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FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

George M Hoekstra

TWO EXHIBITIONS AT THE NEC

Not too much news from Switzerland this time, as your correspondent spent a lot of time in England during November and December. I had two enjoyable visits to the NEC in Birmingham with your editor. Firstly, there was the Railtex infrastructure exhibition, where there were even some Swiss suppliers among the small foreign contingent. There was definitely a more upbeat feeling about the expected level of investment in the railways of Britain. Personally, I am not so sure. Words and promises come cheap for politicians, but the actual spending is controlled by faceless officials in the treasury. And neither understands long-term financial planning, especially as long-term means beyond the next election. For example, the costs of a changeover to electric traction can, over a period of about fifteen to twenty years, be self-financed out of the huge savings in maintenance costs and the longer life cycles of the equipment. Thus, it can be treated as a loan, financed out of the assets account and not as a cost through the budget. No increases in

taxation or fares are necessary. The owners of the railways in Switzerland, the Cantons and the Confederacy, have known this for a long time. Of course, this will not work with Britain's fragmented railways, with their short-term leases and private investors only interested in quick, short term profits at every stage. We shall see.

Then there was the Warley Model Railway Club's annual show, always a pleasure. I was glad to see the Swiss Railways Society had a stand there again this year, ably manned by Paul Hannant and Glyn Jones, helped by various other enthusiastic members. By the time I left the show on Sunday afternoon, they had signed up about ten new members. Great work! Opposite their stand was a layout with a mixture of Swiss, Austrian and German prototype, where another two very active members, Willie McKnight and Dave Howsam were very much involved. They got a "best of show" award from the Mayor of Sandwell. Well deserved, too.

NIGHTBIRD - LARGE CITIES CONNECTED IN THE NIGHT: BY BUS!



In Switzerland, trains at night normally run until sometime after midnight. This can be a problem at weekends: Parties, Theatres, Music-Events and such. The Swiss Postal Cars, together with the SBB, have launched night services on the nights Friday/Saturday and Saturday/Sunday. Since November 2000 between Geneva and Lausanne and between Zürich and Luzern. In December 2001 new services were added: Zürich-St.Gallen, Zürich-Biel and some regional services on the weekends. Services running every night were added between Zürich and Basel and Zürich and Bern. All types of tickets and passes are valid. Every passenger pays a surcharge, depending on the distance, of between 5 Francs (up to 29 km) and 15 Francs (over 100 km). More than 13 000 passengers used these services in the first year, the numbers are continually rising. On certain days and routes, more than one coach is needed. Of all the passengers, 96 % used the train on their outward journey. More than half of the mainly young travellers (mean age was 26) stated they would otherwise have used their car for both journeys. Another success for public transport!

Note from Editor: The Owl is my idea of humour and is not the official logo.

PUBLICAR - PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR RURAL AREAS



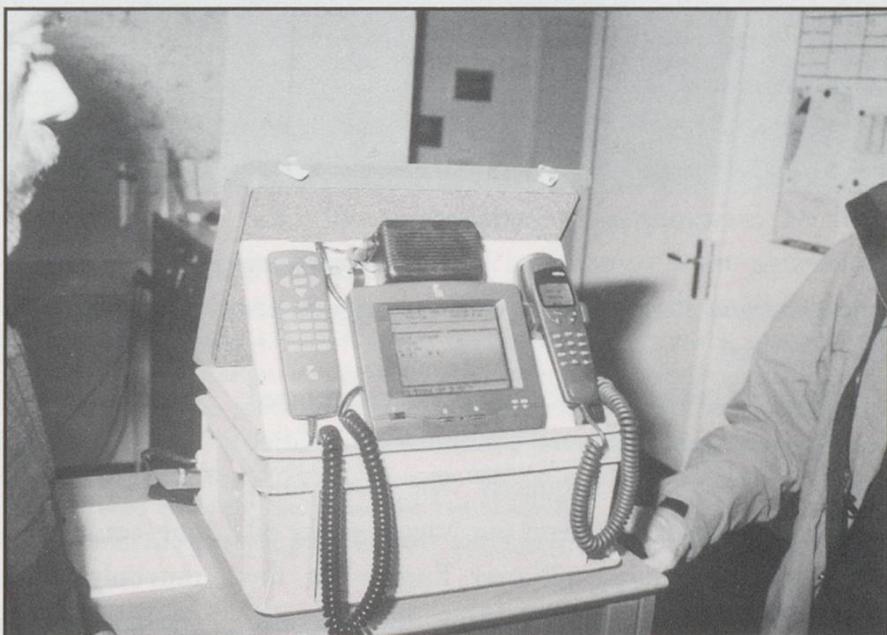
Some services run until late at night: here, outside Frauenfeld station just after midnight. PubliCar thus allows young people to get safely home to their front door, after a night out in town.

