THE SWISS REGULAR INTERVAL TIMETABLE

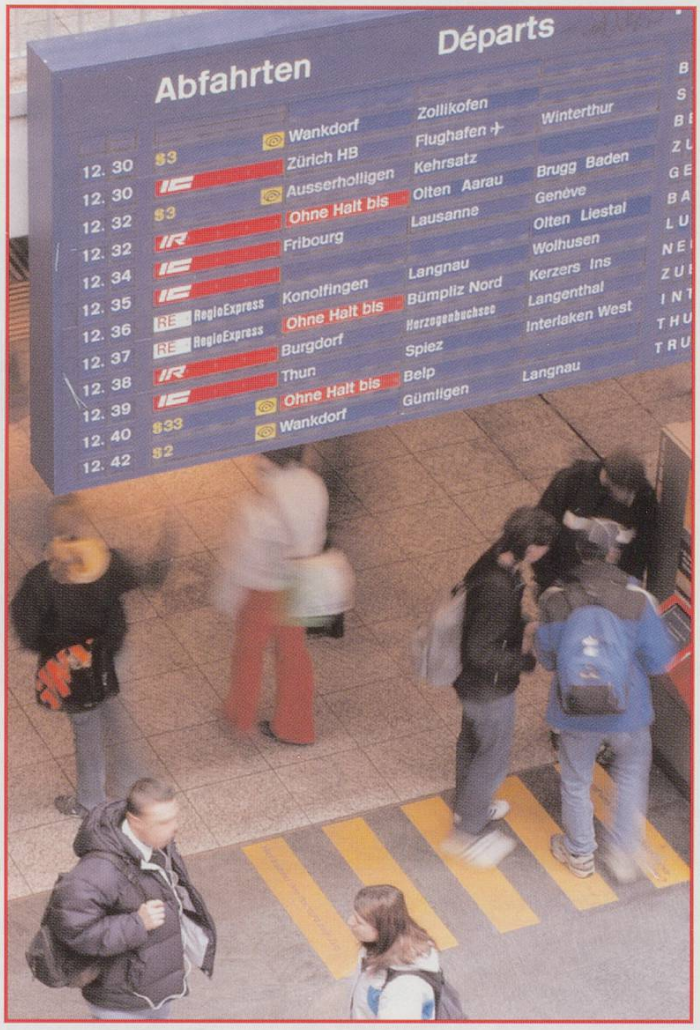
Der Beobachter reports on its 25th Anniversary.

Twenty-third May 1982 saw the introduction of the then completely new Swiss regular interval timetable. This now standard timetable system took a lot of preparation work in order to replace its predecessor that had evolved over decades.

Originally projected to start in the summer of 1977, the project built on the train service which had been running along the right-hand shore of Lake Zürich since the summer of 1968 and on some other suburban routes since the 70s e.g., Bern-Worb and Solothurn-Zollikofen-Bern. For a long time buses in Swiss towns and cities had run to a regular timetable, but it was in the Netherlands in 1934 that a regular interval timetable had first been applied to a national rail timetable. In 1974 Denmark introduced a countrywide regular interval timetable, while in Sweden, England, Germany, Austria, France and Italy regular interval timetables had also been introduced on some routes.

First studies into a Swiss regular interval timetable came in March 1969 as a recommendation from 28 year old civil engineer Samuel Staehli in a 19 page report covering basic questions of timetable organization. The report was dismissed as not relevant to the SBB. In the summer of 1972, however, three SBB engineers; Jean Pierre Berthouzoz, Hans Meiner and again Samuel Staehli, submitted another report on their own initiative. Entitled "Swiss Regular Interval Timetable – A New Passenger Train Concept" the technical timetable designers proved that with practically unchanged expenditure on personnel and rolling stock a regular interval timetable could be introduced offering more trains. This partial study, based on the Dutch model, was not just theoretical but included a proposed regular interval timetable for the whole of Switzerland. The advantages of regular interval (or clock face) timetables were described at the time as follows:

- Every hour the same connections are available to passengers via short cross-platform connections;
- Average journey time would be shorter;
- Railway companies could make better use of their staff as the long lay-overs at end stations would be reduced;
- With standardised routes and train compositions less shunting would be required;
- Since trains would always cross each other at the same place on single track lines, a number of crossing stations could be removed.



Bern Station Destination Board ©SBB

In February 1973 the SBB set up a committee to conduct a feasibility study covering the introduction of the timetable across the SBB and private railways. The committee also looked at the possibility of introducing a regular interval timetable for freight and how to minimise the risk of a service disruption spreading across the whole network.

After the SBB board had given the green light for the introduction of the new timetable system, detailed timetables were prepared in cooperation with the cantons and regions. The introduction date had to be postponed until 23rd May 1982 due to capacity bottlenecks in Olten and Zurich. These bottlenecks were rectified by the addition of tracks and route doubling. To a large extent the introduction ran smoothly and the concept was further enhanced by the first stage of Bahn2000 that came into operation on 12th December 2004.

SBB passenger train kilometres run have nearly doubled over the last 25 years from 67m in 1981, rising to 74m with the introduction of the new timetable in 1982, through 109m in 2004 (following the Bahn2000 changes) to 125m in 2005.

Editor's Note. This item is based upon a translation of a May 2007 LITRA article.