Thursday 6 August saw the celebration of 5 years since the inception of the Maputo Corridor Logistic Initiative (MCLI) and the MCLI AGM, held in a marquee within port limits – with speakers competing to be heard above the noise of diesel locomotives and heavy vehicles. This confirms that the port of Maputo is at work, and things are happening. And the status of the speakers – Dr Mathews Phosa (MCLI Chairman and former Premier of Mpumalanga), the South African Minister of Transport (Honorable Mr S J Ndebele) and the Mozambican Minister of Transport and Communications (His Excellency Mr Paulo Cucula) – indicated the importance of this trans-border initiative. The speakers highlighted challenges faced in making use of the corridor, and committed both governments to resolving these.

From a citrus point of view Maputo Port is seen as an essential element in relieving congestion in Durban, and in addressing the high cost of transporting citrus from regions in the north to Durban. The CGA embarked on an initiative to increase volumes through Maputo to 100 000 pallets in 2009 and to further increase this volume to ensure that the forecasted citrus export volume growth from the Northern regions can be sufficiently managed. Those at the MCLI meeting would have thought that this would be easily attainable, with Maputo Produce Terminal full to overflowing, and ten trucks lined up outside waiting to discharge. But the truth is that this is a temporary situation, with three vessels due in the port in the next week (for Middle East, Mediterranean and Europe). What made the terminal operators frustrated was that a vessel destined for northern Europe was on the quayside, empty – but there was no fruit destined for that market in stock. It is evident that the Maputo port fruit flow will need to be better managed in the future.

Growth projection from the northern regions reflected from tree census data indicates that volume growth may exceed investment in infrastructure at Durban and Maputo ports in the next 5 years. This chart shows the growth in export volume through Durban and Maputo combined has exceeded infrastructure capacity since 2007, this is shown on volume above L2 (Durban and Maputo throughput capability) and hence the reasons Durban port experiences severe congestion annually. L1 shows the throughput capability of Durban based on the current capacity; L2 shows how Maputo plays an important function to relieve pressure off Durban. In recent years Maputo has handled less than 60 000 pallets adding huge strain to Durban’s infrastructure. It can be seen from L3 that further capacity will be required to efficiently manage the anticipated volume growth through both ports. The CGA Maputo volume initiative has tried to increase volume of exports through Maputo to relieve Durban and prevent congestion from taking place.

In order to achieve 100 000 pallets and more all role players will need to come to the table. The decision to use Maputo will boil down to better costs and efficiency. Present costing reveals that sending by container via Durban is in most cases cheaper than Maputo break bulk – CGA is in talks with the terminal operators, shipping lines and port authorities to see where cost savings can be made. In terms of efficiency those who use Maputo presently comment that the terminal is extremely well managed, and that getting fruit through to Maputo does not present a problem.

While attending the MCLI meeting, Justin Chadwick and Mitchell Brooke also attended a function to celebrate the new Maersk service to the Far East. Once again this service and further add-ons will be supported by citrus exporters based on efficiency and cost. CGA will work with Maersk and other shipping lines in order to see how both parties can benefit from the new direct container services from Maputo to citrus markets.