



In place of a damaging road scheme: better ways to access Liverpool's port

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An independent review by Greengauge 21 and Jonathan Roberts Consulting

Prepared for



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 In recent decades, most heavy goods vehicle access to the Port of Liverpool has depended on the ‘final mile’ from the M57/M58 junction to the docks at Seaforth being made via the A5036 road through the residential suburbs of Netherton, Litherland and Seaforth.

1.2 In its budget statement of October 2024, Government cancelled a proposed port access road between the M57 and the Port of Liverpool. It would have been built along the length of the Rimrose Valley Country Park. This, while having been largely formed on land reclaimed from prior industrial use, is now a core open space, a valued recreational zone, a green space for the surrounding residential areas (including those living on the heavily-trafficked A5036). It is an increasingly valued local amenity.

1.3 While the road cancellation decision was welcomed by Rimrose Valley Friends (RVF) and those from surrounding communities who use and appreciate the park, it meant that substantial volumes of Heavy Good Vehicles (HGVs) would continue to access the Port on the local road network, including the A5036. This is undesirable in itself, but so too is the worry that Government in future may change its mind and instruct the relevant authorities, including National Highways, to look again at the port access road proposal. After all, the Department for Transport and its agency, National Highways, will no doubt retain their plans for the scheme, with the prospect of seeking re-instatement as/when Government funding permits, or policy changes.

1.4 Accordingly, RVF, with support from Transport Action Network (TAN), commissioned policy research group Greengauge 21 and Jonathan Roberts Consulting together to examine the situation and provide technical advice on practicable alternatives to the road proposal. The aim is to help ensure that the now cancelled road scheme is not resurrected. Surely, there has to be a better plan?

The highway scheme

1.5 An early idea was to fashion a wider trunk road to alleviate pressure on the A5036 through this well-established residential area. This would have been highly destructive. But in selecting an alternative, the Highways Agency chose to create a new route along the length of the Rimrose Valley Country Park. It does not have the support of the local authority nor either of the two constituency MPs.

1.6 The relevant Local Authority, Sefton Council resolved on 12th September 2024[To]:

“continue to:

- **oppose the A5036 Port of Liverpool Access Road**
- **ask the Leader of the Council to write to Sefton MPs, to thank them for their hard work to date and continue to work with them to look at alternative methods of addressing the needs of the Port**

- continue to protect green spaces within urban environments and support communities to access such amenities to promote mental and physical health wellbeing.
- **Sefton Council commends the historic budget delivered by the Labour Government on 30th October 2024. For the first time in many years, we welcome a new co-operative and collaborative way of working with Local Government. This budget will protect a vital green space in Sefton by cancelling of the Port of Liverpool Access Road through Rimrose Valley."**

1.7 RVF shares Sefton Council's objective to provide enduring protection of green spaces and their amenities. Meanwhile, the impact of current HGV traffic on the local road network and neighbourhood continues to be damaging. Additional traffic growth would make matters worse.

1.8 Damage from port traffic arises from a number of disruptive impacts on local communities through which port-bound HGV traffic flows. These include:

- noise impacts, (which can extend to vibration effects in the case of HGVs);
- pollution from HGV exhausts and tyre wear, (which takes a number of forms but includes small particulates which are particularly damaging to health);

- safety implications with inevitably increased risks of road traffic accidents; and
- there are also significant levels of carbon emissions.

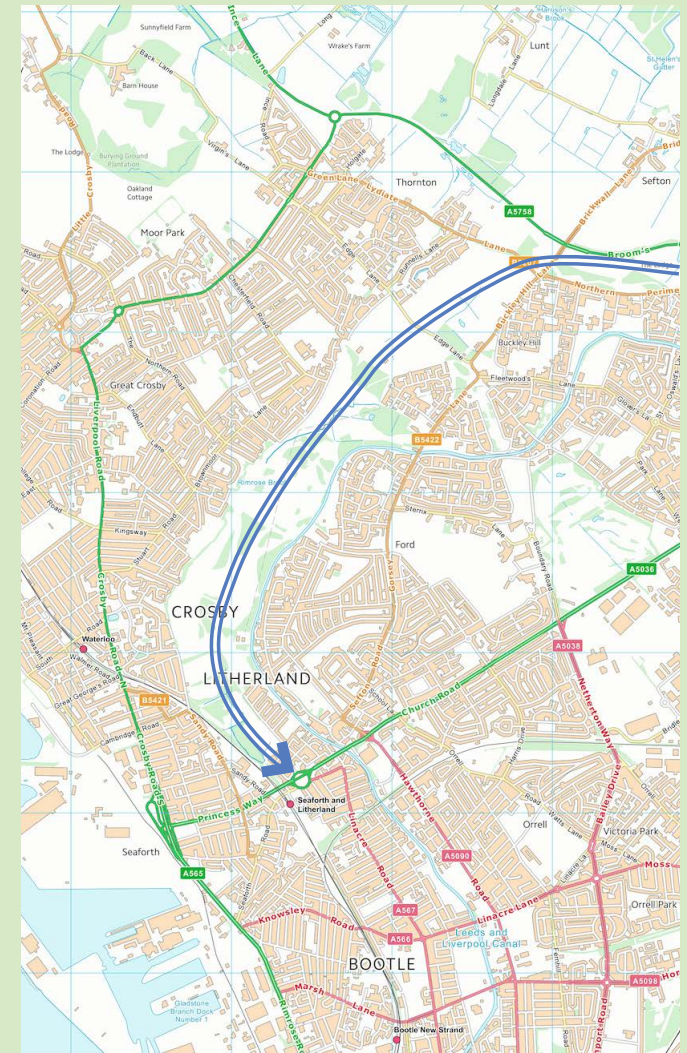
These adverse effects from the substantial HGV traffic flows on local roads impact local residents and workers; local businesses, and of course have unwanted impacts on other road users (cyclists, pedestrians, wheelers, as well as car and bus users). The additional traffic flows also add to road congestion and this also has a negative impact on bus services.

1.9 The map shown to the right illustrates the 'green corridor' of the Rimrose Valley Park that was the chosen route for the now cancelled highway scheme (marked on the map with a blue line). It also illustrates the built-up nature of the main route used for port access today, the A5036 through Litherland from 'Switch Island' where the M57 and M58 motorways meet.

Port characteristics

1.10 Liverpool Port is a 5 km long, 1 km wide, land-holding alongside the estuary of the River Mersey, in the ownership of Peel Ports.

1.11 It is the **fifth busiest for annual tonnage in the United Kingdom, handing 30.6 million tonnes, and the seventh busiest in terms of unitized traffic**, with 1.24 million units.¹



1. Based on a rolling year measured to Q1 2025.

Individual port flows have fluctuated over the years, but are today similar in terms of freight volumes handled to a decade ago. The scale of the Port of Liverpool's throughput is of national as well as regional significance.

1.12 Growth at the port depends on multiple factors, including surface access arrangements. Physically, the port is hemmed in by the Liverpool urban area, itself expanding in population with urban renewal, and with ambitions for an improved city environment and a prospering economy.

1.13 As we shall see, it is by no means unusual in this respect. The adjacency of port and city presents a current and future challenge which Liverpool shares with a number of other cities in the world which have faced similar problems.

Outline of report

1.14 There is a significant task to quantify and understand the shipping and ferry movements and the commodities that are handled through the Port and which are served for access/egress purposes by the A5036. A dedicated study of shipping data for a selected representative period was carried out to establish the pattern of port access demand, and our findings, along with a general description of port activities and access arrangements are summarised in Chapter 2. Data collected are assembled into a spread-sheet

and it is available for subsequent investigations. We have made this work the subject of a free-standing technical report prepared by JRC Consulting.

1.15 We also provide here observations on trends in port freight flows at a UK-wide level. It must be recognised that shipping is global, and that ports operate in a highly competitive market.

1.16 We also examined DfT average annual traffic data (AADT) data to identify the volume of heavy lorry (HGV) flows for recent years. We also sought to identify traffic flows and public transport flows relating to travel to and from the Port for employment and separately for Isle of Man and Ireland ferries.

1.17 In Chapter 3, we look at three case studies of port and port access development, to open up consideration of experiences with port access arrangements elsewhere in the world. This review is not comprehensive, but is intended to allow key lessons to be drawn from cities and their associated ports elsewhere, taking a world view.

1.18 The aim was to learn lessons for road and other forms of port access facilities. It highlights the practicability of solutions other than surface road access, and the unintended consequences of major road schemes that, while intended for port access freight demand, can have much wider effects.

1.19 The case studies provide some valuable pointers to how alternatives could be developed for Liverpool/Sefton. We intend this section to be a gateway to fresh thinking.

1.20 This is followed (in Chapter 4) by a review of relevant developments in North West England and across the wider Port of Liverpool catchment that may influence the pattern of port freight and logistics flows. This includes discussion of current and future availability of relevant capacity for railfreight services to/from the port (noting that the port is served by rail for some specific port traffics).

1.21 The report conclusions are presented in Chapter 5, which sets out a range of options that we believe could and should be explored before (or at least alongside) any new or revived port road access scheme, and which can be used in discussion with Peel Ports (the port owner), Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

2.0 Liverpool Ports shipping and freight flows

2.1 The Mersey Estuary ports and docks are shown below schematically. The Port of Liverpool is the primary group around the River Mersey. It includes the Port of Birkenhead as far as Bromborough. The Port of Manchester begins at Eastham Dock and Locks, at the start of the Manchester Ship Canal. Both Ports are owned by the Peel Group. The Port of Garston is owned by Associated British Ports (ABP).

2.2 Most docks were built as seaward extensions from the previous shoreline, which already had urban settlements. Later docks were built downstream (northwards) along the Mersey Estuary, for larger vessels and their cargoes.

2.3 Port data published annually by the Department for Transport aggregates all cargo flows into tonnes and units, by designated Ports. Combined, Liverpool, Manchester and Garston rank third largest in the UK in 2024, at 38m tonnes. Larger Port groups by volume are London (52m) and Grimsby/Immingham (44m).

2.4 The DfT data does **not** provide a breakdown by the various individual docks shown in the diagram above, limiting the value of this source of evidence for examining specific access routes such as the A5036.

