



A \$60.7 BILLION OPPORTUNITY: MULTIMODAL TRANSPORT AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL TRADE



DP WORLD

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Containerised shipping carries approximately **35%** of total trade volumes and **60%** of its commercial value.

INTRODUCTION

Global trade is entering a new phase - more regional, volatile and dependent on integrated logistics than at any point in recent history. Shifting trade lanes, geopolitical tension, climate disruption and accelerating technological change are reshaping how goods move around the world.

Against this backdrop, the global multimodal transportation services market is projected to grow **from \$98.61 billion in 2025 to \$159.30 billion by 2032, signalling a \$60.7 billion growth opportunity**, according to MarketsandMarkets research, driven by rising demand for resilient, end-to-end logistics solutions.² This growth reflects a structural shift rather than a cyclical rebound. As supply chains fragment and new corridors emerge, the ability to combine maritime transport seamlessly with rail, road and inland waterways is becoming a strategic differentiator.

Containerised shipping sits at the centre of this transition. It carries approximately **35% of total trade volumes and 60% of its commercial value**, yet remains exposed to disruption, from equipment imbalances and congestion to major route diversions and volatile pricing.¹ Increasing container supply alone will not resolve these pressures. What is required is a broader transformation toward integrated, multimodal supply chains supported by digital visibility and adaptable infrastructure.

This paper explores the forces reshaping global trade, the structural pressures facing traditional logistics models, and how DP World is responding by embedding marine services within wider multimodal networks. In doing so, it considers how governments, logistics providers and cargo owners can position themselves to capture the next phase of trade growth.

¹ World Bank blogs, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/transport/why-ports-matter-global-economy>

² MarketsandMarkets research: [Multimodal Transport Market Size, Share, Forecast, Report 2032](https://www.marketsandmarkets.com/Research.asp?Market=Multimodal+Transport+Market+Size,+Share,+Forecast,+Report+2032)

CHAPTER 1: A TRADE SYSTEM IN TRANSITION

REGIONALISATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW CORRIDORS

The structure of global trade is shifting. Long-established East-West routes are increasingly complemented, and in some cases succeeded by regional and South-South flows. Between 2017 and 2024, the average geographical distance between trading partners declined by around **7%**, reflecting a broader move toward sourcing and manufacturing closer to end markets.³

This trend is being driven by a combination of risk mitigation and opportunity. Tariffs, trade disputes and supply chain shocks have encouraged businesses to diversify sourcing strategies and reduce exposure to long-haul routes. Recent analysis indicates that a significant share of global businesses are now diversifying their sourcing strategies to reduce supply chain risk.⁴

Intra-Asia trade illustrates this momentum. Southeast Asia's manufacturing output increased from around **\$1.8 trillion in 2018 to \$2.17 trillion in 2024**, and the ASEAN region has recorded strong trade growth over the past two decades.⁵ At the same time, the Global South is becoming a more powerful engine of trade, with corridors emerging that bypass traditional transpacific and East-West flows and rebalance global trade architecture.³

Africa is gaining prominence as a future trade corridor. Manufacturing's contribution to GDP is expected to rise from around **13% in 2020 to 22% by 2043**, supported by industrialisation efforts, demographic growth and accelerating infrastructure investment.⁶ Recent WTO-reported trade momentum also points to an upswing in African participation in global flows.⁷

The Middle East has consolidated its position as a global logistics hub, supported by geographic centrality and modern port infrastructure that links East-West and



North-South trade flows. In 2023, an estimated 30% of global container traffic passed through the Red Sea, underscoring the strategic importance of this corridor.¹¹

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND TRADE ENABLEMENT

Trade realignment is being reinforced by large-scale investment in logistics infrastructure. In Africa, more than **\$50 billion in port infrastructure investment** is positioning coastal nations as emerging trade gateways and powerhouses.⁹ This direction aligns with the African Continental Free Trade Area agenda, designed to strengthen intra-African commerce and elevate the continent's global competitiveness.¹⁰

Economic integration and trade facilitation are also accelerating. Regional industrial capacity, cross-border initiatives and corridor development are creating new flows that require connected, multimodal networks rather than linear port-to-port models.⁹



Trade is
no longer
linear, it is
multimodal.



