

# Transportation Management System (TMS) Buyers Guide

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## Introduction:

### **A comprehensive buyer's guide to choosing the right Transportation Management System (TMS) for enterprise shippers**

Transportation Management Systems (TMS) have come a long way in recent years. They are more robust and configurable given the emergence of cloud architecture boosted by enhanced integration capabilities, and now AI. A TMS today should enable more than just planning and bookkeeping, it should provide multi-party collaboration and real-time visibility that is essential for streamlined transportation operations.

First let's define what an enterprise shipper is. While there is no one correct answer, for our purposes we will consider enterprise shippers as companies whose are not logistics service providers but do have enough complexity in their supply chain that requires coordination of multiple internal and external parties to move goods across one, or multiple, mode(s) of transport in one, or multiple, region(s) of the globe. An enterprise shipper may only have tens of millions of dollars/euros in freight spend, has a handful of people in their transportation department, and contracts with a dozen or so carriers. On the larger end of the spectrum an enterprise shipper may have 100 million, or over a billion dollars/euros, in freight spend, contracts with hundreds of carriers, has dozens of people in transportation, and in many cases also has different business units (BU) where each BU may have different back-end systems that creates more complexity.

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If you find yourself looking to invest in your first true TMS or considering if it's time to replace or augment your current TMS, this buyers guide will help you understand the factors to consider and the process to evaluate alternatives. With a multitude of options available, making the right choice requires a thorough understanding of your specific business needs. As an enterprise shipper, you are fully aware of the crucial role of efficient transportation flows in your supply chain. The right TMS can drastically change the way you manage and optimize your transportation processes, leading to increased visibility, cost savings, enhanced customer satisfaction, and benefits to your supply chain processes that depend on transportation (manufacturing, distribution, etc.).

This buyer's guide aims to provide you with valuable information and guidance throughout your TMS journey. By addressing key questions, evaluating key differentiators, and considering the return on investment (ROI), this guide will help you select the best TMS for your organization's specific needs.

All the essential considerations will be covered, such as the scope of a TMS, its cost implications, the roll-out process, and the support you should expect. With this information you will be better equipped to make an informed decision that aligns with your business goals and objectives. In this buyer's guide you will find answers to:

- **What is a TMS, and why do you need one?**
- **What are the benefits of a TMS?**
- **What are the best-in-class capabilities to look for?**
- **What are the costs and benefits from implementing a TMS?**

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# Transportation Management: The basics



## What is a Transportation Management System?

Within the industry, different terms are being used to refer to a Transportation Management System (TMS) such as: Transportation Management Solution, Control Tower, Freight Management System, Transportation Management Platform, or simply Transport Management. Each of these terms can mean the same thing or people can mean a different type of solution, so it is always good to clarify what you mean with such a term. This document focuses on a shipper TMS that automates the processes to plan, execute, and optimize the physical movement of incoming and outgoing goods, as well as the communications and documents that enable that movement.

More specifically the basic business processes within a typical TMS include; sourcing, contract administration, rating, planning, execution, messaging, settlement, and analytics. More advanced business processes that some TMS support include; real-time visibility, dock appointment scheduling, yard management, and some TMS even provide capabilities for; private/dedicated fleet planning & dispatch, parcel shipping, and customs compliance.

Enterprise shipper TMS provides the features to optimize and manage shipments across all modes globally or domestically, manage visibility in the day-to-day transportation processes, validate invoicing, and track if freight and goods are delivered on time and within budget. A TMS helps organizations to improve their supply chain efficiency, reduce transportation and operational costs, and increase visibility and control over their logistics operations.



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# Transportation Management: The basics (continued)



## What is the difference between a TMS and a routing solution?

A TMS and a routing solution are both tools that can be used to help optimize transportation processes, but they differ in their primary scope.

A TMS is a comprehensive system as described above to manage all aspects of transportation operations where contract carriers are used across one or more modes. A private/dedicated fleet may be included in the scope of planning within a TMS, but a private/dedicated fleet is often not the only mode when a TMS is being utilized.

