

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2010)
Heft: 104

Artikel: SBB Cargo joins forces with Hupac
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854449>

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SBB CARGO JOINS FORCES WITH HUPAC

Der Beobachter



July 5th saw the confirmation of earlier plans that SBB and HUPAC will in 2011 form 'SBB Cargo International'. The new company creates something which HUPAC, from its earliest appearance in 1967, would once have opposed diametrically - to be in partnership with the 'state' railway. HUPAC, now an UIRR company, was originally formed to facilitate intermodal moves of Swiss private forwarder's and trucker's vehicles and loads by rail. At that time these independent service providers, fighting for cargo, mistrusted acutely the state railway with its deficits and 'de-jure' monopoly. SBB was also a member of Basel-based Intercontainer formed to move deep-sea containers and similar units around Europe. This was 100% owned by European national railways (including British Rail) and at one time carried well over 1m containers per year. However EU rail liberalization legislation in the 1990s, promoting both on-rail competition and competition between its owning railways, compromised much of its legal basis. The UIRR companies allowed organizations like HUPAC a minority rail shareholding, but jealously regarded their freedom to act and compete. HUPAC successfully met the

challenge of new competition and is now a major partner in the transalpine piggy-back services, such as RAlpin, with several daily trains between Freiburg and Novara over the BLS route. These, the Swiss government subsidizes as part of its constitutional obligation to shift EU transit traffic from road to rail. It shows the convoluted state of these relations today.

Times have indeed changed. There are now several companies offering intermodal services and block trains, a pan-European business which, after a setback in the Bankers' recession, is now booming again. SBB Cargo has suffered severe cash losses from its cost-intensive national structures, but is well placed, by service quality, facilities; and customer opinion, to handle more international business. HUPAC is also now the leading European company of its kind. Both have over 50% market shares in their sectors, and HUPAC is also SBB's biggest customer, using it for haulage of 70% of its own transalpine traffic. They are therefore already closely linked.

The new company to be based in Olten with 200 staff, is a closer co-operation than could have been imagined some years ago. It will have

75% SBB, 25% HUPAC capital, and offer both intermodal and conventional freight services by block trains on the main Alpine crossing routes. It will thus compete with the now successful and profitable BLS Cargo (which works with DB, and also HUPAC) and it will also market the new services which become possible as a result of the 2016 opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel.

What remains is the serving of Swiss national clients, who are still dependent upon a dense network of sidings and stations across the country. There is still considerable internal Swiss freight traffic, along with rising imports and exports, especially to the all-important seaports like Rotterdam and Hamburg, Antwerp and Genova. This will remain the task of SBB Cargo, which has now to develop



HUPAC ES64U2-100 at Brunnen on 26th September 2006. PHOTO: Mark Barber

cost-effective ways of maintaining service levels and still being competitive in a now unregulated world. It's not yet clear how this will be done.

For SBB Cargo International, the die is now cast; and we are sure that Hans-Jürg Bertschi, the president of HUPAC and of the European UIRR, has a shrewd idea of how to make a go of it.

A STEAM SURPRISE

Jason Sargerson

On the last Sunday in June I headed to Lausanne to sample the metre-gauge Lausanne Echallens Bercher (LEB) that runs half-hourly to Echallens, and hourly to Bercher, on its route from its Flon terminus in the city centre. Arriving at Lausanne, rather than take the new m2 metro from the main station, I walked up the very steep hill towards the St Francois church then made my way down a long flight of steps into Flon station where the LEB interchanges with both the m1 and m2 routes. Its trains start out running underground before surfacing in the middle of the main road to Yverdon. There are a lot of stops on the line, some at simple halts, resulting in a possibly tedious 39 minute total trip time. After leaving the streets of Lausanne the railway runs through fields and countryside towards Echallens.

The 23km long line, now electrified at 1500V dc, opened in 1873 as the country's first metre -gauge railway. New Stadler RBe 4/8 units were introduced into service in 2010 and are in the customary LEB green and white livery. Although this new stock is very modern, has plenty of power, and is probably very

A new RBe 4/8 waits at Echallens station on 27/6/2010. ALL PHOTOS: Jason Sargerson