2.5 Accordingly, as part of this commission, Jonathan Roberts Consultancy (JRC) carried out a comprehensive shipping survey and developed a methodology to derive estimates of vessel tonnages and cargo unloading and loading volumes from recorded shipping draughts for



© Google Maps, 2026.

individual docks. The survey and detailed analysis along with full commentary on the cargoes handled at each dock is set out in a separate JRC technical report.²

2.6 Comparison between the DfT data and the JRC allocation of freight handled at each dock shows a good match, reflected in the table opposite.

2.7 DfT data is summarised in the top part of the table with 5-yearly samples from 2004 to 2024.³ The lower part of the table shows results of the JRC 2026 survey, with cargo volume annualised and allocated to individual docks. Volumes are categorised by type of cargo, using the main measures relevant for each cargo type.

2.8 It can be seen that there is good overall correlation between DfT 2024 port cargo data and the annualised JRC 2026 survey output.

< Wirral & Cheshire side		Lancs & main urban side >								
DfT port statistics	Manchester (Ship Canal)	Garston	Liverpool inc Birkenhead	Manchester (Ship Canal)	Garston	Liverpool inc Birkenhead	< Unitised loads, <u>not</u> TEUs. During 2004-2024, one Unit averaged 0.34-0.39 TEUs. Units stated here exclude some indivisible loads, eg vehicles, caravans, road-borne equipment			
	Tonnes	Tonnes	Tonnes	Units	Units	Units				
2004	6,634,166	511,000	32,232,889	646	0	1,029,254				
2009	6,670,344	505,000	29,936,422	340	0	1,025,290				
2014	7,124,506	499,000	30,995,861	55	0	1,128,052				
2019	7,307,189	490,000	34,314,657	5	0	1,375,019				
2024	6,045,196	513,244	31,284,217	Spain 3,630	0	1,233,088				
				Amber = main source of HGV road traffic Tonne/barrel: avge crude ~0.142, light ~0.1364						
Cargo types at Mersey Ports, and values				Container TEUs	Trailers & RoRo TEUs	Bulk Tonnes	Gen.cargo Tonnes	Bulk crude oil Barrels	Chemical/ oil Barrels	LPG liquefied m ³
2024 restated as total Mersey Ports volume, by cargo:				746,806	774,418	11,277,135		63,971,577	39,389,399	data query
Month 2026 (x12) summarised as cargo volumes:				632,397	572,695	10,980,615		60,306,326	37,632,534	41,688
		Liverpool 2	Lancs & main urban > side of River >	257,565						
		Seaforth		374,832		2,390,928	470,826			
		Gladstone				3,588,780	48,204		1,456,464	
		Alexandra					687,180		357,168	
		Langton							1,020,372	
		Brocklebank			323,372					
		Canada				857,784	385,478		2,659,981	
2026 survey		Huskisson							2,855,686	
		Princes/P.Head		max	11,520					
outputs, by Dock	< Wirral	Birkenhead			232,500		656,700		230,772	
	< side of	Tranmere						60,306,326		
	< River	Bromborough					263,906			
		Garston	urban >				330,168			
	along the	Eastham			5,304				8,793,179	
	Manchester Ship	Ellesmere Port					454,860		1,019,887	
		Stanlow							18,464,413	41,688
	Canal	WP/Runcorn					824,680		774,612	
		Salford					21,120			

Table 2.1 Mersey Estuary ports: DfT port cargo data 2004–2024 and JRC port and dock survey, 2026

2. A survey and analysis of freight traffic at Mersey Estuary ports in April–May 2026, Jonathan Roberts Consultancy, September 2026.

3. From DfT Port statistics (PORT0101, PORT0301).

Traffic implications of Liverpool Ports cargo volume

2.9 From the JRC survey we can see that the main port-related HGV traffic is associated with:

- Unitised container flows at **Liverpool2** and **Seaforth Docks**, providing short-sea flows, European distribution from deep-sea hubs, and North Atlantic services for Canada and the US East Coast. Specialist Mediterranean-UK flows include perishable chilled cargoes.
- The rail container terminal was only used for whisky exports, just 2% of Liverpool's containers.
- CLdN runs Dublin ferries for unaccompanied trailers at **Brocklebank Dock**. Stena at Birkenhead runs an unaccompanied ferry to Dublin, and passenger/ro-ro ferries to Belfast. The CLdN service has delays entering and leaving Liverpool with its sea locks.
- CLdN proposes to accelerate and increase capacity by building (with Peel support) a new **Brocklebank** river berth directly on the Mersey. A planning application is expected shortly. This may increase HGV traffic volume once the new quay is in operation.⁴

- Large-scale bulk flows excluding oil are estimated as nearly 7 million tonnes in 2026, with dry bulk handled at specialist wharves in **Seaforth, Gladstone** and **Canada Docks**.
- Rail carries about 2m tonnes of biomass fuel onwards from **Gladstone** to Drax power station.,
- **Alexandra** and neighbouring **docks** also handle large flows of scrap metal, currently inwards by ship, rail and (regionally) HGV, and outwards by ship. Over time, biomass flows through Liverpool are expected to diminish, while scrap may increase with new shipping and rail flows geared to electric arc furnaces at Port Talbot and Teesside.
- General cargo is handled at many docks, with a wide variety of goods. Total general cargo at all NW regional ports has declined from 3½m tonnes to 2½m between 2004 and 2024, but Mersey Estuary ports' share is stable, with 1.7m tonnes rising to 1.8m.
- Isle of Man freight comes mainly via Heysham. A nominal volume is shown at **Prince's**.

Liverpool Port highway access routes

2.10 The docks depend on road access via:

- The M57 and M58 approaches which meet at 'Switch Island' north of Aintree. Dock traffic uses the A5036 to the Port gateway at Seaforth, for the main container and bulk docks at **Seaforth, Liverpool2** and **Gladstone**.
- This route can also be used to reach the A565 dockside Derby Road, or, midway along the A5036, there is the A5038 link to Breeze Hill. Both then reach the central docks.
- The A580 'East Lancashire' 1930s arterial road connects the central docks—particularly **Alexandra, Langton, Brocklebank, Canada** and **Huskisson**—and the M6 and M62, via Miller's Bridge and Breeze Hill, through the urban core of Bootle and North Liverpool.

4. <https://www.cldn.com/en/news/cldn-announces-plans-develop-river-berth-liverpool>

Dock sequence set out on right				Cargo volume			HGVs	if sharing			
				Estimated survey TEUs in month		Annualised x 12	TEUs	if separate lorry for in & out	if sharing lorry 50% of outbound	Main Docks	
Containers				inbound	outbound	total	total	(1 unit = 1 HGV)			
				14,146	7,318	21,464	257,568	632,400	515,136	427,320	Liverpool 2
				18,986	12,250	31,236	374,832		749,663	602,669	Royal Seaforth
Bulk and general cargo below											
Includes scrap metal after inwards rail and shipping offsets				tonnes	tonnes	Annualised x 12	tonnes				
lighterage example also used							Biomass & scrap				Royal Seaforth
All Drax biomass assumed by rail onwards				inbound	Tonnes	outbound	total 2-way	by rail do not			Gladstone
Total bulk tonnes un/loaded in survey period				372,719	189,072	561,791	< involve HGVs	4,932,336	365,358	312,154	Alexandra
Rest of bulk tonnes arriving/departing Liverpool				176,275	96,423	272,698	3,272,376				Canada
Plus potential scrap and metals in by HGV				51,885		51,885	622,620				(excl. Langton
General cargo after deducting scrap & lighterage				63,159	23,286	86,445	1,037,340				and Huskisson)
Ferry ro-ro traffic				Estimated survey TEUs in month		Annualised x 12	TEUs	(1 unit = 1 HGV)			
At Brocklebank (unaccompanied trailers via CLdN)						26,948	323,372	334,892	646,743	485,058	Brocklebank
and Prince's (Isle of Man nominal flow - most via Heysham)						960	11,520		23,040	17,280	Prince's
OVERALL MAX and SHARING HGV TRIPS ANNUALISED VOLUME at Liverpool Docks north from City Centre:								1,630,158	1,342,144	Liverpool 2-Canada	
								669,783	502,338	Brocklebank,Princes	
								2,299,941	1,844,481		
				Restated as a daily 2-way basis, using a divisor of 350				4,658	3,835	Liverpool 2-Canada	
				Restated as hourly one-way during an 18 hour day				129	107		
				As above				1,914	1,435	Brocklebank,Princes	
								53	40		
HGV flows arising from shipping volumes have been reduced by annualised estimates:							Based on HGV flows to/from Liverpool 2-Canada Docks mainly via A5036, Brocklebank-Prince's Pier mainly via Miller's Bridge.				
♦ Rail conveyance of ~2.2 million tonnes of biomass from Gladstone Dock to Drax power station											
♦ Inwards rail conveyance of ~400,000 tonnes of scrap to Liverpool dockside recycling plants, for subsequent resending as export.											
No allowance has been made for the marginal 2% of containers carried by rail to Seaforth terminal.											
An additional inwards regional HGV flow of ~600,000 tonnes of scrap has been estimated, associated with export shipping flows.											
This does not include HGVs serving other dockside industry needs, nor HGVs via Wallasey Tunnel to Birkenhead-Ireland ferries or other docks there.											
A 20% HGV share via Wallasey Tunnel to/from Birkenhead ferries and the local docks, with separate inward/outward lorries, would be 100,000 HGVs annually.											

2.11 Table 2.2 shows the rounded estimates of annual port-related HGV traffic volumes on main port approach roads, identified from the mid-April-mid-May 2026 survey by JRC.

2.12 The A5036 is clearly a principal docks HGV traffic access route; other options exist but would lengthen road access to the main docks.

Table 2.2 Summary of annualised Port-related HGV traffic levels, with conversion from tonnes/TEUs (units) to HGVs

3.0 Three case studies and lessons for Liverpool

3.1 This is not the first time Liverpool port's freight access has been the subject of critical review. A recent and relevant piece of work on Liverpool Port access arrangements, for example, focused on the challenge of achieving net zero carbon ambitions with the current arrangements for Liverpool port, given its reliance on HGVs for landside access.⁵

3.2 The likely adoption of battery technology to 'electrify' the nation's HGV fleet, would of course have a strongly beneficial impact on carbon emission reductions. But the pace of introduction of electric HGVs lags other EV types. Range is a factor with electric vehicles (especially so with HGVs) and the significant weight of batteries that need to be added imposes a reduction in permissible/achievable payloads (which is set by axle load levels by the highway authorities).

