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Tram 13 Opening

The TPG drags Geneva screaming into the 21st century with inauguration of the tram 13 line - linking the tram 12 route to the CFF(SBB) main station at Cornavin.
by Chas Bradshaw, Geneva. Photographs by the Author

The festivities took place over the weekend of 27th to 28th May 1995, and apart from the presence of one prototype example of the "extended" trams, suitably decorated with flags, banners and flowers for the occasion, there was the added bonus of the inauguration of the purpose built, new depot for electric trolley buses at *Jonction*. Alongside the service and maintenance depots and the remaining rudimentary facilities for storing the majority of the bus fleet, this new depot will service all the trolley buses and two thirds of the buses making way for the increased tram servicing and garaging requirement at the *Bachet* depot - which will now be almost exclusively reserved for trams.

The new line diverges from the existing tram 12 route between the *rond-point de Plainpalais* and *place Neuve*. The new pointwork completely replaces the previous turnout to the

Jonction depot and completely reversing the direction. The old trackwork has been left embedded in the road for possible future use? The line almost doubles-back, following *rue de Saussure*, at the end of which another turnout allows the possibility of looping back to the *rond-point*. The return trip from the railway station rejoins the 12 route at the southern end of the *rond-point de Plainpalais*, with a separate tram-stop, on the outside of the south side of the *rond-point*, before the completely re-laid trailing pointwork which feeds the new line into the old one and heads off towards *Carouge* and *Bachet* depot.

The line to and from the railway station initially follows the path of the branch to the old tram depot at *Jonction*, alongside the north-eastern side of *Plainpalais* until it diverges from the depot route at the *place du Cirque*, just after the



new tramstop. It is here that the TPG spent several months carefully laying the new track to avoid damaging a venerable plain tree which is sited right slap in the middle of the road junction. Whilst the new tracks head on up *boulevard George-Favon* and on towards the river, the old depot branch is now isolated from the system by a few metres of tarmac. There is no pointwork here, though it could be installed at a future date were the route ever revitalised! The depot branch track remains for the full length of the road to *Jonction* (to maintain a toehold, perhaps?) but has been removed from the area immediately adjacent to the new depot. It is (as it always was) single track, with a couple of passing loops along the way, and double track towards each end.

From *place du Cirque* the tracks run alongside each other, up the crown of the road until they cross *rue du Stand*. Here the track down from the station has a tramstop at the side of the road, with the facing pointwork and crossover already installed for the "Tram 16" route via *place Bel-Air* to *Moillesulaz* (the stretch of rail along *rue du Stand* will be laid in the next phase

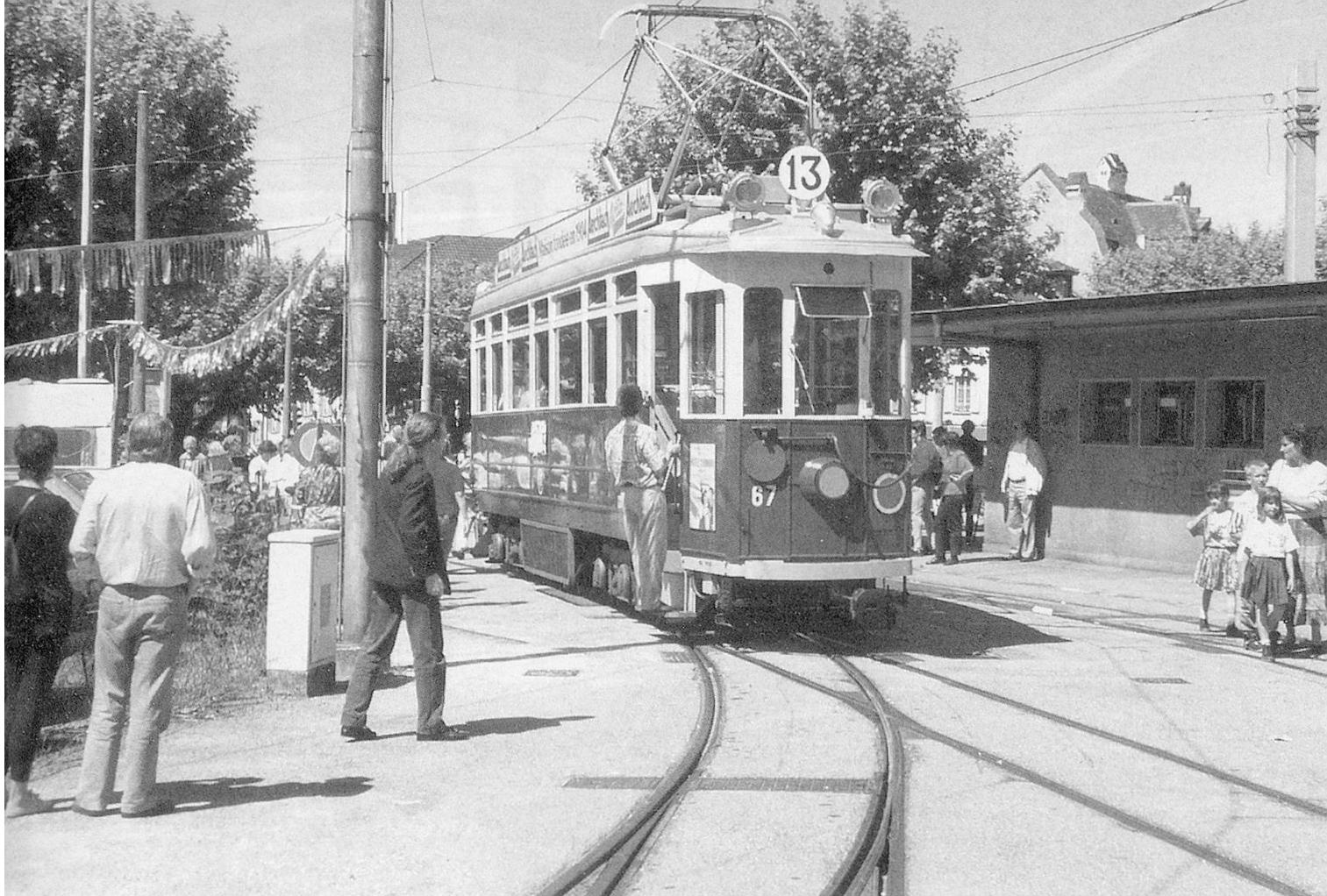
Previous page: The new Be8/4 tram 13 dressed for its inauguration run.

