

These are the goals, expectations and wishes of top managers in the rail sector for 2024

Georg Kern

New year, new luck! 2024 has only just begun, reason enough for *bahn manager* to ask leading figures in the rail sector about their goals, expectations and wishes. Our aim was to represent the railway sector in all its diversity as broadly as possible. What is striking about the managers' answers: the corridor refurbishments planned for 2024 are a major concern for many managers. Also rising energy costs, the shortage of skilled workers and the need to catch up with digitalisation are important issues. These are all significant challenges. However, it is also clear from the responses: Overall, confidence prevails.



Sigrid Nikutta,

Member of the Management Board of Deutsche Bahn AG and Chairwoman of the Management Board of DB Cargo:

"A task of historic dimensions"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

The most important issue for DB AG - but also for the entire railway industry - is the start of the general refurbishment of the German rail network. This is a task of historic dimensions: the 40 heavily used and busiest sections of the rail network will be upgraded to a high-performance network over a total length of more than 4,000 kilometres by 2030.

The general refurbishment of the Riedbahn between Frankfurt/Main and Mannheim alone, which will be completely renewed from 15 July, will directly benefit three European freight corridors and one in seven long-distance passenger trains. It is good and important that federal politicians are taking their responsibility for Europe's largest rail network seriously and are actively involved. The general overhauls create more quality and punctuality for customers in passenger and freight transport. These are decisive factors in increasing the efficiency, reliability and competitiveness of supply chains by rail. Our customers will benefit from this, and they are also important prerequisites for shifting more transport from road to rail. On average, 70 per cent of companies' total emissions come from their supply chains. This is why climate-neutral supply chains are crucial for a greener economy. DB Cargo can already offer customers completely CO₂ -free supply chains. Or to put it simply: goods belong on the railway! Because the fastest way to achieve a climate and transport transition is by rail.

What are your general expectations for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

The importance of environmentally friendly mobility and logistics will continue to grow, in Germany and throughout the world.

Europe. We have noticed that offers such as the Deutschland-Ticket or the introduction of the Deutschland-Takt in long-distance transport are attracting significantly more travellers. The economy wants climate-friendly and resilient supply chains. This makes it all the more important to approach things from the end consider: What does a supposedly cheap delivery route by road actually cost - do we look at the economic costs? Politicians have responded with the new CO₂ pricing in the transport sector. And it is right to focus on the most environmentally friendly mode of transport and to change the framework conditions for this.

Freight transport by rail already offers climate-friendly alternatives in the logistics chains of our economy and industry. Now, for the first time, the labour-intensive additional expense of particularly climate-friendly single wagonload transport is also being supported. Those who set the course in favour of climate-friendly rail will enable our entire economy to achieve the climate protection targets in Germany and Europe.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

For all customers, the most ecologically sensible means of transport must also be the most economically sensible. Then the switch to environmentally friendly rail transport will be successful. To achieve this, we are modernising the infrastructure and advancing digitalisation and automation. Rail freight transport is European through and through. That is why, as Chair of the Rail Freight Forward (RFF) European rail freight initiative, I will be driving forward our five fields of action this year: These are the expansion of uniform digital platforms for data exchange, the digital capacity management of rail networks, the digitalisation of the European Train Control System (ERTMS), autonomous driving and, of course, the Europe-wide establishment of the Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC) as a new European system standard. All of these fields are interlinked. Rail is already the most climate-friendly continental mode of transport. Digitalisation and automation will also make our industry much more competitive - so switching to rail is a win-win situation for the climate and our households! Every cent invested in rail is money well spent for climate protection and the generations of our children and grandchildren.



André Rodenbeck,

CEO Rail Infrastructure Siemens Mobility:

"Further connecting the rail sector with Xcelerator"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

The refurbishment and digitalisation of the rail network in Germany, Europe and the world is a key topic for Siemens Mobility. With our open digital business platform Siemens Xcelerator, we connect railway operators, owners and maintenance companies in order to work with them to drive forward innovations and thus even better solutions for the entire rail system.

What are your general expectations for the development of the rail sector in 2024?

The railway industry is the climate industry. I hope that this will remain the focus of politicians.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

Do, do, do.



