

THE COMPLETE TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (TMS) BUYER'S GUIDE

How to Choose the Right TMS and Stop Wasting Money on Freight





Stop guessing. Start optimizing.

Choosing the wrong Transportation Management System can cost you hundreds of thousands in wasted spend, manual work, and missed opportunities.

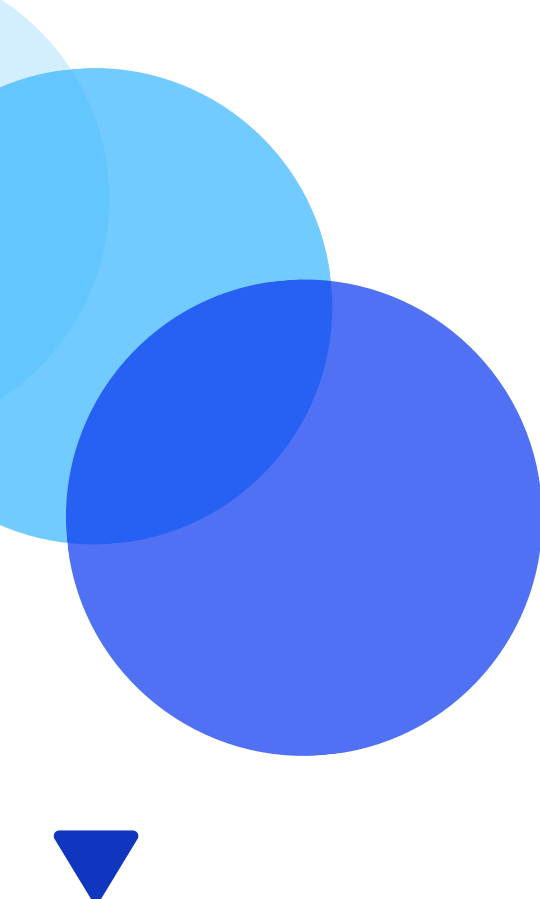
But choosing the right one? That's how you transform your freight operation from a cost center into a strategic advantage.

This guide shows you exactly what to look for in a TMS, how to evaluate vendors, and the critical questions to ask before you buy.

Included in the buyer's guide:

- 6 core capabilities every TMS must have
- How to assess your current operation
- The hidden costs of the wrong TMS
- A vendor evaluation framework
- Real-world implementation considerations
- How to calculate ROI before you buy





WHY YOUR CURRENT APPROACH ISN'T WORKING.

Most companies manage freight the way they managed it five years ago. Email quotes. Spreadsheet comparisons. Multiple carrier portals. Manual consolidation analysis. No real-time visibility.

It's inefficient. It's error-prone. And it's costing you.

You're probably leaving 10-15% in optimization opportunity on the table because you can't see your operation clearly. You're spending hours on manual work that should be automated. You're making decisions with incomplete data.

A Transportation Management System (TMS) is supposed to solve this. But not all TMS platforms are created equal. Some are tracking dashboards. Some are quoting tools. Some are so complicated they require a PhD to navigate.

The right TMS should be a unified command center for your entire freight operation. It should give you visibility, control, and

data-driven decision-making. This guide shows you how to find it.





A Transportation Management System is software that helps you manage freight transportation across your network. It typically covers:

- Shipment planning and visibility
- Carrier selection and quoting
- Load building and consolidation
- Rate management and negotiation
- Performance tracking and reporting
- Cost analysis and spend intelligence

WHAT A TMS IS (AND WHAT IT ISN'T)

A TMS is not:

- Just a tracking tool (tracking is one feature, not the whole product)
- Just a rate negotiation tool (critical but incomplete)
- A replacement for strategy (it enables strategy, not replaces it)
- A solution that works without proper implementation
- A system that makes decisions for you (it provides data; you decide)

The best TMS is a unified platform that brings together visibility, carrier management, quoting, and cost intelligence into one system. It eliminates the need to jump between email, spreadsheets, and carrier portals.



