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Zürich's Rapid Transit System in operation

Zürich's Public Transport System – Mobility for all

The introduction of Switzerland's new railway timetable on May 27 also marked the opening of Zürich's Rapid Transit System, the S-Bahn. Ultra-modern double-deck trains now take commuters from the Zürich region straight to the heart of the city.

The greater Zürich region covers an area of some 1,500 km² with around one million inhabitants. The major part of the region lies in Canton Zürich, one of the cantons that make up the Swiss Confederation and have wideranging legislative and financial autonomy. In the centre of the region lies the city of Zürich, with a population of 360 000 and 300 000 workplaces.

In the 1960s the city still had a population of more than 420 000, and projections for the greater region estimated an increase to 1.5 million by 2020. But the 1960s and 1970s saw intense building activity around Zürich, with housing developments for citizens who wished to leave a city that was becoming noisier and more expensive to live in. Their apartments in the city were converted into offices, and rents went up accordingly. This shift coincided with the car boom. New roads were built everywhere, as people believed there would be hardly any need for public transport in the future. Zürich's growing importance as a financial and business centre brought more and more commuters into the city, and with them a steady increase in traffic. Attempts to improve public transport focused mainly on modernising the traditional tram system.

The S-Bahn Project

In the 1970s the Zürich cantonal authorities developed a plan to convert the local SBB network into an S-Bahn system based on West German models. There would also be an underground train linking the city centre with the airport, and short-distance transport would be covered by trams and buses. The whole package, costing some SFr 800 million at 1964 prices, depended on funds from both the canton and city of Zürich. Swiss legislation requires a popular vote on such issues, but the people rejected the project in 1973. Eleven years earlier, voters had already turned down proposals for an underground tram system, and the impression was that the people of Zürich were against any form of underground transport.

However, politicians and planners would and could not give up. The cantonal parliament approved a special public transport

fund, which would be increased annually and serve as a financial basis for an improved transport system.

Eight years after rejecting the initial project, voters finally approved a massive financial contribution by the Canton towards developing an S-Bahn system. This was a landmark decision, because it was the first time a canton had ever agreed to co-finance an SBB project.

One factor that certainly played a part in the positive outcome of the vote was the success of SBB's rail link between the city centre and the airport, opened three years earlier. The new line had immediately become popular with passengers and had taken pressure off approach roads and multi-storey car parks in the area around the airport.

The Zürich S-Bahn is the backbone of the canton's public transport system. It serves both as a link between cities and other places and as a feeder to the national public transport network.

The S-Bahn offers services in line with the needs of customers.

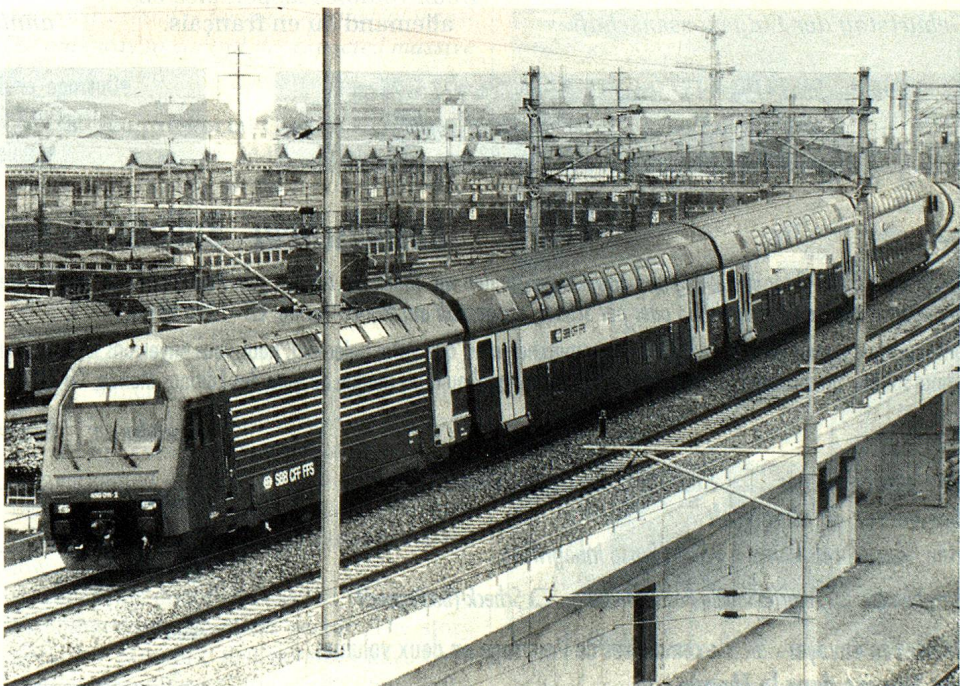
Trains every 15 and 30 minutes make it unnecessary to keep consulting timetables.

