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## **BLS News:** by George M. Hoekstra **"NINA" regional express close to roll-out**

The 8 new NINA railcars, which the BLS will mainly use for local services of the S-Bahn Bern (see Swiss Express, June 97), were presented in various stages of completion to the railway press on the 4th August 1998 in Villeneuve at the Bombardier (ex Vevey Technologies) works. BLS deputy director Mathias Tromp and Bombardier director Hans Vorburger explained the original concept: the users of regional transport are amongst the most frequent, loyal rail travellers. What is needed for these customers is not fancy but costly to maintain high-tech, but a safe,

comfortable, fast, low-floored, high seating-capacity workhorse, using proven modular components. This, however does not have to be a vehicle which would induce a culture shock in a passenger connecting from an Intercity. "It would have made no sense at all to build a rail-bound vehicle, which could be replaced by a trolleybus", commented Mr. Tromp. Rollout is expected for the 30th October 1998 and tests will commence in November 1998 in the Bern area.

**Photo above:** BLS NINA at Bombardier works, Villeneuve.

## **Forging ahead in the Lötschberg Tunnel**

After 4 years of literally inching along (see Swiss Express, March 1995) work along all 57528 inches of the Lötschberg tunnel, to adapt it to the profile of the new EU-Norm 4m high loads on the Huckepack trains, is now in the final stages. This picture of the heavy "Jumbo" china-clay train passing a digger within two feet, was taken on the 12th May 1998, during the the last full working week. The major trackwork is now

completed and trains can once again use both tracks over their full length again: a great elief for the traffic controllers! All that remains to be done now, is the finishing off, laying some new cablework and the signalling. When the Huepack trains will start running, now only depends on completion of the work south of the Simplon tunnel, in Italy. Work here is finally in full swing, with one track blocked between Iselle and





*Above:* The China-clay train passing a "working digger" with about a two feet clearance.

*Below:* One of loaders at work: look at the close to;erance - the rail on the left is the "running rail".

