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# FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

**George M Hoekstra**

who also took most of the photos

## ***YOUR OWN CORRESPONDENT STEPS DOWN***

After several years of writing lots of topical articles for you a change of personal circumstances unfortunately makes it impossible for me to keep on doing it. If members and editor are willing I may still write the occasional article, but nothing on the previous scale. I really hope you enjoyed reading the articles as much as I have enjoyed writing them! I want to thank all the members who have written to me with comments and suggestions.

Feedback is always very gratifying for a journalist!

### ***BLS 465 ON CAR SHUTTLES KANDERSTEG – GOPPENSTEIN***



I received a letter from a member some time ago with a request to settle a bet: did BLS 465 locos ever operate on the Kandersteg – Goppenstein car shuttles? And would I please not mention his name... I wonder why!! Anyway, discretion is a Swiss tradition. The answer is yes. The picture is clear proof. The main reason for this highly unusual operation were tests to confirm the 465 locos could be controlled from the driving trailers on the other side of the shuttle. They can!

Seen from my balcony in Kandersteg on the 1st of June 1995: BLS 465 001 "Simplon/Sempione" operates a loaded car transport shuttle. The shuttle is coming into Kandersteg from Goppenstein, this is evident from the cars: they are pointed towards Kandersteg.



# avec.

## CELEBRATES ON THE "CHURCHILL" RED ARROW



As this was not a trip for rail fans, there were no photo stops. The picture here was taken in Zürich Altstetten. The Railcar now carries the name Churchill Pfeil on its side, below the number.

To celebrate the opening of the 20th "avec." (yes, written small and with a dot) store in the station of Neuhausen am Rheinfall, the preserved double red arrow RAe 4/8 No. 1021 was chartered to take the invited guests on a tour from Zürich-Altstetten to Neuhausen and back. The railcar is nicknamed "Churchill-Pfeil" (arrow) as the great man himself made a short tour through Switzerland on it just after the Second World War. As all seats in this railcar are at tables and there even is a tiny kitchen, it was possible to serve a small evening meal on the way back to Zürich via Winterthur. It was a memorable occasion – quite fitting for the undeniable success of the 20 stations saved from oblivion and vandalism through conversion into an "avec." enterprise. For next year, another five new stores are planned, including two on the RM, the Regionalverkehr Mittelland AG. These will be the first "avec." shops not installed in ex-SBB stations!



The double railcar itself very often can be seen standing in sidings just outside Zürich HB, on the left hand side coming in, with a big sign stuck on the side: "you can rent me"!

As not many of you will have had the opportunity to look inside, here is a picture. The railcar is marketed by the SBB owned "RailAway" organisation, catering is by "elvetino", ex "passagio", ex "Mitropa/Bufferet Suisse" and "Schweiz. Speisewagen Gesellschaft", now also fully owned by SBB, again!





At night, with inside lights and table lamps fully lit up, the railcar really looks grand. Thank you to Cevanova (the organisation behind "avec.") for a great evening!

## **BLS AND RM: HOW STRONGLY TO COOPERATE?**

Talking about RM, they have just completed a study into what passengers really want. As rail travellers ourselves, it comes as no surprise what the passenger really wants, is to be reliably (= with punctual and frequent service), comfortably (= have a seat in a clean, air-conditioned vehicle) and safely (= have see-through visibility and possible direct contact with the driver, not just a video-camera) transported from A to B. The solution would be to replace its ageing and thus costly to maintain fleet of railcars, with more efficient GTW 2/6 and 2/8 railcars from Stadler. The 2/6 is a railcar with 2 driving trailers resting in the middle on a self-contained central 2-axle motor unit. The 2/8 has an additional trailer in the middle. To complicate things, not too long after this study was made public, the Canton of Bern announced at the end of October that it wanted the RM and the BLS to "cooperate strongly in passenger traffic". The Canton of Bern has a dual interest here. It is both the majority owner of the two railways and also the buyer of the regional traffic services they provide. It is obvious, that since both railways provide many connecting and even some overlapping regional services, there could be substantial savings through a leaner (but not meaner) support structure. An external firm made a study of the possible models of cooperation and their respective benefits, right down to a full fusion. The boards of both BLS and RM will study the report and its implications. The areas where RM overlaps with the SBB are also being looked at – but as an entirely separate exercise. At a time, when it looks like the SBB wants to become the only standard gauge operator of regional transport, other operators tread more carefully. See what happened to railways like the Mittelthurgaubahn, the Martigny-Orsières or the Sensetalbahn. Now rumours even abound about the metre gauge Luzern-Stans-Engelberg-Bahn being forced into cooperation. The federal department of transport has stated on several occasions, that the necessary savings in the cost of public transport should be made. They did stress though, this should be done through increased efficiency and not by reducing services. A decision is expected in January; so watch this space...