3.3 In this chapter, we look at some case study 'world port' cities and seek lessons applicable to Liverpool.

3.4 Electrification of selected highways has been tested, including in Germany where the Hamburg–Lubeck port access route was the subject of a trial application in 2019. Its feasibility is proven, although its economics remain questionable. It is one thing to undertake a test-case study, with selected and suitably equipped HGVs. It is another to envision it as a solution for Liverpool—or indeed any other port.

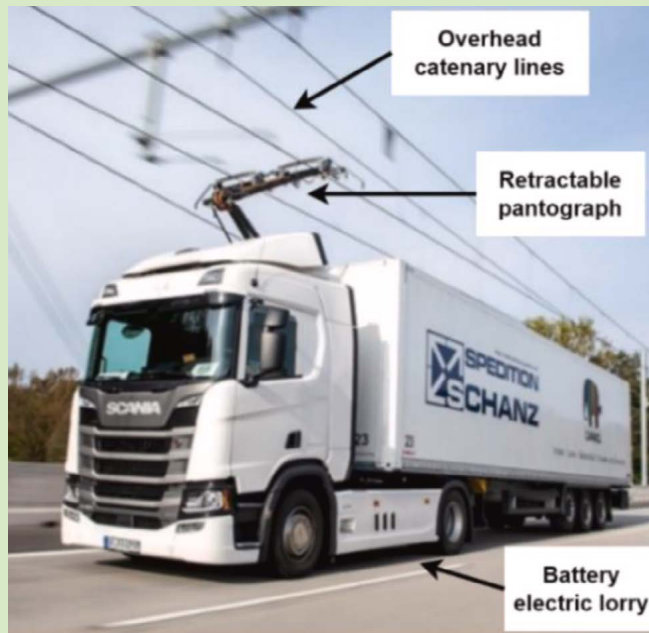


Image: [Transportation Engineering](#), Volume 14, December 2023, (article by Christopher de Saxe , et al).

3.5 A more likely approach to 'electrification' stems from the established commitment to convert all road vehicles to electric power as part of the Net Zero initiative. For HGVs this means— most likely— adoption of battery power for HGVs in due course.

3.6 Alternatives to reliance on HGV for port access flows were also discussed in a major report by Arup commissioned by Sefton Council.⁶ Transfer of freight to rail and (before by canal alternatives), the final report pointed out, would be limited by costs and delays of additional trans-shipment, and/ or limited suitability of the goods involved.

3.7 So without major investment, this report concluded, road freight would continue to dominate for the foreseeable future; and even with major investment, would continue to do so in the medium-term.

3.8 Valuable though these studies undoubtedly are, they haven't as yet provided a way forward for those concerned with the impacts on the local community and the possibility of a revival of some version of the previous 'build-a-new-highway' solution.

3.9 The significance of Liverpool Port, and its recently acquired Freeport status which will boost further development potential, including its contribution to efficient trade and the national economy at a time of considerable challenges to international

5. Net Zero Innovation Programme case study DePoLARiZE (Delivering Port of Liverpool-Associated Road-freight Zero Emissions) 2022, David Tyfield with partners Lancaster University and Sefton MBC.

6. Arup report: [Inland Port and Connectivity Concept](#)

shipping,⁷ mean the UK Government is most unlikely to endorse any measure that could increase import/export costs. Instead the policy emphasis is on easing trade barriers and import/export costs, as part of the national economic growth agenda.

3.10 So, the question of what can be learned from experience elsewhere assumes particular importance. There are, after all, many cities—indeed many of the so-called ‘world cities’—that are located where port facilities were first developed centuries earlier, and where major urban expansion has since occurred around or adjacent to them. Liverpool’s port access challenges are in no sense unique.

Selecting Case Studies

3.11 For this part of the study, our approach was to look around the world, not only for places with a similar ‘port-city adjacency’ situation to Liverpool’s (there are many of these) but at places where some major initiatives have been taken, looking for lessons that might be learned from them for here, on Merseyside.

3.12 Accordingly we chose 3 case studies, from the following port-cities:

- Antwerp
- Dublin
- Dubai.

We found they provide three important reference points and some important lessons for us to learn from when thinking about solutions for Liverpool.

7. From USA-imposed trade tariffs, and from the US/Israel-Iran war and its adverse impact on world shipping, for example.

Case study 1:

Antwerp

3.13 Antwerp is Europe's second largest port. The town turned city developed in medieval times along the River Scheldt. Today it handles 266,500,000 tons of freight/year (2025 statistic).

3.14 While medieval wars had cut off access to the river, Napoleon is attributed as having rescued the situation at the start of the 19th century, by building multiple locks which he envisaged would house his military fleet, with an invasion of England in mind. Locks would ensure calm water.

3.15 The subsequent pattern of port development, for many years, was of downstream expansion away from the host city. Port expansion was towards the North Sea. The port and the city of Antwerp were increasingly separating.

3.16 Internationalisation and expansion of shipping in the 20th century, meant that the labour intensive, hectic, port life disappeared (just as happened in Liverpool, of course). Containerisation completely changed dock handling processes in Antwerp, just as they did in Liverpool.

3.17 The general urban plan of Antwerp in 1990 set the direction for the future development of the city with an ambitious 'Stad aan de Stroom' (City on the River) organisation. The quay areas gave the river Scheldt a new 'face', to act as a central part of the 'city on the river'.

In close cooperation with the City and Port, the plan was further deepened, widened, and embedded in the total urban structure. A Master Plan was approved 2002.

3.18 We can see parallels with Liverpool, with larger ships being handled further downstream, further away from the city centre, while earlier 'traditional' docks interfaced with the city centre and its wider functions, while the later additions downstream did not.

3.19 As in Liverpool, in Antwerp new Museums opened on the older 'city' dock areas, with designs from renowned architects, and a new Port House, (designed by Zaha Hadid). So much, so familiar: two ports cities embracing containerisation of much of global shipping while extending the cultural amenities the cities have to offer.

3.20 The areas to which larger ships now dock in Antwerp (using the Kieldrecht Lock for access— the largest in the world when built in 2016 with a length of 500m) are not adjacent to built-up residential areas as are the Liverpool Seaforth Docks. In Belgium, these new expanded docks border scrub land and rural areas, not areas of residential development.

3.21 Redevelopment plans are widely cast and intended to improve the standard of living in Antwerp's ancient port area. The balance of planned 'functions' are: 60% housing, 30% business, and 10% cultural, commercial, and leisure activities.

3.22 The City of Antwerp, the Antwerp Port Authority, and the Flemish Region are working together on the redevelopment plan. A similar engagement between the port owner in Liverpool (Peel Group) and the Merseyside Mayorality and local government authorities at District Level could replicate the arrangements adopted for Antwerp's port area development, but notably absent is any regional authority. The North West Regional Development Authority (RDA) (abolished in 2012) would have been a real asset in bringing together private and public sector ambitions. Perhaps its contemporary equivalent will emerge from the Burnham Government's No10 North plan. Antwerp's City and Port authorities covered a portion of the significant initial investment to increase the project's financial attractiveness to potential private sector investors.

3.23 The Antwerp Port Authorities don't have the constraints of adjacency that Liverpool has, and were open to radical propositions for port access. Investments were made in public services, road infrastructure, and outdoor areas – and of course, in the Port facilities.⁸ Plans covered canal, highway and rail access to the Port—a truly multi-modal approach.

8. Port of Antwerp built two new terminals, North Sea Terminal and the Europa Terminal, both built downstream of the Port's locks. With more than 5 kilometres of quay walls, it is the largest tidal dock in the world. The River Scheldt has been deepened to accommodate the world's largest ships.

Port Access – Rail

3.24 Railport is a public-private sector collaboration between the Port Authority, essenscia⁹, Alfaport Voka¹⁰, and MLSO. Its principal objective is to double the share of rail transport in the port over the coming years. This collaboration aims to develop rail into a fully-fledged mode of transport to and from the port by offering a “high-quality, economically advantageous, and transparent service within the port”.

3.25 To achieve this, Railport, together with Infrabel (the Belgian equivalent to Network Rail), is translating the rail vision into concrete actions. As a neutral party—that is to say, it is neither a shipping company nor a logistics/transport operator, it provides advice and solutions to the various stakeholders active in the rail sector.

3.26 The Port of Antwerp aims to double the share of rail transport of containers to 15% by 2030—with the current rail market share considered to be ‘too low for sustainable logistics’. In Antwerp, the port’s rail infrastructure is being expanded. Key port access initiatives include:

- expanding hybrid/electric shunting, and
- infrastructure upgrades to bypass a congested rail yard (Antwerp North).

3.27 Logistics companies Combinant and BASF are partially electrifying port tracks. This will eliminate the need for diesel traction at the marshalling yard, cutting freight journey times by up to two hours, they claim.

3.28 In April 2026, The Port of Antwerp announced the completion of its major Eurasia Terminal expansion project, adding substantial capacity and upgrading intermodal connections to meet growing European demand. This significant infrastructure upgrade boosts the terminal’s annual handling capacity by an additional 1.5 million TEUs, bringing the total to over 10 million TEUs across the port. The project focused on extending quay length, upgrading crane infrastructure to accommodate mega-vessels, and significantly enhancing rail connectivity to the European hinterland.

3.29 The development was seen as crucial for supporting the port’s strategic position as a primary gateway for containerized cargo into Europe, ensuring readiness for projected growth in trade volumes. The enhanced capacity is expected to streamline operations and reduce vessel turnaround times.

Related highway developments

3.30 The A1 is a major Belgian motorway, part of the E19, linking the capital Brussels to Antwerp to the Dutch border, turning to the A16 in the Netherlands. The road is a crucial element of the Trans-European Transport Network—connecting Paris (and the UK via the channel tunnel) with Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen along the EU-designated North Sea-Mediterranean Corridor.

