

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2007)
Heft: 76 [i.e. 92]

Rubrik: Sidetracks... a miscellany of items

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SIDETRACKS... a miscellany of items

● HUPAC – the major intermodal player on the transalpine routes through Switzerland – is celebrating its 40th Birthday this year. Starting its operations with only 10 wagons the company now has a fleet of over 4,400 vehicles and runs around 100 trains each day with a staff of 400. The company, based in Chiasso, has 99 shareholders; the majority (72%) are transport companies and forwarding agents whilst railway companies (including SBB Cargo) hold the remaining shares. In 2006 the HUPAC “Shuttle Net”, for unaccompanied container transit, transported 591,000 road consignments, amounting to a total net tonnage of 10.4 million. In addition HUPAC operates its “Rolling Highway” with 6 trains a day crossing the Alps carrying trucks whilst their drivers have the use of sleeping cars on the train.

Since the reference year 2000, road freight journeys through the Swiss Alps have fallen by 16%, while combined traffic has increased by 66%. “Until the opening of the Gotthard rail link in about 10 years, combined traffic needs the current volume of financial support from the government in order to be able to compete with road freight”, explains Chairman of the HUPAC Board of Directors Hans-Jörg Bertschi. “We expect the new freight legislation for 2011-2017 to seamlessly continue the successful shift policy which enables us to move more and more traffic by rail despite an ageing rail infrastructure thanks to attractive offers and good quality.” From Irmtraut Tonndorf at HUPAC. See the article in this edition.

● Switzerland, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria have recently signed a memorandum of understanding for the licensing of rolling stock. It aims to simplify the licensing procedure. Information supplied by the ORR.

● Trains in Switzerland will be using the European train control system ETCS 2 on a daily basis from July 2007 following the trial period. The system allows trains to follow each other with a lapse of only two minutes and all trains which are fitted with ETCS 2 technology will be able to travel at 200km per hour. The ETCS 2 system will also be operational in the Lötschberg Base Tunnel. The system is in place on the Mattstetten to Rothrist stretch and the

Zofingen to Sempach stretch and the installation of the technology has cost the state SFr 610 million (US\$ 0.5bn EUR 0.37bn).

The ETCS project in Switzerland means that the country is fulfilling its part of the international declaration of intent for the Rotterdam-Genoa rail route which will be a high-speed ETCS axis by 2012. Information supplied by the ORR.

● Across Switzerland, on the run-up to Christmas, many towns and cities will hold their traditional Christmas Markets, with Basel being the largest, as well as claiming the longest lit-up street in Europe – all 3 km from Aeschenplatz to Messeplatz. Along with cities like Montreux, Geneva and Berne smaller towns such as Thun, Biel/Bienne, Einsiedeln, Baden, Solothurn and Huttwil will also have their markets. Also in recent years Zürich Hauptbahnhof has been the home to what has been billed as Europe’s largest indoor Christkindlimarkt that has drawn up to 300,000 visitors.

● Anyone interested in cycling in Switzerland will be aware of the extensive network of cycle routes that owe their existence to the Veloland Schweiz organisation. In the June 2007 edition of “A to B” magazine there is a good article on these provisions, and the role played by the Swiss Railways in encouraging cycle use. “A to B” is a quirky magazine that is fun to read and looks at both bikes and trains as an integrated form of transport. It is not available at retail outlets, only by subscription. Look them up on www.atob.org.uk.

