too much about her and can’t say for sure whether she’s the right person for the job. What I do know is that she seems to be the kind of person who gets things right. She has also made it quite clear that she won’t let her previous relationship with Mr Molefe stand in the way of his possible arrest.”

Beira bulking up throughput on the back of efficiency

The Port of Beira is punching well above its weight despite the devastation it suffered last year when Cyclone Idai swept across the region, concessionaire executive Jan de Vries told a gathering of logistics representatives in Johannesburg last Friday.

Speaking at a marketing drive for the corridor which links landlocked markets with the port, the managing director of Cornelder de Moçambique, the company that holds the harbour’s concession for general cargo and containers, said proactive measures had enabled them to withstand Idai destruction.

“We closed the port for two days and made sure that our systems were protected. It involved fastening gantry cranes so they could remain in position and stacking containers like pyramids so the wind could pass over it with greater ease.”

These measures, in tandem with a host of infrastructural developments and systems upgrades, is helping the port remain ahead of the curve – with data to boot backing up De Vries’s views.

“Ten years ago we only had very small feeder vessels, particularly on the container side, calling at our port. Now we have MSC, CMA CGM, Maersk and PIL Shipping, all of the world’s top lines, calling directly.”

Jan de Vries, executive managing director of Cornelder de Moçambique.
DUTY CALLS

Amendments – 2 | FRIDAY February 7 2020

These statements have been edited because of space constraints. For the full versions go to ftwonline.co.za. Note: This is a non-comprehensive statement of the law. No liability can be accepted for errors and omissions.

Audit Bureau of Circulations

The amendments include 351 sets divided as follows: (i) The agricultural, food and tobacco sectors – 27; (ii) The chemical sector – 58; (iii) The wood sector – 21; (iv) The textile sector – 21; (v) The base metal sector – 27; (vi) The machinery and electrical and electronic goods sector – 68; (vii) The transport sector – 22; and other sectors – 52.

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‘Port of Gauteng’ on the cards?

Eugene Goddard

Rapid urbanisation and the effect it’s having on Gauteng could be effectively addressed through a major warehouse development south of Johannesburg, according to the developers, NT55 Investments.

Dubbed “Distribution Junction”, this “Port of Gauteng” is situated on a flat piece of land with crucial multi-modal infrastructure in close proximity.

According to NT55 director Francois Nortje, the best warehousing sites across the world have a railway line, flat land and a highway – crucial aspects that are all present where Distribution Junction sits on the N3 between Vosloorus and an area called Vredebos.

In a document sent to various media houses, key attributes listed include “the shape and length of the land that allows for an extremely efficient mega rail terminal” which, apart from sitting between a railway line and a highway, is connected by a major arterial road – Barry Marais thoroughfare.

This, Nortje added, “creates an efficient intermodal swap”. Made up of several erven, provides “107 hectares abutting the railway line, 2.2 kilometres of straight-on rail frontage, shovel-ready land that will unlock logistical efficiencies, and Nederveen Road which was recently upgraded to the highest provincial specifications”. If the development’s envisioned Railways Park comes to pass, “it promises to turn around a full block train within an hour, significantly saving on costs by reducing railway stock.”

The Distribution Junction’s logistical potential holds significant promise for the region and, Nortje pointed out, was the development of two full-length 750-metre spurs at Railway Park that will have the potential of turning 1 600 000 containers a year.”

Transnet, however, is involved in a similar supply chain game-changer that has been mooted since the 90s and which is as similar in its transformative scope as it is environmentally different to Distribution Junction. The Tambo Springs Logistics Gateway has been Nortje’s ‘bête noire’ for years.

For the Gateway to happen, Nortje argues, it will cost R2 billion in infrastructural investment.

Since it has been in the offing literally since last century, logistics leaders generally agree that there’s no way the Gateway is ever going to happen if not so much as a sod has been turned yet.

Nortje says he already has prominent clients eager to tap into Distribution Junction’s lettable area of 1.2 million square metres. “A terminal with this capacity and the ability to turn around a train in one hour gives the government a very real alternative for road transport between Durban and Johannesburg,” he said.