3.31 For a number of years, the section of this important highway also served as the sole bypass to Antwerp. It was a pinch-point on the European highway system and has been a major source of congestion. Located to the south of the city and port of Antwerp, it has major intersections to feed Antwerp Port as well as the city itself. Existing tunnelled routes under the river had also become bottlenecks, and congestion had spread to residential areas.

3.32 A newer section of Bypass, routed to the north of the city is, like the southern bypass route around the city, marked in red on the map below and it crosses the River Scheldt near where the river is named on the map. For the port area it provides new access routes. But it also provides an alternative route to the current Ring Road, a useful alternative for longer distance traffic on the A16/E19.

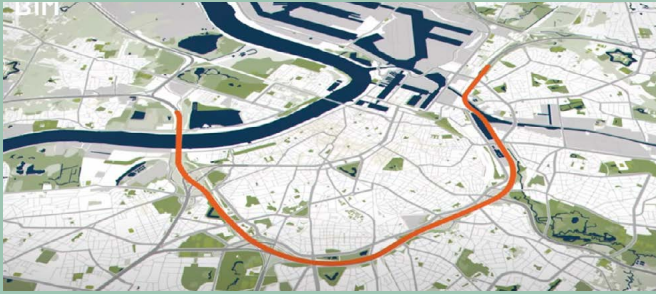
3.33 But new port access road infrastructure doesn’t stop there. Also on offer is a second cross-port highway, the Oosterweel Link, shown in a double-ended blue arrow in the map below, and in more detail overleaf.



Map of Antwerp and its Harbour and its highway access

9. Essenscia is a Pharmaceuticals/Chemicals business group.

10. Alfaport Voka is the platform of and for logistics and maritime companies and professional associations from the Port of Antwerp within Voka—Chamber of Commerce Antwerp—Waasland. Alfaport Voka “strives for an accessible, facilitating, cost-competitive, and sustainable Port of Antwerp with a view to the sustainable anchoring of employment and added value in the port.”



The Antwerp Ring Road before (above) and after (below) the completion of the Oosterweel Link.



© Lantis

3.34 The Oosterweel Link is being called Belgium’s “project of the century”—first put forward in the mid-1990s and developed by Lantis on behalf of the Flemish government. Overall, they claim: “this is much more than just a boring ring road like the UK’s M25 (!). Here, there will be tunnels—lots of them—constructed in some very unusual ways.”

3.35 The brand new Scheldt Tunnel is where the two main sections of the project, on the Left and Right Banks of the river, meet. This massive tunnel is seen as a key part of completing the ring, helping drivers—and cyclists – cross under the river.

3.36 Not just providing new access to the port away from built up areas, the bypass, from October, 2025, knowingly provides an alternative route to the current, congested Ring Road. Not only is it a six-lane tunnel for cars—three in each direction—there’s also a six-metre-wide tube just for bikes.

Conclusions from Case Study 1 – Antwerp

3.37 We included the development of access routes to the port of Antwerp because it reveals a number of interesting impacts of contemporaneous attempts to improve access to a major NW European port.

3.38 First we note the similarity of the relationship of the port area to the city (Antwerp–Liverpool). What is immediately apparent is that for Antwerp, a key driver of access infrastructure development is expected growth in port throughput.

3.39 All ports face competition from rivals, Antwerp most obviously from its near neighbour, Rotterdam, nearby, one country along. Global trade, until very recently—and perhaps still—is on a seemingly upward growth trend.

3.40 Liverpool’s port has a more diverse market base than Antwerp which competes more directly with the UK’s major intercontinental ports at Southampton, London and Felixstowe. Its freight markets are more diverse, and ship sizes handled, smaller. Liverpool therefore needs greater flexibility in its inland distribution arrangements than Antwerp, for which large scale until-load freight trains to/from its wide European hinterland are commonplace.

3.41 We can see how the various authorities in Antwerp combine together at EU, state, region and city levels with the initiative stemming from commercial port interests moderated by wider ambitions to meet the needs of the local communities.

3.42 If expansion is planned for Liverpool docks, a similarly collaborative approach would likely ensure speedy implementation as well as provide a means to embrace community-level aspirations.

3.43 HM Government's commitment to City Region Mayoral devolution would be a crucial part, no doubt, in assembling funding and taking account of local needs. While we have lost access to EU-level funding support available to Antwerp, it could be useful to restore some other funding options that have been lost—for instance through the EIB, for which UK membership has lapsed, but could be re-instated (it operates quite separately from any involvement of the EC/EU).

3.44 In providing better port access, major highway construction has created a complete change in the pattern of road use around Antwerp, affecting local, regional and indeed international travel behaviour and routings. There has been no attempt to designate the new highway infrastructure for port access only traffics. Indeed, the new highways also have new segregated provision of cyclists. The Oosterweel Link has cost an estimated €7bn.

3.45 It is evident that carbon reduction is an issue, with various devices employed including electrification of dockside rail branches, and targets set for an increased rail access mode share. But while these are impressive—and could be copied in Liverpool—the scope for rail-based freight access is nowhere near as high here as it is in Antwerp: different, shipping types, different, remoter, landside markets and no articulation of a national regional or local transport policy to favour electric traction rail.

3.46 We haven't attempted to put a value on Antwerp's port trade, merely noting it is much larger than Liverpool's. Here though is a demonstration of the sheer scale of investment needed if Liverpool port was to seek to expand dramatically. More important, we suggest, is the need for a systematic joined-up strategic planning approach.

3.47 Another major learning point is this. Large-scale road schemes, while initially intended to improve port access (and remove traffic from residential areas in Antwerp), in practice have very widespread consequences—largely beneficial it would seem in this case—by providing congestion relief to an over-loaded section of the European motorway network.

3.48 A major road scheme to improve access to Liverpool docks would also likely have widespread 'network' impacts and these are unlikely to be as apparently benign and beneficial as they are in the Antwerp case.

Case study 1: Antwerp: summary of key lessons

- Liverpool is not alone in having an historic city centre adjoining a traditional ports that over time has moved away, downstream
- Antwerp port area development has been the subject of collaborative planning efforts designed to bring benefits to local communities as well as to port operations and to port authority expansion ambitions
- Carbon reduction has been a factor in Antwerp port huge expansion plans, with improved rail access arrangements and quayside electrification—and provision of segregated cycle lanes on new highways; but the net effect of port and related highways investment will probably still lead to increased carbon emissions
- The major port access highway schemes are expensive (multiple tunnels and bridges). Besides reducing delays for port traffic, they have had the effect of taking traffic from a part of the European motorway network at Antwerp which was a notorious bottleneck—benefits that no doubt have helped attract the substantial capital funding needed.

Case study 2: Dublin

3.49 Thirty five years ago, little had been done to modernise the city of Dublin's transport system. True, a C-ring shaped motorway was being created around the city's urban periphery to the north and west. But plans for an inner ring road (the "Inner Tangent") had been abandoned. The city's road network was substantially unchanged from a century earlier.

3.50 The city had a substantial bus network, but hopes for a rapid transit system developed in the early 1970s –a Tyne & Wear Metro style system was favoured at the time—failed to attract Government funding. (This was the decade, of course, of the creation of Merseyside's 'Loop and Link').

3.51 Dublin's urban development plan envisaged three 'new towns', Skelmersdale-style, on the west side of the city, and these were slowly built out through the 1970s/80s. The traditional centre was largely unchanged with pedestrian, rail and road bridges across the river Liffey which runs east west through the city centre. On both north and south riversides, highways run along 'the Quays' as a one-way pair—east to Dublin's docks which lie both north and south of the river and west to roads spanning out to the rest of the country.

3.52 Dublin's port was (and remains) the most important in the Irish Republic. While it is rail connected, the pattern of freight flows largely don't lend themselves readily to train-load freight traffic. Increasingly port freight would arrive and depart by lorry, using the north and south quays, arranged as a uni-directional street

pair, crossing the major north-south thoroughfare—O'Connell Street—at a signal-controlled city centre junction that marks the very centre of the city.

3.53 But the quays also had to accommodate substantial volumes of buses and regional coach services and had a potential amenity value that could not be realised, bombarded as they were by slow moving lorry traffic to/from the Port.

3.54 Come 1990, and a major EU-funded study would be commissioned (the Dublin Transportation Initiative (DTI)), to look at all aspects of the city's transport arrangements and recommend a way forward. After decades of indecision, from this study emerged clear and comprehensive conclusions. The most notable were a commitment to build a Light Rail System (the Luas), and, as announced in 1991, investment to transform access to the port with a tolled, tunnelled, port access road.

3.55 The Port Access tunnel had emerged from this work, after a sometimes heated debate between the Dublin Corporation—responsible for highway schemes—and the Departments of Transport and Environment, who were responsible for wider transport and planning policies. The Corporation wanted to see the emerging ring-road completed, with a north-south segment built along the city's shore-line, to create a full motorway 'box' around the city, from which spurs into the dock areas could be added. This approach would have removed lorry traffic from the city centre, but it would have come at a huge cost in terms of environmental

damage and amenity loss. This solution was rejected, and a study was commissioned to examine how best to provide a tunnelled port access road instead.

3.56 The port access road, it was concluded, should be tunnelled from the Docks to the outskirts of the city on its north side: the tunnels are 4.5 km long, said to be the fourth longest urban motorway tunnel in Europe.

3.57 The Port Access road had a final cost of approximately €752 million. The tunnel was officially opened on 20 December 2006; it was initially only open to HGVs, but opened to all traffic on 28 January 2007. To discourage commuters from using the tunnel, vehicles other than HGVs are heavily tolled at peak times. HGVs travelling north and west benefit from the expected six-minute journey time through the tunnel a fraction of the journey time over surface roads. A tunnel was chosen as it was decided that a surface relief road was not feasible.

3.58 Three Dublin (city) Bus routes use the tunnel to reach the port area of the city from the northern suburbs. Long distance buses from across the island of Ireland also use the route accessing a bus/coach terminus that handily enough lies between the city centre and the North Wall (dockside).



North portal of Dublin's port access tunnel
Source: internet to be verified/approved



3.59 To facilitate a ban on 5-axled HGVs in Greater Dublin, there are no tolls for vehicles in excess of 3,500 kg MLW.

3.60 The tunnel accommodates trucks and buses with over 25 seats. It links the port to the M50 motorway and Dublin's C-Shaped part of the national motorway system—see map below left.

