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Rail 2000 on track to ensure quicker travel

One of the most exciting parts of Switzerland's rail modernisation programme, Rail 2000, has reached the halfway stage in its construction. It is a 45-kilometre stretch of track between Bern and Zürich which for the first time will have trains travelling on it at speeds of up to 200 kilometres per hour.

When the line opens at the end of 2004, the speeds reached will be the fastest on the Swiss rail network.

Rail 2000 is the concept approved by the Swiss in 1987, with the aim of making services more frequent, faster, more direct and more comfortable.

And unlike most major projects, Rail 2000 is more than keeping to its budget. Final costs of phase one are estimated at SFr5.9 billion francs (\$3.44 billion), down by no less than 20 per cent on the SFr7.4 billion budgeted.

To enable trains to travel faster and shorten journey times between the major Swiss centres, a completely new line between Mattstetten, north of Bern, and Rothrist, near Olten, is being constructed.

It is the backbone of the Rail 2000 project with a cost of around SFr1.5 billion. The line has nine tunnels with a total length of 14.6 kilometres, while 30.5 kilometres is in the open. No fewer than 123 companies and 561 people are working at the construction locations.

When completed, the journey time between Bern and Zurich will be cut by a quarter of an hour from the present 72 minutes to 57 minutes.

The head of the Rail 2000 project, Paul Moser, has said that trains will run every half hour between major cities.

"We're aiming at travelling times slightly lower than an hour between the major stations so that we can offer as wide a range of connections as possible between express trains and regional trains," he said. "The journey time between Bern and Basel will be only 54 minutes (today 65 minutes) and Bern to Lucerne will take 59 minutes instead of the present 80 minutes. People should really take the train rather than travelling by car," he added.

There is no let-up for the construction workers because time is of the essence. Work was due to be completed in



2005 but has had to be brought forward to December 2004 to fall into line with timetable changes decided at European level.

New rolling stock also has to be completed by then. When Rail 2000 phase one is completed, there will be a total of 160 kilometres of new track on the Swiss Federal Railways network and 37 stations will be built or adapted to the traveller of tomorrow. Apart from huge cranes, earth moving equipment and gangs of workers, there are few outwardly visible signs of the new stretch for rail travellers on the present Zurich to Bern line. However, the Federal Railways know there is no lack of interest from the passengers of tomorrow. They have opened an information centre near the station at Langenthal, complete with a model of the new line, and have made a bicycle trail along the entire stretch between Rothrist and Mattstetten. One clever entrepreneur has even opened a restaurant in an old rail dining car, which is perched on a disused viaduct overlooking one of the more spectacular construction sites. Apparently, there is no shortage of visitors.

by Robert Brooks, SRI.

Swiss Chef Berta Kiwi Host Keith

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