The Distribution Junction will change the nature of transport coming up from Durban to Gauteng. – Martin Bailey

If the “Port of Gauteng” achieved its objective of turning goods trains around in several hours or less, it would be a “gold mine”, according to warehousing specialist Martin Bailey, chairman of Industrial Logistic Systems.

Currently Gauteng’s inbound rail freight heads for City Deep and Kaserne with goods trains having to cross passenger lines south of the city, resulting in lengthy delays.

Once at the inland ports, inefficiencies result in yet more delays, translating into several days before a freight train is turned around. “It’s a mess,” said Bailey.

“The Distribution Junction, in comparison, will change the nature of transport coming up from Durban to Gauteng. It’s strategically important for the country but I can’t see it ever happening unless Transnet comes on board,” he added.

NT55 Investments, the company behind the development, believes that once its Distribution Junction is in operation, warehousing tenants will require Transnet to cooperate.

This, said NT55 director Francois Nortje, was based on the anticipated support its scoping analysis was revealing. “We won’t need their participation to stop trains at Distribution Junction. They will have to,” Bailey agreed.

“I’ve seen it before and it can work, but without rates from Transnet up front, I can’t see how prospective tenants will sign up. I have a customer who’s interested in 80 000 square meters, but without a signed, sealed and stamped deal from Transnet, it’s simply too risky,” Bailey said.

Transnet’s focus had moved away from consumer cargo a number of years ago, “back in the days of Maria Ramos”, a former chief executive of the state-owned company. “Back then it was decided that Transnet should concentrate on bulk rail. Unless that mindset changes, I can’t see it getting serious about cargo. They simply haven’t got the assets for it,” Nortje said.

As for the Tambo Springs Logistics Gateway, a government development directly in competition with Distribution Junction and one that was supposed to have unlocked supply chain efficiencies for Gauteng by now, Bailey believes Nortje and his partners have nothing to be worried about.

“Tambo Springs is dead in the water. It will cost too much money. It’s a beautiful project and looks very good on paper but it’s a pipe dream. It’s supposed to provide major opportunities for its partners, BEE interests who between them haven’t got a cent to their names.”

– Eugene Goddard

A task team established to address ongoing challenges at the Port of Cape Town has recorded its first success.

When it was made aware of broken reefer plugs at the Multipurpose Terminal (MPT) that were causing cargo to be turned away at the height of the fruit season, the team took the matter up with Transnet Port Terminals. All the broken plugs have since been repaired with no cargoes being turned away due to unavailability of plugs.

A terminal with this capacity and the ability to turn around a train in one hour gives the government a very real alternative for road transport between Durban and Johannesburg,” he said.

A second workshop for all stakeholders is being planned for April this year.

The team was put together after the Department of Economic Development and Tourism convened a meeting in December with key stakeholders representing the entire port logistics chain, from exporters and importers to trucking companies, the respective divisions of Transnet, Navis, Sars and shipping lines, as well as representatives from the City of Cape Town.

– Liesl Venter

CT task team fixes broken reefer plugs

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According to TPT the MPT recorded a 75% utilisation in December with all of the plugs in the facility now operational.

According to the spokesman the task team has met several times since the workshop in December where it was asked to address port working hours in an effort to improve the synchronisation of shifts as well as the traffic management of trucks as congestion remains problematic.

A second workshop for all stakeholders is being planned for April this year.