3.61 Over the years since, port development has been concentrated on the north side ('North Wall') while the Ringsend area to the south of the river has seen comprehensive regeneration as a high-tech office centre. Rail access to the docks remains available, but is not a major factor in handling port freight volumes.

Case study 2: Dublin: summary of key lessons

3.62 The case for significant investment in a tunnelled highway approach to providing for port access traffic arose not in isolation, but as part of the output from a city-wide transportation study. It was only in the context of a wider examination of transport development options, that the considerable cost of the scheme could be assessed against other approaches.

- The wider examination of transport options for Dublin was made possible with significant levels of EU-funding. Support for the approach of building a port access tunnel formed part of a comprehensive public consultation exercise designed to elicit the views of Dublin residents.
- A viable solution was found to the ambition to prioritise HGV use of the tunnel alongside an aim to gain a commercial return from the capital outlay through user fees. This has allowed other road user types to benefit from the tunnel, but only at tariffs set at high levels during peak periods.

- A port access tunnel for Dublin—a city not dissimilar in size to Liverpool—has proven to be a success, but emerged from a comprehensive transport planning exercise and these no longer appear to be fashionable in the UK. As with Antwerp, major highway investment has had far-reaching consequences and not just for Port HGV traffic flows.

Case study 3: Dubai

3.63 At Dubai, port owner DP World has supported the exploration of innovative technology to automate the movement of containers mounted on flat, bogie wagons within the port area.

3.64 Developed by Nevomo, the technology combines linear induction and maglev technologies for freight handling on existing tracks and has been developed through to a full application at Dubai Port. Claimed to be the world's first retrofit solution for existing rail freight cars using electromagnetic propulsion with a linear motor, it allows each wagon to move independently without a locomotive. This has obvious appeal for docks, where rail lines are generally not electrified for good reason: overhead line electrification systems do not sit easily alongside container lifts and the transfer of loads between wagons and ships.

3.65 Following discussion with Nevomo, we can verify the success of the application of this technology in Dubai. We also discovered that (as yet), while some limited trials have taken place, no European country/national rail operator has been willing to fund development of a mainline application.

3.66 A means to shunt container flat wagons (loaded or otherwise) around dockside trackage systems has obvious appeal. In the absence of such an arrangement, railfreight into docks areas must rely on diesel traction (although battery electric would be an alternative—as

would hybrid electric/diesel locomotives). So this could be a useful solution to what can otherwise be expensive 'last mile' operations for rail freight.

3.67 An important technical constraint should be understood. The linear induction power train is in effect an AC motor and is, we believe, exceptionally difficult to make work alongside AC traction motors as fitted in modern electric locos.

3.68 Nonetheless, here is a proven system for handling containers on rail wagons, created to manage more efficiently and safely the movement of containers on the dockside. Suitably adapted and extended on dedicated tracks, it is a system that could be extended to handle 'last mile' access to ports too.



Nevomo remote control freight cars, in use at Dubai port
Source: Nevomo

Case study 3: Dubai: key lessons

3.69 The application of linear induction technology by Nevomo at Dubai port has reached the proven practicability stage. The Nevomo's system has an obvious appeal to the facility at Seaforth and Liverpool².

- The first problem is that the economics of applying any new technology system would need to go through a potentially extensive and expensive trial and safety case process, with timescale and cost implications. The costs of such a development could not be supported by the limited rail-based container movements at Liverpool (although, of course, a small scale application of new technology also has lower risks and costs). But if Liverpool's container flows were to be expanded (significantly) — and /or if the rail sector decided it wanted to have trial application that it would co-fund, such a system could be applied in Liverpool.
- Such an application might make extra sense if railfreight flows were to form the 'last mile' access arrangement between the port and a purpose built multi-modal logistics/transshipment facility. It would need to form part of a 'last (few) miles' connection for a wider range of port traffic than its current containerised rail flows.

- Should a ‘tied’ inland logistics hub <-> port arrangement be devised, clearly rail connectivity would be an ideal approach with the prospect and virtue of reducing HGV traffic. But, as we discuss in Chapter 4, it has to be recognised that such an approach comes with its own planning/local impact and commercial issues. The link between hub and port would clearly need to be able to handle a variety of HGV traffics—perhaps in some form of ‘piggyback’ operation. Such approaches are common across mainland Europe, but have implications for railway structure gauge.
- There is another important point. This is a localised proposition, so doesn’t rely on unlikely network-wide adoption of new technology. The presumption of a ‘nearby suitable logistics hub’ is realistic insofar as Switch Island might provide a suitable location.
- Any concern that its adoption with a ‘clean energy’ solution to access the port on linear induction rail rather than road based HGVs would add unacceptably to Liverpool Ports’ operating costs might be addressable, since this ‘last mile’ solution, made over a suitable rail alignment to the dockside would be automated. Port freight handling costs at the dockside could come down, even if port access traffic would face some extra costs from the need for transshipment. In other words, this might be workable, commercially, provided development funding is made available.

Case Study Conclusions

3.70 We have examined three very different case studies, looking at:

- a nearby major port on the European mainland (**Antwerp**)—where investment in transport access infrastructure has been very substantial (by UK standards);
- **Dublin**—a partner port to Liverpool, where a solution was found to problems of port access traffic that parallel those experienced in Sefton/Litherland. In Dublin port access HGV flows were being experienced unwantedly across the city centre; and
- **Dubai**—in the Middle East where new technology has been introduced to provide a means to move container flat wagons around the port remotely.

3.71 The scale of port access provision delivered in Antwerp is on a scale unmatched anywhere in Britain. Perhaps an elaboration of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing highway scheme, if extended by new highways to serve the various Thames port facilities directly, might come close in the scale and costs of highway investment made in Antwerp. But that’s not going to happen in Liverpool (or London, for that matter!).

3.72 Both the Antwerp and Dublin case studies illustrate an important point about highway developments designed to improve port access. In each case, clearly the major new road schemes were designed to allow easier, less congested, access to the ports concerned, but they also in different ways have had a wider impact on other road traffic flows. **The reality is that it is unlikely to make sense to designate new highways for ports traffic only.** To do so, would throw up a need for access controls; it would limit the value of the investment in the new road links; and it would mean that the economic burden (of capital outlay) would

likely fall exclusively to the Port Authority/Owner—even though there might be traffic relief on less suited (existing) roads where port traffic would be reduced.

3.73 The implication is the need for a much wider—pan-Merseyside—study, conducted Antwerp-style by a coalition of partner interests including the City authorities, if any major highway scheme, including the original A5036 scheme (or variants to it) is to be considered again.

3.74 A new port access road scheme would have impacts on highway users across a wide geography, and on local communities. HGV flow volumes on the A5036 certainly have unwanted local impacts, but these are insufficient to support the case for investment in a major new highway scheme. Just as was found in Dublin, instead of conceptualising a Port Access-only alternative, it would be necessary to look at wider traffic flow impacts. Access to a new road would likely need to be on a tolled basis (to help defray capital costs) with separate charging regimes applied to different road user groups.

3.75 The use of new technology in Dubai port is an interesting breakthrough technology that could improve productivity at what is (again) a much larger port facility than Liverpool, where containerised traffics form a significantly lower proportion of the freight handled at the port. In practice, however, its main significance here is in thinking about more efficient ways to get freight to and from the port by rail, reducing the need for access by HGVs, with its attendant implication that a logistics hub, designed to facilitate inter alia road-rail transfer may be a way forward for Liverpool.¹¹

11. Of course a road-rail transfer would add to the costs of landside access to the port for the majority of flows (which use HGVs). The Port could not be expected to pay for a facility that increased its opex and diminished its competitiveness. And even if capital funding came from elsewhere, the question would remain of how to cover the additional costs of a modal transfer to a more costly (pre-unit load) means of transport.

Worldwide trends in Port Access developments

3.76 Before concluding this review, we need to consider the extent to which the three selected case studies usefully represent wider (global) trends in port access developments.

3.77 We have seen three factors at play right across the world, as well as being evident from our three case studies. These are:

- A trend towards port **automation—on the quayside and beyond is actively being pursued**—to improve efficiency, reduce ship turnaround times and cut operating costs;
- A struggle for growth in rail freight market share across Europe, despite EC aspirations to reduce both carbon emissions and levels of highway congestion. Nonetheless **growth of port throughput is a driver** of access innovation and investment;
- **Developments in automation have been focussed on rail** at the quayside, with its homogeneity making automation easier, and offering as well better scope for volume growth alongside cost efficiencies
- Where there have been major highway scheme developments to support the expansion of Port activities, these have had **city-wide impacts on traffic flows** (Antwerp) or at least accommodated other traffic flows, in addition to Port HGVs (Dublin).

3.78 We can point to two further recent developments that support this summary—at Algeciras, Spain; and at Xiamen, China.

3.79 Algeciras is Spain's largest port—but its connecting railway—while due for a substantial upgrade, has been closed because of storm damage for a number of months. But still planned, nonetheless, is investment to convert the rail line to the port into a 'rail highway' able to take semi-trailers. Note that such a facility could only realistically be made available over restricted lengths of line in Britain, possibly between a Port and a nearby logistics hub, with the connecting railway needing to have a bigger loading gauge to accommodate this type of use. The cost of gauge clearing for such freight use more widely in Great Britain can be ruled out on cost grounds.

3.80 Chinese shipping giant COSCO has introduced a new loading technology at its CSP **Xiamen** Ocean Gate Terminal, China.¹² A new railway has been provided alongside the shipping berths to allow automated container transshipment. This has been widely seen as a 'last-mile' bottleneck in sea-rail logistics. Innovations in our case study at Dubai, have parallels elsewhere.

12. The Port of Xiamen (or Amoy Port) is an important deep water port located on Xiamen Island in southern Fujian, China.

4.0 Current and future port access options

Diverse port growth prospects

4.1 Ports operate in a highly competitive market-place subject to global pressures as well as domestic ambitions for trade and economic growth. As set out in Chapter 2, Liverpool Docks serve a number of quite different shipping operations, each of which may offer growth opportunities in future. Currently an expansion opportunity is being pursued in the Liverpool-Dublin market.