Luis Castrillo,
Board of the Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Ruhr (VRR):

"Forging a mobility pact together"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

In 2024, we will continue to build on the market success of the Deutsch-landticket and create efficient mobility. Because one thing is clear to us: the Deutsch-landticket is only one part of modern mobility, we need a service initiative in all areas of public transport - including regional transport. And we will make our systems and processes even more customer-friendly and digital: We want to transfer as many ticket segments as possible to digital customer processes, which also means that we will streamline analogue customer processes. So in 2024, we will still have our hands full in continuing to shape the mobility transition in a customer-friendly and agile way. VRR is competently and efficiently positioned to drive these developments forward.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

The enormous amount of construction work on the entire railway network will place a heavy burden on our passengers. All players in the public transport system must work together on stabilisation measures. For the railway sector, this means that functioning and stable replacement concepts as well as standardised, reliable and clear customer information are absolutely essential. Local transport forms the backbone of the daily travel chain for thousands of people in the region. Our task is to make this chain of routes possible.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

I hope that we remain confident despite all the challenges and against the backdrop of the enormous construction activity on the NRW railway network. The most important thing for our industry is that the federal, state and local authorities agree on long-term and adequate industry funding and forge a joint mobility pact. Together with our partners, we must maintain the strength to think about the future and shape it with a reliable, stable and robust range of services and attractive fare products in public transport for our customers.



Torsten Völker,
CRO of Spitzke, system supplier for railway and railway infrastructure:

"Corridor concept is the right approach"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

The dominant topic in 2024 is certainly the start of the so-called corridor projects, with which Deutsche Bahn wants to build a high-performance network by 2030. We already started preparatory work in January. Work began on the kick-off project for the Riedbahn corridor, where we will be entering the main construction phase in July together with our consortium partner Leonhard Weiss. We



Dirk Flege,
Managing Director of the Pro-Rail Alliance:

"We need a genuine railway reform 2.0"

What is the most important topic for your association in 2024?

The further organisation of the infrastructure division InfraGo, which is oriented towards the common good. The public welfare objectives must be specified and enshrined in law. The federal government must also define key figures according to which it can manage the infrastructure division. And it must also create multi-year financing security for new and expansion projects. In short, we need a genuine railway reform 2.0. The merger of DB Station&Service AG with DB Netz AG must only be the beginning.

What are your general expectations for the development of the rail sector in 2024?

I hope the trains will be more reliable and punctual again in 2024. We can't afford to be complacent in the European Championship year. The refurbishment of the Riedbahn immediately following the European Championships must also succeed.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

I have three big wishes for 2024: the federal and state governments will work together to develop the Deutschlandticket into a long-term model for success. In addition, the federal government and the industry will jointly succeed in launching the refurbishment of the high-performance corridors. And last but not least: the federal government, the federal states and the industry continue the InfraGo reform process at high pressure, preferably closely modelled on Austria.

are convinced that the corridor concept is the right approach on the way to sustainable rail transport. However, it also harbours immense challenges - not just for Spitzke, but for the entire industry.

In this respect, 2024 will also be characterised by the question of the extent to which we succeed in creating the framework conditions between the client and the executing companies so that the corridor projects will be successful.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

In principle, there will be no shortage of tasks for the industry in 2024. On the contrary. In addition to the corridor projects that are being launched in parallel, there will also be numerous projects in the existing network financed via LuFV III that are already in the tendering or planning phase. The outsourcing of the rail network to the non-profit organisation DB InfraGo AG is certainly another formative factor. A step in the right direction, without question, but also an ambitious one at a time when those involved are faced with a wide range of tasks.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

At Spitzke, we always endeavour to find the best and most efficient solution for the project. We want this approach to be fundamental to the entire industry. This means that we, from the legislator, the responsible authorities and the client to the executing companies, must work together to ensure that our limited resources are utilised as optimally as possible. In other words: de-bureaucratisation, accelerated planning and a general simplification of processes. In short, the time when we only discussed the development of the railway is over. Now we have to get down to doing!



Gottfried Rübmann,

Chairman of the Management Board of DEVK Versicherungen:

"The railway must become reliable again"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

As an insurer in the transport industry, the new perception of transport that is progressing with the mobility transition is also important for DEVK. We are doing our best to support employees in these challenging times. Our services also help transport companies to set themselves apart from other sectors as employers.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

The railway must once again become a reliable mode of transport. It is important to regain the trust of customers in passenger and freight transport by improving performance. This would also help companies to recruit the staff they need for the transport of tomorrow - probably one of the biggest challenges facing the rail sector in 2024 and the years to come.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

That the rail system network makes great progress in the technical framework conditions. To achieve this, however, it is necessary to secure sustainable and needs-orientated funding in the long term. Then there will also be people who are keen to prove themselves on and in this system.



