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## THE SOB OPENS ITS NEW DOUBLE TRACK BETWEEN DEGERSHEIM AND MOGELSBERG

On the 20th September 2003 the SOB held a large festival, in conjunction with the local authority, to celebrate the opening of the new double track between Degersheim and Mogelsberg. It forms the first part of a major project twin-tracking other parts of the old BT and SOB networks including work in Pfäffikon and Sattel. The project is part of the AlpTransit-Zufahrt OstSchweiz and is intended to improve communications between NE Switzerland and other parts of the Federation.

Degersheim station hosted a carnival celebrating rail transport. Participants included the largest steam locomotive available for use in Europe, 241-A-65 and other famous rail celebrities, the former BT Eb 3/5 No.9 in particular. A passenger carrying model railway was laid out in the station area and model layouts in the larger scales were also exhibited. Needless to say much drink, food and musical entertainment was on hand in various marquees. Finishing at midnight it must have been quite an event.

The welcome and official opening was performed by Dr Guido Schoch, managing director of the SOB, Dr Georg Hess, President of the SOB and Dr Josef Cellar, head of the local authority, St Gallen.

Punches were not pulled during the speeches. Dr Schoch stressed that although only 2.3km of track had been doubled it was still the largest infrastructure project on the railway since electrification. Dr Cellar commented that it was the first of the NEAT projects to have taken place in St Gallen and at SFr20m was small beer compared to the needs of East Switzerland although welcome for all that. He called it a "Geschenk des öffentlichen Verkehrs". Literally translated it means "a present of Public Transport." I suspect something of the real meaning has been lost here and there may be a more subtle point being made. He criticised the national government over its commitment to East Switzerland. The amounts allocated to the European High Speed Network connection project were SFr140m in the East and SFr400m in the west. He tempered his comments in that it was an important first step to improving the St Gallen to Arth-Goldau corridor and looked forward to further projects in Lichtensteig, Wattwil, Uznach and Schmerikon.

Other speakers including Dr Hess from SOB and Reto Gnägi, Mayor of Degersheim, welcomed the new stretch as a first step in improving connections to and from other parts of Switzerland and further afield. The twin tracks were opened with a parallel run by an SOB Re 4/4 and ex BT Eb 3/5 No. 9 to Mogelsberg.



Dr Schoch and Dr Hess from the SOB wave off the first official journey along the new double-track stretch.