A routing solution is a tool that is specifically designed to optimize routes for a private or dedicated fleet. A routing solution can help to improve delivery/pickup efficiency, reduce fuel costs, and minimize the time required for drivers to complete their routes. A routing solution typically includes features such as route planning/optimization, dispatch, and route tracking. Driver management and fleet maintenance may also be included in a routing solution.

Many shippers use strict rules in an ERP, or other backend system, to control whether a shipment/load will be run on the fleet or by a contract carrier and send that load to the appropriate solution. A leading TMS can make this decision more smartly using costs and constraints to make an optimal assignment on whether your own fleet or a contract carrier will handle a shipment/load. A comprehensive TMS allows users to review automatic mode assignments.



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# What are the benefits of a Transportation Management System?



A transportation management system is a powerful tool that enables businesses to gain control over costs and achieve better visibility across their extended supply chain, which will result in higher customer satisfaction. This will provide a competitive edge, leading to more sales and increased revenue. Considering the ever-evolving global trade environment, it is important for businesses to have a system that will allow them to successfully navigate complex transportation processes, turn data into actionable insights, and provide a continuous improvement environment.

## The key benefits of using a TMS are:

- 1. Freight consolidation and rating:** A TMS helps to reduce costs by optimizing loads, mode, and carrier assignments. Increasing trailer utilization with multi-stop loads, using pool points, or selecting direct less than truckload modes when necessary, ensures that the best path and least cost carrier is chosen given customer expectations and cost considerations.
- 2. Freight Audit and Settlement:** The freight audit function verifies carrier invoices against rates and contracts, identifying overcharges and discrepancies before releasing invoices for payment. Pre-billing processes validate transportation charges before invoicing customers, reducing billing inaccuracies and disputes. By catching errors upfront, the TMS minimizes manual corrections, customer disputes, and delayed payments.
- 3. Improved visibility and control:** With a comprehensive TMS that has tight integrations with a real-time visibility platform, businesses can track their shipments in real-time, receive alerts on any issues, get predicted ETAs and gain better visibility into the entire transportation process for all stakeholders (internal and external). This helps companies identify potential problems before they occur to take corrective actions, which can prevent delays, reduce expedited shipments, improve customer satisfaction, and enhance overall supply chain performance.
- 4. Increased efficiency and reduced operational costs:** By automating transportation-related processes like; automated carrier selection, automated communication with carriers/forwarders, dock appointment scheduling/yard management, automatic document creation, etc. a TMS can help companies reduce the amount of time and resources required to manage their transportation operations. This allows companies to focus on more important aspects of their business and improve overall efficiency. Additionally, labor and resources in warehouses and production facilities can be optimized with visibility and alert capabilities. The ability to automatically communicate with your carriers/forwarders across all methods (EDI, API, etc.) is very important to enable these savings and is not something all TMS vendors offer in an effective way out of the box.

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# What are the benefits of a Transportation Management System? (continued)



- 5. Enhanced customer service:** With a TMS, companies can improve their delivery times, reduce errors, and provide better communication with their customers. This can help improve customer satisfaction and loyalty, which can lead to increased revenue and growth.
- 6. Data analysis and insights:** A TMS can provide companies with valuable data and insights into their transportation operations, such as carrier performance, shipping costs, and delivery times. This information can be used to make data-driven decisions that improve supply chain performance and optimize operations even outside transportation. Warehouse labor, inventory management, production planning, and sales can all benefit from the real-time data provided by a TMS.

- 7. Increased collaboration:** A TMS can help improve collaboration between different departments within a company, as well as with external partners such as carriers, vendors, and customers. This can lead to better coordination and more efficient supply chain operations. For example, adding capacity constraints for carriers can improve the rating and tendering process, streamlining the pre-shipment phase for shipments.
- 8. Better inventory management:** A TMS can help companies manage their inventory and safety stock levels more effectively. With real-time visibility into in-transit inventory and shipment statuses with predictive ETAs companies can reduce stockouts, reduce inventory carrying costs, and improve overall supply chain efficiency.

