

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 3 (1991-1993)
Heft: 4

Artikel: A railway history of Switzerland. Part 3, Schweizerische Nordostbahn
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-855178>

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Schweizerische Nordostbahn

by Giles Della Gana

The desire to link the Bodensee with Zurich produced rival schemes which were amalgamated in 1852. Their promoters joined forces with the Schweizerische Nordbahn to form the Schweizerische Nordostbahn (NOB) on 1 July 1853. The new company took over the existing Zurich-Baden line together with works that had just been started which opened as follows, Romanshorn to Winterthur on 16 May 1855, Winterthur-Wallisellen-Oerlikon on 27 December of the same year and Oerlikon-Zurich on 26 June 1856. The original Zurich-Baden line was extended to Brugg on 29 September 1856 and then on to Aarau on 15 May 1858, thus completing the rail link between eastern Switzerland and Basle via the SCB (see part 2).

The separately promoted and charmingly named *Falls of the Rhine Railway* was taken over by the NOB and opened between Winterthur and Schaffhausen on 16 April 1857. A link with Germany was established with the opening of a line from Turgi to Waldshut on 18 August 1859. The Zurich-Zug-Luzern (ZZL), opened on 1 June 1864, was promoted in association with the SCB in anticipation of a Gotthard line. It became part of the NOB system on 1 January 1892. Another associated line was the Oerlikon-Bulach, opened on 1 May 1865 together with a branch from Oberglatt to Dielsdorf and worked by the NOB until its absorption into the latter company on 1 July 1877.

The two lines were opened from Romanshorn, one eastward to Rorschach on 15 October 1869, the other westward to Konstanz on 1 July 1871. The section of line between Rorschach and Rorschach Hafen ran alongside the Vereinigte Schweizerbahnen's (VSB) branch between the same two stations, today this forms a double track section on an otherwise single track line. 2 August saw the opening of the Botzergbahn between Pratteln and Brugg, a joint line with the SCB, but worked by the NOB. The important line from Zurich via Thalwil to Zeiglebrücke together with a connection joining the VSB's Ruti-Weesen-Glarus section at Nafels was opened on 20

September 1875. A line from Winterthur via Bulach to Koblenz was opened on 1 August 1876. An isolated line from Glarus to Linthal was opened on 1 June 1879.

The seventies and eighties were to prove a rather difficult period for the NOB. Dr. Alfred Escher, the Company's best known President, used the railway to further his political interests, including resistance to railway nationalisation. Then came the period of intense competition with the Schweizerische Nationalbahn (SNB), a railway to be covered in a subsequent article. This led to the building of the Niederglatt-Wettigen line which was opened on 1 October 1877. On the collapse of the SNB the Winterthur-Zofingen and Suhr-Aarau lines passed to the NOB on 1 June 1880, with the Winterthur-Singen, Etzwilen-Konstanz and Kreuzlingen-Kreuzlingen Hafen section being absorbed on 1 October of the same year.

The company was, however, seriously weakened by all this. After having paid an average dividend of 7.5% from 1862, it was unable to declare one in 1877. A powerful financial syndicate came to the rescue, reorganizing the NOB's finances and putting it in a stronger trading position. A significant minus point was an obligation to build a number of potentially unprofitable railways, known as *Moratorium* lines, at such time as the Federal Council should deem the company sufficiently strong to undertake the task. The Council now saw a chance to purchase the company and negotiations were begun. When the NOB proved unenthusiastic, the Council attempted to bring pressure to bear by declaring that the company was now in a position to build the *Moratorium* lines. An influential group of

shareholders bought up the majority of the Company shares and offered them to the Government. However, the NOB and the Council could not agree on a price and the matter lapsed.

The shipping operations of the NOB on the Bodensee have been covered in a separate article (*Swiss Express* Vol.2/6). In 1875 the company put the Escher, Wyss built *Helvetia* into service on the Zurichsee. Some 65m long, she carried 1200 passengers on two decks. Eventually passing to the Zurich-Schiffahrtsgesellschaft (ZSG), the vessel was to continue in service until 1959.

