

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 21 (1994)
Heft: 1

Artikel: High-speed trains (TGV) : Franco-Swiss links: the moment of truth
Autor: Ley, Anne-Marie
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906761>

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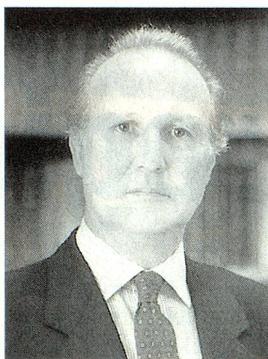
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the form of regular meetings between town councils and in implementing joint projects. The latter includes regulations for cross-frontier commuters, public transport links and regular cultural exchanges.

You are the mayor of a town which – like Canton Ticino and Switzerland as a whole – voted against entry into the European Economic Area. Is your idea of the “Regio Insubrica” a reaction to this decision?

My idea of the “Regio Insubrica” existed before that negative referendum result on the EEA, even if it was “officialised” only afterwards. The preparation of the required documents and statutes



**Fernando Pedrolini,
Chiasso's
mayor.
(Photo:
zvg.)**

took place in February 1993. It is certainly true that in present circumstances the “Regio Insubrica” seems to be more necessary than ever – urgent might even be the right word. We must take steps now for the present and future generations, and the right environment must be created. Also, it should not be forgotten that cross-border policies assist the general coming together of peoples regardless of national origin – which fits in with the need for harmonisation which is so widely felt today. This is probably an element which will make the people of Ticino – who have tended to be rather sceptical on such matters – gradually warm to this idea.

Interview: Giuseppe Rusconi

High-speed trains (TGV)

Franco-Swiss links: the moment of truth

The Jura mountain range forms a natural barrier between Switzerland and the French regions of Franche-Comté and Rhône-Alpes. Better communications is the main demand of the inhabitants of this vast region, which is united by a common language and culture. The European Union is also committed to developing a high-speed railway network. In 1991, France published a master plan, including many new TGV links with its neighbours.

Cross-border bodies, especially the Council of the Léman Region and the Jura Working Committee, are also engaged in modernising public transport throughout the region. They are in fact spoilt for choice amongst the projects being studied, and they also have diverging interests. In addition, government

financial resources are increasingly scarce. The moment of truth for Switzerland has come, since France and Italy have now agreed to give priority to the TGV trans-Alpine line from Lyon to Turin by the Mont Cenis tunnel well south of Switzerland, with branch lines to Chambéry and Annecy. At the same time, studies are now underway with some urgency for the Rhine to Rhône TGV with three branches: towards Paris, Lyon and Mulhouse/Basle.

For the moment at any rate, Switzerland's official position has not changed from that worked out during the discussions on the new trans-Alpine railway lines. This was based on links to the French TGV network by way of Basle and Geneva and came about mainly because France had included the future

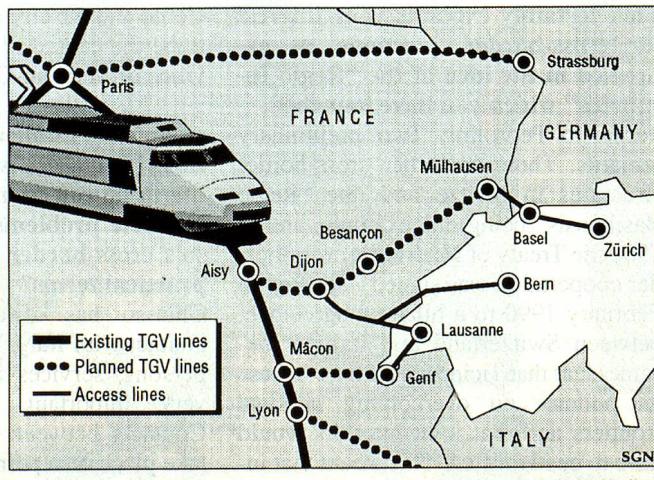
Mâcon–Geneva line in its master plan. This project was to be financed mainly from private sources, and it would have been important for Switzerland's French-speaking cantons, since it would have revitalised the Simplon line. The latter is of prime importance for linking western and north-western Switzerland and the Berne region with southern Europe.

But the Franco-Italian Mont Cenis project has aroused enthusiasm in the Rhône-Alpes region, while the Mâcon–Geneva line has been losing steam. For Geneva and the French departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie, the link-up at Chambéry via Annecy now seems like the lesser evil – although hardly convenient.

Vaud, Neuchâtel and Jura, north-western Switzerland, Berne and Zurich can be satisfied that the Rhine to Rhône TGV line is now taking practical form. This strengthens the advantages of the French Dole–Vallorbe network, serving Lausanne, Neuchâtel and Berne. The Jura Working Committee is at present studying how to improve these lines in order to bring them closer in time to Paris and the Channel tunnel.

On the Swiss side, however, all railway projects are being scaled down, and most local authorities are at present more interested in defending existing regional lines.

The link to the French high-speed rail network has enormous importance for Switzerland. It will decide the future of the Simplon line and lead to much shorter travelling times. The journey from Paris to Zurich will be reduced from today's 6 hours to 3½ hours.



Anne-Marie Ley