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Bryan Stone
ALL PHOTOS: Bryan Stone

Trogenbahn BDe4/4 No 7 leaving St Gallen, on the street, with the SBB station on the right, 1972 .

Tram takeover?

Two new tram-based projects are attracting attention in St Gallen. The merger in 2006 of the metre gauge Appenzellerbahn (AB), St Gallen-Gais-Appenzell Bahn (SGA) and Trogenbahn (TB) has brought forward plans for a major improvement in St Gallen. This envisages the TB, which runs-in on the street from its namesake community, to one side of the city's main Post Office, connecting with the SGA line to Teufen and Appenzell that starts within 20m of the Trogenbahn's terminus, but on the other side of the Post Office. The key however lies outside St Gallen, on the SGA line at Ruckhalde, where the project plans to replace the last 750m of rack operation on the route (this was once a steam

Trogenbahn No 25 about to leave for Trogen.

powered rack and adhesion line) by a new tunnel. Not only shorter journeys, but major savings, from replacing the present expensive and complicated SGA rolling stock by modern energy-efficient low floor trams, can be achieved. The Confederation is prepared to support the cost of some CHF90m from its infrastructure

TOP: *St Gallen SGA and TB stations in 2007. The former SGA train is on the right for Appenzell, and on the left is the Trogenbahn, illustrating that not much actually separates them.*

MIDDLE: *From Altstätten SBB there was also the Rheintalische Verkehrsbetriebe with a tram, No 40, shown here setting off down through the town from Altstätten Stadt, where the railway from Appenzell stops today.*

BELOW: *A rarity, RhV No 6 on the tramway at Altstätten SBB in 1965.*

SGA rack car No. 3 is preparing to leave St Gallen. The SBB car on the left is a post van on the nearest siding to the Post Office.

fund. Also, after 53 years without town trams, the successful use of the TB street section in the City has attracted the planners who are proposing a new St Gallen tram network as possibly the best way to handle fast-growing demand for public transport. Lines could run to Gossau, Abtwil, Mörschwil and Wittenbach. The major problem is one of finance.

Stations which are not

With Ron Smith's wonderful puzzle question in SE 100 about 'ghost' stations, I was tempted to think of two more I know. Soyhières (Table 230) is a station which has never served a train, though built new in the 1980s. The story is local politics at their best. The local trains served Soyhières at a 'classic gare' locale, in the middle of the village. The main road through the village was busy and narrow. A bypass was the thing, and planning started, but it was a stroke of genius to divert railways and road together away from the village centre, and so two sweeping alignments across the fields were staked out. This meant a new station, a lot of money, and some lengthy debate. Finally all was ready, and Soyhières fell quiet as rail and road traffic took to the new lines. Regrettably, however, the local train service had by then fallen foul of a parallel cost dispute between the Canton and SBB, and had been replaced by buses. Soyhière's station has never seen a service train, although the Basel S3 service and Genève expresses race past all day. The bus goes, again, through the village.

Another ghost is visible, if you are very quick, at Le Creux on the south side of the Biel line a few minutes outside La Chaux-de-Fonds. It has a twin, Convers, on the Neuchätel line. This is an old history. La Chaux-de-Fonds, a centre of the watch making industry, lies behind a high ridge impeding access from the rest of the country. The Jura-Industriel railway built the line to Neuchätel 'downhill', so to speak, from La Chaux-de-Fonds between 1857 & 1859, with a tunnel at Convers. The Jura-Bernois railway was building a line in 1874 from Biel, and, blocked by the hill, turned south at Le Creux with a diversion (and reversal) via Convers. The last 3 kms into Chaux-de-Fonds took until 1888 to

build, when the spur to Convers was then closed as it had no further purpose. But the station house at Le Creux still stands 120 years later, and you can snatch a view of it and the old alignment as you leave or enter the tunnel there. Looking at the Chaux-de-Fonds end, where a narrow valley and steep hill somehow accommodate two standard and two narrow gauge lines, you see how difficult it was.

Basel trams cross frontiers

Another recent new tram project that seems likely to go ahead has been agreed between the Swiss Canton of Basel Stadt and the French Alsace Region. This is for the extension of Basel's BVB Line 3 from Burgfelden Grenze (its western terminus at the French/Swiss border) to St-Louis Gare in the almost contiguous French town. At the same time the Basel BVB Line 8 is now being actively constructed over the German/Swiss border from Kleinhüningen in the north of the city to the Bahnhof at Weil am Rhein including an already approved new railway bridge there over the 8-track DB main line. Operations should start in 2012. As readers of Swiss Express will be aware Basel already has an international tram route – BLT Line 10 to Rodersdorf that crosses into France at Leymen. All this development is exciting, as new tram lines are also under construction in Bern, Geneva and Zürich, and next year a link on the BLT line 10 will be tackled. Swiss users are beginning to clamour for more and better tram services and that also means a lot of new cars will be required.