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# Comparing potential software and vendors



Now that you have a clear understanding of what a transportation management system (TMS) is and what benefits it can bring to your organization, let us get into what you should be looking for when evaluating potential transportation management software and vendors. From afar, transportation management solutions may look the same. However, in examining how the solutions deliver on their promise, there is more than meets the eye. The differences do not all lie in the software functions and pricing, but also in the strength of the implementation and customer success teams, as well as the reputation of the company itself.

Refer to the below key differentiators for comparing TMS providers when deciding whom to entrust your operations.

## What are the best-in-class TMS capabilities to look for?



- 1. Carrier connectivity:** The ability for your TMS to automatically communicate (e.g. tenders, bookings, instructions, documents, proof of delivery, etc.) with your carriers/brokers/forwarders is essential to realize operational savings (for you and your partners). A TMS without this capability is like a car without an engine, and while communicating across various standards is crucial, not all TMS providers offer this effectively without creating custom connections which add cost and time to your implementation. Lacking this capability will force manual processes, increase response times to disruptions, and affect the resilience of your transport operations.



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**2. Automatic Carrier/Mode Selection:** Selecting the cheapest, fastest, or most reliable mode and carrier helps companies reduce costs and meet customer service levels. Understanding whether Less-than-Truckload (LTL or Groupage) can be used versus Full Truckload (FTL) or parcel vs LTL and which carrier has the best rate and capacity is crucial. Examples of selection criteria include the lead time, carrier capacity, base rate, accessorials, the carrier's real-time visibility performance, and reliability of the carrier. Load tenders or booking requests should be capable of being sent to carriers/brokers/forwarders in a sequence following the order set in a routing guide or in simultaneous fashion if the lead time is short and you need to get the load booked with the provider that responds first.



**3. Consolidation/Optimization:** Reviewing all shipments for possible consolidations into multi-stop truckloads, utilizing private/dedicated fleets or contract carriers, or sending shipments through pool-points are key capabilities for a TMS. If two or more shipments with the same, or different, origins and destinations can be combined into one truck/container while meeting all constraints the total freight charge may be

less than if the shipments were sent separately. Similarly, analyzing smaller shipments for shipping to a nearby pool point where they can be combined into a trailer/container to share costs for parts of their journey. This capability requires sophisticated algorithms and good data on the characteristics of the freight and expectations on delivery times.



**4. Bid/Spot Booking:** The bid/spot booking process has a few different flavors. There are automated e-brokers that will return a rate in real-time to move a load. Shippers also can work through brokers/forwarders that will take some more time to calculate a spot rate before sending that cost information back to the shipper. There are also private bid boards where shippers can post a shipment/load and carriers/brokers/forwarders can 'bid' on moving the shipment. The shipper controls who can bid, the time period for bids to be submitted, and can pick the provider with the best rate and service. This capability is useful in cases where your regular carrier doesn't have capacity, or this is for a lane with very little volume with no contracted rates set up. This capability reduces risk and helps control costs.

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# Comparing Potential Software and Vendors (continued)



**5. Freight Charge Calculation:** Calculating the freight charges and additional costs within all kinds of dimensions, including all modes such as express, parcel, truckload, less-than-truckload (groupage), air, and ocean including additional accessorial costs such as ADR(Hazardous), lumper fees, and fuel/bunker. This information gives a clear insight into the total costs per shipment/load, including their additional costs. Additionally, a comprehensive TMS should be able to break out these costs across multiple shipments sharing equipment.



**6. Real-time visibility with ETA Calculation:** Seeing all updates on shipments throughout their journey, with predictive ETA calculations that utilize historic and real-time information like weather, traffic, customs status can be used by the receiving party to plan their resources and, if applicable, make agreements on delivery to the final customer, resulting in better customer service.