Above: Another view of the heavily decorated tram.

of work). The track leading up to the station has a tramstop on an island in the middle of the road, after which it passes over the already installed passive trailing pointwork, the returnung track from *place Bel-Air* (yet to be installed along *quai de la Poste*, respecting the existing one-way street system). This is intended to be ready by the end of 1996, with the "Tram 13 Extension" from *Bachet* to *Pallettes* not long after.

The tracks then cross the river *Rhone*, on the considerably modified *Coulouvrière* bridge. This has some splendid catenary supports which are quite unique and attractively illuminated with neon strips at night!

At the other side of this bridge the tracks diverge, respecting the one-way road system, up the slight incline towards the station. The track running towards the railway station remains on the left-hand side of the road (coming from the crown of the road over the



Above: One of the AGMT preserved trams No.67

bridge), with a tramstop on an island (*place Goulart*) and a reserved lane for much of this stretch. This was the first section of track to be laid on this side of the *Rhone* since the old tracks were ripped up in a fit of late sixties short sightedness; behaviour which was repeated around the world in various forms.

The track passes to the south side of the *Notre Dame* church and turns left alongside the bus waiting bays, where it bifurcates to form a passing loop, before continuing to turn round and crossing over the road to the right-hand side where the two tracks rejoin after the *place Cornavin* tramstop, opposite the north side of the same church. From here the track along the right-hand side of the returning one-way street, past another tramstop (*place Isaac-Mercier*), descending towards the bridge of the *Rhone* again, after which it re-crosses to the crown of the road immediately following the *rue du Stand* tramstop.

At each new tramstop there are traffic light controlled pedestrian crossings and new design illuminated yellow poles! The shelters at each tramstop are of a unified design. The tarmac

laid between the rails is coloured green. Though how long it will last like this, with rust staining from track wear, especially where grit is used near tramstops, remains to be seen. Where the track has a tram-only reserved lane, often isolated from other traffic by a narrow kerb rib island, the whole area is finished in green tarmac. These lanes can also be used by emergency vehicles whenever heavy traffic renders this necessary.

Running back south-eastwards from the *rond-point de Plainpalais*, two tramstops along the *rue de Carouge*, is the turnaround on the right-hand side of *place des Augustins*. This has had the facing pointwork completely rebuilt. There are two tracks for the first section of this turnaround, used as waiting bays, rejoining after about a (new extended) tram's length and passing behind the restaurant and HQ of the *Vieux Grenadiers*, before crossing the down line and rejoining the up line via a passive trailing turnout. This has simply been strengthened a



Above: Preserved AGMT No. 729, these ran between normal services.

Left: The Pylons used over the river bridge section.

little to cope with the extra traffic, as latterly it was used only rarely, in case of sector power-downs, special workings of the AGMT preserved trams and last service at night in the days when the *Jonction* tram depot was still in use. Every alternate No. 13 turns round here, in normal service.

Two AGMT preserved trams: No. 67 and No. 729 were operating (without their respective trailers) over the entire weekend, proudly wearing the "13" plates. These antiques were timetabled in between the regular tram workings (single Be6/4 units and single Be8/4 unit, No.836 "Puplinge", bearing No. 13 and double Be6/4 units bearing No.12), but were turning round at the old terminus of the *rondeau de Carouge* instead of at *Bachet*. Seven more of the Be8/4 (extended) trams, to serve the "13" route, were due to be ready by the end of September and another ten early in 1996; though I have just spotted two Be8/4s wearing No.12!

Post Script:

Sunday operation now uses the Be8/4s on route 12 and single Be6/4s on route 13!

