

••• The Port of Belfast



The Port of Belfast is one of the principal maritime gateways on the island of Ireland, linking importers and exporters with Great Britain, Europe and onward to worldwide markets.

The 400 year-old history of the Port of Belfast is inextricably linked with the development and progress of the City of Belfast.

Throughout the centuries, the history of the Port has recognised the importance of the foresight and bold vision of previous generations of Trustees, Operators and Commissioners in creating the basis of the modern Port. This bold and visionary approach carried on by successive generations of Harbour Commissioners has ensured the continued growth of the Port's capabilities and underpinned the development of regional trade.

The modern port

The Port handles over 60% of Northern Ireland's sea-borne trade and 20% for the Republic of Ireland, with cross border trade accounting for over 40% of Belfast's roll-on/roll-off traffic. The Port is also Northern Ireland's leading logistics and distribution hub and is home to many well-known local businesses such as the George Best City Airport, Harland & Wolff, Bombardier, Odyssey, the NI Science Park and the Titanic Quarter development.

The Port of Belfast's activities cover three distinct areas:

- Services to shipping.
- Warehousing and distribution services.
- Management and development of the Harbour Estate, including co-promotion with Titanic Quarter Ltd of the 185-acre Titanic Quarter development.

The many benefits offered by the Port of Belfast – its location at the hub of Northern Ireland's motorway network; location at the centre of population, industry and commerce; modern port facilities; competitive port charges and efficient working practices – have enabled it to attract a wide range of shipping services to the Port and provide flexible transport options for Ireland's importers and exporters and for the travelling public. Regular shipping services operating at the Port provide nearly 80 freight and passenger sailings each week to Great Britain. Additionally, ten direct container sailings each week to Continental European Ports provide an essential link to worldwide markets.

Roll-on/Roll-off

On 7th May 2008, the Port and Stenaline opened a new £35m Stena Line ferry terminal on a 32 acre site at the mouth of the existing port, which will facilitate the reduction of crossing times to Loch Ryan, Scotland. The Port of Belfast is one of the busiest passenger Port in Ireland handling a record 1.3m passengers in 2007.



The steel coil facility at York Dock

Port Development

During 2007 the Port continued its five year (2006-2010) £142m Capital Expenditure programme to deliver new terminals, logistics facilities and container capacity. The main highlights included:

- The opening of a 75,000-tonne capacity, animal feeds facility at Stormont Wharf. This deep-water facility ensures the Port of Belfast maintains its position as the leading agriculture sector port on the island.
- The opening of Belfast Container Terminal (BCT), the Port's second dedicated container terminal at an 11.5 acre site at Herdman Channel. BCT is one of the largest container facility expansions to be developed by an Irish Port in the last decade.
- The opening of a 3,530sq m warehouse facility for Menzies Distribution Ltd. This represents the first development at the new 40-acre Logistics Park at Airport Road West.



Plan for future developments

'Project 2025' – The Future of the Port of Belfast

In July 2007, the Port of Belfast unveiled plans to reclaim 120 acres of land from Belfast Lough at a cost of £630m to accommodate economic growth.

The announcement was made as an economic report was published detailing the scale of the Port's contribution to the Northern Ireland economy. Produced by the London-based research consultancy 'CEBR', the study forecast that by 2025 the Port, like all other Northern Ireland Ports, will be required to cater for a doubling of traffic if Northern Ireland is to match economic activity in the rest of the UK. ▶



Aerial view of the seaward entrance to the port

► The Port of Belfast continued...

According to the independent study the Port's activities, directly and indirectly, support 187,000 jobs (27% of Northern Ireland's entire workforce) and 31% of the region's total economic value (£19.5 billion). This study also calculated that the value of trade handled by the Port in 2007 was £21.4 billion.

Although the ongoing removal of barriers to international trade presents opportunities for Northern Ireland's economy, it is also crucial to ensure that Northern Ireland has the infrastructure in place: the terminals, the quays, the warehouses and the roads, to successfully manage the projected growth and to allow for the closing of the performance gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and the Republic.


Roy Adair, CEO, Port of Belfast, said:

"The report shows how important the Port of Belfast is to the continued success of the Northern Ireland economy. Economic growth means that current Port land resources will become exhausted and it is for this reason that we plan to reclaim 120 acres from Belfast Lough. The new land will support an additional 6 km of quayside and will require a total investment of £630m. Since Belfast's earliest days, the Port has ensured that local products can reach markets across the world. From our original base at the bottom of High Street, we have grown, and will continue to grow, to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland economy."

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A large, dark silhouette of an industrial crane structure, possibly a gantry crane, dominates the left side of the page. The structure is composed of a complex lattice of steel beams. The sun is positioned behind the top of the crane, creating a bright lens flare and casting the rest of the structure into shadow. The background is a bright, cloudy sky. In the lower-left corner, there is a white rectangular box containing text.

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History & Development

The first quay in Belfast was established at the confluence of the Rivers Lagan and Farset, however, access in the early 1600s to and from the quay proved to be navigationally tortuous for nearly two centuries. The development of the Port of Belfast took a significant turn in 1785, when a new body was established to manage the affairs of the Port under the title of "The Corporation for preserving and improving the Port & Harbour of Belfast". The Corporation, mindful of the shortcomings of the existing Port, realised that bold steps were necessary for future development and embarked upon a comprehensive large-scale improvement of the Port.

For the next 30 years, attempts to open new channels were frustrated by lack of finances and appropriate powers. Despite the limitations of these early wharfs and quays, a secure economic platform for the Port of Belfast was created which enabled local industries such as linen and rope-making to flourish and attracted prosperous new industries such as shipbuilding.

The beginning of the year 1830 marked the dawn of a new era destined to elevate Belfast from a position of comparative insignificance to a point where it ranked as one of the best equipped Ports of the United Kingdom. In 1839, the long overdue cutting of a new channel was commenced using steam engines. Completed two years later, the new channel was opened with a depth of 3 metres; the spoil from the cutting was then used to create a 7-hectare island – 'Queen's Island' – which has become synonymous with Shipbuilding.

In 1847 a new Body was constituted to control the Port of Belfast – The Belfast Harbour Commissioners. The Harbour Commissioners remain today as the Custodians of the Port of Belfast, ensuring the continued growth of the Port's capabilities and underpinning the development of regional trade.