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– Liesl Venter
As the ocean freight industry continues to grapple with the fallout from dangerous goods misdeclaration – with the fire aboard the 10000-TEU Cosco Pacific the most recent case in point – the airfreight industry has taken decisive action to address the issue head on. A new international regulation will soon be implemented that provides a framework for ‘competency-based training’. “The Icao (International Civil Aviation Organization) has come up with this for the parties involved in dangerous goods shipping, including “airfreight forwarders” and “shippers”. Under this regulation, all shippers will be required to train their employees in the proper handling of dangerous goods which includes identifying, classifying, packing, marking, labelling and documenting, subject to international regulations. “This global initiative will be implemented on 1 January 2021, which means that there will soon be a “global” movement in shippers training their employees in the handling of dangerous goods in an appropriate manner,” says Tom Shinya, an International Union of Marine Insurers (IUMI) committee member. “It’s an issue that will affect everyone, and it’s an issue about which Professional Aviation Services’ David Alexander is passionate. Dangerous goods need to be packed and declared correctly. People often don’t know how to pack – and if you have a large quantity of lithium batteries close to inflammable liquid it will become a very big problem.” The consequences for air were particularly dire, he said. “Which is why we are working very hard on education – and that includes training this month in Johannesburg and Cape Town by a specialist team from Iata. Shinya says it’s top of mind for the insurance industry. He uses the ocean freight example of the MSC Flaminia case decision in September 2018 to illustrate the dire consequences of misdeclaration for the parties involved, with both shipper and NVOCC facing a significant amount of liability. The US district court determined that the shipper and the NVOCC had breached the legal duty of warning as well as the contract. It was found that the chemical cargo was already at risk due to negligence before being loaded on the vessel although not reported as such. “The point is, these catastrophic losses are not caused by acts of God but by human error, which means they are avoidable.” CFR Freight will increase its airfreight import product offerings in 2020 as part of a bigger strategy to remain competitive. According to the company’s airfreight director, Stephen Bishop, they are cautiously optimistic for the year ahead following a tough 2019 that saw global demand for airfreight drop for 12 consecutive months. “The global market has been a bit depressed, but the Africa region continues to show signs of promise,” he said. “We certainly had our challenges in 2019. Imports were under tremendous pressure, but we performed ahead of expectation with our exports.” Bishop said African airlines would continue to play a crucial role in CFR’s airfreight strategy in the next year. “Direct flights to hub stations are always attractive options, and African destinations will continue to feature heavily in our top lanes,” he added. “Some airlines have been aggressively expanding their fleets. By providing additional options they become more attractive.” Key to success, he said, was having the right partners in Africa. “We have a new network onboard to assist with delivered-at-place (DAPs) into the region. We hope that this will be a differentiator in the market.”
International players muscle in on African market

African air cargo carriers are re-aligning and repositioning themselves in the face of an increasingly challenging and more competitive operating environment. As global airfreight traffic continues to decline, more and more international players are turning to Africa, one of the few regions still posting growth.

The African market has always been strong and is steadily increasing, according to Tshepo Tladi, sales and marketing manager for Airlink Cargo.

Tladi told FTW there was an overflow of capacity available in the market at present due to the increased number of international carriers flying into the continent with wide body aircraft.

“The local industry has felt the pinch and as a result certain carriers have reduced their frequencies and aircraft types being operated.”

But, says Tladi, it’s not all bad news. “There are many opportunities for local carriers.”

“We are very positive that this year will yield a more positive result for the region and the industry players considering the growth in the African air freight sector.”

According to the International Air Transport Association (Iata), African carriers are posting the fastest growth of any region in the world, with an increase in demand of 19.8% in November last year compared to the same month in 2018.

Predominantly driven by strong trade and investment links with Asia, this positive performance was good news for the air cargo sector, said Tladi.

“There is undoubtedly a positive investment trend in the region,” he said. “Despite the total airfreight market recording negative growth of -1.1% growth, the African market has shown grown 19.8% year-on-year.”

With this in mind, Tladi said, Airlink Cargo was planning to align itself with the growth despite the physical constraints it faced.

While he was unwilling to share details of the alignment process or the strategy, Tladi said it was essential that African carriers remained ahead of the game and took steps to ensure they were competitive with their international counterparts.

“The African continent has the potential for future growth. A lot of the international carriers want to see themselves playing in the African market for obvious reasons,” he said. – Liesl Venter

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Transports in limbo as DoT dilly dallys

Liesl Venter

With no moratorium in sight allowing high cube containers on the roads, the transport sector is facing a growing crisis.

