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FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

George M Hoekstra

avec. KEEPING THE SMALL STATIONS ALIVE



Seen from the side of the tracks, the station of Altstätten SG, between St. Margrethen and Sargans, with its new avec store. A few tables and chairs invite casual guests in front of the entrance. Opening times are 6 am till 8 pm, 365 days of the year.

THE STORY CONTINUES

Regular readers will remember my first article about the opening of the "avec" store in Schüpfen, on the line from Bern to Bienne, see Swiss Express September 2000, pages 29-30.

A few weeks ago, I made a long trip to Altstätten SG, all the way to the eastern edge of Switzerland, on the Austrian border. The occasion was the opening of the 10th avec store. Altstätten SBB station has about 80 train - and 1500 passenger - movements a day. Like other stations converted to avec status, this makes it too small to be kept open by the SBB alone. As with all the other "little big stores", as they like to be called, avec Altstätten SG is a joint venture of SBB, Migros, Kiosk AG and Café Spettacolo, operating together under the name of "ceanova AG". All the shops offer a food store, full service ticketing point, magazines and other kiosk articles, a café with snacks and an Internet terminal. The licensee gets financial help in the form of loans, but he essentially

operates at his own risk. Likely sites for the avec shops must be well situated in the local traffic network, have about 3000 persons living in the vicinity, the necessary conversion work should not exceed a realistic price and a yearly turnover of about 3 million francs (£1.2 million) should be attainable. Altstätten SBB station is situated about a mile from the town and thus is not really in competition with the local shops. I asked Mrs. Liselotte Inauen, who runs the restaurant Bahnhof right opposite, what she thought of the competition. She did not really feel there was any: "I do not sell sandwiches and they do not sell meals". Also she felt that a dead, closed up station right across from her restaurant would do neither the area nor herself any good at all. The licensees of half a dozen of the other avec shops were present at the opening, so it was an ideal opportunity for me to ask them how well they had fared. Without exception, all of them stated that after about the first six months, during which trade was slow due to



ABOVE: Inside, the large windows towards the road let in lots of light. As this station (the SBB one) is about a mile from the town, the avec store is not really in competition with other suppliers.



