

RAIL TMS EVALUATOR'S GUIDE

What every rail leader needs to know before evaluating a Rail TMS

Before your team demos a single platform: the decisions, risks, and questions that determine whether this evaluation ends well.

What is at stake

Most Rail TMS evaluations focus on the wrong things. A platform with a clean interface and a confident sales process is not evidence it was built for bulk rail freight. When a Rail TMS is misconfigured for bulk operations, the cost does not arrive as a single line item. It accumulates: demurrage charges your team had no time to prevent, billing errors that passed through without systematic review, and railcar events the platform had no independent basis to document. Six months into go-live, a misaligned platform is difficult and expensive to unwind.

This guide was developed from over 30 years of bulk freight operations experience and reflects the specific gaps that surface most often in Rail TMS evaluations for bulk and break-bulk shippers.

Where most evaluations go wrong	What the evaluator guide gives you
Rail TMS vendors design demo environments that show their platform at its best. The capabilities that distinguish a purpose-built Rail TMS from a configured one: independent system of record, rail-specific accessorial depth, native BOL and EDI status reporting, are routinely avoided or demonstrated indirectly. A clean interface is not evidence of operational depth.	A pre-evaluation diagnostic that surfaces your actual cost exposure before you compare vendors. Five evaluation criteria with a scoring rubric anchored to what vendors demonstrate, not what they claim. Red flags that indicate a platform was configured rather than built for rail. A commodity lens for your freight type. A business case framework for executive approval.

How to use this guide with your team

VP of Supply Chain or Operations

Start with the business case section. Review the five criteria before vendor demos and the completed scorecard before the final decision.

Director of Rail or Logistics

Start with the pre-evaluation diagnostic. Work through the criteria and red flags before your first demo. Use the commodity lens to build your demo script.

Logistics Manager or Rail Operations Lead

The red flags section and commodity lens are written for your role. Use the red flags as a live checklist in every demo.

IT or Procurement

Review the configurability and implementation criteria before engaging vendors on technical terms. The business case section includes total cost of ownership framing.

Download the complete evaluator's guide

Five criteria. One scorecard.

The framework your team needs to make a defensible decision.

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