

# Rail upgrade to enhance competitiveness of Humber ports

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The largest port in the country is getting a boost thanks to a £15m upgrade to the Humber's rail infrastructure.

The Port of Immingham handles more tonnes of freight than any other port in the UK. Container volumes have also risen from 68,000 in 2013 to 182,000 in 2017, but restrictions on the railway between Immingham and Doncaster mean the largest "hi cube" containers require special waggons to be transported to and from the port by rail. Hi cube containers are expected to make up half of the containers arriving into the UK by 2020, so local leaders decided that an upgrade was required to help the port maintain its competitiveness and enable growth along the line.

The scheme is being funded by £7.2m from the Government's Local Growth Fund through the Humber LEP's Growth Deals, £7.761m Network Rail and £0.8m North Lincolnshire Council. It will see the line cleared to the largest W12 gauge, with structures along the route realigned or rebuilt to make space.

The proposed works include bridge reconstruction at Eastfield Road, Armthorpe Road, and East Halton Road, copper realignment at platform edges, including Brocklesby, Barnetby, Scunthorpe, Crowle, Thorne South and Hatfield & Stainforth, and signal relocation. This will therefore provide full clearance for wide loads along the full route, not just at individual structures.

A recent report by Transport for the North emphasises the importance of enhanced east/ west rail connectivity and predicts a growth of rail freight traffic of 29% by 2050 in the North of England. As such, investment in the South Humber Rail Gauge will contribute towards future transport needs and economic growth in the north as a whole.

This route was chosen ahead of two other routes that connect Immingham to the East Coast Main Line, as it was a lower cost and offers the best connectivity with other key routes.

This comes in addition to the announcement in September of a major expansion plan for operations at the Port of Immingham. Following continued growth in container volumes in 2017, ABP will spend £36 million on the container terminal and a further £2.8 million in expanding the land and services available to support customer operations within the port.

The Humber's Ports complex is currently the largest by tonnage in the UK. This scheme alongside the investment being made by ABP will ensure that this position is maintained and that jobs in linked businesses are sustained.

The scheme is expected to be complete by March 2019.

Lord Haskins, Chair of the Humber LEP said:

"By 2020 more than half the containers arriving into UK ports will be 'high cube' containers. This scheme will ensure that the Humber's freight infrastructure is fit for the future, while also improving the competitiveness of the Humber ports.

"The Humber ports are a vital asset for the North and the UK as a whole, so this welcome upgrade we are enabling in our area will also have positive benefits for the whole country."

Rob McIntosh, Route Managing Director for Network Rail explained:

"Rail freight is vital to our economy. It contributes £870m to the economy and plays a big role in reducing congestion and carbon emissions. The northern Lincolnshire ports are an essential part of the freight network and this improved route will allow onward distribution from Doncaster to Scotland, the Midlands and beyond. This in turn will support the growth of local businesses at the ports and in the distribution network as well as preventing the need for goods to be transported on the road network."

Simon Bird, Director ABP Humber said:

"The Port of Immingham is already the UK's largest port by tonnage and has seen significant growth over the last few years, especially in terms of container volumes. Rail gauge enhancements will unlock the door to securing further growth by giving us a more diverse offer to customers and reduce congestion on our roads. This could not just be good news for the Humber, but unlock growth across the North and the Midlands."

Cllr Rob Waltham, leader of North Lincolnshire Council added:

“These much-needed enhancements to the rail network throughout North Lincolnshire will open up further business opportunities for the area by reducing the limitations on freight being brought to and from our ports. These works are critical to enhancing the port infrastructure on the south Humber bank.

“This significant investment from the council, Network Rail and the Government through the Humber LEP, shows commitment to securing the future of our area and will boost the local economy by opening up more opportunities and, ultimately, creating jobs in North Lincolnshire.”

Jake Berry, Local Growth Minister added:

“This government is committed to boosting economic growth across the whole of the Northern Powerhouse and building an economy which is fit for the future.

“This upgrade to the South Humber Rail Gauge, backed by £7.2m from the Local Growth Fund, will improve freight connectivity with the Port of Immingham.

“This project will ensure that Britain’s largest port remains competitive, resilient and ready to embrace the opportunities that come with our departure from the European Union.”