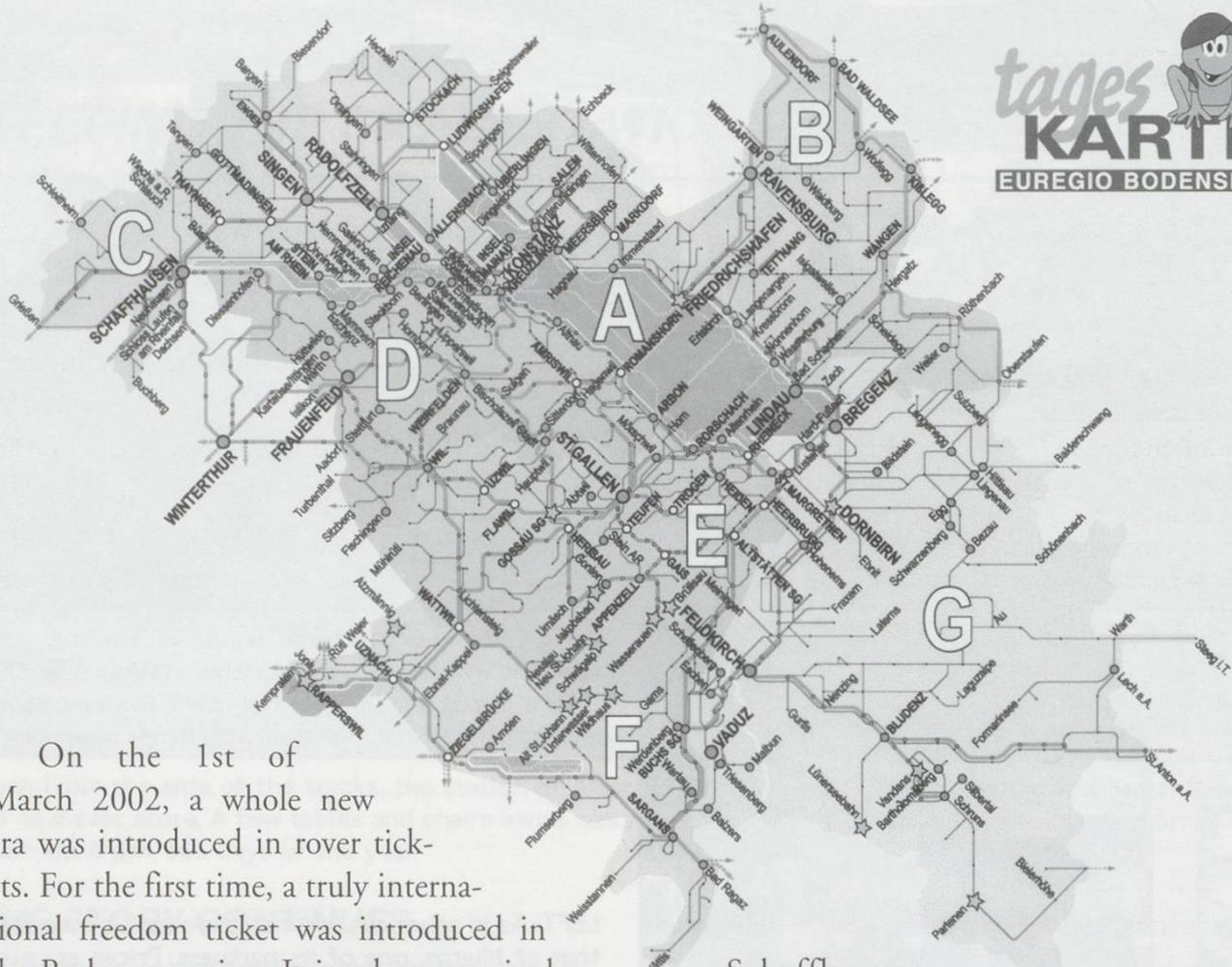
LEFT: As in other avec stores, the range is based on that of Migros, one of its partners. Prices are also the same as in the supermarkets. Fresh produce is also on sale.

BELOW: The new licensee, Mr. Albert Egger, was the stationmaster at Altstätten. He has spent the last 35 years as a civil servant with the railway, but is quite confident he will be able to make it a success

the "wait and see" attitude of local people, residents and commuters alike, they were now doing very well and above budget - so a success story! The ceanova consortium hopes to have opened a total of 50 avec shops by the end of 2004.



THE FOUR COUNTRY DAY TICKET



On the 1st of March 2002, a whole new era was introduced in rover tickets. For the first time, a truly international freedom ticket was introduced in the Bodensee region. It involves one single ticket, which is valid on the fully integrated transport services (trams, buses, trains and shipping) of 70 participating independent operators located in four different countries: Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Liechtenstein! In view of the large number of operators, plus the fact that four countries are involved, it is incredible that negotiations took less than two years. The fact that 2 million people live in the area and four million visit there every year, helped to push the ecological aspect of public transport with an easy go, no fuss ticket, valid across national borders. Until this time, the private car had a huge advantage in cross-border travel: no need to buy multiple tickets with complicated and ever changing tariffs. No longer! The area covered by the new ticket, as the name implies, is located all around the Bodensee and is roughly bordered by: Bad Ragaz, Rapperswil, Frauenfeld and

Schaffhausen

in Switzerland, Engen, Ravensburg, Aulendorf, Wangen and Oberstaufen in Germany, Lech and St Anton am Arlberg, Schruns and Feldkirch in Austria, as well as the whole of Liechtenstein.