6 CORE CAPABILITIES EVERY TMS NEEDS

When evaluating TMS vendors, look for these six capabilities. If a platform doesn't deliver on all six, keep looking.

1. Real-Time Network Visibility

You should see what's happening across your entire freight network right now. Not yesterday. Not after a report runs. Now. This means:

- Live shipment tracking across all modes and carriers
- Status updates that reflect current reality
- Exception alerts that flag problems before they escalate
- Dashboard customization so each team sees what matters to them

Without real-time visibility, you're always one step behind. You react to problems instead of preventing them.

2. Integrated Carrier Quoting and Negotiation

You should be able to source freight, compare bids, and manage negotiations all in one place. This includes:

- Direct quoting to your carrier network without email
- Bid comparison based on rate, service, and performance
- Shipment-level negotiation for complex shipments
- Load tender management through the platform
- Acceptance tracking in real-time

Email quotes are dead. Spreadsheet comparisons are dead. If your TMS doesn't handle quoting and negotiation natively, you're still doing it the old way.

3. Comprehensive Carrier Performance Data

You need to know which carriers are actually performing. Not based on gut feel. Based on data. This means:

- On-time delivery tracking by carrier, lane, and mode
- Cost performance metrics (are they charging what they should?)
- Exception and incident tracking (damage, delays, service failures)
- Historical performance (trends over time, not just last shipment)
- Benchmarking capability (carrier vs. carrier comparison)





4. Spend Intelligence and Cost Visibility

You need complete clarity on where every dollar goes in freight. This includes:

- Spend breakdown by carrier, lane, mode, and cost component
- Cost per unit tracking (the metric that actually matters)
- Trend analysis (month-over-month, year-over-year)
- Lane economics (which routes are most expensive?)
- Cost component breakdown (base freight, fuel, accessorials, exceptions)

Most companies can't answer basic spend questions. A good TMS makes this visible.

5. Easy Integration With Existing Systems

The TMS should work WITH your operation, not force you to rebuild around it. This means:

- API integrations to your ERP, WMS, accounting systems
- Data import/export capabilities
- No duplicate data entry (information flows between systems)
- Built by logistics people, not software engineers (they understand your world)

If a TMS requires expensive IT implementation or forces you to change your business processes, it's the wrong tool.

6. Built for Decision-Making, Not Data Overwhelming

A bad TMS gives you so much data you're paralyzed. A good TMS gives you exactly what you need to make decisions. This means:

- Customizable dashboards (your team sees what matters)
- Actionable reporting (highlights what's important)
- Automated alerts (flags problems before they escalate)
- Mobile access (you can check status from anywhere)
- Clear, visual KPIs (metrics that make sense at a glance)





ASSESSING YOUR CURRENT OPERATION

Before you start looking at vendors, understand where you stand. Answer these questions honestly:





Visibility:

- Can you see all your shipments in real-time?
- Do you know the status of shipments without logging into multiple carrier portals?
- Can you identify consolidation opportunities?
- Do you have visibility into your entire network?

Carrier Management:

- Do you know which carriers are actually performing best?
- Can you compare carrier performance systematically?
- Are your carrier relationships strategic or transactional?
- Do you have data to back up your carrier selections?

Cost and Spend:

- Do you know your cost per unit shipped?
- Can you break down your spend by carrier, lane, and mode?
- Do you know which shipments are most profitable?
- Can you identify cost trends month-over-month?

Process Efficiency:

- How much time do you spend on manual freight work (email, spreadsheets, portal checking)?
- How many systems do you jump between to manage freight?
- How many manual consolidation analyses do you do?
- How long does it take to generate a freight report?

Decision-Making:

- Are you making freight decisions with complete information?
- Do you rely on anecdotal data or gut feel?
- Can you answer "what if" questions (what if we changed carriers, consolidated differently, etc.)?
- Are your decisions reactive or strategic?

The Audit:

Rate yourself on each area (1-5 scale, with 5 being excellent). Areas where you score below 3 are opportunities for improvement. A good TMS should address most of these gaps.



