

“The world is getting more complex”

“We have to use infrastructure in a clever way. Our target must be in cities and ports, to avoid traffic jams and keep the traffic flowing,” says Port of Hamburg CEO Jens Meier.

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PHOTO ANTERO AALTONEN

Almost five years ago, Port of Hamburg CEO **Jens Meier** joined colleagues in Los Angeles, Antwerp, Barcelona, Lausanne and other ports to share data.

“We shared our knowledge,” Meier said. “We shared our ideas. That is the chain-port networking, so efficient in so many areas.”

Upcoming threats in the realm of cybersecurity makes data sharing mandatory to the world’s leading ports, but data sharing also helps in sorting one of the largest challenges facing the maritime industry today: traffic management.

Disentangling traffic has been one of the major benefits of data sharing in Hamburg, third busiest in Europe behind Rotterdam and Antwerp. Meier, chairman of the port’s executive board since 2008, uses the combined knowledge to help keep traffic moving through the port as well as the surrounding northern Germany city of almost two million residents, as well as ensuring that the supply chain is efficient.

“If you look at real statistics in many ports, I can guarantee you that you have a percentage of close to 40 percent empty trucks. Avoid that. Try to implement platforms where you can pick up goods, that’s a win-win. Empty trucks bring nothing; you only lose money. From an ecological standpoint it’s also important that we avoid that and give the residential people the chance to get through a city much smoother.”

In Hamburg, Meier has implemented a project called Mozart to help with traffic management based on traffic-flow patterns.



“We work with the city because we want to serve the interface between port and city to make traffic management more efficient than today,” he said. “When you visit the Port of Hamburg, you’ll see that traffic flow is quite good. We’ve invested heavily in sensors, in traffic-light management, and in technology that makes it safe, secure, and in a much better way than before.”

“The dream at the end is we can combine everything. There’s a vessel coming up, a container has a final destination and we’ve got an optimizer to put in on a train, a truck or a small vessel to reach the final destination – to balance all that out to use the empty capacity and integrate all modes of transport.”

Hamburg began working in 2018 with Nokia and other companies to implement 5G technology to help with traffic management.

“We were the central test bed for the European Union,” Meier said.

It’s all about keeping the supply chain – or, as Meier calls it, the demand chain – efficiently moving with innovative solutions.

“We are working with rail operators, with freight forwarders,” he said. “Freight forwarders don’t like to be

stuck in a traffic jams, so we bring people together and we look at facts and figures. What would be the right place to move from a truck to a train before being stuck in a traffic jam?”

“But we also have meetings with production companies, from the textile industry, for example, and they tell us they have to make sure a container has to be removed from vessel quicker so they can bring it into their central distribution center to make sure the stuff of the new collection that they have already advertised is on their shelves in the shops on Monday morning. The customer perspective is much more interesting to me than just looking at a shipping line or a rail operator wanting to optimize themselves.”

“We have to use infrastructure in a clever way, before something happens,” Meier said. “Our target must be in cities and ports, to avoid traffic jams and keep the traffic flowing. That’s what we think about.”

In meeting future carbon-emissions targets, Meier said Hamburg is looking less at electric technology and more toward future solutions, such as hydrogen.

“We don’t believe that batteries are the future,” he said. “We think that future technology is the future. We try to invest and look at that because battery technology is just for city movement. But if you have long distances and heavy goods, we believe you need something for the future.”

And with future threats from cybersecurity, ports must be more vigilant.

“The world is getting more complex,” Meier said. “Complexity, as a single thing, is not a threat. To make things unnecessarily complicated is a threat. To share knowledge, to work with the complexity, that is a key factor for success, to be able to work with the complexity and find the best solutions for the customers’ needs. That’s what we’re working on, while trying to avoid threats coming from the cyber side.” ✕