4.2 The operator of high-capacity ferry services for unaccompanied trailers between Liverpool and Dublin is CLdN. The service today is subject to delays at the sea locks, when entering and leaving Liverpool Port. CLdN (with Peel support) proposes to accelerate and increase capacity by building a new river berth directly on the Mersey.¹³ A planning application is expected shortly.

4.3 As with all such development plans there will be implications for port access traffic. In this case, for example, there is likely to be an increase in HGV port access volumes once the new quay is in operation. HGV traffic to/from an expanded riverside Brocklebank Dock would likely access the port via the Miller's Bridge route and A5038 and/or A580, as well as via the A5036. See map on p25.

4.4 Of course, port access traffic is dominated by HGV movements over the surrounding road network. Rail plays a minor role and we will first review existing rail freight arrangements before looking at planned and potential changes and developments in the rail network and rail/logistics terminals in North West England, all of which could have a material bearing on Liverpool port access arrangements.

Current arrangements for rail

4.5 North West England's rail network is intensively used and suffers significant operational constraints. In particular, finding paths for freight trains across Manchester has proven difficult (as evidenced by the illustrated routeing of the Liverpool-Drax (Yorkshire, near Selby) daily wood chippings flow). This particular freight flow has declining volumes and may be phased out in due course. A new short rail link at Edge Hill ('Olive Mount Chord') was provided with funding from the Strategic Rail Authority to facilitate this flow around 20 years ago. (The chord avoids the need for a costly reversal where the line from Peel Ports docks reaches the Liverpool-Manchester main line).

4.6 But it is the routeing of the Drax trains across the Manchester conurbation that is remarkably indirect and so costly and time-consuming to operate. The route usually followed is illustrated overleaf.

4.7 The other 'live' rail freight operation to/from Peel Ports docks at Seaforth is a unit load (container) train that links the port with Scotland. A (nominally) daily unit load container train operates between Seaforth docks and Glasgow. It uses the Liverpool-Manchester main line as far as Newton-le-Willows where it switches to the West Coast Main line for its journey north.¹⁴ A key flow is Scotch Whisky exports.

4.8 For railfreight flows southwards from Liverpool, it can be deduced from the Drax routeing that it might be feasible to add freight flows to Crewe and continue southwards over the West Coast Main Line to the several major rail-connected distribution/logistics centres in the East Midlands—and indeed to London and the channel tunnel to European destinations. But a separate capacity constraint would make this challenging: the West Coast Main Line is where additional freight paths could be difficult to accommodate.

13. <https://www.cldn.com/en/news/cldn-announces-plans-develop-river-berth-liverpool>

14. There are also freight flows to/from freight terminals in the Garston-Widnes area where there are rail freight terminals including at Garston and at AB Ports docks). But none of them generate trans-Pennine railfreight movements.



Route followed by Liverpool Port–Drax Power Station (Yorkshire) wood chippings freight trains

Rail network developments

4.9 The Trans Pennine Route Upgrade (TRU) is a £11bn+ investment scheme) where work is currently progressing. It has a specified output of a freight gauge-cleared route across the Pennines, which will be electrified throughout, with an hourly freight path.¹⁵

4.10 This would indeed be transformational, but it is not feasible on current plans. It is also unclear what freight flows would materialise, although flows between Liverpool docks and freight terminals in Yorkshire/ the Humber, Tees Valley and Tyne And Wear (and possibly the East Midlands) would all be possibilities.

4.11 Crucially, while the TRU project has made steady progress, the section between Huddersfield and Salford remains to be started, and there is no network capacity to accommodate additional rail freight flows across the Manchester conurbation.

4.12 To be 100% clear, there is no plan as yet to provide a solution to the freight capacity problem. If identified in due course, it would no doubt require substantial capital

15. "The Business Case for TRU includes the boost for rail freight associated with the 15 additional freight paths per day in each direction, Monday to Saturday, along the TRU core corridor between Manchester Victoria and Ravensthorpe. However, it is recognised by the rail industry that these new paths will impact existing services both within and beyond the TRU core corridor. Current planned investment will be insufficient to address those concerns and enable usable and resilient freight services between the North's ports and inland freight terminals via TRU infrastructure." Source: [Transport of the North](#)

investment in the grade separation of junctions, some property acquisition and similar. The various cross-city freight lines that once were available across the south side of Manchester's central area have all been lost.

4.13 Rail freight flows northwards to Scotland could potentially be accommodated over a more direct route via Aintree, joining the West Coast Main Line further north at Preston, where capacity to accept additional (freight) flows on the northern section of the WCML to Scotland is available, but in practice, still limited. And this northern section of the WCML is subject to a major renewals programme over the years ahead.

4.14 In summary, current access arrangements by rail to/from Liverpool/Seaforth port area are constrained and likely to remain so without substantial investment on the rail network—on schemes that are, as of now, unidentified. The omens are poor.

4.15 The Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) project, (stage 2 of which, west of the Pennines, with a possible implementation date in the 2040s) could provide a new line between Manchester and Liverpool. The approach to Liverpool (which is not yet determined) would be from the south—so again not ideal for access to/from Seaforth. A possible subsequent phase of this scheme would likely include a cross-Manchester tunnel with a central city underground station, but this, of course, does not provide a suitable means to accommodate additional freight capacity across Manchester.

4.16 Are there other (non-rail) measures available that could alleviate port access pressures on roads in the Liverpool urban agglomeration? One possibility might be to double-tranship, from large ocean-going vessels to smaller vessels capable of taking loads onward for final transshipment away from the city of Liverpool. This is what in effect the Manchester Ship Canal (MSC) has been doing since it was completed in 1894. Indeed, smaller coastal vessels can continue sea voyages onwards using the MSC, and Peel Ports has identified some sites it believes may yet be suitable for such an approach (one is at Irlam, south of Warrington, for example, where a logistics hub might be provided). Such a development might bring some relief and reduce the case for new road construction as well as take HGV traffic away from sensitive residential areas near Seaforth. But such developments on their own would seem unlikely to solve the problem of high volumes of HGVs on the A5036 through residential areas, since they must inevitably mean additional handling costs in those cases entailing ship to ship cargo transfers, limiting their appeal, perhaps, to flows to the immediately adjacent hinterland along the ship canal.

Logistics hubs and freight terminals

4.17 There are specialist rail freight terminals (for household waste, and for construction materials) at several locations across Greater Manchester, and elsewhere in the North West, including in Merseyside (with Potter Logistics at Kirkby, and Ravenhead (oil for Pilkington's, at St Helens) for example). But local freight sidings and terminals, once so common, are now few and far between.

4.18 A key location for railfreight in the North West region is at Trafford Park, on the west side of Manchester. Here, with access from the Manchester–Warrington (Central)–Liverpool line (the 'CLC' route), lie two terminals and it is expected that one of them, owned by Freightliner, will be relocated as part of the Old Trafford sports complex redevelopment. (The other is a protected facility).

4.19 Discussion has centred on the idea of creating a new logistics hub/freight terminal to which Freightliner could re-locate at Parkside (known as ILPN, at Newton-le-Willows), near where the Liverpool–Manchester Main Line crosses the West Coast Main Line. This possibility has been on the cards for a number of years, without apparently much progress being made.

4.20 Logistics hubs/freight terminals elsewhere in England have taken some time to secure planning consent, so local acceptability may turn out to be factor in this case, given the no doubt pressing timescales behind Old Trafford redevelopment. Connections to both the rail and national highway networks will not come cheap.

4.21 The concept of an 'inland port', designed to relieve pressure on scarce space at ports as through put increases, has been the subject of significant earlier work, by Arup.¹⁶ This identified the growing global trend for locating modal transfers and intermediate cargo handling away from the port docksides. It referenced as an example the rail served logistics hub at Daventry, suggesting it in effect played this role for a number of major ports in south east England. While identifying a range of new technologies that might be available to connect inland hubs to nearby ports, no assessment has been made of any schemes specific to Liverpool Port.

4.22 The surrounding geography and possible port access arrangements described in this chapter are illustrated in the diagram opposite.

16. See: "Inland Port and Connectivity Concept Summary" Arup, Manchester, June 2020.



Aerial backdrop,
© Google Maps, 2026.

Switch Island

4.23 For Seaforth/Liverpool docks, there is the possibility that the nearby junction of the M57 and M58 motorways, at Switch Island, which has undeveloped land nearby/ adjacent, could be a suitable site for a logistics hub. Its existence would open up the possibility of a rail-based shuttle system—in effect an extension of dockside tracks intended to trans-ship unit loads/containers between ship and shore facility onwards to the logistics hub. There transfer could be made to HGVs using the national motorway network. Unitisable loads between the national motorway network at a Switch Island logistics hub and Seaforth docks by road could be radically reduced.

4.24 Much of the route needed for a dedicated rail connection of this type follows the course of an abandoned rail line into the docks. Where this previously joined what is now the Mersey Electrics line between Liverpool and Ormskirk, a right-of-way would need to be re-created on adjacent land where tracks have since been removed. See map on previous page. Clearly, significant capital costs could arise (for instance to provide grade-separated access/egress into the logistics hub), but hopefully property demolition could be avoided.

4.25 Environmental and community benefits would flow, provided that HGV movements in and out of the port were minimised. The challenge would be to ensure a smooth extended quayside operation

to/from the dockside. The need for handling unit load HGVs at the docks could be removed, freeing up space usable for other purposes.

4.26 There would be a number of variants of this concept to be tried (and in due course) tested. We can see from our case studies that an approach that extends automated quayside load handling follows a world-wide trend driven by ambitions to reduce costs and improve efficiency in ship to shore load transfers. We judge this to be a real possibility but one that would likely need some development funding, say from UK Development Bank(s) to succeed. A proven application here could be replicated in other British ports, improving efficiency and helping facilitate international trade flows – while at the same time, providing relief for the local community from the unwanted impacts of port HGV traffic—primarily over the A5036 in Litherland.

4.27 Another possible approach if a logistics hub is developed at Switch Island would be to use the facility as a location to switch HGV cabs. Conventional diesel power cabs used for haulage over the national highway network via M57/M58 being replaced by (say) battery powered tractor cab units for the short transfer into Liverpool docks. This would reduce HGV carbon and exhaust emissions locally, but the economics of such an arrangement may not prove attractive, lacking the payload benefits of rail-based solutions.

