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Cover:

On December 11, 1845, the French railway station in Basle was inaugurated. This marked the conclusion of the first railway line on Swiss soil, but it was only 1,800 metres long. Detail from a painting in the Basle Historical Museum. (Photo: Max Baumann)



A special postage stamp would have been enough to mark the 150th anniversary of railways in Switzerland if the latter had only been a mere form of transport. Can you imagine what our society would have been today without railways? Have they not widened our horizon? Strengthened our cohesion? Conditioned our prosperity? Have they not forged our identity? With more than 5,000 km of railway, Switzerland has the densest network in the world, and with the exception of the Japanese, no one takes the train more often than we Swiss. This is why it has seemed to us indispensable, in this commemorative year, to open the window of Swiss Review onto our railways.

700,000 people are transported daily. This makes 40 trips per inhabitant per annum. The railways seem to have health of iron. But the statistics are deceptive. 150 years after the first railway line entirely on Swiss soil was opened, that between Zurich and Baden, our railways have to face up to very sizeable problems and their future is uncertain.

The individualisation of our society, with the huge expansion of road traffic during the last half century, is crushing the railways, which today account for no more than 12% of passenger traffic and less than 7% of goods transport. To that we may add the wind of liberalisation leading to more intense competition, the opening up of markets, the spiral of indebtedness and the reduction of services during the last few years.

Never has the climate been so hostile to railways. Numerous lines

in the outlying regions have been sacrificed in the last 20 years and replaced by road services. Apart from the main lines, timetables have been reduced, stations are no longer used, and staff numbers have fallen greatly. It is true that it may be said on the upside that installations and equipment have been modernised and services increased on the main lines. Substantial efforts have also been made to promote complementarity between the various types of transport, and ambitious projects such as Rail 2000 and the new railway lines through the Alps are now being realised or developed.

The present situation is paradoxical. On the one hand we have heavy menaces and a political and economic climate which is more or less hostile to railways, whose worst enemy is the individualisation of society. And on the other hand at the same time we have new prospects and opportunities opening up by the exaggeration of this phenomenon of individualisation, whose symptoms are clogged roads, pollution, accidents and stress.

It is impossible to imagine our society of tomorrow without a form of transport which is collective, clean, reliable and fast. This means that the railway should still have many fine years ahead of them!



IMPRESSUM

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 24th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 320,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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