³ McKinsey Global Institute, <https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/our-re...he-geometry-of-global-trade-2025-update>

⁴ Economist Impact, <https://impact.economist.com/projects/trade...transition/supply-chain-restructuring/>

⁵ Statista, Manufacturing - Southeast Asia | Statista Market For...uploads/2024/05/ASB-202405-03.pdf?utm_

⁶ ISS African Futures <https://futures.issafrica.org/thematic/07-...ufacturing/#04-structural-transformation>

⁷ Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/business/merchandise-trade-vo...cted-q1-2025-says-wto-report-2025-07-15/>

⁸ Economic Commission for Africa, https://www.uneca.org/stories/...an-amongst-themselves%2C-eca-report?utm_

⁹ African Leadership Magazine, <https://www.africanleadershipmaga...ts-gateway-to-economic-transformation/>

¹⁰ African Union, <https://au.int/en/african-continental-free-trade-area>

SHORTER, MORE ADAPTIVE SUPPLY CHAINS

Alongside regionalisation, supply chains are becoming shorter and more adaptive. Nearshoring strategies are gaining traction as companies bring production closer to end markets to improve agility and reduce exposure to long-distance shipping disruption.¹² This shift is reinforced by wider supply chain restructuring trends as businesses adapt to volatility and reposition for resilience.¹³

Friend-shoring is also rising as a strategic priority, with Eurozone firms increasingly signalling a preference for sourcing from aligned markets.¹⁴ These models can reduce container mileage and improve responsiveness, while also offering a pathway to lower emissions in markets where ESG expectations are growing.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE ACCELERATION OF TRADE

Technology is amplifying the pace of these changes. Artificial intelligence is already transforming trade operations by accelerating documentation, enabling predictive logistics and improving planning accuracy. Surveys indicate that a majority of supply chain leaders have adopted AI in at least one area of their operations.¹⁵

The operational impact is tangible. AI is reported to cut documentation lead times significantly and reduce workload for logistics coordinators, translating into faster handoffs, improved exception management and more responsive supply chains.¹⁶ As AI becomes more widespread, it will widen the performance gap between networks that are digitally enabled and those that remain fragmented.



The future belongs to adaptive supply chains.



¹² Bain, <https://www.bain.com/insights/nearshoring-overcoming-the-obstacles/>

¹³ Economist Impact/ DP World, Trade in Transition 2025, https://www.economist.com/insights/2025/01/20/american-businesses-are-navigating-2025?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social

¹⁴ European Central Bank, https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/economist/2023/07/202307_01~2a0bcf0b48.en.html

¹⁵ PwC, <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/business-transformation/digital-supply-chain-survey.html>

¹⁶ McKinsey, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-research/how-gen-ai-is-reshaping-supply-chains>

¹⁷ Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/2023/07/20/china-trade-surplus>

CHAPTER 2: DISRUPTION AS THE NEW NORMAL

While new corridors and technologies are creating opportunity, disruption has become a defining feature of the global trading environment. Structural imbalances and external shocks continue to test the resilience of logistics systems.

TRADE IMBALANCES AND EQUIPMENT CONSTRAINTS

Persistent trade imbalances remain a core challenge. Large export surpluses can lead to equipment pooling in certain regions and shortages in others, constraining capacity and increasing costs. China, for example, has maintained large trade surpluses with major markets, contributing to imbalances in container availability and repositioning incentives.¹⁷

PORTS UNDER PRESSURE

Port congestion continues to limit efficiency across global networks. In Europe, major hubs such as Antwerp and Rotterdam have experienced extended unloading delays, driven by capacity constraints, low river levels and extreme weather.¹⁸ These disruptions increase dwell times, drive demurrage and detention costs, and cascade through inland networks - particularly during peak seasons when slack capacity is limited.¹⁹