## ALL OVER ADVERTS-HOW MUCH?

Agfa Film was the first advertising livery to be put on a 460-class locomotive. Others followed, not only on SBB 460 engines, but on many other locomotives as well. Trams and buses followed. Ever since, there has been a lot of speculation about the prices charged for this kind of advertisement. Up to now, there has not been a lot of information available to the general public. Now though, in an article in the magazine "Via", a publication that is distributed in trains and in stations, almost all is revealed! First of all, not all deals are for cash. Sometimes the advertisement is in exchange for services provided, such as the SF DRS/TSR/TSI television stations, where they carry SBB-advertisements. This is also the case for all advertisements carried on BLS stock, like Mystery Park, Wallis Tourism, Lauchernalp and so on. No money is exchanged; the partners pay for all the work and the BLS benefits from different promotions. Info: [www.bls.ch](http://www.bls.ch). Here are some of the prices where money is involved, all for the advertisement fee only; design, artwork, cutting of stickers, application and removal are all extra. These costs can easily run to well in excess of 100,000 francs (£45,000). Yearly costs vary widely according to size and "exposure" in area as well as population density. The SBB charges 240,000 francs (£ 115,000) for a class 460, which has an 18 m. by 2 m. (approx. 60 ft by 7 ft) large area on both sides and can be spotted all over the country. More info on: [www.sbb.ch/railadvertising](http://www.sbb.ch/railadvertising). The RhB, which covers a much smaller area, charges 100,000 francs. See [www.rhb.ch](http://www.rhb.ch). The Geneva tram company covers a much smaller area again, but with a huge population exposure several times a day, charges between 99,000 and 199,000 francs (£ 45 – 90,000) according to type. See [www.tpgpub.ch](http://www.tpgpub.ch). Postal cars, covering a lot of rural areas with a lot less exposure, cost 20,000 (£ 9,000) for an all-over job (the front is always excluded), or 6,000 francs (£ 2750) for just the back. Information (not easy to find): [www.postauto.ch](http://www.postauto.ch). Most companies limit the number of vehicles that can be used as mobile billboards. I am indebted to my colleague Peter Krebs, who supplied most of the information in this item.

A good example of a straightforward paid-for loco advert. SBB Re 460 460-021 at Spiez, 7-Aug-01, in Kambly Biscuit livery.

Photo: Phil Weaver





## EUROPA FORUM LUZERN

**EXPERTS FROM GERMANY, AUSTRIA, ITALY AND SWITZERLAND  
DISCUSS FREIGHT TRANSPORT OVER THE ALPINE ROUTES.**



Co-operation in freight on the bls. One of the new bls 485 locos double hauls with a DB twin over the Lötschberg.

Photo@bls

On the 27th and 28th of October, government officials, local and national politicians, transporters and shippers, all agreed on one fact during the two days of lectures and discussions: unless things change quickly, there will be a collapse of the freight traffic across the alps.

The opinions about what to do about it though varied widely. Naturally the road lobby cried out for more and cheaper motorways and a second Gotthard tunnel. It was claimed that in the last 15 years the roads had been terribly neglected compared to the railways: they conveniently forgot to mention that, during the previous 35 years, almost all the money for transport infrastructure had been spent on roads.

Road pricing is an important factor: over 500,000 lorries a year on the way from Germany into Italy make 100 mile detours to use the Brenner Motorway across Austria, as the fees there are low. Traffic in this area now is so bad, that local officials are considering calling upon the European court in Strasbourg to limit this traffic. The argument is that the total emissions from the road traffic make basic quality of life for the people there impossible and such a basic quality is guaranteed in the convention on human rights. It would be an interesting case, with very wide implications. Feelings are running very high; all politicians at the conference agreed no political party would be able to get a majority for an increase in the capacity of the Brenner road crossing.

So where do we go from here? The only other major alpine crossings between Germany and Italy are all inside Switzerland: Gotthard, Simplon and Bernina are not border crossings and thus are outside EU control. It was generally agreed that pressure on Switzerland from the EU to accept more traffic will increase. As is known, Switzerland will only accept an increase in rail transit, not on the roads. The road lobby tried to make the point that the railways would not be able to cope; they already had problems with the recent increase in traffic due to the low water level in the Rhine, severely restrict-



ing fluvial transport. Here again, it is clear how the road lobby will try to bend any event into its favour. Nobody can afford to have a huge spare capacity in waiting for events such as this, neither the railways nor the road transport industry.