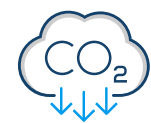
**7. Dock Appointment Scheduling – Yard Management:** With automated, carrier-facing solutions, dock scheduling can be automated and optimized to streamline operations, reduce detention charges, and provide a better carrier experience. Yard management bring inventory planning outside the warehouse and allows an overall view of goods and provides cost savings and labor efficiencies as well.



**8. Pre-Billing – Invoice Control:** Pre-billing ensures that the invoiced amounts match the agreed freight rates. All the information can be sent to the accounts payable system with the appropriate data. Invoice Control provides full control on the freight invoices with a minimum of effort. Once the carrier's invoice specification is uploaded, the amounts are checked against the freight charges and surcharges approved by the solution so the payment can be released.



**9. Business Intelligence:** With a BI tool you can easily analyze the data from any viewpoint with only a few clicks, run performance reports and see graphical data that provide a clear overview of your supply chain and allows for KPI tracking, continuous improvements, vendor/customer performance monitoring and overall better decision making.



**10. Sustainability:** A TMS provides visibility in your transportation processes and collects a massive amount of data. This data will be helpful in complying with the ever-growing regulations worldwide concerning greenhouse gas (GHG) emission calculation and it forms a solid base for sustainable transportation decisions at any level.

## MODES COVERED

- Truckload/Road
- Fleet
- LTL/Groupage
- Ocean
- Rail/Intermodal
- Air
- Parcel

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# How to find the perfect shipper TMS for your organization?



Making the right choice for your organization starts with asking the right questions. Are you not sure where to start with your RFP/RFIs? No worries, we have created this outline of steps to take in your selection process. If you want to see specific examples of questions to ask of a TMS vendor please see our [‘TMS RFP Example RFP Questions’](#) document.



## 1. Identify stakeholders and define your goals

A good first step is to select the right group of stakeholders for your TMS project. They will help you in selecting the right solution depending on the business’ needs and values. These stakeholders should come from different groups and represent the different functions the TMS will enable. Some of these people should come from outside transportation (customer service, warehousing, finance, sales, etc.). This team should start by setting goals with executives for the transportation management system. Determine the return on investment you want to see, and what processes you need the system to support. What are the current manual activities that you would like to have automated? Which data is currently not readily available in your systems that a new TMS can provide? It is important to understand your current processes (even those not in transportation, but rely on transportation), your current shipping volumes by modes, and the number of nodes and partners in your network.



## 2. Identify your transportation needs

Once your goals are defined, you should get into the details of the processes and back-end systems that support each goal. Be careful not to simply require a new TMS to replicate everything you’re doing today but just in an automated process. Really think about what business value can be unlocked without having your current technical limitations. A best practice is to have different categories of needs; must-have functionalities, nice-to-have, future need, etc. It is important to gather feedback from different lines of business if you have them and different regions as well to ensure that you capture all requirements across the business.

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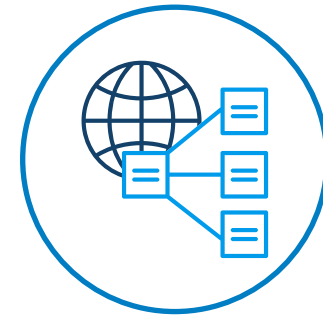
### 3. Research potential vendors

Conduct thorough research on available transportation management vendors that meet your requirements. Talk with industry peers who use different solutions. Look at the health and financial structure of vendors. Are they backed by venture capital or private equity, are they a publicly traded company etc.?



### 4. Evaluate the vendor and software

Create a list of selection criteria including modifiers to adjust to their importance to your business and rank each vendor based on their system's performance and how it will meet your requirements. Conduct live demos, customer reference calls, and review the implementation and support services as they are just as important as the functionality of the software. Understand the pricing model involved and expected total cost for the software and the cost to implement it.