GEOPOLITICAL AND REGULATORY VOLATILITY

Geopolitical tensions are reshaping maritime routes. In the Red Sea, attacks on commercial vessels have forced shipping lines to divert around the Cape of Good Hope, adding up to two weeks to journey times and increasing risk and cost for time-sensitive cargo.²⁰ Wider maritime security and trade constraints - including sanctions and conflict effects - have also increased uncertainty for shipping through certain regions and corridors.²¹

Economic and regulatory volatility further compounds these challenges. Freight markets have experienced sharp swings, with significant declines discouraging repositioning of empty containers in some periods, while tariff uncertainty has triggered surges as shippers rush to move goods ahead of potential policy changes.^{22,23} For cargo owners, the result is a landscape where cost predictability and schedule reliability cannot be assumed.

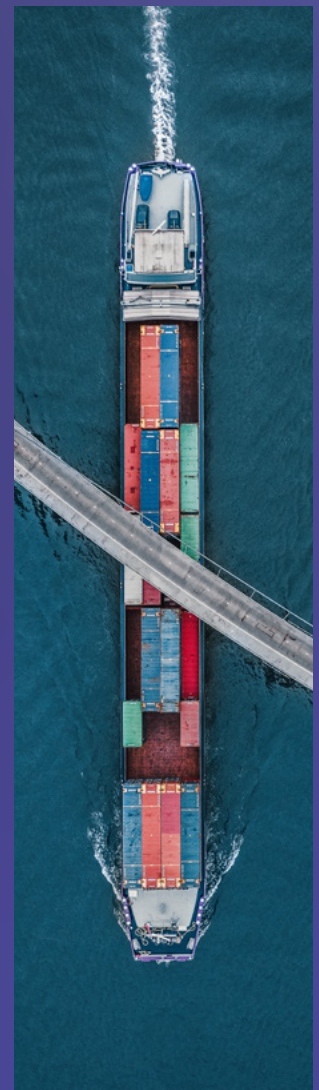
CLIMATE DISRUPTION AND CONSTRAINED WATERWAYS

Climate change is increasingly disrupting global waterways. Prolonged drought has reduced transit capacity through the Panama Canal, while low water levels in major European rivers have constrained inland shipping and disrupted regional supply chains.^{24,25} These events highlight the vulnerability of critical trade arteries to environmental stress and reinforce the need for diversified routing and multimodal options.

Taken together, these pressures expose the limitations of linear logistics models. In a world of persistent disruption, resilience depends on flexibility, redundancy and integration across transport modes.



Multimodal integration is the response to disruption.



¹⁸ Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/2d155bde-5c99-4829-a2d2-1e8c289f083b>

¹⁹ Container X-Change, <https://www.container-xchange.com/blog/demurrage-detention/>

²⁰ Ship Universe, <https://www.shipuniverse.com/news/red-sea-ship...in-waters-amid-ceasefire-developments/>

²¹ Chambers, <https://chambers.com/articles/maritime-trade-in-the...nd-food-supply-chains-msta-27-may-2025>

²² Ship Universe, <https://www.shipuniverse.com/news/container-fr...in-europe-as-regions-economy-sputters>

²³ The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/13...88-as-shippers-pounce-on-lower-tariffs>

²⁴ International Chamber of Shipping, <https://www.ics-shipping.o...ws-adapting-to-climate-change-impacts/>

²⁵ World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/07...ope-and-other-nature-and-climate-news/>



In 2025 DP World's Marine Services expanded its owned container fleet by approximately

47,000 TEUs

CHAPTER 3: DP WORLD AND THE SHIFT TO INTEGRATED MARINE SERVICES

As global trade continues to expand, estimated to have reached a record value in 2024, logistics systems are under pressure to evolve.²⁶ Maritime transport remains central, with seaborne trade accounting for the majority of global trade volumes, but marine services can no longer operate in isolation.²⁷

DP World's Marine Services business strategy, reflects this reality. The organisation is positioning marine services as integrated enablers within end-to-end supply chains, supported by investment in assets, multimodal connectivity, infrastructure, sustainability measures and pragmatic digital capability.