4.28 There is a related possibility to consider once the creation of an ‘Inland Port’ at Switch island is considered. This location could also be used for a major park and ride facility. This would need a new (or possibly relocated) station on the Mersey Electrics line, and potentially a new bus service feeding Bootle and Liverpool city centre/waterfront. This could have the beneficial effect of reducing car commuter traffic on the A5036.

Expansion of direct railfreight flows for port movements

4.29 We have seen how the rail network is today not well placed to accommodate more port-based freight flows. There are capacity constraints on the West Coast Main Line (which ultimately, should be relieved by HS2, but a crucial section northwards from Crewe to Golborne where it would rejoin the West Coast Main Line) was abandoned in June 2022.

4.30 This means there is little rail network capacity for more freight both north and south from Liverpool Docks; and port traffic eastwards is constrained by the lack of network capability across Manchester.

4.31 Plans for improving rail infrastructure have centred on better city—city passenger services (TRU, NPR and HS2 projects described earlier). Scheme cutbacks (in the case of HS2), combined with the scope for additional railfreight being regarded as a ‘fringe benefit’ from remaining rail investment plans, leave expansion

of port railfreight flows as ‘problematic’. Simply, until recently there has been no strategic consideration given to expanded use of the rail network for freight, which is perhaps surprising at a national level given the challenge of decarbonising road freight. In September 2026 the DfT announced a 40% rail freight growth target by 2040, as part of a longer aim to raise rail freight volume by 75% by 2050.¹⁷ This gives the opportunity to consider cost effective options for expanding Liverpool port’s rail modal share.

A possible plan for comprehensive rail port access

4.32 Clarity around objectives first: the aim is to provide rail network capacity for a significant expansion of Liverpool port traffic flows, with substantially reduced need for HGV traffic flows along the A5036.

4.33 In practice, it would be expected that local (and especially very local) road based traffics, and those using a Roll on/Roll off ferry facility (essentially Irish traffics) would likely remain road based. But Liverpool Port freight flows:

- (i) northwards across Lancashire/ Cumbria and to/from Scotland;

- (ii) across the Pennines to/from Yorkshire/ Humberside and North East England; and

- (iii) southwards to/from the Midlands, Southern England and the nearby continent

are in scope for a switch to rail—provided the rail network could accommodate the trainloads of freight on offer. This means both:

- finding a ‘way around’ the Manchester rail network deficiency and
- avoiding major routes like the West Coast Main line which are operating close to capacity—and so where additional freight flows would probably not be welcome.

4.34 Ideally, of course, the rail investment needed would be capable of swift implementation; and with capital costs on a scale that would result in strong benefit cost ratios and benefits that DfT and HM Treasury would recognise as supporting national economic growth ambitions. For this outcome to be achieved, it would need to come through cutting distribution and import/export costs, speeding up transits, so making supply chains (especially ‘just in time’) more reliable—with an added benefit of causing less damaging (lower harmful emissions, improved road safety)—as well as making UK ports more competitive.

4.35 We have an outline proposition that could meet this ambition. It brings some essential capital costs, but in relation to recent programmes, these are modest, and capable of delivery within a 5–10 year period.

4.36 The plan would be to invest in improving the rail route northwards from Seaforth via Ormskirk towards Preston. Some of the route is only single line; Mersey Electrics operate only as far as Ormskirk, instead of reaching the more natural terminus at Preston (which remains a long term Combined Authority ambition).

4.37 The key investment would:

- extend the electrified section into Preston (plans already exist for this, but it isn’t funded)
- re-double tracks where necessary, and...
- re-instate a very short connection from this line at what was Moss Lane junction, to join existing tracks bridging over the West Coast Main Line, 2 miles south of Preston station) and continuing eastwards through Lostock Hall and Blackburn (and beyond).¹⁸

4.38 This can provide Liverpool docks with comprehensive railfreight access capacity, using:

17. DfT press release: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/great-british-railways-sets-course-for-rail-freight-growth>

CILT press release: <https://ciltuk.org.uk/news/the-uk-government-is-aiming-to-increase-rail-freight-by-40-by-2040/>

18. An alternative to creating the new chord near Lostock Hall exists. It would use the remaining two sides of what was a triangular track layout, with trains reversing on the (Up and Down) freight lines on the west side of Preston station. Such a facility would be feasible but of course add to operating costs and extend journey times.

- (i) a different but less intensively used trans-Pennine route for freight;
- (ii) a route from Liverpool to Scotland avoiding use of the West Coast Main Line; and
- (iii) potentially too, access between Liverpool Port and the Midlands, also avoiding the busy West Coast Main Line, but over a much lengthier route.

The plan is illustrated here.

4.39 With this approach, port railfreight to/from Scotland using the short new connection at Lostock Hall, would travel via Blackburn to access the Settle-Carlisle line at Hellfield (with a choice of 2 routes northwards from Carlisle to Glasgow).

4.40 Liverpool Port railfreight to/from Yorkshire/the North East, instead of using the busy main passenger line though Huddersfield, would use the same route from Liverpool Docks as the Scottish freight trains from Lostock through Blackburn to Rose Grove (Burnley) where trains would 'turn right' to join the line to Hebden Bridge, Brighouse, Wakefield Kirkgate and onwards to serve Yorkshire/ North East England terminals. This would avoid use of the main Trans Pennine Route upgrade line via Huddersfield with its unresolved implication of needing to find a route for railfreight paths across Manchester. Instead this uses the 'Lancashire and Yorkshire (L&Y) trans Pennine route, which is less congested and better connects with freight terminals



A Comprehensive railfreight routing strategy for Liverpool Docks

east of the Pennines. (This route has been used extensively as a diversionary route while the TRU works on the parallel line via Huddersfield have been progressed).

4.41 Flows to/from the Midlands could use the same route across the Pennines, (so, via Copy Pit and the former L&Y main freight route through Normanton). This route would turn southwards to access the logistics hubs of the east and west Midlands, via Sheffield and Rotherham. A re-instated Crigglestone chord could help establish an efficient freight route for South Yorkshire/Midlands–Liverpool port rail freight flows.¹⁹ But the higher costs that this indirect route would entail (Midlands–Liverpool) may not justify a switch from road haulage to rail—and it is the case that no such trains operate today over what would be a much more direct route via the (albeit busy) West Coast Main Line.

4.42 Together, this would amount to a transformed rail freight catchment for Liverpool Port. It would require route improvements (ideally with one short significant missing link re-connection made). Of course, as with all railfreight there would be timetabling (pathing) issues to resolve and there may be freight gauge clearance issues too. But if adopted, Liverpool port's rail access would be competitive against other British ports which are reliant on oversubscribed and trunk hauls on congested parts of the national rail network, the West Coast Main Line in particular.

4.43 Such an approach would resolve the problem of operating freight trains east west across Manchester. The city would gain a northern bypass route. Creating it would entail a new rail network development strategy for the north of England. The route between Rose Grove (Burnley) and Yorkshire would need to be gauge cleared for container trains—and this may require works such as track lowering in tunnels. But the key point is that here is that there is spare line capacity on the routes identified—including to/from Scotland, and this is not the case on parallel routes (the West Coast Main Line and the trans-Pennine route across Manchester).

4.44 The route northwards from the port is used by Mersey Electrics, but only as far as Ormskirk. Here there is an enforced change of trains for travellers to/from Preston. This connection would need to be re-instated, and either the Ormskirk–Preston line would be electrified or Mersey Electric trains would need to operate in battery mode over this section. Tracks would be re-doubled. Having a 'metro' service Liverpool–Preston would bring significant complementary benefits that would contribute to any capital investment business case.

4.45 The 'missing link' at Tardy Gate, on the west side of Lostock is around 0.5 miles long and is the missing part of what was formerly a triangular junction. A property has been built over the former rail alignment and would need to be purchased/re-located—or a re-aligned rail line could potentially be fitted in, with somewhat tighter than the original line's curvature.. Its re-reinstatement to create the freight route for Liverpool port opens up

another possibility, which is the creation of a direct Lancashire towns–Liverpool commuter train service: Colne–Burnley–Accrington–Blackburn–Ormskirk–Liverpool.

4.46 Port freight trains would be able to take a variety of routes east of the Pennines, and reach all of the existing freight terminals in Yorkshire/Humber and North East England. Access to/from terminals in the Midlands would require operation over busier rail lines, but some of these are in effect prioritised for freight and none are as busy as the West Coast Main Line.

Highway based propositions

4.47 Many of Liverpool Port's land-side freight traffic flows are typically medium and long distance across Britain, and so at least have at least the potential for using rail. Most road movements (by car, taxi, van, bus) are much more local. For short distance travel, walk, cycle and wheeling are real options too, and of course dominate at neighbourhood level.

4.48 On a busy road such as A5036, there are inevitably choices to be made on priorities. Meeting the needs of the local community, its residents and local businesses and shops have to be examined today alongside the HGV flows to & from the Docks.

19. [Interim rail improvements for the Yorkshire economy](#) – Greengauge 21.

4.49 Possibilities, some of which are now in hand, that might ameliorate adverse traffic impacts include:

- Traffic calming measures
- Bus priority measures
- Speed restrictions
- Park and Ride strategies
- Re-routeing strategies
- Speed limits
- Vehicle restrictions.

Indeed, the multi-purpose nature of the A5036 suggests that, if it formed part of a wider strategic plan for the area, this could open up the possibility of considering whether responsibility for the road might in future sit differently between National Highways and the local authority.

4.50 From the perspective of local residents and businesses, priorities to be considered could be packaged, with, for example:

- speed restrictions with speed cameras installed;
- increased prioritisation for pedestrians, wheelers and cyclists, with cycle lanes, additional light controlled road crossings, and widened pavements;
- a forward plan for restricting the route to electric (battery) only vehicular traffic (with a time line set in due recognition of nationally-set plans for road traffic de-carbonisation)

- restrictions on night-time use by HGVs.

4.51 Whether such an approach would have the support of local communities would need to be tested of course, with soundings taken on the variety of measures that fall under a 'traffic management' policy. Studies of such programmes elsewhere—which include even more substantive measures such as ULEZ and so-called Congestion Charging regimes— have resulted in demonstrable improvements in child and adult health, for example. There is no reason why such measures and similar outcomes could not be achieved here. The ambitions would most likely need to be set in terms of public health and street safety.

