

The ECTA's view on the pressing matters facing Chemical Transport

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The world of logistics involves the transportation of a myriad of goods and commodities, some of which require special attention and custom solutions. A primary example of this is Chemical Transport, where volumes can be particularly heavy and safety is especially paramount.

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To learn how shippers in the chemical industry are addressing present-day challenges in Chemical Logistics, we spoke to ECTA, the European Chemical Transport Association.

Reacting to the downturn in combined transport

In a statement issued in mid-April, ECTA said that it and its members are worried about the future of combined transport in Europe.

"Rail networks are lacking capacity and the punctuality of train operations is very weak due to rail infrastructure works further reducing the capacity and causing delays or even cancelled trains," said ECTA, in the aforementioned statement.

According to ECTA figures, the share of shipments executed by combined transport has been falling for several years. Back in 2019, the figure was 52.2%, while last year it had dropped to 45.4%.

Regarding this, ECTA President Andreas Zink told trans.INFO:

"ECTA members follow the transport mode choices in line with the customer preferences and needs and this in function of price, lead time, reliability, and sustainability. Over the last years, ECTA has observed a downward trend [in combined transport], as explained in the latest ECTA statement on the future of combined transport in Europe."

Amid this development, ECTA has taken issue with some policy decisions taken by certain EU member states. Among other things, the organisation has expressed disappointment with Germany's decision to reduce considerably their subsidies for rail operators by reducing the 'TRAFÖG-Trassenförderungsgesetz':

"Despite the trend, ECTA and its members – major Transport Service Providers for the Chemical Industry – will continue to invest in combined transport solutions as we do believe that this mode of transport does not only contribute to a reduction of emissions, combined transport also positively contributes to the competitiveness of the European economy and the overall mobility across Europe. We trust that the Chemical Industry players will follow us along this path," said ECTA representative Andreas Zink.

The challenges presented by digital transformation

ECTA believes the digital transformation is a journey that will take many years. Although the organisation stresses that digital collaboration is easy to understand, it notes there are still several challenges to be overcome, including the mindsets of people and companies towards digital collaboration.

To address these challenges, the ECTA digitalization workgroup has come up with a set of digital best practice standards. In addition, ECLIC and EFTCO have been working on defining digital industry standards such as the eECD (electronic EFTCO Cleaning Document) to replace standardised paper EFTCO Cleaning Document since 2018.

Cooperation can also be an issue, as ECTA explained on its website:

"A second challenge before digital collaboration can take place amongst a group of company actors, is that a diverse group of companies, suppliers and customers are willing to work together by exchanging data to improve safety, sustainability and to create new logistics efficiencies. In other words, companies with a common goal have to form a community or ecosystem that are willing to work together according to these industry best practices data standards."

Trust is another challenge listed by ECTA. The organisation calls for the implementation of data standards that include a trustful, connected data pipeline, which needs to be formed amongst all actors, highly secured, and form a "chain of trust" to exchange data.

ECTA stresses that in order to "implement these digital best practice data standards, this connected data pipeline needs to be secured, controlled and governed by data policies and governance rules".

Moreover, the organisation states that once data is exchanged, it is maintained and stored centrally at company level. This means "the data provider can reap the benefits of the data exchange and not the central/federated IT platform".

As stated within the Transition pathway for the Chemical industry, the digital transformation is a journey that will take many years.

The biggest challenges with digitalisation across the logistics chain are nicely summarised in our latest [ECTA online article](#) and are related to the use of digital data standards, the willingness to collaborate, the "chain of trust" and last but not least the mindset towards digitalisation.

Finally, ECTA states that "a complete change in mindset is required where individual company silo thinking need to be broken down to see the broader industry value picture, its industry competitiveness and digital benefits, where we all know that using logistics paper documents like eECD and eCMR are not the future".

"Many companies do not embrace this digital change yet simply because digitalisation costs money, it requires new investments/skills/talents and creates new business risks," concludes ECTA.

Addressing driver grievances and issues at loading and unloading sites

Slot booking

Continuing the digital transition theme, one area that many see ripe for digitalisation is slot booking.

Asked about the ECTA's thoughts on how the situation looks like with slot booking at the present moment, representative Peter Devis, ECTA Managing Director, said:

"The ECTA and its stakeholders understand that static slot bookings are currently contributing to longer truck driver residence times within the chemical industry. At this point in time ECTA cannot judge if more flexible slot booking systems are more used versus the past, however in the future, the ECTA Drivers APP might give us an indication. As recommended in the ECTA Position Paper on driver shortage, ECTA believes that more slot booking flexibility is one of the key factors to increase the job attractiveness and work conditions for drivers."

Gathering data from drivers

On the topic of the aforementioned ECTA Drivers APP, the ECTA says the aim behind the application is to create "a hands-on initiative to improve the driver shortage situation on the one hand and on the other hand, to make the job of a chemical truck driver more attractive again, by giving them a voice to talk about their daily experiences at (un)loading sites and terminals in Europe".

The application was subject to "extensive months of testing" and was improved thanks to feedback from ECTA members and lorry drivers.

Through the app, registered drivers working in the chemical industry can rate almost 1,000 locations across Europe. A rating can be given for safety, waiting times, truck driver treatment, driver facilities and total residence times. After 30 submitted individual driver ratings per location, the public access is activated and the average ratings per location become visible in the app directly.

ECTA told trans.INFO that by launching the app, it "aims to gather valid data to exchange with the involved chemical industry stakeholders with the recommendation for continuous improvement while keeping the anonymity of drivers in mind all the time".

According to ECTA, 1,200+ registered drivers are now using the app to report their positive and negative experiences. The application is currently web-based, but ECTA says it has ambition to launch a native app to make it more convenient for end users.

In addition to this, the app will also add new functionalities that will provide the means for users to give ratings on how women-friendly the sites are.

Concerns over injuries

Finally, in the latest annual report, ECTA revealed that injury incidents at all points in the supply chain



Rowland, ECTA Responsible Care Director, said:

"The main risks in delivering chemicals include: falls from height, contact with chemicals from an unplanned release and manual handling injuries. There are also secondary risks such as: slips and trips or contact with moving vehicles. The way that the loading and unloading sites are set up and managed can have a significant impact on reducing the risk of injury."

Here, the ECTA notes the importance of guidelines as far as safety is concerned. The organisation works with Cefic, who represent the chemical producers, in producing best practice guidelines which cover some of these major aspects referred to above.