All change

I remember the MOB as a picturesque, penniless and undernourished straggly line with old, faded, decaying cars, the once-blue livery then nearly white; early perpendicular power units and the occasional trains grinding over worn rails meandering through the long grass. That was 50 years ago. The Lenk line very nearly succumbed. Then came the transformation. Today it is an exemplary undertaking which has seemingly unlimited modern equipment and carries, as well as locals and people like me out on their GA cards, a stream of wealthy tourists in splendid panorama cars. Michael Farr describes the latest series in this magazine,whilst Gordon Wiseman describes the modern line.

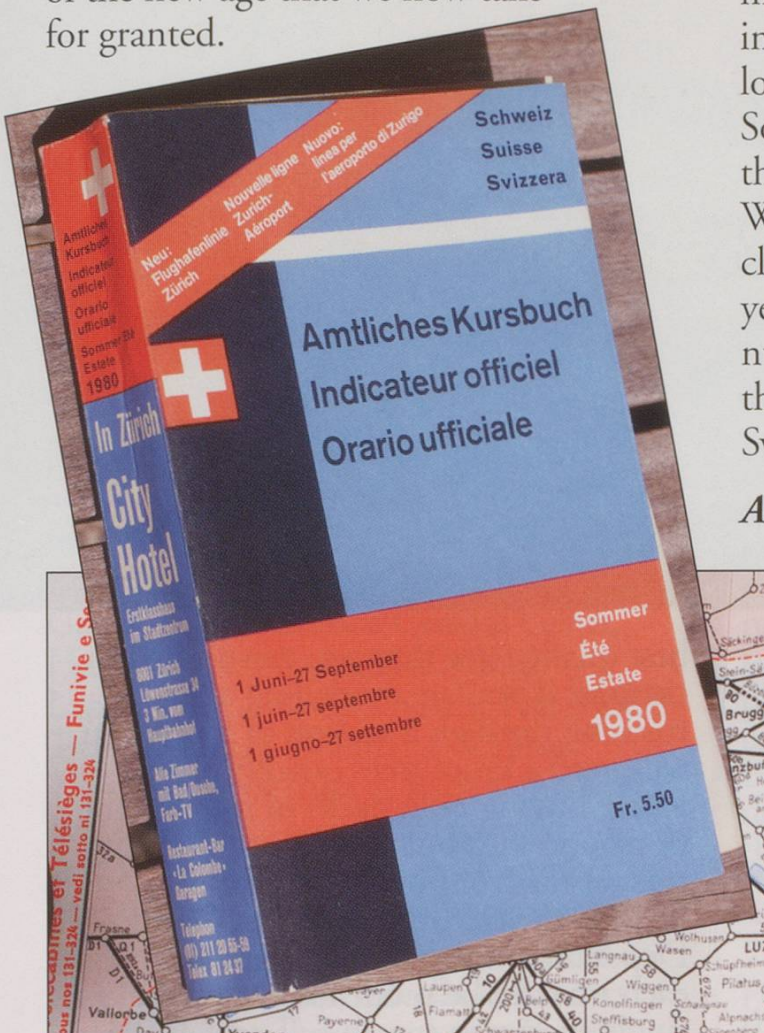
School outings by train

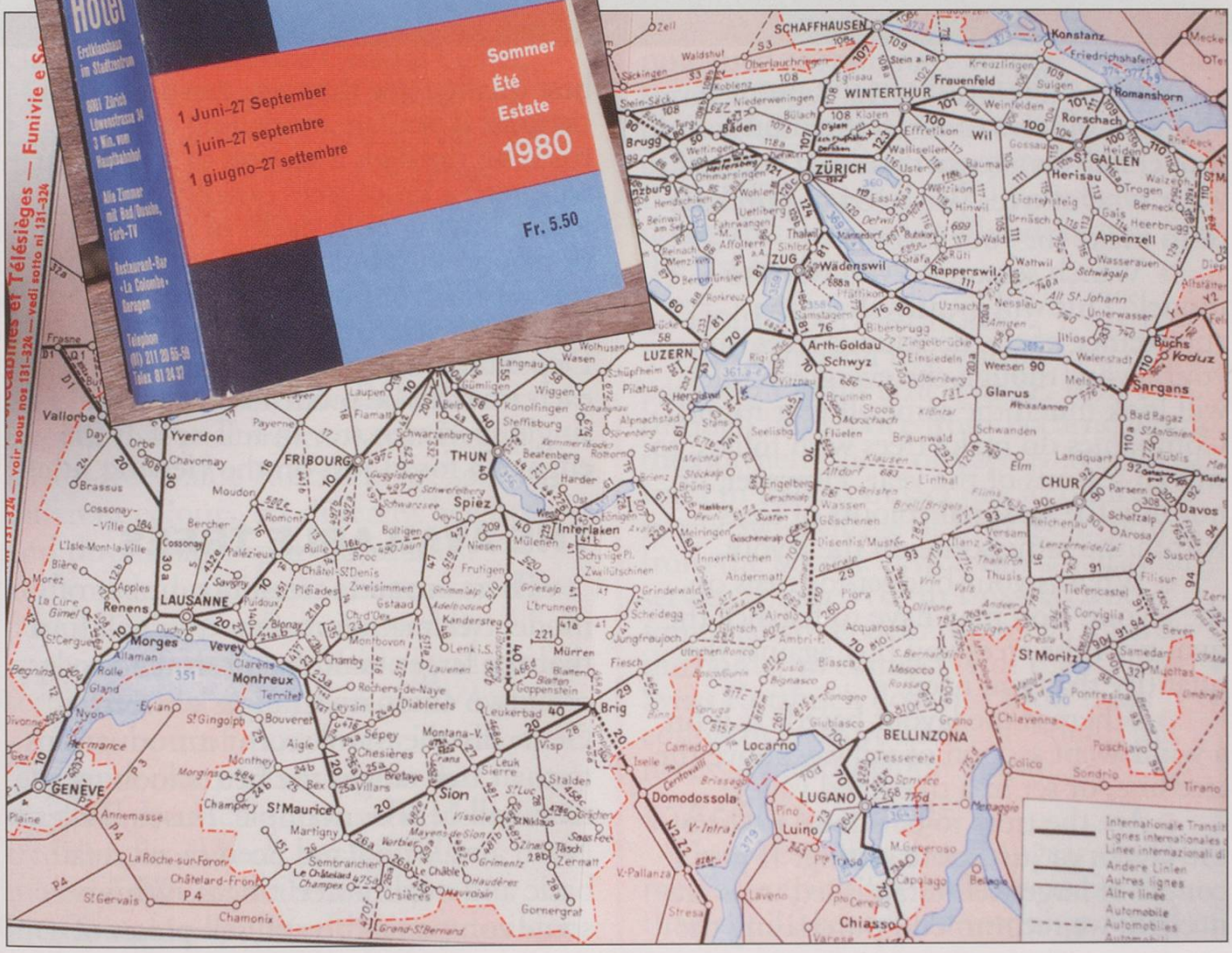
A 'typically Swiss' news item caught my eye, and it might surprise those who thought this was a long-dead practice as it is in Britain. In the week of June 6th to 13th 6,000 school classes comprising 150,000 children travelled on traditional annual school trips using the SBB. On June 10th alone 1,800 classes with 40,000 children travelled by train. Although the dates are variable Canton by Canton the school term ends just around the end of June and in total throughout that month some 20,000 classes comprising 1/2m pupils will have travelled by rail across Switzerland. They will be going to lakes and mountains, museums and galleries, for tours of the Parliament, and to all kinds of creative destinations. They will have group tickets, which often cover their whole day out, including steamer trips or admission charges. It is a big business. You will often hear announcements about reserved accommodation at front or rear of trains. Much strengthening of regular services takes place plus the running of extra trains on popular routes. Unlike in the UK most Swiss

children have made many train journeys before they grow up. Then they will start buying their own half-price train cards – and voting!

Nostalgia

I was browsing through the 1980 Kursbuch one day. It was just two years ahead of the Taktfahrplan which was the dawn of the new age that we now take for granted.



In 1980 the single book retained the old (and much simpler) tables and had all the buses, funiculars, cable cars, ships, international services, etc., in it rather than today's three volumes. The map still showed Delle, Vallorbe and Verrières as international main lines whilst many of today's familiar cut-offs' the NEAT and high speed lines; and Geneva airport are missing. Zürich Airport had just scraped in; the FO still went through Gletsch; locals still ran from Herzogenbuchsee to Solothurn and Lyss (my last trip over there was with an Ae3/6[I]), and to Wasen-im-Emmental, one of the few closures that have taken place in the 30 years. Station closures though are now numerous; Wassen, Blausee-Mitholz, and the others. We need a Swiss Flanders and Swann to praise them in song.

Allerlei is Swiss-German for 'Allsorts'.