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A year of major milestones in Swiss transport policy

2016 is a decisive year for transport policy in Switzerland. Key milestones for current and future transport infrastructure projects will be set during the course of the year.

On 28 February, the Swiss people decided on the renovation of the 17-kilometre-long Gotthard road tunnel. By approving the second tube, voters opted for a safe, rapid and sustainable road link on the north-south axis which takes account of the key issues of alpine conservation.

The next milestone will be achieved over the coming days with the opening of the Gotthard tunnel – the world's longest railway tunnel. This project is part of the New Railway Link through the Alps (NRLA). It significantly reduces journey times for passengers and goods on the railways and is a cornerstone of the transport policy seeking to shift freight transit to the railways from border to border. Further key elements are the Ceneri Base Tunnel and the four-metre corridor for freight transport through the Alps where the railway infrastructure on all approach routes to the Gotthard Base Tunnel will be brought into line with current standards and greater capacity will be created for combined transportation (HGVs on railway carriages). These construction projects will improve the general situation for the economy and the well-being of future generations.

But all this does not come free of charge. If Switzerland wishes to continue to look after its transport infrastructure, it will require a solid financial basis. Simply shifting funds from one government portfolio to another as envisaged by the popular initiative entitled "For fair financing of transport" (the so-called "milch cow initiative") is not an expedient approach. Launched by auto-schweiz and recommended for rejection by the Federal Council this goes to the vote on 5 June. The initiative calls for all federal government revenues generated from road transport to be used solely in this area.

A master plan is required for funding transport infrastructure. The Federal Council is aware of this and has taken the first steps towards addressing the issue. The bill to fund and expand the railway infrastructure entered into force on 1 January 2016. The Swiss people had approved the corresponding constitutional amendment in February 2014. Under this, the operation, maintenance and future expansion of the railway infrastructure is to be funded from a single pot, the Railway Infrastructure Fund.

The Federal Council is now seeking to implement on the roads what has already been achieved on the railways. The increasing mobility of people and goods is putting strain on the current national road network, making further expansion necessary. In order to secure the long-term funding of the national highways and urban transport, the Federal Council has decided to create a permanent fund at constitutional level – the National Highways and Urban Transport Fund. Existing and new revenues will be fed into this fund. The issue is currently being debated in Parliament. The Council of States approved the fund in mid-March as the first chamber. The constitutional amendment will eventually be decided upon at referendum.

However, expansion projects alone will not be sufficient to cope with the rapid growth in traffic in Switzerland. It is vital that we make even more efficient and intensive use of the existing roads. What will help above all, is an effective transport management strategy involving different instruments. Intelligent mobility will also open up new opportunities which should not be underestimated. Our vehicles are already communicating independently with their environment, using driver assistance systems. Some models already possess the technical equipment to self-drive. Postauto AG will trial an automated bus for passenger transportation on a particular route in Sion for the first time this year – a further milestone in this eventful year of 2016. The Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC) and, in particular, the Federal Roads Office (FEDRO) are actively involved in these developments in the interests of realising safe, sustainable, environmentally friendly and affordable mobility.

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Publications

Swiss Foreign Policy Strategy 2016 – 2019



The Foreign Policy Strategy sets out the Federal Council's priorities and areas of special interest in foreign policy for 2016 – 2019. Its strategic objectives include consolidating and regulating relations with the EU and the EU and EFTA countries, working more closely with global partners, expanding mediation activities in the field of peace and security, and pursuing the commitment to sustainable development and prosperity.

The strategy is also available in German, French and Italian.

For the internet version (pdf) and to order printed copies:

www.fdfa.admin.ch/publication

Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation



The short version of the dispatch indicates the areas where the Federal Council has set its priorities in international cooperation for the period 2017 – 2020 – for a world without poverty, living in peace, and for sustainable development. The areas concerned are humanitarian aid, development cooperation, economic and trade policy measures in the context of development cooperation, transition cooperation in Eastern Europe, and the promotion of peace, human rights and security.

The short version is also available in German, French and Italian. For the internet version (pdf) and to order printed copies:

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Federal referenda

Voting proposals are determined by the Federal Council at least four months before the voting date.

The following three proposals will be put to the vote on 25th September 2016:

- Popular initiative of 6th September 2012 "For a sustainable and resource efficient economy (green economy)"
- Popular initiative of 17th December 2013 "OASiplus: for a strong OASi)*"
- Federal Act of 25th September 2015 governing the intelligence services

*old-age and survivors insurance

Further voting date: 27th November 2016

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations of Parliament and the Federal Council, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at www.admin.ch/votes.

Popular initiatives

The following new federal popular initiatives had been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- "Yes to the ban to cover your face" (15.9.2017)
- "For more transparency in the financing of political life (Transparency Initiative)" (26.10.2017)
- Stop to the excess of Via sicura (For a fair and reasonable sanctioning system)" (03.11.2017)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.



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