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"Braking; The Sound Barrier" by Mike Harris

Whilst on a trip to Switzerland this year I heard the following report on Swiss Radio International on the evening of June 9th 1996.

Apparently around 30,000 people every year are disturbed by train noise, particularly the sound of trains braking to a standstill. It appears that research has shown that the old block brakes roughen the steel wearing surfaces of the wheels which then creates high noise levels on the rails under braking.

Two answers to this problem are being investigated; technological improvements and physical sound barriers.

The SBB have been carrying out tests at Crecy (?) running special trains over a section of track at three minute intervals and some of these tests have been run in front of invited VIP guests and journalists who were brought in specially on the 1935 "Red Arrow" train.

Some test trains had the old system of cast iron brake blocks, others disc brakes, drum brakes, disc and drum braked mixed rolling stock and a mix of disc, drum and block brakes. Need-

Above: Noise will not be a problem with the latest units being designed in Switzerland. One of the new Martigny-Châtelard (MC) units being delivered from Stadler of Vevey, seen here on route to Vernayaz, between Aigle and Bex, 24/1/97. Photo: Les Heath

less to say there was a marked difference in the noise level when either disc or drum brakes were used in isolation or together.

The men from SBB interviewed by SRI seemed pleased with both the test results and the press reaction to the new systems. Teio Weres and Pierre Alain Urresch (apologies for the undoubted misspelling) looked forward to a decision being made on the provision of finance for the upgrades. Both the new braking systems and the sound barriers are currently estimated to cost around SF1.7 Billion and the Swiss people will vote on the subject next year.