Public transport in sparsely populated areas has a well-known problem: in the morning and afternoon rush hours, the buses have a reasonable load factor. In the long hours in-between, they run around mostly empty. Yet not running them is not an option in Switzerland, where getting from anywhere to everywhere every hour is thankfully still adhered to (even though a few two-hour connections have crept in - a mistake). So what do you do?

One of the possible solutions is the call-bus: if you want to travel, you call a free telephone number and give them your code, which means the central control knows exactly who you are what type of ticket you use and where your home is. You tell them where you want to go. Control enters this into the computer,

Every PubliCar has this high-tech installation. The display for the instructions to the driver, here with the next pick-up with the number and names of the passengers. Then the mobile telephone for communication with the control centre (normally by SMS) and finally a radiotelephone for communication with the garage, should a problem occur with the vehicle.

which will then find which vehicle - usually a minibus - is closest to you and what time it can pick you up in front of your door. No need to go to a bus stop! The operator will tell you this and ask you for confirmation. If confirmed, "OK" is pressed on the computer and the driver concerned will get the information and instructions as an SMS on his display when he is close enough to you. Thanks to GPS, the computer knows exactly where the vehicle is. The return journey is done in exactly the same way; you are put off directly in front of your home. All normal tickets and passes are valid and you only pay a surcharge of a few Francs for the privilege of getting door-to-door service. There are now 25 PubliCar areas in Switzerland. They are all operated by the Swiss Postal Cars. The passengers like it: 55% rated it as very good, 38% as good. Only 7 % were not satisfied.





One of the new colourful euro tank cars at Glattbrugg, the fuel depot of the Airport of Zürich. Photo: © Wascosa.

Back to railways in Switzerland. You might have noticed I have a special interest in the BLS. After all, its main line runs right at the back of my house! Also, I am very interested in freight. So what better than some news that combines both. The deregulation of the railways in Europe brings sweeping changes in the way goods are transported on the railways. To the shipper, overall costs and depending on the commodity, speed, now decide the means of transport chosen. The railway industry used to have a bewildering array of wagons, a different one for every commodity, at its disposal. The cost of maintaining such a very specialised, but only lightly utilised fleet of cars, has become uneconomical. With ever increasing safety regulations, as well as the increasingly more complicated insurance and legal considerations, the number of different wagons has to be reduced.

New, adaptable wagons must be constructed that can transport different commodities, so they can be utilised more frequently. The WASCOSA company, based in Zug, rents out wagons to the oil and chemical industry all over Europe. At the moment, they have a fleet of about 2600 wagons.

They now are now adding 150 new universal tank cars to this fleet. Four prototypes were put through a period of six months of rigorous testing. Manufacturers note: you do not go from the drawing board straight into service! The order for the patented "euro tank car" was then placed with Trinity Industries, a company with its European headquarters in Winterthur. The tank cars will be manufactured in Romania. The new cars are quite colourful and will provide a challenge for the model railway industry. The vehicles are 17 metres (56 ft) long and run on bogies. Capacity is 95 m³ or 66 tons. The wagons have many special features to make them universally adaptable for the transport of many different commodities. At the top and bottom of the tank there are eight openings with different connectors to the different mineral oil and chemical standards. Also, there are different types of connectors for the various systems of gas-vapour removal, as the different systems unfortunately do not have a universal connector. Until now, most wagons were only equipped with one type of connector and could thus only be used for one system. The hatches on the top have four closing levers, instead of the single one



Some of the special connectors at the bottom of the tank car: on the left the connector for the products ("Produktanschluss"), on the right the different connectors for the gas-vapour removal ("Gaspendelanschlüsse").

Photo: © Wascosa.

Rhine near Basel) and Glattbrugg (near Zürich Airport). This is where the BLS comes in: since the 4th of November, BLS Cargo is running these trains for Petrofina. Also, since the 15th of December 2002, BLS Cargo has taken over all

most of today's tank cars have. Some of the new wagons will be used in block trains for the transport of products of the Petrofina refinery between Cornaux (near Neuchâtel) or Birsfelden Harbour (on the

operations between the refinery at Crissier and Cornaux station, including the inspection of the trains. This service was previously provided by the SBB.



LOCO-LIVERY FOR THE SKI WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

By the time you read this, the Ski World Championships of St Moritz will be all over. The new combined Südostbahn created a special livery on one of the Editor's favourite locomotives, Re4/4 456 091-8, which will be used to pull the special SOB-Gold-Express trains. These will run on the days of the finals from Herisau via St.Gallen, Rorschach, Buchs and Sargans to Landquart. There, a special RhB train will take the fans on to St Moritz. The special train could only be boarded with special tickets, which included coffee, a croissant and... a glass of schnapps, served by officials of the Swiss Ski Federation, many of whom are ex-champions themselves. The well known Swiss Ski Star and World Champion Sonja Nef unveiled the engine on the 2nd of December 2002, one side depicts the Churfirsten range in winter, the other the Rigi in summer. The idea is to promote the Südostbahn as the leading private railway in Central and Eastern Switzerland - the Editor would probably say in all of Switzerland...

Photo: © Südostbahn