ENHANCING CONTAINER CONTROL AND TERMINAL EFFICIENCY

To address equipment imbalances and improve reliability, DP World's Marine Services has expanded its owned container fleet by approximately **47,000 TEUs**, reducing reliance on third-party leasing markets and improving flexibility in deploying equipment where it is most needed. This supports schedule resilience during periods of disruption and demand volatility.

Terminal operations are also evolving. DP World's BOXBAY high-bay storage system enables direct access to individual containers without reshuffling, improving yard efficiency, space utilisation and cargo visibility. By reducing terminal footprint and dwell times, these innovations strengthen throughput and reliability when congestion pressure is high.

MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY AS A CORE CAPABILITY

Multimodal integration is central to DP World's approach. Combining sea, rail and road transport allows logistics solutions to be tailored around speed, cost, resilience or emissions, depending on customer priorities.

DP World's feeder and coastal services link major transshipment hubs with underserved and emerging markets across Europe, the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Africa and the Americas. These services increase frequency and accessibility, offering efficient alternatives to mainline routes and helping cargo owners bypass chokepoints. Asset-light networks, synchronised scheduling and integrated visibility enable more agile cargo flows across regions.



²⁶ UN trade & development, https://unctad.org/news/global-trade-...-services-and-developing-economies?utm_

²⁷ UN trade & development, https://unctad.org/topic/transport-an...gistics/review-of-maritime-transport?utm_

