



INTERVIEW SPOTLIGHT

Dr Jochen Holzfeind, voestalpine's Chief Technology Officer of Railway Systems, explores the company's methods in environmental protection through performance and explains why voestalpine Railway Systems recently exhibited at Europe's largest transport research conference.

Why did voestalpine participate at the recent Transport Research Arena (TRA) event in Vienna, Austria?

TRA is co-organised by the European Commission and attracts many of the decision-makers who set policy direction. The motto of this year's event was: 'A digital era for transport – solutions for society, economy and environment', reflecting precisely our own understanding of mobility and our role as a mobility enabler. This was reason enough for our strong presence.

So, your expectations were quite high?

Of course. And they were more than fulfilled. Our companies are recognised as technology leaders and pioneering innovators in rail transport, which is why they have the ear of European Institutions. However, that means we are expected to not only offer advanced products and system solutions, but also to make a strategic contribution to the sustainability of railway systems.

Does this include corporate social responsibility, such as environmental considerations?

voestalpine has been at the forefront of environmentally aware innovation for many years. For example, in the H2Future Project, we research breakthrough technologies in view of the EU's 2030 climate and energy goals. Already today ecological aspects are an important part of our corporate identity; a reason why voestalpine's main turnout plant is completely CO₂ neutral. We also operate our own hydropower plant. Even the waste heat from our rail rolling mill is fed into voestalpine's heating network which supplies Styrian towns with clean energy. These are examples, but they express a new approach. Not only that, we are confident that future public procurement is to be based on best bidder criteria in terms of system performance and lifecycle economics and so ecological factors should also be considered.

Isn't this slightly utopian?


Not at all! Still too often

public procurement follows the principle of the cheapest provider, ignoring ecological criteria and factors such as availability, performance, and costs, not only during the initial purchase but over the entire lifecycle. However, rail operators need an efficient and competitive infrastructure if they are to compete with other modes of transport.

Our interactive Rail LCC Tool, which calculates and visualises the relationship between initial investment and maintenance expense for various forms of rail transport, attracted visitors to our TRA stand. They saw how system costs decrease substantially with the use of highly developed products, while track performance and availability rise drastically.

Politics is well advised to focus on rail transport if only to meet the EU's own climate goals. The European Institutions understand that railways, metros and trams hugely benefit from comprehensive digitalisation, diagnostic and monitoring systems, data analytics and preventative maintenance regimes, so they steer public procurement in this direction and we welcome and support that development.

Your presentation at TRA gave a track system supplier viewpoint on the procurement and operation of smart complex networks, considering the total cost of ownership and ecological factors. Why?

In my previous employment, I was responsible for the track asset management of Swiss Federal Railways (SBB). I know both sides of the coin, so I can call on infrastructure managers and system suppliers to cooperate closely. Our spheres of activity fundamentally complement each other and should be geared in the common interest of the whole sector. Shift2Rail was one of the first lighthouse examples and I hope there will be a continuation after 2020. 

DR JOCHEN HOLZFEIND studied civil engineering at Graz University of Technology. After working at Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) in the field of planning and building new railway lines, Jochen developed and led the Asset Management Track of Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) between 2010 and 2017. In September 2017, Jochen joined voestalpine as Chief Technology Officer of Railway Systems.