COSTS OF THE WRONG TMS (OR NO TMS AT ALL)

- **Manual Labor Burden:** Someone is spending 20+ hours a week managing freight manually. At \$50/hour fully loaded, that's \$50K+ annually just in labor cost.
- **Missed Consolidation Opportunities:** You're missing 30-40% of potential consolidation savings. For a \$5M freight spend, that's \$150K-\$200K annually.
- **Suboptimal Carrier Relationships:** You're booking based on rates, not performance. You're paying more for less reliability.
- **Spend Visibility Gap:** You don't know where your money is going, so you can't optimize it. 5-10% of spend is waste you never find.
- **Process Inefficiency:** Multiple systems, multiple handoffs, manual data entry errors. This creates confusion, delays, and mistakes.
- **Decision Quality:** Decisions made with incomplete data are usually wrong decisions. You think you're saving 5% but losing 8%.

Total Hidden Cost: \$250K-\$450K+ annually (in direct and indirect costs)



PRICE OF THE RIGHT TMS

- **Software License:** \$5K-\$25K annually (depending on vendor and complexity)
- **Implementation:** \$10K-\$50K (one-time, varies by complexity)
- **Training:** \$2K-\$10K (one-time, included with many implementations)
- **Annual Support:** \$5K-\$15K

Total: \$22K-\$100K annually (in software and support costs)

But the benefits:

- Eliminate 50% of manual labor (\$25K+ savings)
- Find 10-15% in consolidation and optimization (\$100K-\$150K savings)
- Better carrier decisions and relationships (\$25K-\$75K savings)
- Visibility and data-driven decision-making (5-10% operational improvement)
- Total annual benefit: \$150K-\$300K+

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Choosing the right TMS pays for itself in 2-4 months. Choosing the wrong one or avoiding the decision costs you hundreds of thousands.





ALTERNATIVE TMS PRICING MODEL

Supply Chain Solutions uses a different approach entirely — one designed to align vendor success with your success.

How It Works:

- **TMS Fee:** You pay based on monthly shipment volume tracked in the platform.
- **Non-SCS-Managed Shipments:** Charged according to volume, only for shipments you're managing yourself or through a third party.
- **SCS-Managed Shipments:** No TMS charge for shipments managed by Supply Chain Solutions.

Why This Model Is Different

We're incentivized to manage your shipments. The more we manage on your behalf, the less you pay in TMS fees. Our success is measured by reducing your costs, not increasing your spend.

You control your cost structure. The more SCS manages your freight, the lower your TMS fees. You benefit from our expertise and infrastructure.

You maintain flexibility. You can self-manage some shipments while we manage others. No lock-in. No penalties.





HOW TO EVALUATE TMS VENDORS

If a vendor can't deliver on your must-haves, eliminate them. This filters your list dramatically.

Step 1: Define Your Must-Haves vs. Nice-to-Haves

Common must-haves:

- Real-time visibility across all carriers
- Integrated quoting and negotiation
- Carrier performance tracking
- Spend intelligence and reporting
- API integrations with your ERP/WMS
- Ease of use (designed by logistics people)

Nice-to-haves:

- Advanced predictive analytics
- Specific industry features
- Particular language support
- Custom branding



Step 2: Do Your Homework

Before talking to vendors:

- Talk to peers in your industry who use TMS platforms
- Look at case studies (how did similar companies benefit?)
- Understand the vendor's roadmap (where are they going?)
- Check financial stability (will they still be in business in 5 years?)
- Determine if the TMS was built by logistics experts or tech experts (better to be built by people who know the industry)

Step 3: Request Demos (With Your Team)

- Don't just watch a generic demo. Prepare specific scenarios your team faces.
- Bring your procurement, operations, and finance teams. Each team sees different value in the platform.

