

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2011)
Heft: 105

Artikel: Allerlei
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854680>

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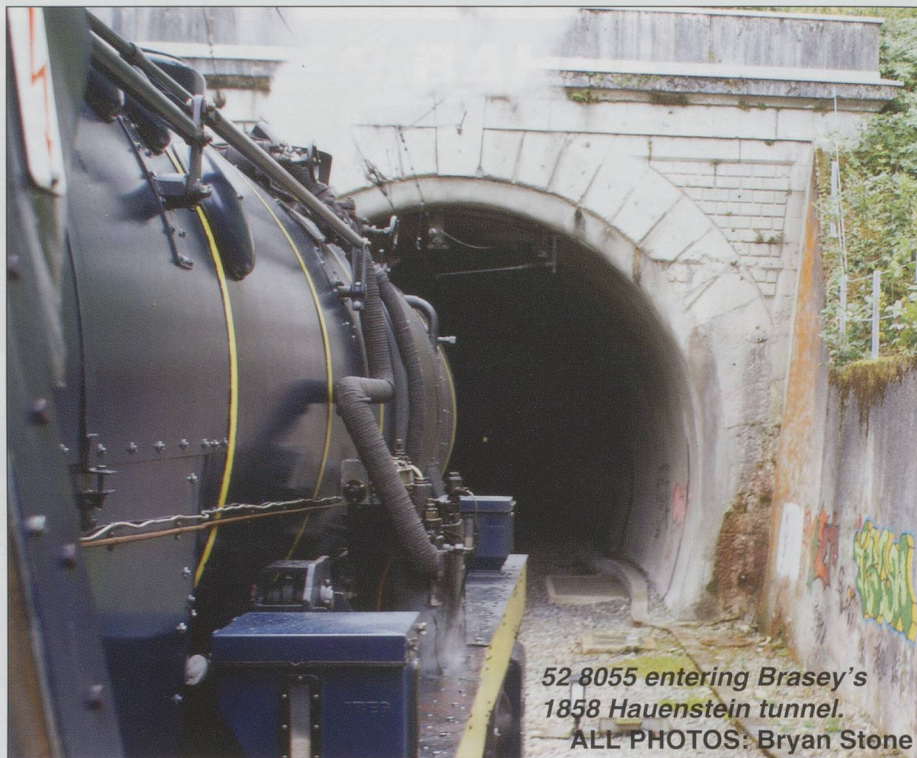
Bryan Stone

Another Tunnel anyone?

Railway tunnel building in Switzerland has never stopped and there are many proposals on the list waiting for plans, votes and cash. The Monte Ceneri Tunnel was recently started as a part of the new Gotthard Base Tunnel route. The proposed Wiesenberg Tunnel between Liestal and Olten is still in fiercely heated planning discussions; the dramatic new S-Bahn tunnel under Zürich SBB is nearly through; and new plans are on the table for a Basel S-Bahn link in a tunnel under the city between the SBB and German stations. In July a new project came to light. This would take the metre-gauge RhB line at Scuol-Tarasp through a 25 km tunnel to Mals in the Südtirol - the German-speaking Alto Adige region of Italy. What looks a fantasy is in fact a serious proposal to cope with heavy traffic which has blossomed in recent years. The Italian rail connection from Mals to Merano (the Vinschnaubahn) was resuscitated some years ago and found itself with an unexpected heavy leisure and tourist traffic. Today the international connection is by Swiss PostAuto from Zernez on the Engadin line, through the Swiss National Park and over the 2149m Ofen Pass to the Val Müstair (with the big tourist attraction of Charlemagne's 1300 year-old St Johann Monastery), and on to Mals in Italy. These hourly PostAutos are now seriously crowded at peak tourist times, whilst keeping the Ofen Pass open all year is often a problem. The opening of the Vereina Tunnel from Klosters to Susch, although planned as a mainly car-carrying link for skiers and local traffic, has actually stimulated travel to the Lower Engadine from even as far as Basel and Zürich. The tunnel has become a major fast train route with REs from Chur to Scuol-Tarasp that also feed the Italian connection at Zernez. The new idea may never happen; but it has been taken up in the planning processes of both Switzerland's Canton Graubünden and Italy's semi-autonomous Alto Adige Region, whilst such inter-regional projects also qualify for support from the EU.

Steam on the Hauenstein

During the August 2010 school holidays the local enterprise 'Modern Steam am Hauenstein GmbH' organised a twice daily public steam powered shuttle between Sissach and Olten that was rewarded with a 70% load factor; enormous goodwill; plus press and TV coverage. Although this line (Basel S9) runs through glorious hiking country it only serves some small communities and is a desperate financial case. In the school holidays it carries next to nobody. Despite its rural nature the route is available to the heaviest trains and is often used as an alternative to the main line that now a days uses the 8134m Hauenstein Base Tunnel to reach Olten. Much of the area is a countryside park so the development of tourism and access by steam train are all part of regional plans for the future. The engine used in August was 52 8055, a former DR



52 8055 entering Brasey's
1858 Hauenstein tunnel.