● The Sernftalbahnhof Museum Engi (SME) has been established to preserve the artefacts and memory of the Sernftalbahnhof (SeTB). This metre gauge line, 13.8km long, ran up a side valley in Linthal from Schwanden to Elm and operated from 1905 to 1969. Electrified from the start at 750 volts DC, it started in the station forecourt at the SBB station at Schwanden, and set off along the road through the town then it followed the roadside (and the River Sernft) all the way. There were two intermediate stations, at Engi and Matt, before it terminated with an impressive fan of tracks at Elm. The roadside running was the cause of the demise of the SeTB as even with 1960s traffic levels such occupation

of the valley road was not to be tolerated. Buses took over, and still provide the service today. Many relics have been on display in the Restaurant Sonne, at Engi, and these will form the basis of the museum which will be in the bus garage at Engi - but eventually at Elm. A committee has been formed, items gathered, and the first meeting of the association was held on 23rd October 2006 at the Hotel Schwanderhof, Schwanden. This is right beside the track of the old line and today is the bus departure point. The plan is to have the museum open during the summer only, at least for the start. Some of the rolling stock of the SeTB is still extant, and in the longer term, this may be brought to the valley too. The society is growing, and welcomes new members. If you are interested, contact Ernst Leutwiler on eisenbahnverlag@bluewin.ch. There is a fascinating film of the SeTB on Herr Leutwiler's video "Historische Schweizer Bahnen", which is available from The Signal Box 1 Albion Street, Anstey, Leicester LE7 7DD 0116 236 2901. Email signal_box@talk21.com. Information supplied by Ron Smith.

- Following-on from the item in the September edition on the EuroShuttle operation we have been informed that since August 2006 that company and the "Red Trains" are now owned and run by the Zurich-based Hangartner organisation. www.hangartner.com Information from Paw Samson at Hangartner Danmark A/S.

- The RhB has recently announced the first of a massive series of rolling-stock orders that will result in the majority of their services being operated by state-of-the-art EMUs. This move away from conventional loco-hauled operations is partly to keep up with the need to offer their passengers a high quality travel environment, and also due to the fact that manufacturers are no longer prepared to build small quantities of metre gauge locomotives. We hope to report further on this development in future editions of Swiss Express. However, the message is if you wish to see loco hauled main line metre gauge trains you should not delay your visits.

- A member notes that BLS are running specials through the new Lötschberg base tunnel from Bern to Brig called the NEAT EXPRESS using first-class stock at a supplementary cost of SFr 10 each way. The trip takes about 12 minutes from Spiez to Visp.

INTERNATIONAL

CIS

The first Pendolino Due unit, ETR 610 001, was towed from Chiasso to Biel on 5th July for approval tests.

SBB / SNCF

SBB Cargo has commenced moving timber from Pontarlier (SNCF) to the new Stallinger sawmill at Domat-Ems.

Loadings on the Zürich – Paris TGVs are already exceeding the planned capacity of some workings. To reduce loadings in Switzerland, the morning service from Zürich (Train 9294 at 07.02) is now for passengers to France only, with a relief train run in advance for internal passengers.

SWITZERLAND

SBB

On the night of 26th June, a Cargo Express train from Zürich Mulligen to Chur collided between Wädenswil and Richterswil with the crane jib of Tm 234 005 which was working on the other track. The tractor and one wagon were derailed, while train locomotive Re4/4ⁱⁱⁱ 11362 was damaged. The line was completely blocked until midday the following day, with the second track not reopening until the day after. Zürich – Chur express services were diverted via the Romanshorn avoiding line.

More bad weather on the evening on 8th August severely affected Swiss Railways, closing many lines temporarily. The last line to reopen was the section between Payerne and Grolley on 22nd August, which had previously been closed after the June floods between 22nd June and 6th July. However, the main line between Bern and Fribourg, which was blocked by a landslide on 8th and 9th August, then closed completely on 19th August after an embankment between Wünnewil and Flamatt was undermined and slipped by up to 48cm over a 150m length. The line was blocked until 24th August, during which time passengers were diverted via Neuchâtel.

A halt opened at Le Crêt du Locle (Le Locle – La Chaux de Fonds section) on 27th August, almost on the site of the station closed in 1995; it is served by all trains on the line, including SNCF Besançon – La Chaux de Fonds DMUs.

The Mattstetten – Rothrist NBS section was passed for 200 kph operation from 29th July, the highest permitted speed on the Swiss