### 5. Make your final selection

Based on your evaluation, you will have all the necessary information for making a grounded decision. Then you can start preparing your plan for implementation. This would include training staff, reviewing, and updating processes.

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# Cost Considerations



It is essential to consider the size of your organization, the scale of your transportation operations and the specific functionalities you need when evaluating TMS. For a smaller shipper, not every solution will make sense from a cost and implementation standpoint, and some TMS vendors have focused on meeting the needs of those smaller shippers.

For details on different TMS pricing strategies you can read our article '**How much are the recurring costs of a shipper TMS?**' Basically, there are transaction-based fees determined by the number of expected transactions in a month. Transactions are typically shipments, but if other solutions are used in conjunction with the TMS, there could also be fees based on the number of messages sent between partners, or dock appointments scheduled etc. In addition to software fees, you should understand the effort and costs for implementation, training, and any on-going support/maintenance fees.

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# Implementation Services



For a TMS to deliver the expected value, it must be implemented correctly to actually improve/automate the related business processes. Implementation will require integrations to multiple systems, as well as the configuration of workflows and parameters, plus the population of dozens of data tables that will also require seamless update processes to ensure that the TMS can continue to be utilized as designed even as the supply chain changes (physically, and in terms of logistics partners).

Many TMS vendors have their own implementation services, while some vendors work with third parties for integration and implementation. There are also instances where a hybrid approach is undertaken, where the TMS vendor and a third-party consultant or systems integrator team up to perform the implementation if there are complementary areas of expertise, whether that be in change management, systems integration, training, etc.

In many cases a TMS may be implemented in stages with different functions going live at different times. This can reduce the risk in the implementation but can also extend the timeframe to capture the full value from the TMS. Your implementation partner should develop a thorough understanding of the current business processes and systems (including manual processes, emails, phone calls, etc.) that are part of what the TMS will need to replace/augment moving forward. It is important to note that the TMS should not simply automate everything that is being performed today. Shippers should take this opportunity to consider alternate workflows and strategies that a TMS can enable. A strong implementation partner can help make these determinations.

With a clear understanding of the business, a project plan can be put together that will identify the critical tasks, the people responsible for delivering on those tasks, the timing, risk mitigation strategies, and milestone/budget tracking.

When choosing a TMS, it's important to understand how the implementation will be managed. How much effort will be required from your organization and determining the right level of support that is needed from the vendor or other service providers. Even the best TMS can be implemented poorly with disastrous results. Ensuring you have the budget for implementation and training considered early in the selection process will help you on your journey to transform your operations.



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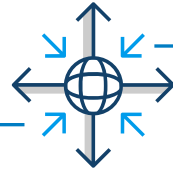
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# Quantify the benefits



- **Increased operational efficiency & productivity** - A TMS automates transportation processes, reducing errors and optimizing operations for improved efficiency. By automating bookings/tenders, communication, automatically generating documents, a TMS can typically lead to administrative labor cost savings between 15% and 50%.
- **Optimized Carrier/Service/Mode/Load planning** - Studies have shown that companies can achieve freight spending savings of between 3% and 15% after implementing a TMS with optimization capabilities.
- **Reduce Fees and Charges** –OTIF charges, detention fees, and claims can be reduced by over 50% with better planning and real-time visibility
- **Warehouse labor reduction** – With dock scheduling and predictive ETAs a TMS can reduce warehouse labor costs by 5%-10%
- **More sustainable processes** – A TMS will consolidate loads, reducing fuel consumption and carbon emissions for greater sustainability and enable GHG reporting
- **Improved customer experience** – Giving visibility and real-time updates, combined with proactive issue resolution, will reduce stockouts, enhance customer satisfaction and expand sales and grow revenues
- **Data-driven insights** – TMS provides valuable data and analytics, allowing organizations to continually improve and perform root cause analysis, identify trends, and optimize their supply chain