ALL PHOTOS: Bryan Stone

'Kriegslok' modernized in East Germany, and then taken in hand and rebuilt in Winterthur by Roger Waller as a demonstrator of what a really well-engineered steam locomotive can do. She is truly remarkable (your correspondent has ridden many km. on her) and the newest Brienz-Rothorn locomotives are built to the same principles. The 'old' Hauenstein line is worth a pilgrimage: it's where the British Contractor Thomas Brassey built the first Swiss main line and includes the 2495m Hauenstein Tunnel, opened in 1858.

Geography, not economics

While newspapers and TV worldwide covered the October 15th breakthrough of the world's longest rail tunnel, the 57km Gotthard Base Tunnel, and some even reported on the money raised by Switzerland to build it; the relations with the EU; and the need to maximise use of rail in future Alpine transit; the Financial Times, from whom we really expect better, got it firmly and gloriously wrong. Its front page headline praised the building of the record tunnel - between Switzerland and Italy! They obviously failed to understand that from Bodio, the southern end of the Base Tunnel, and the Italian border at Chiasso there is still 80km of Switzerland to go. The Ticino, Switzerland's southernmost canton, was formally created in 1803 but for the previous 200 years it had been under Confederate authority. But perhaps the money men at the FT think Lugano is in Italy? After all, it's where many wealthy Italians prefer to go to the bank.

Rigibahn rebuild

SRS members will know the ironwork bridge over the Luzern lines at Arth-Goldau station that carried the platform of the Arth-Rigi Bahn (ARB), now part of the Rigibahn (RB). The layout is quite complicated. Having started on the bridge the Rigi line then passes its depot at hillside level and from here sidings run back to the tracks of the SBB where, as both are standard gauge, connection was always possible. Until its closure in 1959 the ARB's 3km 'Talbahn' (Valley line) to Arth-am-See on the Zuger See left from here. Now the last train has started from the bridge as a new station is to be built

at ground level next to the main line one. The bridge was too low and a serious obstacle to improving clearances on the Gotthard route. However, it is also a National Monument so it will not disappear, but be raised 0.7m and will be used as a waiting area and a link for RB passengers on their way to the new station on 'dry land'. When you are next in Arth-Goldau, or going up the Rigi, look out to the north east for the 1580m Rossberg, the mountain across the valley. Part of this slid down in 1806 (you can clearly see the section) burying Goldau and killing some 600 villagers. The valley nearby is still full of boulders.

The Brig accident(s) and 'heritage' signalling

On January 28 2010 a serious accident occurred at the south end of Brig yards when a Crossrail freight from Italy collided head-on with a BLS freight leaving the yard. It was surprising to learn that the signal controlling the yard outlet passed at danger by the BLS train, had no automatic train-stop protection. The UUS inspectors recommend that they should be repositioned to give greater braking distance (over-run) and protection be installed forthwith, together with other signals in the layout. It has also come to light that on March 14th there was a shunting accident at Brig which severely damaged a Domino-set and a passenger coach. The inspectors' report stated that in Brig *'Train and shunting movements are controlled by three signal boxes with out-of-date technical means'*, and indeed it is apparent at the station. Scarcely anywhere else do you see free-standing wooden signal boxes with interlocking, still controlling local and mainline movements. Of course it is 'safe' as it has been for 100 years; but this is where the arrears of renewals recently highlighted politically, start to take their revenge.



On the scrounge

There is a rumour that SBB are looking to avoid renovating (at CHF0.5m each) at least some of the 180 2nd Cl. EW IV cars earlier proposed. The suggestion is to see what is available for hire from other railways. We wait and see!

A recent surprise was another 'Phoenix from the ashes'; at the Innotrans 2010 in Berlin, SBB displayed what was claimed to be the most comfortable vehicle at the show. It was no other than the 20-year-old 1st Cl. Panorama car 85 19-90 110 completely reconditioned for CHF1m, apparently



ABOVE: SBB Panoramawagen, Luzern, Basel- Locarno train
Interior of Panoramawagen.

soon to be followed by the remaining 11 cars. They have the newest seating, toilets, décor and power connections, and are internationally (RIC) cleared. At present they perambulate hourly across the Gotthard on the slow Inter-Regio trains to Locarno and Lugano, but they are always popular; experienced passengers make for them. The last international use was on the daily Vienna Transalpino, and we thought that after being loaned to cover the various Pendolino crises, they would disappear. We rejoice to be proved wrong.

RAIL FREIGHT. No, we can't – um, yes we can

Trenitalia Cargo has taken draconian measures to reduce the costs of wagon-load freight. Only 42 freight depots in the whole of Italy are now open for this traffic, and marshalling facilities are greatly reduced. Moreover, in the wake of the Viareggio accident where derailment of a freight train led to an explosion killing many around the station, even in those remaining depots and yards hazardous cargo is - in principle - forbidden. Some other networks take the same view, but not all so this can lead to trouble.

One side of the problem is that although Switzerland has reduced its local goods stations, several hundred are still open and there is a business to be done despite serious doubts on costs and quality. Hazardous cargo is also a substantial share of freight traffic. SBB Cargo and others are now looking for private railway and intermodal facilities in Italy, or to re-marshalling, as does BLS Cargo in Domodossola, so that the Italian wagon-load freight goes forward in block loads to agreed destinations. Another aspect is that among the many block loads crossing the Alps there are still some conventional freight trains such as from Sweden. Swiss operators with their own delivery facilities in Italy can ensure that this cargo stays on rail, also a contribution to the objective of keeping Alpine transit freight on rail. 