

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2008)
Heft: 94

Artikel: Switzerland's busiest boats
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854621>

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SWITZERLAND'S BUSIEST BOATS

Jakob Jäger



Horgen to Meilen Ferry 'Zürisee'.

PHOTOS: Jakob Jäger

The well known fleet of ships on the Vierwaldstättersee carried some 2,376,000 passengers in 2007 but this was on a network of routes that criss-crossed this multi-armed lake serving a large number of destinations. The busiest single shipping route in Switzerland is not however on any of the major tourist routes, it is across the Zürichsee between the communities of Horgen and Meilen.

In 2007 this essential link in the local transport infrastructure carried 2,247,000 passengers and 1,277,000 vehicles on its five ferries as they shuttled on their 10 minute trips across the lake. Operated by Zürichsee-Fähre Horgen-Meilen AG this service reaches its 75th anniversary this year following its opening on the 23rd May 1933. There are a number of local celebrations planned to commemorate this operational milestone. All the ships are similar being a double-ended design with a drive through vehicle deck running underneath a central block of accommodation for

passengers that includes the navigation bridge. They are practical work-a-day vessels rather than the elegant steam and motor ships that cruise the other lakes, as well as the Zürichsee, but I find them attractive.

Of the five ships the *Schwan* is the oldest having been built in 1969, although it was refurbished in 1999. The *Meilen* was built in 1979, the *Horgen* in 1991, the *Zürisee* in 1999 with the *Burg* being the youngest having only joined the fleet in 2003. Each can carry some 300 passengers and up to 44 cars and all the ships were built by Bodan-Werft at Kressbronn in Germany. The ferry company has its own small maintenance base at Horgen on the west shore of the lake where the ships are normally moored when not in use. Sailings take place at a 7 minute frequency during peak periods, although three ships operating at a 10 minute headway is more common, whilst the service normally runs from around 6am to almost 10pm each day.

Details are in Kursbuch Table 3735. The passenger fare is just SFr2 one-way and the Swiss Pass is valid.

Horgen is a busy commercial and commuter town that is served by trains from Zürich Hauptbahnhof on lines S2 and S8 to its main station from where it is a short walk alongside the lake to the ferry terminal. There are also services from Zürich to Horgen Oberdorf (S21 and S24) but this station is high up at the back of the town some distance away from the lake. Meilen is a smaller community, which is now another dormitory suburb of Zürich with an attractive lakefront. It too has frequent trains into the city from its centrally located station on lines S6, 7 and 16. When in Zürich why not take time out for a short excursion to experience Switzerland's busiest boats?



TOP: Ferry leaving Horgen.

MIDDLE: Ferry leaving Meilen.

BOTTOM: Horgen to Meilen Ferry 'Burg'.