

Press Release

Voith Group

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Voith at InnoTrans: Without a strong rail system, there can be no competitive Europe

- Rail freight transport is critical infrastructure for Europe's industry: It connects production sites and markets, secures supply chains, and strengthens Europe's resilience and ability to act.
- For the past four years, transport volume in European rail freight has been declining. High costs and productivity shortcomings are putting pressure on the sector. Digitalization and automation are key levers for countering these challenges.
- With CargoFlex, Voith demonstrates how freight trains can be digitalized. The key now is to bring innovations to industrial application more quickly.

Berlin, Germany, September 22, 2026. Europe's industry relies on an efficient rail freight system. In a changing geopolitical landscape, rail is also becoming increasingly important for Europe's ability to respond in times of crisis.

According to Eurostat, rail freight transport volume in the EU fell by 1.8% in 2025 to 368 billion ton-kilometers, marking the fourth consecutive year of decline. In addition to the weak industrial economy, high costs and structural productivity disadvantages are weighing on the sector.

"Without an efficient rail system, Europe will not be able to strengthen its industrial competitiveness. Rail freight transport cannot afford to stand still. Digitalization and automation are key

levers for increasing its productivity,” says Dirk Hoke, President & CEO of the Voith Group.

From manual coupling to digitally networked freight trains

In Europe, freight cars are still frequently coupled manually using screw couplers. Consequently, train formation and shunting processes are time-consuming and labor-intensive.

The Digital Automatic Coupler (DAC) is a key component in the digitalization of freight trains. With CargoFlex, Voith has developed a DAC solution that not only automates mechanical coupling but also establishes energy and data connections between the cars. This transforms the analog freight car into a digitally connected car and many connected cars into a smart freight train. Automated processes, from brake testing to condition monitoring, are thus made possible.

CargoFlex is already in use in commercial freight transport. The coupler has been successfully in regular operation in Switzerland since 2019 and thus has more than half a decade of practical experience in commercial rail freight transport. A total of 230 freight cars and 25 locomotives have been equipped with the system. This makes CargoFlex the only DAC solution with a multi-year, commercially proven track record in European rail freight transport.

“A particular challenge is integrating the DAC into locomotives, as they must remain flexible enough to be used in various types of service,” says Müslüm Yakisan, CEO of Voith Turbo Rail & Marine. “With CargoFlex, we’re leveraging our system and integration expertise to lay the groundwork for the freight train’s digital functionalities.”

Now it’s all about scaling up

The technological development of the DAC is well advanced. For Europe-wide migration, approximately 900,000 couplers for freight cars and about 46,000 couplers for roughly 23,000 locomotives must be retrofitted. Technical integration is particularly challenging when

it comes to locomotives. This requires interoperability, a reliable migration path, and investment security.

With the funding program for DAC pioneer trains launched in September, the Federal Ministry of Transport of Germany has initiated the next phase of testing. The pioneer trains are intended to test the interaction between couplers and digital train functions under real-world operating conditions, thereby enabling an important step toward Europe-wide migration.

“Digitalization doesn’t end with software and artificial intelligence. It must also reach our physical infrastructure,” says Hoke. “Europe has the technologies and the industrial expertise. But technological leadership alone is not enough. What is crucial for our competitiveness is how quickly we put innovations into practice. Europe must also be a leader in industrial scaling.”

As part of the InnoTrans opening ceremony, Germany’s Federal Minister of Transport Steffen Bilger and Apostolos Tzitzikostas, EU Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism, visited the Voith booth. The discussion focused on the digitalization of rail freight transport and the conditions necessary for successful Europe-wide scaling.

About the Voith Group

The Voith Group is a global technology company. With its broad portfolio of systems, products, services and digital applications, Voith sets standards in the markets of energy, paper, raw materials and transport. Founded in 1867, Voith today has around 21,000 employees, sales of € 4.8 billion and locations in over 60 countries worldwide and thus is one of the larger family-owned companies in Europe.

The Group Division Voith Turbo is part of the Voith Group and a specialist for intelligent drive technology, systems as well as tailor-made services. With its innovative and smart products, Voith offers highest efficiency and reliability. Customers from highly diverse industries such as oil and gas, energy, mining and mechanical

engineering, ship technology and rail rely on the advanced technologies and digital applications of Voith.



From left to right: Philippe Tabarot, Minister of Transport of France; Steffen Bilger, Germany's Federal Minister of Transport; and Dirk Hoke, CEO of Voith Group, in front of Voith's CargoFlex digital automatic coupler.



From left to right: Steffen Bilger, Germany's Federal Minister of Transport; Philippe Tabarot, Minister of Transport of France; Müslüm Yakisan, CEO of Voith Turbo Rail & Marine; Denise Kurtulus, CEO of Voith Turbo; Dirk Hoke, CEO of Voith Group.



Exhibit: CargoFlex digital automatic coupler from Voith.

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