The new direct trains, the construction of new stretches, and stops of no more than 15 or 30 seconds at stations cut many journey times.

Several methods of calculation were employed to work out the cost for the new 11-kilometre line and the running of the S-Bahn. As it was clear that the new underground-through station would free capacities in the terminus station for profitable long-distance traffic, it was agreed that SBB would pay 20% towards the total cost, and the canton of Zürich the remaining 80%.

Application of Modern Technology

In order to cope with the expected increase in traffic, SBB had to buy new rolling stock. They chose high-performance locomotives with two double-deck carriages and one double-deck power car each. This type of train is able to carry 60% more seated passengers than a conventional train of the same length. Its fast acceleration and wide entrance doors also guarantee shorter stops and journeys. The double-deck trains cost 20% less per seat than Intercity trains. Du-



The Zürich rapid transit network S-Bahn has been operating since the end of May. Double-deck trains came into use for the first time in Switzerland. (Photo Keystone)

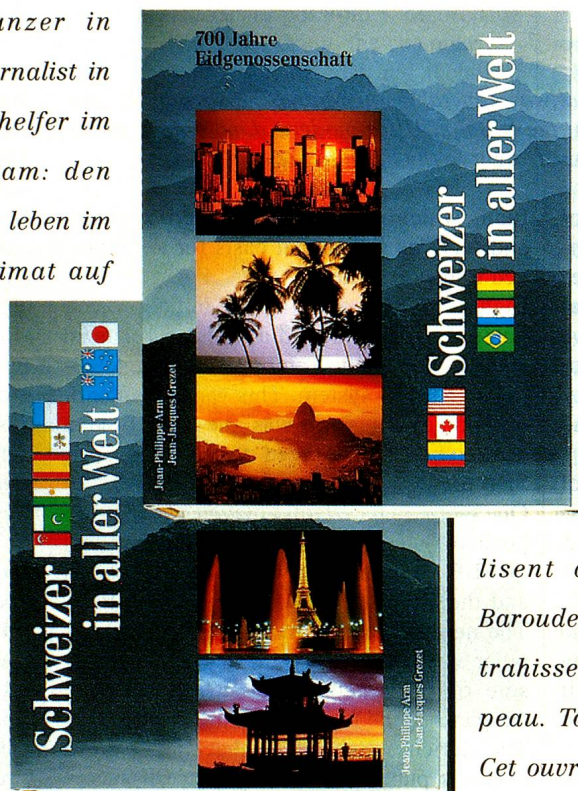


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ring peak hours compositions are made up of three trains seating 1,200 passengers. Unlike other such systems, Zürich's S-Bahn does not have its own exclusive rail network (except for the 11-km long new track). The remaining 369 km are used by Eurocity, Intercity and S-Bahn trains, as well as goods and service trains. Although this is attractive in financial terms because the rail network is being used to better effect, it is difficult to run. SBB therefore installed an electronic operations control centre which not only shows the current situation on the network, but also thinks ahead, as it were, making planning easier. Direct radio contact with the driver and passenger information on delays/connections etc. should considerably improve the quality of travel. In principle, the Swiss Confederation guarantees and pays for an hourly train service in all directions from every SBB station. But Canton Zürich wanted a more frequent service for the S-Bahn, and consequently agreed to pay the additional costs. Because the Zürich project is in fact an experiment, SBB and Canton Zürich agreed in a cooper-

