

INTERVIEW

An interview with Peter Füglistaler, Director Swiss Federal Office of Transport

Freight transport in Switzerland is much higher than in other Alpine countries and responds to a specific political mandate and corresponding promotional measures. This approach helps institutions and communities achieve sustainability targets, improve intermodal supply chains, and favour a greener economy.

Switzerland can be considered a centrepiece for the modern rail freight corridor between northern and southern Europe, offering a wide infrastructural network and advanced technologies thanks to relevant investments

1. Could you tell us about the role and state of development of internal cargo transport in Switzerland compared with other European countries like Germany?

The freight transport market in Switzerland has two distinct segments: In terms of freight transport through the Alps, rail has a 75% market share. This is much higher than in other Alpine countries. **The strong role of the railways in this area is due to a political mandate and corresponding promotional measures.** In the remaining areas of freight transport (domestic, import and export), the share of rail is lower at around 25% but still higher than in comparable other European countries. Railways are under a great deal of pressure here. We are therefore examining whether in future we also want to provide state support for domestic, import and export transport, especially in terms of single wagonload transport, to strengthen railways here as well.

Another special feature with regard to freight transport in Switzerland is the new legislation on underground freight transport: The Confederation has put in place a legal framework to enable the realisation of the private “Cargo sous terrain” project. **Here goods would be conveyed underground using automated driverless transport vehicles between the major economic centres as a supplement to transport by rail and road.**



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2. How do you think EU infrastructure can be improved through pan-European investment and the mix between private and public investments?

It is important for the EU to define superordinate European corridors for rail freight transport and undertake the corresponding investment in those corridors, as they **promote efficient cross-border freight transport by rail**. In constructing the base tunnels at the Gotthard and on the Lötschberg-Simplon axis, Switzerland has provided the centrepiece for a modern rail freight corridor between northern and southern Europe. It is important that line upgrades in neighbouring countries are also carried out or completed promptly. In addition to this task on the part of the EU and its member states, **railway undertakings and shippers are also called on to contribute to efficient European rail freight transport by investing in rolling stock and terminals.**

3. How can rail help public institutions and communities achieve sustainability targets in line with the increasing need to reduce truck traffic?

Freight transport by rail is around ten times more energy efficient and thus more climate friendly than transport by road. It therefore makes sense to promote the shift of freight transport from road to rail through a broad bundle of measures. **Switzerland is playing a pioneering role in that respect and is supporting this policy within various international platforms, as well as within a European framework.**

4. What can be done to improve intermodal supply chains and favour a greener economy?

Important measures include the expansion of rail infrastructure and the levying of an appropriate charge levied on freight transport on the roads. In Switzerland, the revenues derived from the heavy goods vehicle charge are largely reinvested in railways, meaning that the charge has doubled the effect to create a more sustainable transport system. Furthermore, **the Confederation is making a substantial contribution to the construction of transshipment terminals, also abroad, if this can bring about a shift to rail in shipments passing through Switzerland.**

5. What is the role of digital transformation in helping achieve these objectives? Specifically, how can automation drive the industry to become more competitive?

There is considerable potential in that respect. Today, rail freight is carried out in almost the same way as it was a hundred years ago. **With automatic coupling and brake testing, rail freight transport can be made significantly more efficient.** The Confederation is therefore looking to develop a means to provide financial support for these automation elements - in line with developments in the EU.