Oliver Schuster,

CEO of rail technology provider Vossloh:

"Financing costs will rise"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

Worldwide population growth, urbanisation and globalisation are increasing the need to transport people and goods. At the same time, there is no alternative to rail as a green mode of mass transport in the fight against climate change, and the trend towards sustainable mobility is and will remain intact despite the tense economic and political situation worldwide. The Vossloh Group has benefited from this in recent years with immense growth rates. In order to be prepared for the expected further increase in demand, we will focus on expanding our capacities in the current year, including in Australia and Sweden. After years of constantly setting new sales records, we want to use 2024 as an opportunity to break through with a cushion of orders behind us. At the same time, we will expand our digitally based technology portfolio to include additional applications and further expand our partner network in this area. In this way, we will enable the transition from predominantly deadline-based to condition-based or predictive maintenance and thus make a significant contribution to increasing the availability of the railway infrastructure. This, in turn, is one of the key prerequisites for more traffic on the railway.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

With regard to railway infrastructure, we expect that higher factor costs - for example for personnel and energy - could have a negative impact on demand for goods. The same applies to significantly higher financing costs. As a result, this may lead to the postponement of projects. I would particularly like to emphasise the construction of new

affected. Nevertheless, I expect the global trend towards sustainable, green mobility to continue unabated. After all, the ambitious climate protection targets, such as those formulated for the European Union in the "Green Deal" and also laid down in a similar form in other parts of the world, have one thing in common: they simply cannot be achieved without a comprehensive expansion of the railway. At the same time, the demand for transport capacity for people and goods will increase steadily in the coming years, and in many countries, far too little has been invested in the railway and especially in the railways in recent decades.

invested in the railway infrastructure. We have been running on wear and tear for too long and must now act. Numerous governments around the world have recognised this and have launched investment programmes worth billions for rail infrastructure, from which Vossloh will benefit in the medium and long term thanks to its position as a leading global player.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

Above all, we hope that the many repeated declarations of intent and approved investment programmes worldwide will be followed by action, that projects will be implemented as planned and that the potential of the railways, by far the most sustainable mode of mass transport for goods and people, will finally be fully exploited. With regard to Germany, I would particularly like to see the initiated reforms regarding the planning and approval of rail projects continue to be driven forward and for us as suppliers to have sufficient planning security to be able to make important investment decisions, for example.



Chris Engelsmann,
Managing Director and co-founder of European Sleeper:

**"End climate-damaging
favouritism towards air travel"**

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

The procurement of additional, modernised sleeping cars for our current and future night train routes.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

Whether 2024 or another year: it depends on the will of politicians to end the climate-damaging favouritism towards air traffic.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

That the railway sector finally starts to think more internationally.



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Wolfgang Jahn,

Managing Director of the railway software provider Zedas:

"Advancing the use of AI"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

Our most important topics are the continuing high level of investment in the Zedas software suite. The aim is to continuously expand an end-to-end solution in which users can seamlessly integrate powerful functional modules, map their entire operating process and receive maintenance and service, including complete operational management if necessary, from a single source at low cost and around the clock. Following initial successes in the use of AI by Zedas users in 2023, we want to actively promote the use of AI in the railway sector together with customers and partners.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

- Fair competitive conditions for all those involved in freight transport.
- Increased digitalisation, automation and networking in the rail sector.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

The creation of framework conditions that promote a high level of willingness to invest on the part of public and private providers with the aim of realising a competitive, efficient, networked and digitalised rail sector.



Karsten Gruber,

Chairman of the Management Board Obermeyer Infrastructure:

"Making the civil engineering profession more attractive"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

One of the key issues is overcoming the shortage of skilled labour. This challenge is directly linked to the continuous expansion of the company's digital transformation. We want to

We want to use new technologies and digital methods to make the civil engineering profession more attractive and sustainable in order to attract new talent and inspire employees. In addition to long-term recruitment, the automation of planning and construction processes and the improvement of collaboration between all project participants will be a topic of the future that will occupy us in the coming year.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

Deutsche Bahn's success in passenger and freight transport depends largely on the attractiveness and reliability of the rail transport sector. A breath of fresh air is blowing in the railway sector right now - new, partnership-based contract models between the client, planning and construction industries as well as modern digital methods and processes are coming to life and filling everyone involved with confidence. However, following the budget-related ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court and the resulting decisions at federal level, it is now to be feared that investments that have already been promised and planned will be withheld or cancelled and that the railways' financial resources will return to the low level of previous decades.

