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SBB GmbH – A GERMAN OPERATOR

Jakob Jäger



SBB RABe 521 FLIRT units at Schopfheim.

PHOTO: Jakob Jäger.

In a recent edition of *Swiss Express* one of our friends from France introduced us to the international tramway that linked Basel with a community in his country. Apart from the widely travelled locos of SBB Cargo the passenger side of SBB also has cross-border operations that take its trains into French territory at Delle, and serve German towns in the Bodensee area. Many people do not realise though that the Swiss state-owned company has a German subsidiary, part of which operates two local services almost wholly in one small area of Germany.

Although this subsidiary, SBB GmbH, is based in Konstanz it has a local operating centre in the Baden-Württemberg town of Lörrach which is effectively a suburb of Basel. From here it operates two services numbered S5 and S6 as part of the jointly run Tarifverbund Nord-westschweiz (TNW) and the Regio Verehrsverbund Lörrach GmbH (RVL). Service S5 runs wholly in Germany and links Weil am Rhein, on the main line north from Basel to Freiburg, through Lörrach to Steinen every 30 minutes, with some peak hour trips going on to Schopfheim. Service S6 Runs from Basel SBB through the DB's Basel Bad Bf to Lörrach, Steinen, Schopfheim and on to Zell-im-Wiesental in the foothills of the Black Forest. This service is also basically half-hourly during weekdays over the whole route although with some service reductions late in the day. Table 501 in the Swiss Kursbuch has all the details.

The SBB took over these services a few years ago following their operation being put out to tender by the local transportation organisations. Looking at a 1989 DB timetable the Zell service only ran from the poorly located DB station in Basel, and the service was not as comprehensive

as it is now, whilst what is now service S5 only ran infrequently. The route to Zell is single track for much of its length although some route improvements have taken place since the SBB operation started and some additional stations have been added. The Swiss operation has lifted the traffic levels on the line by over 33%. Up until the mid-60s a metre gauge line, the Zell-Todtnaubahn, connected the present terminus with tourist areas in the Black Forest. It used 0-4-4-0T and 0-6-6-0T Mallet locomotives and two of these are preserved on the Blonay-Chamby Museum line (see September 2009 *Swiss Express*). To operate the S5 & 6 services SBB GmbH has a fleet of RABe 521 FLIRT units in regular SBB livery with just a large logo showing a white 'R' on a green background being the only indication that their operations are in any way different from their Swiss equivalents.

Whilst Lörrach and Weil are part of Greater Basel, as the route heads up into the Wiesental it becomes more rural in nature. Personally I have found Zell to be a disappointing place, although in a nice setting, and my favourite location is Schopfheim one of the passing places on the line. The really attractive historic core of this busy community is just a short walk from the massive station building that is probably far too large for its current use. In the main square by the Rathaus is an extraordinary, modern, elevated "statue" commemorating the events that took place in the town during the Badischen Revolution of 1848. This can be studied at leisure from the adjacent outdoor cafes. This town, although not in Switzerland, is well worth a half-day excursion if you are staying in Basel – and you can go on a Swiss train.