

Lobito Corridor a regional game changer

After years of delays and false starts, the game-changing Lobito Corridor is due to come back on track – thanks, in part, to the West’s new love affair with electric vehicles.

Copper, cobalt, lithium and other strategic mineral assets in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia are in growing demand, and sending them via Dar es Salaam, Beira and Durban is seen as taking too long and favouring importers to the east.

At present Walvis Bay is the only port on the west coast. It is 2 264 kilometres from the Zambian copper town of Solwezi, while Lobito is a 1 800km trip by road.

Recent developments have put the Lobito rail link ahead of plans for Walvis Bay.

The US International Finance Corporation is evaluating \$250 million in financing for the Lobito Atlantic Rail Corridor.

“The United States supports the development of the Lobito

Corridor through an initial investment in a rail extension that could become the primary open-access transportation infrastructure linking the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zambia to global markets via Angola,” says the White House in a statement.

The funding is part of US President Joe Biden and the G-7’s Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) initiative for low- and middle-income countries.

In July, the concession of railway services and support logistics of the Lobito Corridor was granted to Lobito Atlantic

Railway, which will take over the operation and maintenance of the 1 300km link from Lobito to Luau on the eastern border with the DRC.

A further 400km of rail needs to be built or rehabilitated to join Luau to Kolwezi in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

There are also plans to connect Chingola in Zambia to the Lobito line.

The 30-year concession has been awarded to the Lobito Atlantic Railway consortium joint venture company comprising Trafigura, Mota-Engil, an international construction and infrastructure management

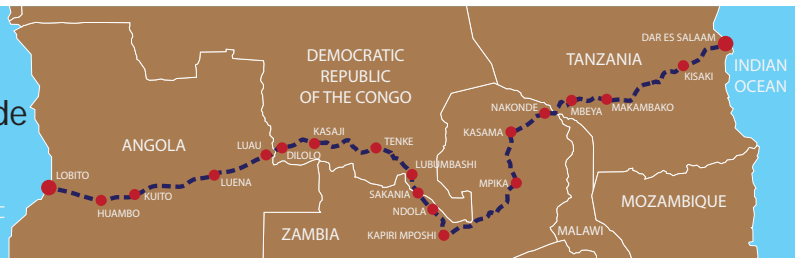
company, and Vecturis SA, an independent rail operator.

The consortium plans to invest \$455m in Angola and up to \$100m in the DRC.

This will include securing 1 555 wagons and 35 locomotives for the Angolan side of the corridor alone.

“We believe the Lobito rail corridor has huge potential to boost the development of sectors along the line, including heavy industry, agriculture and mining, creating new jobs and new opportunities,” said Jeremy Weir, speaking at the signing ceremony on behalf of the Lobito Atlantic Railway concession companies.

The ultimate vision of the Lobito Corridor is to provide a continuous rail link across the continent.



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