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CISALPINO - THE END

Nick Freezer



470 054 at Erstfeld on 13th September 2007.

PHOTO: Mark Barber

A joint announcement was made by SBB and Trenitalia on 29th September that the Cisalpino company will cease to operate trains between Switzerland and Italy from the timetable change on December 13th this year. The reason given is the failure of Cisalpino to achieve adequate reliability and punctuality with its ETR470 Pendolino train sets. From December, services will revert to operation by the national train companies. The timetabling of these is currently unclear.

Cisalpino was originally formed as a 50/50-owned joint venture between SBB and FS to operate the dedicated ETR470 Pendolino fleet on selected services between Italy and Switzerland, starting operations in 1993. More recently, they have taken over operation of all daytime international services on this axis, initially using existing loco-hauled stock with hired-in motive power pending conversion of all services to Pendolino operation using the new ETR610 fleet on order from Alstom.

However, the ETR610 fleet is now three years overdue and, although three units have at last been accepted for service, they have only been passed for use on the Simplon

and Lötschberg routes and this leaves the Gotthard line relying on ETR470s. To maintain the hourly fast service between Central Switzerland and the Ticino SBB is having to deploy ICN sets on a route for which they weren't designed. Alstom must bear a large share of the blame; that two train sets will be delivered free as compensation for late delivery is little consolation to the operators and passengers.

Undoubtedly, 2009 has been unsatisfactory for service provision on these routes. The ad-hoc arrangements to cover for the stock shortages have not been helped by FS giving priority to regional over international services, something that is not in fact so unusual in Italy. However, this is not very helpful when those international services are, to a large degree, integrated in the Taktfahrplan as an element of Switzerland's internal IC network, resulting in Italian delays disrupting connections miles away on the Swiss network.

The Cisalpino fleet will be divided evenly between the two companies, with the ETR470 class being split: 5 & 4 between Trenitalia and SBB; the 14 ETR610 class (if they are ever delivered) being split 7 & 7.



As each railway will maintain its own train sets it will be interesting to see how their availability compares. From December, the Milano – Zürich service will go over to complete ETR470 operation, with 'hot spare' sets based at Zürich and Milano for use in the event of late running. The Simplon axis will go over to ETR610 operation, presumably employing loco-hauled stock until the outstanding 11 units on order are commissioned.

At the same press conference, it was announced that overnight services between Switzerland and Italy would cease from 12th December; improvements in daytime journey times having made their continued operation uneconomic, although forthcoming international open access will allow any operator to take on such services.

TOP: FS ETR610 CIS near Kiesen on 30th January 2009.

PHOTO: Ron Smith
MIDDLE: Cisalpino in Milan Central.

PHOTO: Peter Fiabane

BOTTOM: Cisalpino ETR 470 at Brunnen.

PHOTO: Phil Weaver