It remains uncertain when – and even if – the Department of Transport (DoT) will issue a moratorium allowing high cubes to be transported at heights of 4.6m. It is currently illegal to move these containers on South African roads if the height exceeds 4.3m.

Various stakeholders have told FTW there is talk of the DoT wanting to take a “new direction” on high cubes. This comes after it committed to industry in December that it would extend up to 60 knots of its year-long moratorium for a further 18 months while the department studied the impact and safety of these containers on the roads.

“The weather is of increasing concern,” said Quintus van der Merwe, a partner at Shepstone & Wylie. “As matters stand currently it is illegal to move a high cube container at 4.6m.”

“Without a gazette notice, local authorities and provinces have the right to enforce the law as it currently stands, with a maximum height of 4.3m,” said Mike Walwyn, a consultant for the South African Association of Freight Forwarders (SaAaff).

Van der Merwe said undertakings by government not to enforce the law did not make the movement of these containers at 4.6m legal.

CEO of the Road Freight Association, Gavin Kelly, said RFA members had been advised that moving high cubes at 4.6m was illegal and could have legal ramifications for companies.

“I think it is important that this issue be resolved once and for all. Either implement the law or amend the legislation to allow for transport at 4.6m,” he said.

Port of Cape Town gets welcome reprieve as winds die down

The Port of Cape Town is back on track after being plagued by heavy winds for days on end.

In December the port was closed for a total of nine and a half days due to wind, and this year when it came to a complete standstill on the land and water side.

According to a spokesman for the Port Liaison Forum (PLF), an initiative of the Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry, port users had little option but to use other ports to move cargo.

“In December the port was closed for a total of nine and a half days due to wind,” he said. “There is not much that can be done in these situations. The weather is of increasing concern.”

In January it was closed for four consecutive days when gale force winds gusted at speeds of up to 60 knots.

“Usually during heavy wind the port can operate landside in some areas, but in January it had to shut down all operations for nearly a week. This had a massive impact and caused huge delays, not only to cargo owners but also shipping lines.”

At least six vessels bypassed Cape Town during this time which was particularly damaging for importers who could not access their containers. “The only option is to then tranship via another port,” said the spokesman.

Cape Town is also impacted by ongoing congestion in Durban. Many liners prefer to bypass the city rather than Durban where they are already being slowed down.

“This has a real impact on cost for both importers and exporters in Cape Town,” said the spokesman.

According to Transnet Port Terminals the wind has died down in the past two weeks and the port is running smoothly again.

Liesl Venter

Moving high cubes at 4.6m is illegal and could have legal ramifications for companies.

– Gavin Kelly

ONE executive sets the record straight about scrubbers

He said that “as of 10 December last year the total number of container vessels fitted with scrubber technology was 212 vessels – new and retrofitted – totalling 1.29 million TEU carriers”.

It equates to “5.9% of total vessels or 11.8% of capacity”, he said.

For the most part, McIntosh explained, newbuilds came fitted with scrubbers and a lot of large vessels were being retrofitted.

“There are currently about 100 vessels at any one time being fitted with scrubbers in yards.”

The expectation is that by the end of 2022 maybe 1000 vessels, or 20% of the global fleet, could be fitted with scrubbers but it will also depend on the price difference between fitting these systems and the use of low sulphur fuel oil (LSFO).

“While scrubber fitment remains a more affordable method of complying with IMO2020, the price difference between scrubbers and LSFO is apparently narrowing.”

– Eugene Goddard

The issue of scrubber technology and the number of vessels fitted with the water-wash systems used to remove air pollutants from bunker fuel emissions has sparked lively debate.

Scrubber technology is the preferred method for many lines to comply with the sulphur restriction imposed from January 1 by the International Maritime Organization, commonly called IMO2020.

It’s the number of vessels equipped with the system that is in question. In a recent article FTW was told that more than 3000 vessels had been equipped with scrubbers.