falls behind. Due to the urgency of the measures, it is to be hoped that the funds already pledged for the refurbishment and renewal of existing buildings will be maintained. The use of partnership-based contract models and modern digital methods should also be continued jointly and unabatedly.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

As a customer and frequent traveller, I would first and foremost like to see Deutsche Bahn's services become much more attractive and reliable. In addition, a serious and genuinely desired integration of the planning and construction industry into the railway's processes could be an important step towards more successful cooperation and ultimately towards faster and more cost-effective planning, construction and operation. I also hope that Deutsche Bahn will implement the reorganisation in the infrastructure sector, keyword InfraGo, as quickly as possible and bring its service providers on board so that they can work with the client to provide the best possible service in the interests of rail-bound transport.



Alberto Nobis,

CEO of the wagon hire and rail logistics company VTG:

"We are expecting a turbulent year"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

For us, the political, regulatory and financial framework conditions for the railways and the German economy will be of the utmost importance in 2024. What is needed

clear commitments and corresponding measures by the German government in order to achieve the national political goals for rail freight transport by 2030 on the one hand and to strengthen Germany as a business and industrial location and make it fit for a decarbonised future on the other.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

The multiple geopolitical crises have put the German economy - and therefore also the rail sector - under severe pressure since 2020. Resilience is the order of the day, as a comprehensive easing of the situation is not foreseeable in 2024 either. We at VTG expect a challenging and turbulent year for the development of rail and rail freight transport, also in view of the latest traffic forecasts from the Federal Office of Logistics and Mobility.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

Our greatest wish is that the existing political promises of the traffic light coalition are followed by action and that companies in the railway sector finally have planning and investment security again. This includes not only securing funding for the maintenance and expansion of the rail infrastructure, such as the planned renovation of the high-performance corridors, but also development issues such as combined transport, single wagonload transport and digitalisation. If we fail to set the course for the future, the decarbonisation of the transport sector and the achievement of national climate protection targets by 2030 and 2045 will be a distant prospect.



Berthold Bartsch,

CEO of Powerlines, provider of overhead contact line systems:

"Challenging search for employees"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

Recruiting and training qualified new employees is certainly a major challenge. With our proactive approach, particularly through further training opportunities and promotion prospects, we believe we are well positioned to inspire new colleagues for the challenging jobs on our construction sites.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

The expansion of rail infrastructure is an important lever for achieving the climate targets set for transport, and we expect further initiatives to decarbonise local and long-distance transport in order to achieve these targets.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

Despite the ongoing crises in the world, the permanent and stable financing basis for the European railway sector.



Christian Heidersdorf,

Managing Director DVA - Deutsche Verkehrs- und Assekuranz Vermittlung:

"I would like to see more modal shift to rail"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

We want to continue to offer the best possible service for customised insurance solutions for our customers in the rail sector.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

I expect politicians to remain highly committed to expanding the rail infrastructure.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

That the logistics sector develops sustainable concepts with the rail freight companies that lead to a significant modal shift to rail.



Ludolf Kerkeling,

Chairman of the Board of Verband Die Güterbahnen:

"Carry out closures in a minimally invasive way"

What is the most important topic for your company in 2024?

The most important issue is and remains the difficult situation on the rail network. As an association, we are campaigning for stronger and multi-year funding for new construction and expansion, which is so urgently needed to meet future growth targets. In addition, the Riedbahn will show in the second half of the year how InfraGo will master this pilot project of so-called general refurbishment. As an association, we very much hope that the federal government and InfraGo will take both - refurbishment and new construction and expansion - equally seriously and that DB will carry out the upcoming closures for and with the companies in a minimally invasive manner.

What general expectations do you have for the development of the railway sector in 2024?

The government is at least verbally stating that it recognises the importance of rail in freight transport - which is a good thing. However, the realpolitik of the traffic lights does not match this. The announced 45 billion has not been realised since it was announced.

and most of the points in the coalition agreement that would make rail freight transport more competitive are still outstanding. I expect the government not to drag these plans into the last two months before the next election campaign. We can already see that the particularly contested area of CT, which offers great potential for growth in the rail sector, is not yet being realised, is currently falling behind. This will continue if the transport minister does not put in a determined year in the service of the railways.

What is your biggest wish for 2024?

I would like to see a stronger exchange between the government / Ministry of Transport and the private rail freight companies. We bring outstanding expertise to the table, the attention of which would strengthen cooperation between the players in the rail industry. This will be crucial for the further development of InfraGo in particular, as a mere merger will not be enough.



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