

NOT ONLY TRAIN DRIVERS

Automotive logistics body highlights serious labour shortages, including rail

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A recent survey by the Association of European Vehicle Logistics (ECG) found that 96% of members involved in moving vehicles by either road, rail and maritime/waterways or using compounds, had serious concerns about labour shortages. While the increasing deficiency of truck drivers in Europe has captured the headlines, other modes of transport are also finding it very difficult to recruit staff.

shortage was particularly acute in technical and operational rail positions.

DB Cargo Logistics input

Interviewed for the ECG survey, Kai Birnstein, head of Automotive at DB Cargo Logistics, said that tensions in staff numbers in the rail segment of finished vehicle logistics (FVL) complicates recruitment and retention.” It is especially apparent in cross-border traffic operations. For example, delays in journey times due to rerouting can mean replacement staff are required to man locomotives at locations other than the scheduled crew change points.

Birnstein also highlighted that the training to become a train driver usually takes between 9 and 12 months. For Karl Gümpel, head of Sales at DB Cargo Logistics, the biggest shortage of labour in the segment usually concerns wagon inspectors. “They inspect freight cars for safety, technical condition and readiness ahead of the departure of trains. They also identify defects and organize necessary repairs.”



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Complications in recruitment and retention

Andreas Sundl, COO of family-owned Austrian automotive logistics specialist, Hödlmayr International, said the rail freight industry is facing a growing talent and skills shortage. In Austria, but also all over Europe, private rail providers are experiencing shortages in train drivers, wagon technicians, and shifters, prompting targeted recruitment campaigns, he said.

“The labour shortage in FVL, particularly in rail, is real, acute, and structurally rooted. It is role-specific, especially affecting technical rail jobs, and varies regionally across Europe. Regulatory trickle-down, through new mobility rules and compliance burdens, further complicates recruitment and retention.”

There is also a shortage of qualified trainers to onboard new staff, compounding the issue, he noted. He went on to warn that without co-ordinated action on training, career attractiveness, and working conditions, this shortage is likely to deepen, particularly as the FVL and rail sectors aim to scale for the green transition and logistics expansion.



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