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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Zurich S-bahn (RTR)

On 27 March 1991 the Swiss Federal Railway's board of directors approved SFr 259 millions for a further 45 class Re4/4 450 locomotives, the teething troubles of this class having now been eliminated. Members will be interested to learn that apart from the door opening and closing controls on the coaches and a few amendments needed to optimise adhesion in the macro skid range to adapt the locomotives to extremely slippery track sections where *Mirage* trains equipped with synthetic brake blocks are operating, no major changes in the technical design have been required. Overall punctuality has also been improved to the point where 98% of all trains arrive either on time or not more than 30 seconds late.

A further order for 200 identical trains is now being discussed. 100 of these are intended to replace older rolling stock now in use on the service and to create the necessary reserve once train frequency is increased to 15 minutes during the rush hours. This will come into effect when more double tracking has been carried out and longer passing loops have been installed on the remaining single track sections. The other 100 trains are intended for the introduction of RTR services in the Geneva-Lausanne, Berne and Basle areas.

At the end of May 1991 the S-Bahn had been in service for one year. On balance, despite a few initial problems, the results have been more than satisfactory. An average increase in rail passenger traffic of 21% has been achieved, instead of the predicted 10% whilst the joint workings of bus, ship, public transport and the RTR system has resulted in an average increase of 12%.

Swiss Federal Railways

Apart from the credit for the S-Bahn locomotives, some SFr 1 billion has been voted to enable all mechanical signal installations to be replaced by electronic systems and for further modernisation of stations throughout the network.

First reports on the tests of the Re4/4 460 Class locomotives are very promising and it appears that the performance is better than specified. For instance, the new self-steering bogie permits far higher speeds on sinuous track sections than initially required.

NEAT (Neue Alpen-Transversale)

The projected base tunnels under the Gotthard and Lotschberg is threatened with cancellation. The EEC Commission for traffic still insists on the free passage of 40 tonne trucks on the Gotthard route. The Federal Council has offered minimal exceptions to the existing 28 tonne limit for perishable goods up to a maximum of fifty 40 tonne trucks daily, but all remaining transit has to take place by rail. Furthermore the Sunday and night-time ban remains in force. In addition, once the huckepack corridor is in full operation by 1993, all 40 tonne trucks will have once again to be carried by rail.

Polls amongst transport operators have shown that should complete liberalisation of 40 tonne trucks be enforced, 40 million tonnes of the current 68 million tonnes would attempt to use the Gotthard route, as it is 400-600 km shorter than alternative routes through Austria or France. This would mean an average daily transit of 3000 40 tonne trucks or approximately two a minute! Even if the serious damage to the environment of the Reuss and Ticino valleys is ignored, the route is simply not capable of carrying this traffic, particularly as the Gotthard road tunnel has only two lanes.

Traffic jams of unbelievable size would result. Therefore the Federal Council has made it clear that there will be no NEAT if the EEC still insists on complete liberalisation of 40 tonne traffic.

Private Railways

Work on the Vereina Tunnel is now in progress and the RhB expects to have it in service by 1999.

On the initiative of the writer of this report, a private committee has been formed to promote the modification of the Private Railway Act so that Private Lines will have the same legal status as the Swiss Federal Railways. The committee comprises a number of railway experts, traffic experts, members of the Federal parliament, members of the Boards of Private Railways and marketing specialists. One goal is to obtain similar subsidies for the so called social tariff as are currently enjoyed by the Swiss Federal Railways. Another important project is the standardisation of rolling stock and other railway material in order to obtain lower purchase prices from industry.

The committee also has a group of railway experts analysing railway projects, such as the connections from Meiringen to Oberwald and from Gstaad to Aigle and Sion. This committee is also analysing the commercial potential of other routes that could bring in a sensible improvement of public service in certain regions. Naturally, it co-operates with those bodies already working on these projects. The aim is to do everything possible to guarantee the continued existence of existing lines by promoting every possible source of additional traffic ■

PHOTOGRAPHING THE ALBULA LINE

by A.E.Hauser-Guber

This is a very rewarding suggestion since you will be able to shoot a large number of outstanding photographs in only a few hours of a beautiful morning or afternoon, preferably in September or October when the air is at its clearest. You will need a pair of sturdy shoes, good rain protection should the weather change and, ideally, an 80-200mm zoom lens - a 300 mm would be even better.

Board a RhB train stopping at Preda and alight there. Walk back towards Bergun/Bravogun for about 700 m until you reach the small hamlet of Naz, where you turn left and cross the young Albula River on a small bridge. Follow the signposted path in the general direction of Val Tschitta-Piz Ela-Tinizong-Savogin. The path is rather steep so take it slowly. After a further kilometer a small path deviates to the right. Follow this path above the tree line and, if possible, climb to the wooden cabin. You are now on Alp Fallo.

Now turn right and descend slowly and very carefully to the edge of the cliff which drops into the Albula Gorge. From here you have an outstanding view of almost the entire line between Bergun and Preda. Be certain to have ample film stock with you as the intensive traffic on this route will provide ample opportunity to take photographs of trains negotiating one of the most fascinating rail routes in Europe.

It is also a good spot for a picnic, you will hear the trains in ample time to break off for photography. On your return, do not try to take a short cut, the cliff turns around in the forest and you could easily get into difficulties. Follow the same path +

Editor's Note. This is clearly one case where the effort of toting a tripod would be rewarding, hand-held shots with 200+ mm lenses aren't always free of camera shake. Our President has offered to lead a party if members are interested, but warns that there can be no guarantee the weather will be suitable on the chosen day. Contact Swiss Express in the first instance.