Marketing head in South Africa for Ocean Network Express (ONE), Iain McIntosh, said hard facts about global liner figures proved that it wasn’t possible that so many vessels could have been fitted with scrubbers.

“The global fleet totalled 5337 vessels as of the first of January this year. So scrubber fitment would be nearly 60% of the total global fleet,” McIntosh commented.

Scott Melville
Ziegler SA calls on SA Express to pay back the money

Liesl Venter

Cash-strapped South African companies unable to pay debts will increasingly face business restructuring – a practice that is fast gaining ground in the country.

Relatively new to the South African legal system, the restructuring of companies in financial distress is on the increase globally.

In December last year SAA became the first state-owned entity to be placed in business rescue. Last week logistics major Ziegler SA launched an urgent court application to have SAA, also a state-owned entity, placed under business rescue. Not only that but it wants the airline’s 12-member board held accountable for opposing the application and have asked the court to order them to pay all of the legal fees out of their pockets.

Ziegler SA is owed a whopping R1.3 million by SA Express which is technically already considered insolvent as its current liabilities exceed its assets. Not to mention that it recorded a loss of R291 million during the 2018/19 financial year.

“Business rescue proceedings in South Africa are relatively new,” said Simon Chetwynd-Palmer of Shepstone and Wylie. “What is hoped is that the business rescue practitioner takes over, on an interim basis, the management of a company which is unable to pay its creditors.”

Working with the directors, the practitioner seeks to develop a turnaround plan with a view to discharging existing debt over a period of time, and ensuring a returned profitability.”

One of the biggest challenges, however, says Chetwynd-Palmer, is that the practitioner is generally required to raise interim funding to enable the distressed company to continue its operations, pending a return to profitability.

“In a case such as SA Express, one expects very considerable funding required to allow the company to continue its operations. If the business rescue is successful service providers such as Ziegler SA will get paid - but usually over a very lengthy period of time and only after post-commencement loans are repaid.”

Lawyers agree that much of business rescue remains untested in South Africa – and while the system is slowly maturing, many matters are still likely to land in court.

According to Werksmans Attorneys, directors who allow companies to continue to trade in a position of insolvency or financial distress and who do not take the necessary steps will have to recognise that such trading may be the subject matter of far more intense scrutiny than in the past. Directors also need to be aware of the consequences and the circumstances in which they can and will be held personally liable, in a position in which the SA Express board of directors now finds itself.

While the court has reserved judgment in the SA Express case and it remains unknown whether they will be held accountable for the state of the airline or even instructed to continue its operations, if it will be placed under business rescue, the airline has a fight on its hands.

According to Chetwynd-Palmer, over the past ten years airlines have increasingly face business restructuring – a practice many matters are still likely to land in court.

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According to Chetwynd-Palmer, over the past ten years airlines have increasingly face business restructuring – a practice many airlines are struggling to maintain profitability. 

“Business rescue is fast gaining ground in the country. It is being used to save companies from bankruptcy and to allow them to continue trading.”

Chetwynd-Palmer said the practice is generally used in cases where a company is able to continue trading but needs additional funding to do so. However, if the company is unable to continue trading, it may be placed under business rescue to wind it up.

Ziegler SA launched an urgent court application to have SA Express placed under business rescue.

Urgent court application launched to have SA Express placed under business rescue.

If the business rescue is successful Ziegler SA will get paid - but only after a lengthy period of time and usually over a very lengthy period of time. 

— Simon Chetwynd-Palmer

SA economy not looking good – BER

The year is barely off the starting blocks but already things are looking bleak, the Bureau of Economic Research (BER) is reporting.

Guardforce is back in business

Three and a half weeks after announcing that it was closing its doors, Guardforce International Transportation has rescinded its notice of termination with immediate effect.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development has confirmed that a suspect has been arrested for contributing to the spread of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the Limpopo province.

Celebrating International Customs Day

World Customs Organization secretary general Dr Kunio Mikuriya drove home the sustainability message when he addressed customs authorities around the world on International Customs Day (ICD) which is officially marked on January 26.