During the 1880s, the lines from Sulgen to Gossau opened and Effretikon to Hinwil (opened in 1876) were absorbed on 1 August 1885 and 1 January 1886 respectively. As the NOB finances had recovered, a start was made on the *Moratorium* lines. The Dielsdorf-Niederweningen Dorf line opened on 12

August 1891, a line from Koblenz to Stein Säckingen (under the ownership of the Betzbergbahn) followed on 1 August 1892 and the Amriswil-Egnach link on 1 December 1893. The following year Zurich Stadelhofen-Rapperswil opened on 15 March, Zurich Hauptbahnhof-Zurich Stadelhofen on 1 October and Feuerthalen-Etzwilen on 1 November. A line between Schaffhausen and Feuerthalen was opened on 2 April 1895. Finally, 1897 saw the opening of the Eglisau-Neuhausen, Thalwil-Zug and Zurich Wiedikon-Zurich Altstetten lines on 1 June and the Kollermühle-Zug loop line on 18 December. The NOB system, complete with the shipping services on the Bodensee and Zurichsee, finally passed by an agreement of 1 June 1901 to the Federal system on 20 December 1901. However the NOB carried on the working until the formal date of transfer, 1 January 1902.

Publications Consulted

Schienenetz Schweiz

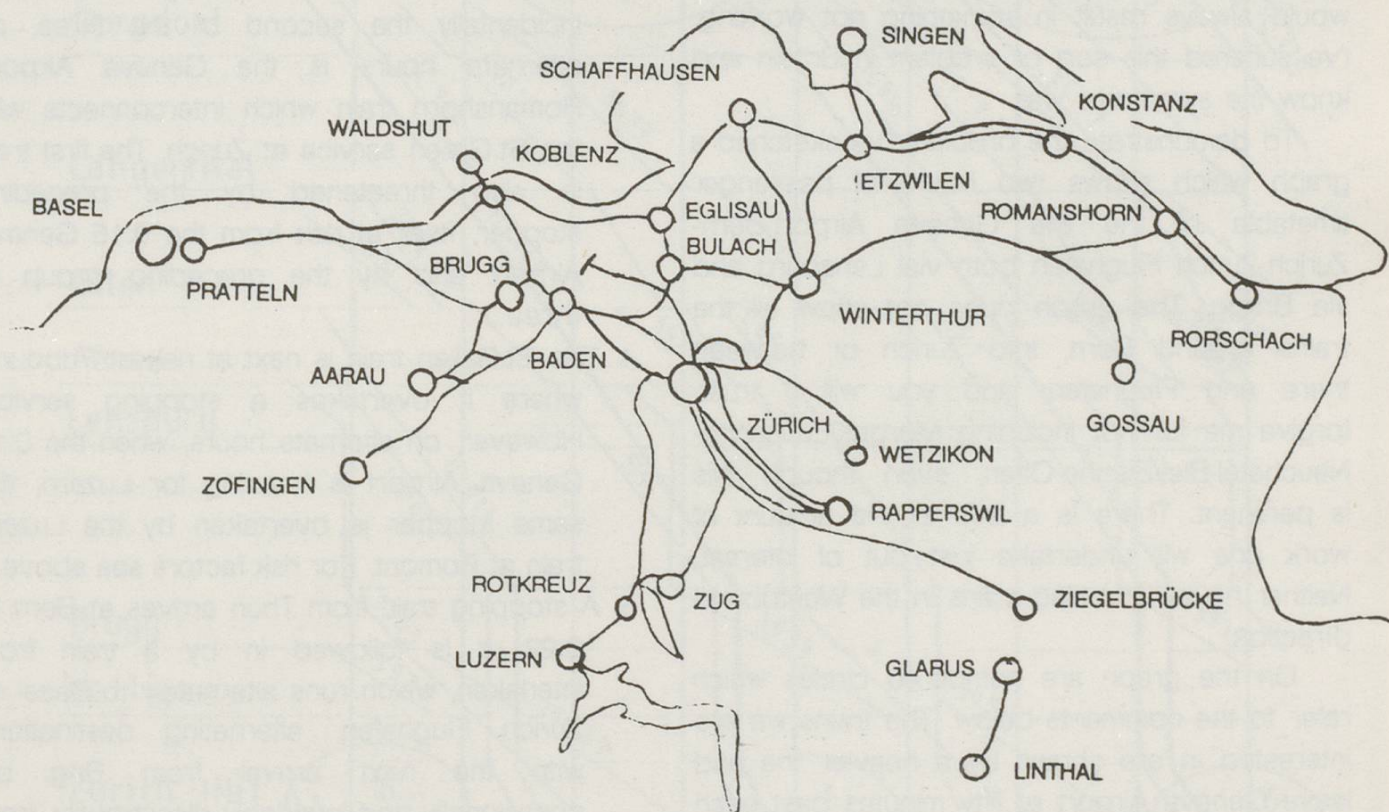
Schiffart auf den Schweizer Seen

The Railways of Switzerland

Hans G. Wägli, Sebastian Jacobi & Roland Probst

Anton Raber

Railway Gazette Publication, 1947



Map of Nordostbahn, as at 1901