The total area covered measures more than 10,000 square km or 3,900 square miles and thus is larger than the whole of Luxembourg or about the size of all of Switzerland: quite a size for a regional pass! The region is divided into seven areas. There are two types of tickets available: one for two neighbouring areas at 30 francs a day, and one for all areas at 40 francs. Children (6-15) pay 15 or 20 francs and small groups of up to two adults and four children pay 60 or 70 francs for a day. Anybody can buy these tickets at any railway station or many automats, no pre-booking or half fare cards are necessary. No reductions for FIP, Swiss Pass, or Swiss Card holders. As travel across a Swiss bor-



One of the most frequented ways to cross the Bodensee is the Car-Ferry from Romanshorn to Friedrichshafen. Here the ferry *Romanshorn* has just docked in at the town that gave it its name and several large German lorries are coming ashore. Foot passengers just walk on, after going through customs: you are leaving Switzerland and entering the EU here..

der involves entry into, or out of the EU, a valid passport must be carried.

This is a great opportunity for anybody staying in the area, to really explore the region, without being boxed in by national borders. As it is a day ticket, you can buy it when the weather is good and you fancy making a longer excursion. It is great value for tourists, who do not want to travel all over Switzerland - then you should buy a Swiss Pass - and usually do not have the half-fare card most of the Swiss possess. The day cards are valid from Winterthur, only a few miles to pay extra from Zurich airport. Also great is the fact that you do not need to plan ahead.

The sponsors, the Cantons of the inner and outer Appenzell, St.Gallen, Schaffhausen, Thurgau and Zürich, as well as the Länder of Baden-Würtenberg, Bavaria and Vorarlberg and the Principality of Liechtenstein have agreed to

finance the costs of setting up and marketing, as well as one half of the expected loss in revenue of the operators over four years, a total of 1.6 million Euros (1 million pounds). The increased volume in traffic should cover the other half of the loss in revenue. It is expected 140,000 of the new international tickets will be sold this year, compared with 70,000 of a similar day card - but valid only in Switzerland - last year. General timetable information sites for the different countries are at:

www.bahn.de (German Railways), www.efabw.de (Baden Würtenberg), www.oebb.at (Austrian Railways), www.vmobil.at (Vorarlberg) and www.sbb.ch (guess...). Most of the sites are predominantly in German, but have some English. In case you are new to this game, "timetable" is "Fahrplan" in German.

Further information about this special ticket (in German) at: www.euregiokarte.com. There is also a great game (watch for "Spiel") at

Arriving at Friedrichshafen, Germany. The attractive old town can be seen on the left. The ferry docks on the right, opposite the white building, which is the Zeppelin museum. The railway station is well hidden behind this building, up a flight of stairs. The new building on the sea front with the "DE" sign is only a ticket office!



this site, about a frog (the logo and mascot of the new ticket) catching insects with his tongue, earning points. Aimed at kids, who can win free day cards and then will pester their parents to ride. Great fun, although a stork caught my frog, before I could clock up a reasonable score . . .



From Friedrichshafen, I took a German train along the northern shores of the Rhine, to Radolfzell. From there, a MittelThurgau Bahn electric railcar, running a border crossing service from Engen, Germany to Weinfelden in Switzerland. Here we cross the Rhine at the pretty town of Konstanz. Not a border crossing: both shores are inside Germany.



This is Konstanz railway station in Germany, but apart from the barely visible class 365 German diesel shunter, all the stock is Swiss! The Ae 477 (ex DR) in "Helvetia Patria" livery (an insurance company), belongs to the MittelThurgau-daughter Lokoop; the driving trailer is from an "Swiss Express" set (SEE, mark III stock, not us!), running a "RX" (Regional Express") service to Zürich airport, sometimes extended to Bern-Geneva Airport, known as "City Vogel" and finally a MThB class 566 electric railcar. Truly Euregio!

NOTE

Ryanair now fly to Friedrichshafen as noted by Steve Horobin in the last issue. Check the website. www.ryanair.com for details.

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