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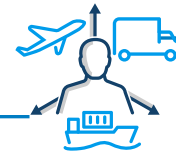
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# Shipper Transportation Management System with Descartes



## The shipper TMS for minimizing transportation costs while maximizing service

The Descartes shipper TMS solution provides a cloud-based TMS to several of the world's leading companies. Customers benefit from a rich, functional solution that handles all global logistics requirements. Descartes Shipper TMS customers use the solution to manage both inbound and outbound transportation for millions of shipments per month. The Descartes Shipper TMS modular solution approach covers all global logistics requirements combined with the largest network of connected carriers and forwarders provides customers with unparalleled automation and cost saving benefits with an accelerated time-to-value.

| CAPABILITY |  | VALUE   |  |  |
|------------|--|---|--|--|
|            | <b>Carrier Connectivity</b>                      | Save 5-10 minutes per booking/tender            | Largest network of connected partners                | Integrations to ERP and back-end systems                               |
|            | <b>Consolidation/Optimization</b>                | Reduce transportation costs 3% to 15%           | Multi-mode, multi-leg, global                        | True fleet vs. for-hire optimization                                   |
|            | <b>Bid/Spot Booking/Tendering</b>                | Find best rate, reduces risk, improve on-time % | Automated bid initiation and carrier inclusion       | Extension of standard booking/tendering process                        |
|            | <b>Real-time visibility with ETA Calculation</b> | Charges and fees can be reduced by over 50%     | Predictive ETAs, highest compliance rate in industry | Give visibility and real-time updates to customers and internal groups |
|            | <b>Dock Appt Scheduling Yard Mgt</b>             | Reduce warehouse labor costs by 5%-10%          | Carrier-facing appointment solution                  | Turn equipment faster, become Shipper of Choice                        |

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# Why Descartes?



## Uniting the People and Technology that Move the World

Descartes has one single purpose: to automate and optimize the logistic process of its customers and constantly innovate to improve its customers' operations.

## Multimodal, Multiparty, and Global

Descartes' comprehensive solution allows for true global optimization and management across all modes. Descartes is the only provider that delivers a complete TMS with industry leading fleet routing, parcel shipping, real-time visibility, and the largest network of connected carriers. There is no need to stitch together TMS solutions from different vendors.

