

Transit traffic through Switzerland : a subsidiary aspect of the ongoing debate about Swiss transport policy

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our roads can only be tackled on the spot. The motorways in France, Germany, Austria and Italy will not be able to solve our traffic problems between Basle and Zurich or inside our cities and built-up areas.

Improvements to public transport are not enough!

That our traffic problems cannot be solved merely by improving public transport is evident from the results of the strenuous efforts made in recent years to encourage people to make greater use of public transport services, such as half-fare travel cards, ecologically beneficial season tickets and a streamlined timetable ("a train every hour"). These measures have given rise to an enormous increase in the volume of passenger traffic by public transport. But in spite of all devices introduced to make motorised private traffic less attractive, it continues to expand too. In the total volume of passenger traffic, the share of that carried by road amounts to four fifths and more (for goods traffic, it represents barely one half). And as public transport will never be able to take over the share corresponding to private means of transport it is sheer self-deception to think that it will be possible to solve our current traffic problems and those of the future by furthering the use of public transport while at the same time neglecting road traffic infrastructure. In view of traffic needs now and in future, such a course will inevitably turn out to be a dead-end blind alley.

The Federations of Road Users therefore



Motorways channel traffic and are five times safer than main roads. (Photo: Keycolor)

want to make their view abundantly clear that alongside the promotion of good public transport, the still uncompleted sections of our national highways should be finished in a determined and purposeful manner, so as to guarantee the smoothest possible flow of traffic, with if need be, an expansion of the motorway networks. Likewise, on the main roads of all the cantons, existing bottlenecks must be remedied without delay in the interest of local residents and other road

users. And the traffic problems in the overcrowded and expanding outer conurbations can in the opinion of our federations only be overcome if solutions are sought (and found) which do justice to the needs of *all* parties – and these include of course the needs of motorised road users too.

Hans Koller, the Information Officer of the Swiss Federation of Road Users ("FRS"), Berne.

Transit traffic through Switzerland

A subsidiary aspect of the ongoing debate about Swiss transport policy

After much discussion, the concept "Rail & Bus 2000" seems to have been accepted by most of the parties concerned. And now interest is being concentrated on the question of what reforms are actually needed in the sector of transit policy, with special reference to the requirements of other countries and in particular those of our European neighbours.

In the foreground of our traffic policy is the objective of getting more traffic on to the railways and less on the roads. Even so, two features are rather surprising:

Only a minute proportion of the goods traffic in Switzerland is *not* "home-made". The total of all goods traffic amounted to 513.1 million tonnes in 1989, but the proportion relating to foreign trade is very small. 89.6% of the total volume concerns our own domestic market. Imports and exports together amounted to 7.2%, while transit traffic by road only reached 3.2%.

On the other hand, transit traffic for goods transported by rail and road together represented only a modest 0.3%.

The EC as a factor for stimulating public transport

Current Federal policy regarding traffic is being directed towards what can only be seen objectively as a small and very marginal segment of all traffic in Switzerland. This fact is evidently connected with the attempts to realise by the end of 1992 a single free-trade domestic EC market, and with the

increase in trans-alpine goods traffic that would probably be involved if these attempts succeed.

The perfecting of the single European market – which can hardly be achieved unless the problems of traffic across the Alps are solved – is at present the driving force behind the attempts to shift goods traffic from road to rail and thereby to promote the development of a "combined" Rail/Road traffic system. Admittedly, the EC is demanding that Switzerland should at least permit the provision of a road corridor through which 40 tonne lorries would be allowed to travel. The negotiations on this point have been going on for about a year and a half. In these discussions, the Federal Council has repeatedly confirmed Switzerland's willingness to collaborate in relation to transit goods traffic *by rail*, but not to such traffic *by road*. As an alternative, the Swiss government has hinted that it would be prepared to effect investments running into billions of francs for the construction of new rail tracks



with the objective of enabling the EC members to use them as a testing ground for the "combined" traffic system. In October 1989, the Federal Council decided to allocate one and a half thousand million francs for "piggy-back" traffic on the Gotthard and Lötschberg/Simplon lines. On the Gotthard section, the plan would be to provide, not later than by 1994, 44 piggy-back trains a day, with up to 36 carriages and a capacity for

possibility of quite legally circumventing the ban on lorry traffic at night. Road transport on the other hand has the advantage of its greater flexibility in respect of both time and routes, and the possibility of offering better individual service to the customers. From the standpoint of cost and technical considerations, the formula for a "division of labour" between rail and road is seen by many as the use of *unaccompanied* transport

terminals for the goods or their containers. Furthermore, a pre-requisite for the success of the "combined" traffic system is that it will be feasible to operate a continuous succession of fully loaded trains between the junctions, and to maintain an exact timetable ("...a train every hour!"). If such logistic pre-conditions can be met in rail operations, the "combined" traffic system could prove acceptable to the business community and provide an alternative to the exclusive use of road transport where longer distances are involved.

In connection with international traffic (imports and exports, including transit) these above-mentioned pre-requisites could be met if the European railway bodies make a corresponding effort. They do not however apply to Swiss domestic traffic-which after all represents some 90% of the total volume of all goods traffic here - because of the large proportion of short distances in the stream of domestic goods traffic, and of the fine ramifications of the rail network needed to serve the considerable surface of the built-up areas. If it were feasible, in the domestic traffic scene, to switch just ten percent of the goods traffic now going by road, this would at once almost triple the volume of the rail traffic!

An extension of the railway network with the aim of improving transit facilities in the "combined" traffic system does not offer a useful alternative in connection with the transport of inner-Swiss goods traffic by road. This therefore indicates the need for the development of a well-planned road infrastructure in the near future, in the interest of both goods and passenger traffic.

Jakob Schälchli, Secretary General of the Swiss Federation of Road Users.



Rail 2000 - heading for the future. (Photo: Keystone)

1,500 consignments, in the event of the EC renouncing their demand for a 40-tonne limit, the BLS ("Berne-Lötschberg-Simplon Railway") has been promised a non-repayable contribution by the Federal government for the construction of a middle track in the Lötschberg tunnel, to enable vehicles with a corner height of four metres to be entrained. These investments for an extension to the "combined" traffic system would in the opinion of the Federal Council provide an interim solution for goods in transit through Switzerland, pending completion of the new railway "transversal" over the Alps (the "NEAT") with new basic railway tunnels on the Gotthard and Lötschberg stretches.

Finding the right path ...

The solution proposed by the Federal Council is undoubtedly a good one. For the "combined" traffic system is a form of "division of labour" between rail and road offering the best possible union of the advantages relating to each of these traffic carriers. Rail traffic has the advantage of offering mass goods transport between widely separated junctions at comparatively low cost, plus the

in combination with trailers and "swap-bodies." The "piggy-back" system, also known as the "Rolling Highway", whereby the vehicle, loaded or unloaded, is carried by rail with its driver, has certain important disadvantages, such as the high tare weight (useless during rail journeys) and the need for more personnel. It can therefore only be seen as offering a transitional solution. It is thus the unaccompanied traffic technique which should in our view be furthered and given financial support, as subsidising the "piggy-back" system will prove an obstacle to the desired implementation of the container plans.

Rail offers no solution for domestic traffic

It will be possible to take full advantage of the benefits offered by the "combined" traffic system only if and when the distances from one junction to the next are not less than 300, or sometimes 500 kilometres. Otherwise, the savings in costs and speed of delivery would be wiped out by the extra expense involved by twice as many loading and unloading operations being needed at the

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