During the demo:

- Ask to see real data (not demo data)
- Walk through your actual workflows (not their ideal workflows)
- Test the user interface (can your team figure it out without training?)
- Ask about integration with your specific systems
- Understand the implementation timeline
- Ask about ongoing support and training



Step 4: Create a Scoring Framework

Build a simple spreadsheet scoring each vendor (1-5 on key criteria):

Capability	Must-Have?	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
Visibility	Yes	5	4	5
Quoting	Yes	3	5	4
Carrier Tracking	Yes	4	4	3
Spend Intel	Yes	5	5	4
Integration	Yes	4	3	3
Ease	Yes	5	5	5
Reputation	Yes	2	4	4
Price	Yes	5	5	3
Reporting	Yes	4	4	5

Score only must-haves for the decision. Nice-to-haves help break ties.

Step 5: Reference Checks

Ask each vendor for references from companies similar to yours. Then actually call them. Ask:

- How long did implementation take?
- Did the vendor meet expectations?
- What's the support quality like?
- Would you choose them again?
- What surprised you (good or bad)?
- What would you change if you could?





COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Mistake 1: Choosing Based on Price Alone

The cheapest TMS isn't the best value. A \$10K/year system that saves you 10% of freight spend is better value than a \$3K/year system that saves you 2%.

Mistake 2: Choosing Without Alignment Across Teams

Your procurement team, operations team, and finance team all have different needs. Make sure the TMS works for all of them.

Mistake 3: Not Planning for Implementation

A great TMS implemented poorly is a bad TMS. Build in time, budget, and resources for proper implementation.

Mistake 4: Choosing a System That's Too Complex

Bells and whistles don't matter if your team can't use them. Choose a system that fits your complexity level.

Mistake 5: Not Integrating With Your Existing Systems

A TMS that doesn't talk to your ERP or WMS creates data silos and manual work.

Mistake 6: Not Establishing Success Metrics Upfront

Define what success looks like before you implement. Then measure it.





NEXT STEPS

We created SCS TMS for inventory-centric, mid-market, businesses that are often overlooked by the massive logistics providers and misunderstood by Silicon Valley private-equity-led tech firms.



Josh Halgrimson
President and CEO

You now understand what a good TMS should do, how to evaluate vendors, and how to think about ROI. Your next steps:

- 1. Assess your current operation.** Use the audit questions from Section 4. Understand where you stand.
- 2. Define your must-haves.** What capabilities are non-negotiable for your operation?
- 3. Request demos.** Bring your team. Walk through your actual workflows.
- 4. Do reference checks.** Talk to customers of each vendor.
- 5. Calculate ROI.** Understand the financial impact of improving decision-making and reducing manual labor.
- 6. Make a decision.** Choose the vendor that best fits your needs and budget.
- 7. Plan implementation carefully.** Build in time, budget, and team resources.
- 8. Measure success.** Track against your baseline and success metrics.



SCS TMS



For inventory-centric businesses that depend on the timely delivery of goods and materials, visibility alone isn't enough. Shippers need immediate insight into what's happening across their network, and the ability to act on it.

Our proprietary TMS is designed to deliver exactly that: a powerful, intuitive

platform that brings together real-time data, operational visibility, and strategic insight into a single, unified view.

At the core of the platform are customizable info blocks that power decision-making. Get instant, always-on access to the metrics that matter most, without digging through reports or manually pulling data into a spreadsheet.

REAL-TIME NETWORK VISIBILITY

LOGISTICS PERFORMANCE

COST INTELLIGENCE

SCHEDULE A DEMO

SCS TMS is designed specifically for shippers who need more than just tracking. It's a unified command center for managing freight transportation: real-time visibility, integrated quoting and negotiation, carrier performance tracking, and spend intelligence — all in one platform.

If you're evaluating a TMS or want to optimize your freight operation, schedule a demo. We'll show you how our platform silences the noise of freight management and gives you time back in your workday.



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About Supply Chain Solutions

Supply Chain Solutions is a leading managed transportation specialist built on integrity. We combine 30+ years of transportation expertise, proprietary TMS technology, and a battle-tested optimization process to help shippers build supply chain strategies they can count on. Our TMS is a unified command center for managing freight transportation: real-time visibility, integrated quoting and negotiation, carrier performance tracking, and spend intelligence — all in one platform. Designed by logistics people (not software engineers), it's the SCS TMS is built for how you actually work.