However, the rail transport industry still has to change; the days of national autonomy are well and truly over. Free access brings huge changes and the industry must become more efficient. But government departments must also change. It is intolerable that every country still has to approve locomotives and rolling stock capable of crossing borders and equipped with all the security devices, separately. Depending on the country, this process can take years. Sometimes there are quibbles about very small things: minute differences in size or tint of a window can be used to bar a locomotive. There are huge differences in exercising control. For instance quite a lot of German locomotives made extensive test runs on the Lötschberg line, famous (or rather infamous) for its sharp curves and steep gradients. None of these machines was required by the Swiss authorities to have a full Swiss certificate. Yet the reverse certainly does not work. The new BLS high roof ferry-wagons for the Kandersteg-Goppenstein car transport route were built in Aachen. They then had to be transported to Bombardier in Villeneuve for finishing. Both plants are rail connected, but the German authorities flatly refused permission for these railway wagons to be transported over German tracks, without full certification. This would have taken months and cost a fortune. So they were all transported by road on huge low loaders: madness! This macho display of local power must be weeded out very quickly. Any road vehicle certified in one EU country is allowed to operate in any other EU country without further certification.

Then there is the problem with track path slots. The hoarding of these by the old national carriers must not be allowed to continue. In Germany, the various new DB companies refuse to give up slots, even if they do not use them. Nor should some parts of the network be regarded as local fiefdoms. On the Gotthard line, after the BLS started running freight trains over this route, some toilets in the local depots were labelled "for SBB personnel only". This is childish; the SBB has been running thousands of trains over the Lötschberg without this nonsense. In fact, SBB had better get used to it; under the open access rule, Stinnes (owner of Railion, ex DB cargo) plans to run thousands of trains over the Gotthard, partly in cooperation with BLS cargo and partly on their own. Railion are able to do this, as they now have their own registration as a certified rail operator in Switzerland. This means they can also run traffic to destinations inside Switzerland and not just transit traffic.

There were questions about the Railion/BLS Cargo operation: was BLS Cargo to be gobbled up by the giant, like NS and DSB Cargo? The CEO of the BLS Hr.Tromp gave an assurance that this would not be the case; BLS Cargo will run about 50% of traffic on its own and 50% as a subcontractor for Railion. All the shippers, who were present in Luzern, agreed competition has brought about dramatic improvements in punctuality and thus is good for business. For instance on the Brenner, after the arrival on the scene of the private Italian operator RTC and after Trenitalia lost 10% of the total traffic, a dramatic increase in punctuality of all freight was observed. This also included the old national carriers; 85% of freight trains now run with less than a 60 min delay, a record for this route. Similar "magic" improvements in *Trenitalia* services have also been observed on the Lötschberg-Simplon-Milano route after the BLS started a cooperation with FMN, and SBB announced they would establish their own certified carrier in the north of Italy. Long delays still can occur at border stations. Piles of paper forms still need to be hand-stamped by custom officials. This is another anachronism in these days of electronic communication.

Further discussions brought out another topic: in Switzerland even the lowest class of regional stopping train has absolute priority over any kind of freight. Many times an already delayed freight has to be sidetracked for the passage of a regional passenger service. It is true this is not the case in some other countries, for instance in the USA. On the other hand, passenger traffic in the USA is nowhere near as intense as it is in Switzerland. My personal opinion is, that as long as freights do not seem to be able to operate as punctually as passenger services generally are, this should stay as it is. Just a personal opinion.

All in all a most interesting conference!



## FATAL ACCIDENT ON THE SBB

Normally, I do not comment on accidents. They happen everywhere people work. It was very unfortunate though that, on the 24th of October, the SBB had its first fatality in almost ten years. A train ran through a red signal in Zürich-Oerlikon and ran into the side of another one, killing a lady and injuring about another 100 passengers. Normally in Switzerland, trains cannot run through red lights without the emergency brake coming on. At this time, it is not totally clear what happened. It seems there has been a most unfortunate and hard to understand combination of human errors and omissions. When the locomotive and two additional cars were connected to the train at Zürich HB, the brake-hose was not connected between the first and second car, so when the driver applied the brakes in Oerlikon, only the locomotive and first car responded. The momentum of the further eight cars in the train then kept pushing it along, past the signal and into the other train. Why the brake-hose was not connected and why no brake test was made before leaving Zürich HB, is still under investigation.

The personnel involved have been suspended on full pay until the outcome of the inquiry. There is never an excuse for human error, but maybe a possible explanation. Over the last four years, constant reorganisations, changes in job-descriptions and reductions in manpower have left many in the workforce feeling insecure. More importantly, it has also severely eroded the feeling of being proud of their job. What is their job anyway? It might change again in six months. On the railway, that is a potentially deadly cocktail, as has now been tragically demonstrated. Overall, though, it was heartening to see how many railwayman and women immediately rallied round, coming into work from home without being asked, as soon as they heard about it. They all helped to get the injured seen to and to get traffic running and passengers on their way again as soon as possible. There is a feeling of duty and responsibility left. Management must take great care not to waste it.

### IMPORTANT SWISS LAYOUT FOR SALE "DISENTIS"

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