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A sincere and 'public' thank you to Beatrice and the editing team for producing the HELVETIA during my 'Swiss-holidays'

Rinaldo.

President's Message

Firstly, I would like to thank and congratulate the ten young people who put so much effort and time into completing our recent quiz about Switzerland. You certainly all deserve receiving something for your contributions.

I hope now that we will also be receiving heaps of entries for the holiday memories activity. And because you are able to prepare your entry any way you like - the possibilities are endless!

We are planning to reward all entrants for taking part, so any donations for 'prizes' would be much appreciated.

Once again, we are quickly heading towards Christmas, which means Club Christmas functions will be held over the next few weeks. These are always lots of fun and well worth attending.

I'd like to thank everyone who supported me from August to October, whilst I was producing the *Helvetia*. The many kind messages and phone calls I received were very much appreciated.

Next year, I will continue to report on any new and relevant information received from the Secretariat for Swiss Abroad, so everyone is kept up to date with current happenings

For now, on behalf of the whole Society committee, I would like to wish all our members and readers a very happy Christmas, however you celebrate and a safe and prosperous New Year.

My best wishes to you all - Beatrice.

Swiss Federal Railways on Track for the Future...

Over the years calls for the Federal Railways (SBB) to take over or amalgamate with the Bern-Lötschberg-Simplon Bahn (BLS) brought about lively, often heated discussions - invariably ending in a no-contest situation. But now that the SBB has been transformed into a "limited company" (SBB-AG, or SBB Ltd), co-operation between the two, until now generally cordial, has taken on a whole new meaning.

Following talks between SBB and representatives of the Confederation on one hand, and BLS and representatives of Canton Berne (the main shareholder of BLS), on the other, the Canton has declared its willingness to let SBB become a minority shareholder (34%), thus bringing about new levels of co-operation and above all, streamlining. The only question still to be resolved is the price of the BLS shares. Under the deal, the new structure will be:

Long Distance Passenger Transport: SBB will take over and run all long distance passenger trains, ie. Inter-city, Euro City, and any other 'fast trains' throughout the country, except the Rhaetische Bahn (RhB) and the Furka Oberalp Bahn FOB.

Regional Passenger Transport:

In return, BLS will continue to run regional passenger traffic on all its networks, and also the present SBB 'S-Bahn' lines - Biel-Bern-Thun, and Thun-Bern-Freiburg/Laupen, as well as co-ordinate all other regional passenger traffic.

Freight Transport:

BLS will retain present operations. It will also continue to operate car ferries through the Lötschberg and Simplon Tunnels.

Rolling Motorway:

For anyone not familiar with the country's latest initiatives to overcome the damaging environmental problems, Switzerland recently came up with the "NEAT" (New European Alp Transverse) concept. Instead of having 40 tonne trucks cruising on the motorways system between northern and southern Europe, they will be transported through the country by rail. Hence

the necessity to construct the new 57km long Gotthard, and 28km long Lötschberg Tunnels.

Some time ago the Federal Government awarded a contract to run the rolling motorway to a consortium consisting of SBB, BLS, and a third company, Hupac. The terminals will be situated in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, and Novara, Italy.

As from early 2001, SBB will take sole charge.

Network Management:

Until now, the two railways have set their own individual timetables, but the new arrangement will see SBB given country-wide control. They will also be responsible for the sale of access to (power) lines - both for Swiss and foreign rail operators.

Maintenance and New Construction:

The companies will continue to retain the respective concessions of their networks, therefore no changes are required. For all new constructions, the two companies will work together in future.

Finally, in keeping with corporisation and globalisation of big business, SBB-AG is not only interested in running its own organisation.

According to a recent news report, SBB-AG has signed a contract of intent to take on an (approx) 40% share of two English rail companies operating to the west of London !

(Article provided by Heinz Leuenberger)



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