## Operational & Financial Strength

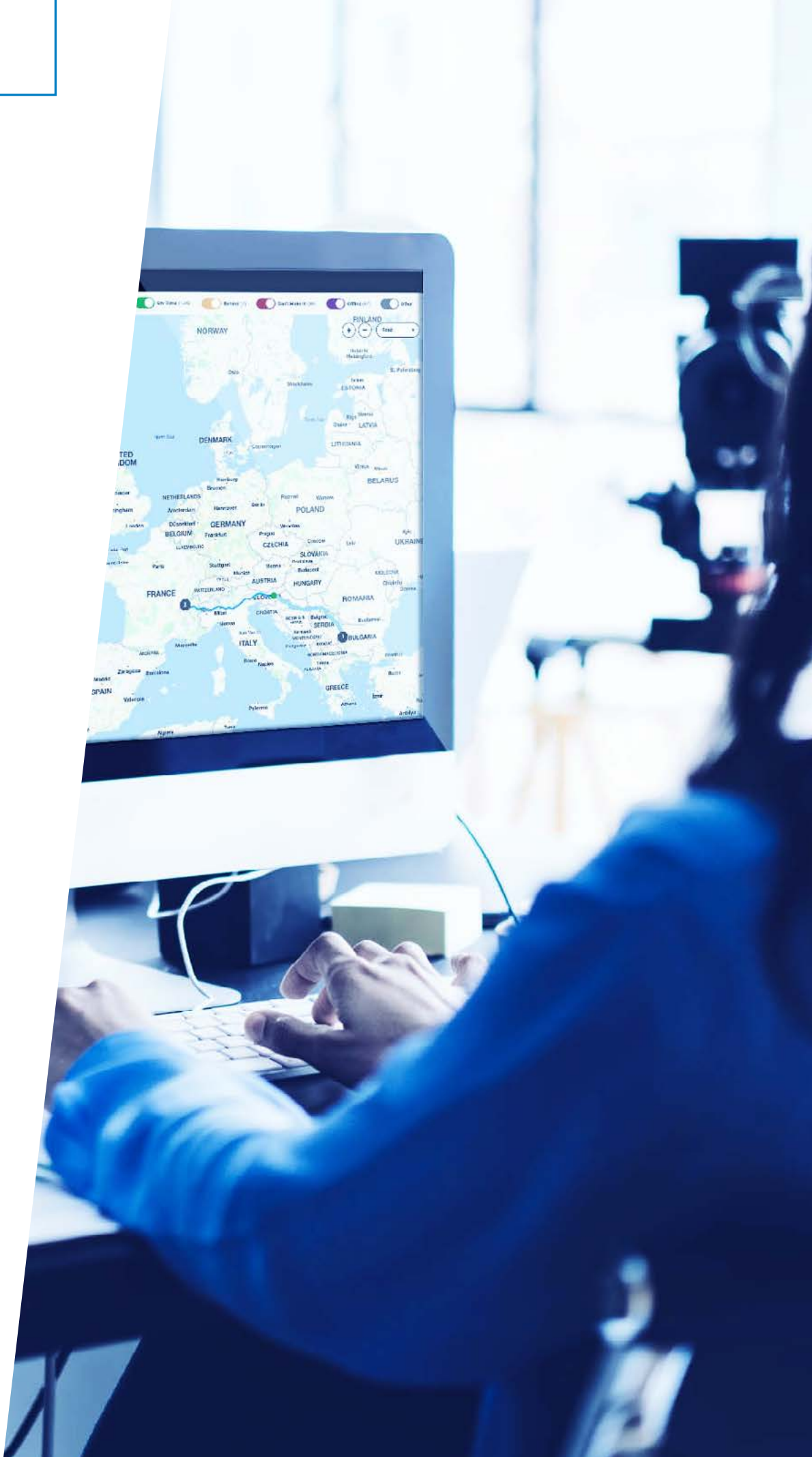
With 26,000+ customers worldwide, over \$520M of annual revenue and 2,100+ employees. Descartes's financial health allows it to lead the industry in innovation investment, customer success, and provide stability for your logistics and supply chain projects today and into the future.

## Let us assist you

Investing in the right Transportation Management Solution is half the battle in transforming your transformation processes. Are you ready to move forward with optimizing and digitizing your transportation operations? Are you looking to connect carriers more efficiently? Do you still have a whole list of questions and no clear vision of where to start?

We are more than happy to help you on your journey. You can always reach out to one of our experts for advice on your specific transportation management project or for additional information/ we look forward to partnering with you to answer any questions you might have and help you determine with TMS would make the perfect fit for your organization.

Contact us via [info@descartes.com](mailto:info@descartes.com) or visit the TMS pages on our website: [www.descartes.com/solutions/transportation-management](http://www.descartes.com/solutions/transportation-management)



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# About Descartes



Descartes (Nasdaq:DSGX) (TSX:DSG) is the global leader in providing on-demand, software-as-a-service solutions focused on improving the productivity, performance and security of logistics-intensive businesses. Customers use our modular, software-as-a-service solutions to route, schedule, track and measure delivery resources; plan, allocate and execute shipments; rate, audit and pay transportation invoices; access global trade data; file customs and security documents for imports and exports; and complete numerous other logistics processes by participating in the world's largest, collaborative multimodal logistics community. Our headquarters are in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada and we have offices and partners around the world.

Learn more at [Descartes.com](https://www.descartes.com) and connect with us on [LinkedIn](#).

## DESCARTES

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Uniting the People & Technology  
That Move the World



Network.