4.52 But successful implementation of such measures requires:

- Clarity on the beneficial outcomes being targeted
- Health and well-being, pre- and post, scheme surveys to establish quantifiable targets and outcomes against objectives
- A local public consultation programme (to cover residents and businesses)
- An understanding of the implications at a wider city-region level and the involvement and support of the Mayoral Combined Authority

- Consultation with the Highways Authorities and with Peel Ports and any other major impact group.

4.53 The precise aims and ambitions would need to be set and formally adopted by the relevant council (Sefton), which will be mindful of all of its policies including supporting the local economy which in part will include jobs at, or related to, Liverpool Port activities, which will be considered as part of the new Local Plan consultation.

4.54 But on a key route such as the A5036, National Highways (NH) have on the stocks a 'highway improvement' scheme, one that re-locates the road along the length of Rimrose Valley Park. This idea may be 'stopped' for now, and it is currently unfunded. But it will remain on the NH files, and it may re-surface as/when highway investment policy is re-visited.

4.55 From a national road network standpoint, options could include:

- A 'red route' style concept, junction 'improvements', and possibly, widening the existing road

- 
- Building (as previously proposed) a new replacement road, on the surface over the Rimrose Valley Park (the benefits of which, it might be argued, could be improved amenity for local residents and businesses on the current road—indeed, including some of the benefits that restrictive traffic management schemes could offer), but at the cost of loss of a local amenity and local ‘green lung’
 - Building a tunnelled route.

4.56 A tunnelled road in comparison with a ‘widened’ road could bring a wider set of benefits (including to the community living on today’s A5036), and would bring choices on type of tunnelling. There would likely be considerable amount of disruption during construction. Such a concern, together with the likely variable nature of the sub-strata, geology and deposits, might make a ‘cut and cover’ approach more achievable (and lower cost, so more likely to be favoured) than a bored tunnel (which implies a deeper design solution). A cut-and-cover option would conflict with Sefton’s plans to establish the park as a ‘Habitat Bank’ and with the Liverpool City Region’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which identifies the site as having potential to support nature’s recovery. A fully bored tunnel option should therefore not be dismissed without first undertaking the necessary feasibility work and cost assessment

4.57 But—as our case studies of Antwerp and Dublin have shown—while the headline ambition of major highway investment (which in both these cases entailed tunnelled construction) may well be better port access for HGV traffic—such schemes inevitably also have impacts for non-port traffic. And that would surely be the case here. Any such major highway scheme would need to be considered in the context of the wider city region’s traffic flows. A tunnel, for example, restricted to port HGV traffic, would likely fail to justify the capital outlay, on current DfT/Green Book investment case criteria.

4.58 In short, a surface road scheme—similar to the most recently abandoned National Highways’ scheme, would seem the most likely highways-based option to re-emerge for consideration in the years ahead. So it would be important to have data and evidence on the community value attributable to the existing Valley Park.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Port Growth

5.1 Major ports such as Liverpool operate in a competitive environment. Major improvements to port access may be seen as necessary if there is an intention to expand port activity. And the port of Liverpool does have such plans.

5.2 Its owner, Peel Ports, has invested £400 million constructing **Liverpool2**, to expand ‘the UK’s largest transatlantic port’ and to create one of Europe’s most advanced container terminals. The investment is designed to “create a new deep-water container terminal at the Port of Liverpool, enabling the largest vessels to call directly in the heart of the UK.”

5.3 The Liverpool2 Strategy, in outline, comprises “future-proofing the facility to allow global shippers ‘ship-to-door’ access to major import and centres at the heart of the UK.”²⁰

5.4 The stated aim is “to offer exporters based in the North a more competitive route to international markets, helping businesses to reduce costs, congestion and carbon emissions in their supply chains. Peel Ports Group plans to invest in equipment and port infrastructure works to expand the terminal and introduce further “leading-edge port technology solutions”.

5.5 This will include the installation of a further three ship to shore cranes (STS) and 10 cantilever rail mounted gantry cranes (CRMG), adding to the previous five STS cranes and 12 CRMG cranes installed as part of Phase 1. Liverpool2 will have the capacity to manage the unloading of two 380m vessels simultaneously. There will also be investment to allow the terminal to handle greater quantities of refrigerated containers.

5.6 Government would likely welcome the focus on steel/metals handling at the port: “Peel Ports Group is to invest £100m into the steels and metals sector in a move to enhance capacity and boost the efficiency of logistics. It will add a further 140,000 sq ft of storage at its Port of Liverpool steel and metals terminals”, given its commitment to acquire for the state existing steel plants in North Lincolnshire and South Wales.

5.7 Further Peel Group plans include creating a second automated terminal in Liverpool dedicated to steel coils. Investment by the Port group, it says, follows a record year for steel imports at the Liverpool facility and will help further grow the volumes of steel transported across the UK.

5.8 Peel Group have said that:

“demand for steel and metals handling across our port group, and the UK in general, has risen sharply over the past five years and this will allow us to expand our support to the construction and manufacturing supply chain right across the country. The port group ... is actively recruiting for extra positions and training internal staff to enhance handling capability to meet the rise in demand. The port now boasts more than 610,000sqft of storage for the commodity, and this expansion means it will be able to store an additional 35,000 tonnes of steel and metals. The company reported a record-breaking year for steel imports at the Port of Liverpool, with volumes increasing by more than 35% year-on-year. 702,000 tonnes of bulk steel were processed at the port in 2024.”²¹

20. [Liverpool2](#).

21. [Peel Ports Group to invest £100m to expand national steel and metals multimodal hub.](#)

Accommodating port expansion while protecting adjoining communities

5.9 The implication is that, with already announced developments, and with potentially more ahead, the question of sufficiency of current port access to Liverpool Port may come under renewed scrutiny. The scope of any future enquiry into improving port access arrangements, we recommend should be set widely, drawing on the lessons from around the world reported here. Technology and logistics are evolving fast, and shouldn't be overlooked.

5.10 The challenge of reducing the impact of highway-based port traffic is by no means unique to Liverpool. We saw a number of global trends of relevance to Liverpool Port's situation, including:

- 1) Towards ship to dockside automation of rail movements, potentially extendable over rail port access lines; and
- 2) Major highway investment in better port access involving bridges and tunnels that can have far-reaching impacts across the city/city region in question, stretching beyond port access traffic.

Any major highway scheme in future should be examined across the city-region, since the impact of additions to highway networks in urban areas inevitably have widely spread impacts (positive and negative) on traffic flows across the wider city region.

5.11 If in future a highway-based port access scheme is being examined, so too should alternatives to it. Assessments of transport user benefits and disbenefit would need to include place-based impacts as per Green Book guidance. New highway access arrangements for Liverpool, as elsewhere, would have potentially far-reaching impacts that would need to be assessed carefully against viable alternatives not restricted to other highway schemes.

5.12 Liverpool has been investing in ship-to-shore automation, reflecting a world-wide trend. For Liverpool, this approach could be extended to provide automation of electrically powered, rail-based, freight to/from a suitably located logistics hub. The possibility of such a hub—perhaps located at nearby 'Switch Island' on the national motorway network—has been noted, but its development would likely attract local objections.

5.13 Nonetheless, a combined automated ship-dockside-logistics hub connection is a possibility for Liverpool. It would need to be the subject of feasibility and a full impact assessments if thoughts at National Highways turn again towards resurrecting any highway scheme. An automated rail connection could be a cost efficient, zero carbon, alternative for port access freight flows in Liverpool—one that could spare the local community from a significant proportion of the adverse impact of HGV traffic accessing the port over what are busy, local roads, as well as signposted long distance routes.

5.14 As regards rail more generally, there are currently significant network capacity constraints that limit the scope for increasing rail's share of Liverpool Port freight flows—and as yet there is no plan in place to overcome them. There is no plan in place, for instance, to resolve the problem of providing train paths for freight transiting east-west across Manchester with (and apparently no solution in sight).

5.15 But in this study, we have identified the possibility of accommodating Liverpool Port access traffic from across a wide catchment by rail, including across the whole of the north of England, avoiding Greater Manchester with a new (but almost entirely existing) freight route to the north of the city. This would be a significant development that could help achieve Government's recently announced growth target for railfreight of +40% tonne-km by 2040.

5.16 To take this radical plan for port rail freight expansion forward, a joint study team would need to be formed, with Peel Ports working together with GBR, the railfreight industry and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council looking at the proposal outlined in our report to overcome the limitations of the current rail network.

5.17 The prize here is the scope to realise Peel Port's existing (and in, future, we suppose, potentially more ambitious growth) plans, while at the same time relieving the local community of the adverse impacts of lorry traffic to & from the Port, on the A5036.

5.18 Adoption of a rail-based port expansion plan would also feed into the Department for Transport's carbon reduction plan. Even if diesel-hauled, freight trains offer major carbon savings over road haulage. This development is likely to be essential if the recently set Government target of a 40% increase in railfreight by 2040 is to be achieved, given the very high utilisation levels of key routes such as the West Coast Main Line.

5.19 Meanwhile, the scope for measures that would moderate the impact of port access traffic on the local community in Sefton, and along the A5036 in particular, should be examined. The aim would be reduced accidents and safety risks; less local pollution—in terms of noise and air quality—and re-balancing of meeting the needs of road users in favour of pedestrians, wheelers and cyclists. Such measures have, of course, been applied in many cities around the world, and doing so along the A5036 need be no exception.

5.20 In summary, we are suggesting the need for engaged, co-sponsored, strategic planning assessments, **the results of which would need to be considered (and approved) at local community and council, city region and national levels.** For National Highways, the message should be clear: unless

these studies have been conducted, there will be no way of knowing whether other, non-highway based investments could be available to better accommodate the access needs of a growing Liverpool Port

5.21 Such studies will take time. Government (DfT) should support them financially and as part of a wider aim to grow the national economy. What Government cannot do, we suggest, is to allow its agency, National Highways to revert to its earlier plan (or a variant of it) to replace the A5036 without considering the alternatives to it as identified in this report.



In place of a damaging road scheme: better ways to access Liverpool's port
An independent review by Greengauge 21 and Jonathan Roberts Consulting

October 2026