DOING IT THE OLD WAY — Losing More Every Day

As long as everything must be ready by 08:00, we will continue to reproduce waste and chaos in supply chains.

The actors of the supply chain — manufacturers, retailers, freight forwarders, carriers, and service providers — work today in an environment where costs and environmental burdens are drastically increasing. Owing to deeply rooted, decades-old habits ***("This is how we do it")***, countless processes are wasteful, overloaded, or simply poorly organized. The road transport sector is often blamed, even though shippers, consignees, and the ordering side have at least as much (often greater) influence over costs, efficiency, and environmental indicators.

Current practices generate systemic problems, such as:

- unrealistically short delivery deadlines,
- entrenched goods-receiving routines,
- inflexible time-slot systems,
- labour shortages and weak professional preparedness,
- poor capacity planning,
- the unpredictability of global supply chains,
- outdated information flows.

The result: moving the same amount of freight requires too many vehicles, too many resources, too much human intervention — and too much money and energy. Sustainability does not start with carbon credits, but with efficiency. The first principle of lean philosophy: ***„minimize waste"*** — and waste is every unnecessary euro, minute, vehicle movement, labour hour, and every gram of CO_2 emitted.

1. Responsibility and mindset: real greening begins with efficiency

A logistics chain will not become greener because there are more electric vehicles, LEDs, or new packaging materials. Change begins with a change in mindset.

The foundation of efficient operation:

- **E2E (end-to-end) process walkthrough:** literally ***"walking through"*** the entire journey of the goods from production to the user.
- **Identifying waste:** every unnecessary vehicle movement, time loss, waiting, poor capacity utilization, overcapacity, unjustified urgency.
- **Recognizing distorted KPIs:** deliveries requested ***"for yesterday"*** often have no real basis, but stem from poorly designed performance indicators.

The real questions that must be asked — often requiring years of education:

- "Does it really have to be done this way?"
- "Is it truly needed yesterday?"

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- "Who actually benefits from this?"

The environmental price of excessive urgency is often invisible. A shipment requested urgently may have a CO_2 footprint equivalent to the annual sequestration capacity of hundreds of trees — yet this is ignored in decision-making. The ***"it fits in the budget"*** logic is misleading.

Choice of transport mode = strategic decision

When the chain is efficient and transparent, it becomes possible to make meaningful decisions on whether a specific product should be moved by:

- road, rail, water, or intermodally.

This depends partly on service providers, but equally on the functionality of infrastructure (public sector actors) and the regulatory environment. The simple truth: without efficiency, all greening efforts are just ***greenwashing*****.**

2. The „speed fetish" and misselection of transport modes

The ***"I want it the day before yesterday"*** logic is still widespread in the market, automatically excluding rail and water — shippers want goods moved at "light speed" across Europe.

Meanwhile, the goods:

- often sit in warehouses for days/weeks,
- and the full supply chain could easily absorb +2 days by rail or +7 days by water.

Economic and environmental advantages

Rail:

- 20–30% cheaper for large-volume cargo than road.
- Carbon footprint: 3–7 times lower → approx. 70–85% reduction per ton-km.

Inland waterway shipping:

- 30–50% cost advantage over road.
- Carbon footprint: 2.5–4 times lower → about 60–75% reduction per ton-km.

Conclusion:

Not physics, but the reflex of ***"it must be fast"*** excludes rail and water — even though they are often better physically, logistically, and financially.

Intermodal transport (rail + road, water + road):

- Road is needed only for the last mile.
- This significantly reduces truck-kilometres and CO_2 emissions while maintaining service level.

Reality: "+2 days by rail" is not exaggeration — but not universally accurate.

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Some routes allow rail to match road transit times within hours. Others require buffer time. The key question: ***"What is needed for it to work?"*** — and adapting to the timetable. When an intermodal door-to-door schedule becomes predictable, time-slot systems can also be organized to fixed times, making the whole chain more manageable.

3. Goods receiving, time-slot, and waiting issues — invisible cost and emission bomb

One of the most neglected areas of the chain.

In road transport, the lack of evening parking and basic hygiene facilities (WC, shower) further worsens the utilization of drivers' working hours. In many places, even warehouse or office toilets are not accessible, causing unnecessary delays and organizational burdens.

Ordering 8 trucks for 08:00 even when only 1 can be unloaded per hour — this is a textbook system error.

- The last truck is released around 16:00.
- Until then, 8 vehicles wait; some can complete only one shift that day.

Problems with time-slot systems:

- Inflexible, often requiring booking 5 days in advance.
- If a truck arrives early: it waits.
- If it arrives late: loading may slip to the following week.
- Huge human coordination effort required.

Unnecessary waiting:

- Even time-slotted trucks wait hours (retail units, warehouses — nearly everyone).
- Drivers' working time: only ~30% effective driving (domestic transport, certain sites); the rest is waiting and loading.

Weekly cyclicality (specific to Hungary and the region)

- Monday and Friday: minimal deliveries.
- Tuesday–Wednesday–Thursday: chaos, congestion, waiting.
- This is a receiving-side and forwarder-side planning issue.

Impact: more trucks needed → more CO_2, more cost, more labour.

Intermodal-specific: Flexible receiving → smoother container allocation → fewer ***"satellite"*** road movements → 30–40% truck reduction.

4. Customer and production-side business logic overriding rational logistics

Behind the ***"we needed it yesterday"*** there is often nothing — just bad decision logic and unrealistic expectations.

