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CityNightLine **EXPANDS SERVICES**

Ron Smith

CityNightLine (CNL) is a successful Swiss company with its HQ in Zurich. Today it is owned by Deutsche Bahn (DB). CNL provide many overnight trains with luxury sleeping cars that provide many attractive alternative routes to and from Switzerland. The company was formed in 1995 by a consortium of Swiss, German and Austrian railways. The network of services continues to expand, with several routes that would be of interest to UK travellers to Switzerland.

Prior to CNL many of the old sleeper trains on Europe's railways had become rather run-down, lacked security and facilities, and were losing ground to the low cost airlines who made it economical to go there and back cheaper and quicker than by train. Reduced cost overnight trains did not work, as the quality was reduced to sitting in ordinary coaches all night. CNL set out to focus on quality, and with the benefit that comes from having a dedicated company and staff, they have succeeded.

The coaching stock is also continuously improving. The remarkable double deck coaches used by CNL are wonders of detailed engineering. In 2008, another version of coach has been introduced, the "Comfortline" coaches that are owned by CD (Czech Railways). These operate between Basel and Prague daily. Air conditioning and air suspension assure a smooth and comfortable ride, and on-board conditions are the equivalent of a high-class hotel. Key cards give secure access to your berth, or in first class, to your suite, as it includes a shower and WC. There are four levels of travel, from the luxury to reclining seats. There are packages of fares to suit all market segments and a loyalty scheme; collect points every time that you travel and accumulate them for free travel.

Aeroplane travel has become tedious, with lengthened check-in times, cattle herding techniques at airports, delays and

restrictions. This compares to a recent experience of "check-in" at the reception in the dining car on the train in Amsterdam, and being taken to my luxury compartment with a welcome drink. Dinner on the train, a good sleep, and breakfast served in my compartment on the way into Zurich. There is something special about the glamour and style of the gathering dusk and quieting station, a long train disappearing off the end of the platform, and being treated as a person on the big train. To find out more, try www.citynightline.ch

In 2008, trains with Swiss connections are-

Amsterdam to Bellinzona, Lugano, Chiasso, Brig, Como, Milan

Amsterdam to Basel, Baden, Zurich, Thun, Spiez, Frutigen, Kandersteg, Goppenstein, Brig.

Prague to Basel.

Dresden to Zurich, Baden, Basel.

Bremen, Hamburg to Zurich, Baden, Basel.

Copenhagen to Basel.

Graz to Zurich, Sargans, Buchs.

Villach to Zurich, Sargans, Buchs.

Vienna to Zurich, Sargans, Buchs.

Moscow to Basel.

The continued growth resulted in no less than 780,544 passenger journeys in 2007 on CNL overnight trains. Yet another innovation is "Night and Fly" option, where one way is by train, and the other by "Swiss" flight. With the increasing uniformity of trains, with TGV, ICE and other multiple unit trains dominating European rail travel, it is good to see these lengthy trains, with a miscellany of different coaches in different shapes and colours, making attractive pictures in the main European cities.

If you are a railway modeller there are also a number of excellent models of CNL's rolling stock that are now available.