



3.A: Rivers of opportunity: Unlocking inland waterways for urban and long-distance freight

Friday 24th October – 9:00 am to 10:10 am

Session hosted by Elvina Nowak (elvina.nowak@etp-alice.eu), Project manager, and coordinated by Nik Delmeire (nik.delmeire@etp-alice.eu), Senior Expert and Marion Cottet (marion.cottet@etp-alice.eu), Urban Logistics Deputy Programme Manager/Project Manager.

Linked exhibitors: [MULTIRELOAD](#), [CRISTAL](#), [FOREMAST](#), [PLOT](#), [IKIGAI](#) and [DECARBOMILE](#)

Session teaser:

Rivers of opportunity are flowing through Europe's cities and regions: from hinterland to urban nodes. As the EU pushes for decarbonization, inland waterways stand out as a clean, efficient, and underused alternative for both urban and long-distance freight. By better connecting rivers and canals with city logistics and TEN-T corridors, we can cut congestion, lower emissions, and boost resilience and achieving EU objectives in terms of the increase of Inland Waterways Transport. This session brings together policymakers, innovators, and practitioners to explore real use cases, breakthrough solutions, and future policy directions—unlocking the full potential of Europe's waterways for sustainable logistics.

Session Description:

Europe faces the urgent need to accelerate the increase of use of Inland Waterways Transport to meet its climate and sustainability objectives. While inland waterways represent one of the most energy-efficient and low-emission modes, their potential remains underutilized—particularly in urban contexts. The European Union, through strategies such as NAIADES III and projects like PLATINA 4, is pushing for a drastic increase in the share of inland waterway transport within the TEN-T network and local supply chains. Yet, challenges remain: limited integration with last-mile logistics, fragmented governance between cities and ports, and the need for innovative vessels, terminals, and digital solutions may hamper the use of inland waterways transport within local framework. We believe that linking urban areas with inland waterways opens new opportunities to reduce congestion, cut emissions, and enhance resilience, while contributing to the broader European Green Deal goals.

Logistics in city centres face several challenges including the limited availability (and high cost) of space, congestion, environmental and noise pollutions.

In this context, rivers and canals offer an alternative path that could ease urban freight flows on roads and streets and contribute to the liveability of cities, as well as their climate goals.

This session will bring together policymakers, innovators, and practitioners to explore the opportunities and challenges of inland waterway transport as a whole, but also in the context of urban logistics. The discussions will connect to future EU research and innovation calls and policy directions, helping to define next steps for mainstreaming inland waterways into Europe's logistics ecosystem.

This session will be in two folds:

- Firstly, Jef Bauwens from De Vlaamse Waterweg will bring the Inland Waterway Transport under the PI principles. Is Inland navigation ready for the Physical Internet? We will get a presentation of 20 minutes followed by an interactive discussion with attendees and panellists.
- The second part of the session will be mainly focused on discussing barriers and challenges faced by Inland Waterway and also opportunities to connect the hinterland with the urban node. The session will reflect on existing solutions and inspire future actions. Bringing together practitioners, policymakers, and innovators, the session will reflect on existing solutions and inspire future actions.

Who will participate

Host session and moderator: **Elvina Nowak**, Project Manager, ETP-ALICE

Panel moderator: **Nik Delmeire**, Senior Expert, ETP-ALICE

Speaker:

- **Jef Bauwens**, Project Manager, De Vlaamse Waterweg

Panel:

- **Eloi Flipo**, Head of cargo & modal shift department, Voies Navigables de France
- **Herfried Leitner**, General Manager, TTS
- **Yves de Blic**, Project Manager
- **Matteo Matarazzo**, General Manager, IWT Platform
- **Jef Bauwens**, Project Manager Smart Logistics & RIS, De Vlaamse Waterweg

Background and link to ALICE Activities

Inland waterways are a cornerstone in the transition toward a more sustainable and resilient European freight transport system. Their integration into the Physical Internet and wider logistics network directly supports [ALICE's mission](#) to enable an efficient, decarbonised, and fully connected logistics ecosystem in Europe. This session is a continuation of all the efforts part of the [Inland Waterways](#) Activity Field.

This session contributes to ALICE Thematic Groups 2, 3 and 5, focusing on:

- **TG2 – Corridors, Hubs and Sychromodality**: exploring how inland waterways can become essential components of sychromodal networks by better connecting ports, terminals, and urban nodes through interoperable and flexible logistics chains.
- **TG3 – Systems & Technologies for Interconnected Logistics**: addressing the role of smart, multimodal terminals and ports as enablers of Physical Internet corridors, where digitalisation, automation, and new governance models play a decisive role.
- **TG5 – Urban Logistics**: linking inland waterway transport to city logistics systems, improving last-mile connectivity, reducing congestion and emissions, and supporting cleaner urban freight flows.

Moreover, the discussion on whether inland navigation is ready for the PI directly reflects [ALICE's strategic ambition and roadmap](#) to move toward open, interoperable and modular logistics systems that connect waterborne, road, and rail transport seamlessly.

Several ALICE-related and liaised projects are actively advancing this vision:

- **MULTIRELOAD** and **CRISTAL** demonstrate multimodal and sychromodal concepts in European corridors, developing governance and digital frameworks that can also be applied to inland waterways.
- **FOREMAST** explores the design of future-proof and energy-efficient freight vessels and terminal solutions aligned with zero-emission goals.
- **PLOTO** and **DECARBOMILE** contribute through innovative digital platforms, decarbonisation pathways, and demonstration pilots improving the operational efficiency and sustainability of inland navigation.

The session reinforces ALICE's collective effort to integrate inland waterways into the Physical Internet vision, ensuring they play a pivotal role in Europe's green and digital transition for freight logistics.

 See previous related activities [here](#) and <https://www.etp-logistics.eu/activity-fields/inland-waterways/>

Related call: CL5-2025-01-D6-10 **Integrating inland waterway transport in smart shipping and multimodal logistics chains (20 January 2026)**

For more information, please contact Elvina Nowak – elvina.nowak@etp-alice.eu , Nik Delmeire – nik.delmeire@etp-alice.eu, Marion Cottet – marion.cottet@etp-alice.eu