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Customer pressure:

Manufacturers are often completely exposed to customer demands:

- failure to deliver = loss of business or worse conditions,
- buyers may switch providers.

Drivers' feedback shows: the ***"urgently needed"*** goods often sit unused in warehouses — but were labelled urgent.

Production-side challenges:

- Labour shortage (no night shifts).
- Technical problems, raw material delays.
- Logistics must ***"make up"*** for delays:
  - small vans, taxis, even over 1000 km,
  - extremely expensive, environmentally irrational.

Financial/cash-flow aspects (FMCG):

- If the monthly sales plan lags, last days see 2–3× demand.
- Truck unloading times increase.
- Utilization decreases.

Distorted KPIs drive:

- vans, taxis, even 1000 km shipments,
- massively increasing costs and emissions.

Global & EU trends:

In air cargo, tight margins and schedules mean any disruption — holidays, congestion — triggers delays and fee spikes. Forwarders often cannot pass on extra costs, increasing market instability. If deadlines were less extreme, more buffer would remain.

"Why must everything be manufactured in China?"

Since COVID:

- persistent delays,
- extra work,
- large carbon footprint.

Intra-EU air freight:

- Road takes the same time in many cases.
- Road or rail + intermodal is cheaper and far greener.

Rail/water/intermodal alternative:

If production and financial planning builds in +2/+7 days, rail and water become realistic. Goods in transit = mobile warehouse → less physical warehousing needed.

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5. Workforce quality, organizational culture, and "information-blocking layers"

Weak professional skills, low motivation, and high turnover lead to:

- poorly organized processes,
- higher costs,
- underutilized systems.

Between management and operations:

- layers form,
- personal "domains" and interest groups emerge,
- only ***"compatible"*** information flows upward,
- new efficient solutions are blocked.

Consequences:

- poorly organized processes,
- expensive, underperforming systems,
- dissatisfied employees, high turnover.

6. Loading, packaging, and container-handling problems — direct waste

Packaging & stacking errors

- Stacking 2-high instead of 3-high → 30% space loss → more vehicles needed.
- Training can immediately reduce vehicle needs.

Container quality demands exceeding standards

Many customers:

- require ***"food-clean"*** containers (no such standard),
- complain about new-container smell,
- impose unrealistic aesthetic requirements ("VIP container").

These cause rejection and extra costs across road and intermodal chains.

Extreme case: modern Luddism (anti-technology sabotage)

Some customers:

- fail to prepare export cargo on time,
- order the container anyway,
- and instead of cancelling, deliberately damage it so it can be rejected ("the container is defective").

Terminals detect this (e.g., seals ***"falling upward"***), illustrating how wasteful the behaviour is.

Intermodal aspect

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Rail and water are more sensitive to packaging errors (vibration, longer route, handling). If packaging is proper, these modes are:

- safer, cheaper, greener.

7. Infrastructure, regulation, and delay-driven constraints

Real-world examples:

- sea + rail delays push container arrivals by weeks,
- chronic underfunding leads to rail capacity shortages,
- unstable regulatory environment increases uncertainty,
- customers are forced into expensive road alternatives, costing hundreds of thousands of euros extra.

The paradox of rail communication:

- The rail operator cannot say exactly where the train is or when it will arrive,
- yet expects the terminal to specify when the train should depart.

Rail becomes a real alternative only if:

- infrastructure is stable,
- timetable reliable,
- communication transparent,
- regulations predictable.

"This is how we do it" in port selection

In sea–rail chains, many forwarders and shipping lines still route Central European cargo via Northern ports (Hamburg, Bremerhaven) through Suez — even though Adriatic ports (Rijeka, Koper, Trieste) offer:

- 5–10 days shorter sailing time,
- about half the rail distance,
- available capacity.

Despite this, practices do not change. Even when neighbouring Adriatic ports (just tens of kilometres apart) have free capacity, cargo is not re-routed. This reflects risk aversion and inertia blocking efficiency and intermodal optimization.

8. New logistics model: systemic integration of rail, water, and intermodal

Not ***"green romanticism"***, but:

- achievable today,
- economically rational,
- proven better in cost and CO_2.

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8.1 Realistic deadlines and inventory planning

Production and order planning should incorporate:

- +2 days for rail,
- +7 days for water.

Goods in transit = mobile warehouse → less physical warehouse space needed.

8.2 Mode shift: rail/water as the backbone, road only for the last mile

- Terminal → plant
- Terminal → customer
- Returnable packaging can also move by rail/water.

8.3 More precise time-slots, flexible systems

- dynamic slots,
- IT integration,
- less waiting, fewer empty runs, fewer vehicles.

8.4 Groupage and consolidation

Instead of ***"running around for each pallet"***:

- groupage,
- consolidation,
- intermodal solutions.

8.5 Competence development

- loading rules,
- intermodal knowledge,
- open communication between management and operations = training, training, training.

8.6 ESG and transparent metrics

- CO_2 and cost indicators: rail/water/intermodal vs. road → quantified, used for decision support.

Summary

The entry point to sustainable logistics is not electric trucks or carbon credits — it is efficiency. E2E thinking, removing distorted KPIs, educating stakeholders about real needs, integrating intermodal modes, and cultural change form the basis of real greening.

Without this, everything else is greenwashing. With it, rail, water, and intermodal are not alternatives — they are the rational choice.

What is needed? Education, education, education — at every level (state and corporate).

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