SAA operates first A350 flight to New York

South African Airways (SAA) last week for the first time deployed its Airbus A350-900 on the New York route.
CT truck staging area makes progress

Transnet National Ports Authority has identified a parcel of land for the construction of a large truck staging area that makes up Phase 2B of its extension at the Port of Cape Town. This comes after various consultations with the City of Cape Town to find a suitable space for the facility.

Long truck queues have become a common sight at the port where drivers have no access to any food or ablution facilities as they wait to enter the harbour.

While the truck staging facility is only expected to be fully completed in 2025, it is understood that capacity for trucks to park will be released on a continuous basis as the project develops.

"Congestion at the Port of Cape Town and surrounding areas is continuing to increase, resulting in economic losses," said Corrine Gallant, Western Cape deputy director: freight. "The Western Cape Government (WCG) has formed a task team to look at alleviating this congestion."

It comprises representatives from various WCG departments, Transnet, shipping lines, and freight and logistics service providers and has been mandated to identify causes of the congestion and implement urgent actions required to address these issues which may relate to port productivity, equipment, infrastructure, information, systems and traffic movement.

-- Liesl Venter

Beira bulking up

From page 1

Compared to the 30 000 TEUs Cornelder managed in its first year, 1998, they equalled that figure in one month last year.

"Currently we do about 300 000 TEUs per year but plans are to push that to 700 000.

On the bulk side the company is particularly emboldened by its growth in market share.

"We used to have no copper. Now we’re sitting on 40% growth in market share out of Zambia and 700% growth out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)."

They were also working hard to expand the 250 000 tonnes of copper ore that Cornelder is currently handling. De Vries said, to 350 000 tonnes. As of the middle of last year, they also started exporting sulphur and have managed to ship 80 000 already.

Part of the reason for the port’s growing popularity for bulk ore shipments, De Vries explained, was its proximity to the copper belt areas of the DRC and Zambia in relation to the Port of Durban, more than twice as far away.

Being able to deal with bulk commodities like tobacco, fertiliser and maize is also adding to the port’s appeal.

“Like copper we had to fight for tobacco. Now we’re by far the biggest exporter of tobacco out of Zimbabwe and other markets, sitting on around 230 000 tonnes of tobacco per annum,” sensing the potential to gain even more market share, De Vries said an expansion project of 90 000 additional square meterage for bulk and project cargo are in the pipeline.

As for the port’s additional facilities – four gantry cranes, two twin-lift cranes, more than 20 reach stackers and at least 35 terminal trackers – they’re in the process of acquiring two RTG cranes that can be remotely operated.

“We are no longer experiencing the problems we used to have. We can get a container through the port in a day or less and the size and number of vessels calling at Beira is steadily on the increase.”

-- Eugene Goddard

New Transnet chief

From page 1

But the proof will be in the pudding, Besnard said. Recalling several high-level meetings held last year where the likes of Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan and even President Cyril Ramaphosa were frequently involved in a private sector-led bid to address issues experienced around the Port of Durban, Besnard said it was time for real action.

“We’re experiencing massive delays at our port where ships are at anchorage for six to seven days and when they finally manage to dock there are other reasons why lines can’t offload as fast as they should.”

“Michelle Phillips, the SOC’s general manager for customer growth and freight solutions, has said it will take around 18 months to turn things around in Durban and we can only hope that the heads at Transnet come to the party and do whatever is necessary to resolve the capacity challenges.”

-- Bruce Lovemore

It’s encouraging to see that they have appointed someone who has experience in the industry.

-- Liesl Venter

Appointment came from one source, as far as FTW could determine – the EFF.

The red berets said Derby should still be prosecuted for an allegedly corrupt business venture she shared with a former minister of public enterprises, Alec Erwin, involving a multi-million rand coal deal.

The contract, though, issued to a company called Ubu Logistics that was reportedly owned by Erwin and Derby, never came to fruition.

The groundbreaking inland port that will transform Southern African logistics

PORT OF GAUTENG

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