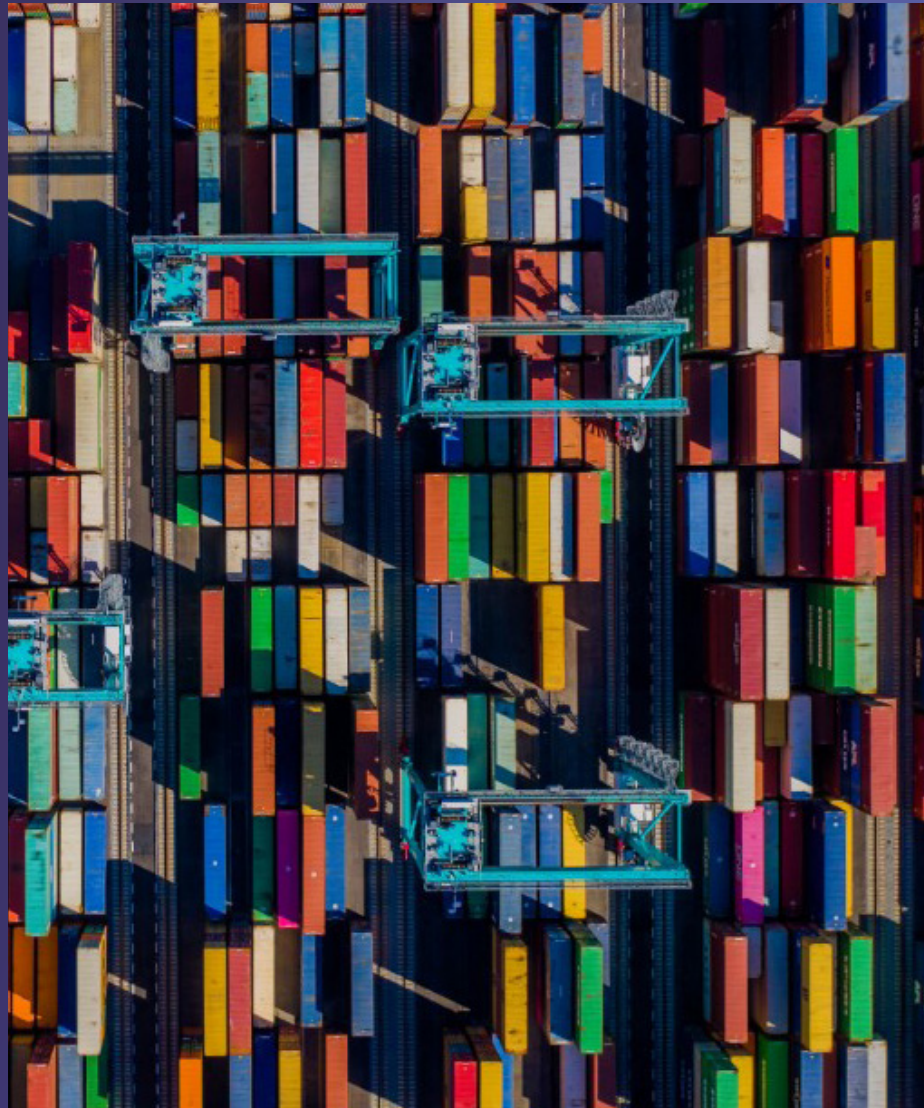
EXTENDING REACH TO REMOTE MARKETS

Shortsea, coastal, and feeder services connect more than 200 ports globally, including island and shallow-draft markets beyond the reach of conventional deep-sea infrastructure. These networks help integrate remote economies into global trade systems and support resilient regional supply chains where direct deep-water access is limited.

FUTURE TRENDS IN CONTAINERISATION AND CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Container logistics is changing rapidly, driven by digital tools, shifting demand and vessel upscaling. Smart containers equipped with sensors to monitor location, temperature and humidity are increasingly important for sensitive cargo such as food, pharmaceuticals and electronics. The smart container market is expected to grow strongly through the next decade.²⁸

At the same time, larger vessels and the continued rise of e-commerce are increasing the need for fast, flexible container flows, including improved hinterland connectivity and better handoff management across modes. These trends reinforce the case for integrated, multimodal networks that can deliver both reliability and visibility.



MULTIMODAL LOGISTICS IN ACTION: INDIA

India provides a practical illustration of multimodal integration. At the Sanchana Inland Container Depot, containers are consolidated and moved by dedicated block train to Mundra Port before onward shipment by sea. This integrated rail-and-shortsea solution reduces reliance on road transport, improves transit times and cuts CO₂ emissions by approximately **65%** compared to road-only alternatives. This model demonstrates how multimodal design can deliver both operational and environmental value.²⁹

INFRASTRUCTURE AND DIGITALISATION

Infrastructure investment remains a cornerstone of DP World's strategy. New terminals and expansions in India, West Africa and the United Kingdom are increasing capacity and improving connectivity to inland industrial zones.

Digital control towers and transport management platforms also support performance oversight and customer visibility. Across the industry, end-to-end visibility remains uneven, but incremental improvements in booking, tracking and documentation are reducing friction at critical handoffs and improving decision-making.



Shortsea, coastal, and feeder services connect more than

200 PORTS
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²⁸ Towards Packaging, <https://www.towardspackaging.com/insights/...cape,period%20from%202025%20to%202034>.

²⁹ Unifeeder, https://www.unifeeder.com/news-and-insights/carbon_cut?utm

CONCLUSION

Positioning for the Multimodal Decade Ahead

The projected expansion of the multimodal transportation services market from **\$98.61 billion to \$159.30 billion by 2032 represents a \$60.7 billion opportunity.**

Three priorities are emerging.

First, accelerating the development of new trade corridors through coordinated investment in ports, inland terminals and cross-border processes.

Second, deploying multimodal, coastal and feeder solutions that extend the reach of existing hubs, integrate remote markets and provide resilience when traditional routes are disrupted.

Third, strengthening pragmatic digital foundations that improve visibility, data sharing and decision-making across transport modes.

Across all three, partnership is critical. DP World's approach - anchored in vessel ownership growth, container control, multimodal connectivity, infrastructure investment and digital enablement - positions marine services as a catalyst within broader logistics ecosystems.

By embedding maritime capability within end-to-end supply chains, DP World is helping translate projected market growth into resilient, inclusive and sustainable global trade.



The next decade of growth will favour those who integrate, not isolate.



ABOUT DP WORLD

DP World is reshaping the future of global trade to improve lives everywhere. Operating across six continents with a team of over 125,000 employees, we combine global infrastructure and local expertise to deliver seamless supply chain solutions. From Ports and Terminals to Marine Services, Logistics and Technology, we leverage innovation to create better ways to trade, minimising disruptions from the factory floor to the customer's door.

WE MAKE TRADE FLOW





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