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FROM: RALPH HANLEY – SOUTHAMPTON

Plane vs. Train

In June's edition of *Swiss Express* you extolled the virtues of air travel, in particular its cheapness and speed. You were rash enough to solicit members' comments.

Having spent some of my previous working life visiting my company's sites around Europe and America I have been well-exposed to the "benefits" of air travel. What you omitted to mention were the:

- Endless check-in queues
- Delays, cancellations and overbooking
- Cramped accommodation
- Seemingly endlessly circling around one's destination waiting for a landing slot
- Time spent watching the luggage carousel rotating with the hope of seeing your luggage eventually appear
- Queues for the planes' toilets
- Plastic food

In fact towards the end of my career I gave up flying whenever I could and travelled by train, car or ferry. No. For me train travel is relaxing with plenty of room to move around, ever changing scenery and passengers. One also feels that one has actually travelled and arrived at another destination. My perception is that it is not too expensive. The last major journey I took with my wife was from Southampton to Voghera (south of Milan) for £240 return including reserved seats and the ability to break our journey in Luxembourg and Brig.

Editors Note: I am pleased that someone has stood up for the train against the plane although I would personally take issue with the majority of what Ralph has to say. For example I would be interested to know if, and I hope I can be excused for the intrusion, whether these fares are Senior Citizen fares, the length of the journey and whether the breaks lead to hotels and overnight stops at extra expense. I agree that the airlines are far from perfect. easyJet have lost my luggage twice, both on trips from Spain back to the UK. One was understandable, the other not, but they paid up the correct amount under insurance after a reasonable amount of time. I have been delayed by easyJet and been compensated by easyJet. This has never happened on any rail or ferry service I am aware of. I would never fly Ryanair by choice though as their customer service is dreadful and you are on your own if there are any problems. What about it Ralph? Let us know about the trip. And if any members have more comments send them in!

FROM: GREG BEECROFT

Neuchâtel Funicular

Further to the article in the September 2005 edition of *Swiss Express* on Neuchâtel, the funicular from La Coudre to Chaumont definitely deserves a mention. This is one of the longest Swiss funiculars, being 2097.5 m long and with a rise of 570 m. The lower station is to the east of the town, and the line climbs through dense woodland for most of its length. It includes four, large masonry viaducts. The trees obscure the view from the upper station, but a viewing tower is nearby. This is accessed by means of a turnstile, operated by inserting SF1 in a slot. The elevated walkway leading to the tower and the stairs to the top are not recommended for those who suffer from vertigo, but the view is spectacular. Quite apart from the Lac de Neuchâtel, directly below, you can see the Alps right round from the Mont Blanc range to Pilatus. A helpful sign indicates which all the peaks are. So often in the Alps you cannot see too far, because the mountains nearby hide the more distant ones. This view is truly panoramic and takes your breath away.

Although opened in 1910, the funicular is quite modern, the present cars dating from 1995. Normally, only one car is in use, so the timetable is unusual for a funicular in having different departure times top and bottom. Both cars may be used between 10:00 and 16:00 if the weather is fine. Trolleybuses on TN Line 7 stop by the lower station and a combined bus and funicular ticket can be purchased from ticket machines. The day ticket for local transport in Neuchâtel is not valid on the funicular.

Editor's Note: The funicular is operated by TN (Les Transports publics du littoral Neuchâtelois) and is listed in Table 2011 in the Kursbuch. Its two cars are numbered 451 & 452 in the TN fleet.

FROM: JAMES FRANCIS – TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Panoramic Coaches

I was shocked and dismayed to see the news item in the September Notepad that SBB is planning to withdraw their panoramic coaches. These cars have been the highlight of many of my standard gauge travels in Switzerland, and in Europe as well.

But I am confused by the explanation you offered. What do you mean by "conversion to IE operations"? And no matter what the rationale for withdrawing them from international service, why couldn't they continue operating within Switzerland? Perhaps the Society should consider purchasing one!

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Hotel Frohsinn. CH 6472 Erstfeld Switzerland

Tel: +41 41 882 0101, Fax: +41 41 882 0100, e-mail: frohsinn@bluewin.ch

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