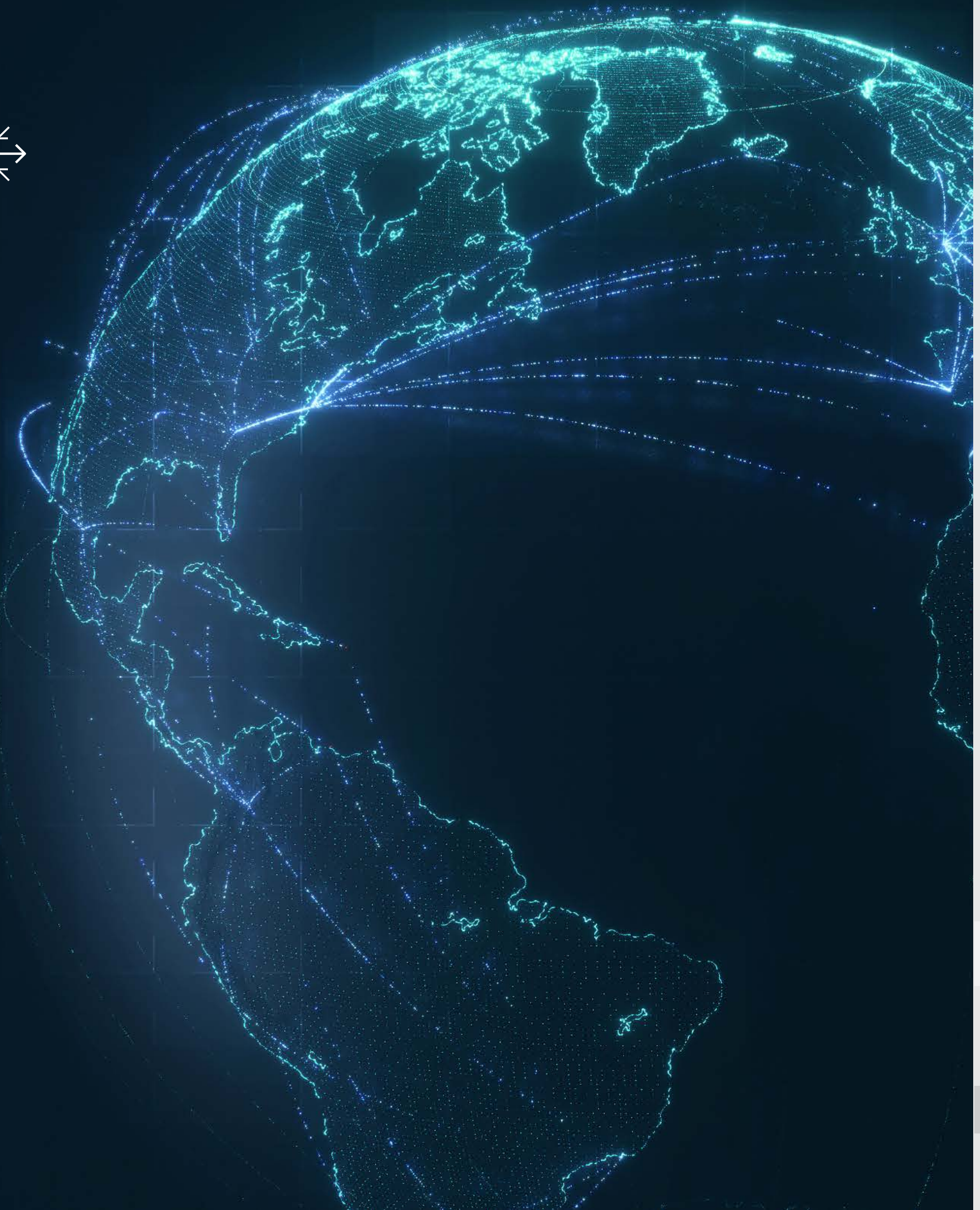
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