ation contract that SBB would pay for the operational costs for three years and the canton would bear the operational losses. The canton's main interest is not, of course, to make financial gains, but to encourage a shift from private to public transport. This is also why Canton Zürich, with popular approval, set up an interconnected transport system regulating the fares of all 35 transport operators in the canton. It also co-ordinates services, such as timetables, and the quality of rolling stock, vehicles and routes. This means that S-Bahn passengers may buy a ticket at their nearest stop and then travel freely using all available modes of transport within a chosen time and zone. The transport system receives all revenue from public transport within the canton and then pays the appropriate sum to individual operators. This simplified fare structure using single and season tickets has already paid off in the city of Zürich. You will meet more people in town now with a monthly or annual season ticket in their pocket than with a set of car keys.

Some 200,000 people currently use the station each day. Over the next ten years the number is expected to rise above 350,000, with the station handling more than 2000 trains daily. An extension to the station is being built over the western track area in conjunction with a private contractor. By the end of the decade the building is expected to house some 430 flats and provide jobs for around 3000 people in offices, schools, hotels and cultural centres. It will be a complex with instant access to superb public transport facilities. It is not surprising, therefore, that concentrated building work around the focal points of public transport in and around Zürich has become the trend. Nor will it come as a surprise to find that users of Zürich's trains, trams and buses not only include your average citizen, but also the city's top bankers and managers, as well as politicians on official and private journeys.

Walter Finkbohner, Management Secretary of SBB's Zürich Region

Aspects of Swiss-EC Transport Policy Relations

With the approach of the Single European Market, Switzerland is facing a number of transport problems that require a speedy solution. The only way to control the expected massive increase in traffic is to consistently improve public transport.

Traffic in Europe has increased enormously over the last 25 years. Between 1965 and the middle of the 1980s, passenger traffic rose from about 1,500 million km per person per year to 3,100 million. In the same period goods traffic increased from around 700 billion to 1200 billion tonkilometres per year. As far as Switzerland is concerned, this is the most important type of traffic. Since 1965 transalpine traffic has risen from just under 20 million tons to some 65 million. But almost the entire increase in that period was in road transport, while the railways' share rose only very little. However, this needs to be put into perspective: It is estimated that in 1988 about 1000 million tons of goods were transported within Western Europe (figure based on projections). Today the major part of all goods traffic, almost 45%, is handled within the triangle formed by France, the Benelux states and West Germany.

The Increasing Social Cost of Transport

It is becoming more and more obvious that traffic, particularly on the roads, is not paying for itself and is costing society money. The total cost of road traffic can be broken down as follows:

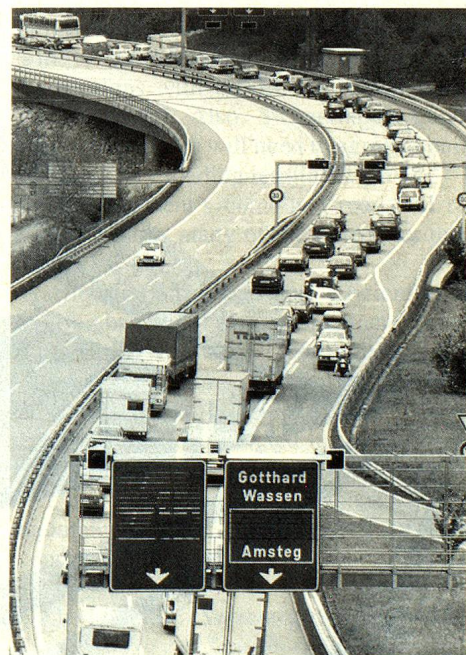
Operating costs for vehicles, which are paid by owners and operators.

Maintenance costs for roads and parking facilities, which are covered by public funds.

So-called external costs, such as damage caused by noise or exhaust fumes.

It is estimated that these external costs are in fact considerable, and we may conclude that, on the whole, transport charges are too low.

At times this distortion has led to grotesque planning in the transport sector: The story goes, for example, that potatoes have been carried from West Germany to Italy to be washed there, only to be sent back to West Germany afterwards for processing. There



At peak travelling times our motorways are often overcrowded.
(Photo: Keystone)