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THE NStCM MOVES FORWARD



Two trains cross at St-Cergue in 2005.
Photo: Ron Smith

The metre-gauge Chemin de fer Nyon – St-Cergue – Morez (NStCM) runs for 27km from Nyon, on Le Léman, to a terminus that is physically on the French border at La Cure. The 12km of line from there on to the Jura town of Morez was closed in 1958 - however a small section of it may soon be reopened. This is the story of a line re-born after decades of neglect.

Arriving at Nyon CFF prior to 2004 the terminus of the NStCM was to be found in the street, opposite the station entrance. Here a café terrace formed a platform where the train stopped, and the establishment was the handy “waiting room”. Setting off down the street trains curved under the main line to join their own right-of-way north of the station. This arrangement had worked well for the first 50 years of the line’s life, but as both road traffic and train frequency increased, an arrival or departure stopped all the traffic on surrounding streets. The resulting chaos and confusion resulted in the construction of a new station that opened in May 2004 and is underneath, and at right angles to, the main line. Since then, although there have been no other operational developments on the line, passenger traffic had increased by an amazing 58% to no less than 1.25m trips in 2010, and is still rising, an indicator that this area of Canton Vaud is one of Switzerland’s economic growth areas. The service offered by this local company is increasingly vital for workers and students, with usage expected to grow rapidly in the next few years. Interestingly, despite serving a booming ski area Swiss and overseas tourists represent less than 20% of travellers. Nyon, with a population of some 20,000, is centred on its historic core alongside the lake. It needs to expand, but as space is at a premium around the town centre, new

development is planned to be along the corridor of this line with upwards of 4,000 extra people expected to live and work in the immediate vicinity of the route by 2030. It already serves the community but the NStCM is now set to become a key element in urban growth plans for this area. In Switzerland sustainable public transport provision is part of the planning process.

The NStCM is electrified at 1500V dc, and climbs up into the Jura from Nyon (406m) by adhesion on gradients of up to 6% (1 in 16), serving some 16 stations and halts en-route. The summit of the line is at 1233m on the Col de Givrine some 2km prior to dropping down to the current terminus at La Cure (1155m). The route is quite serpentine in nature with a number of quite severe 180° reverse curves - at Genolier the station is unusually situated on a tight radius 90° bend. An hourly service currently operates to La Cure with an additional train most hours on the 19km section to St-Cergue (1047m). This mountain resort was once the largest community on the route although Arzier-Le Muids is now bigger with a population of some 2,500 and Genolier is rapidly catching up. A planned move to a 15 min. headway on the first 7.5km from Nyon to Genolier by 2013 has been put back to 2015 to enable the first four units of a CHF66m ten-train order to be brought into service, the remaining six units following in 2018. These will be 2-car versions of Stadler’s 3-car ‘Diamant’ design supplied to the BDWM. The current fleet of five Be4/4s dating from 1985/6, and three older BDe4/4s (obtained from other lines), are being pushed to their limits. The new trains will eventually allow a more intensive service on the remainder of the line. To accommodate this step-change in frequency CHF43m

of improvements are to be introduced including; a revised layout at Arzier; increased platform heights; automatic signalling and points and train information systems. All this is to be jointly financed by the Confederation and the Canton. The present depot at Les Plantaz, just 1km from the terminus, is now too small, especially with the impending arrival of new trains. The depot is surrounded by houses, so a new 80m long building incorporating the railway's offices, is planned to be built some 4km up the line near Trélex, freeing-up the present site for redevelopment with housing, or for a Park & Ride facility. South of Trélex, near the halt at L'Asse, is the site of the Paléo Festival, Switzerland's answer to Glastonbury and now in its 37th year. If you do not like crowds do not go there during the third week of July each year, when over 40,000 Rock fans attend on each of the six days. Favoured transport is by car as many bring their camping equipment.

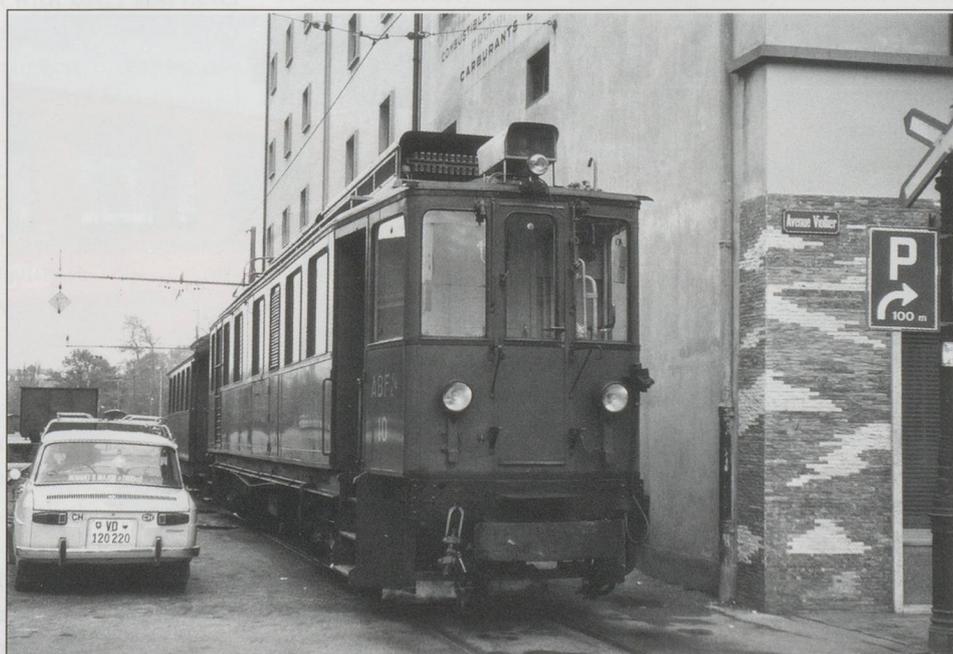
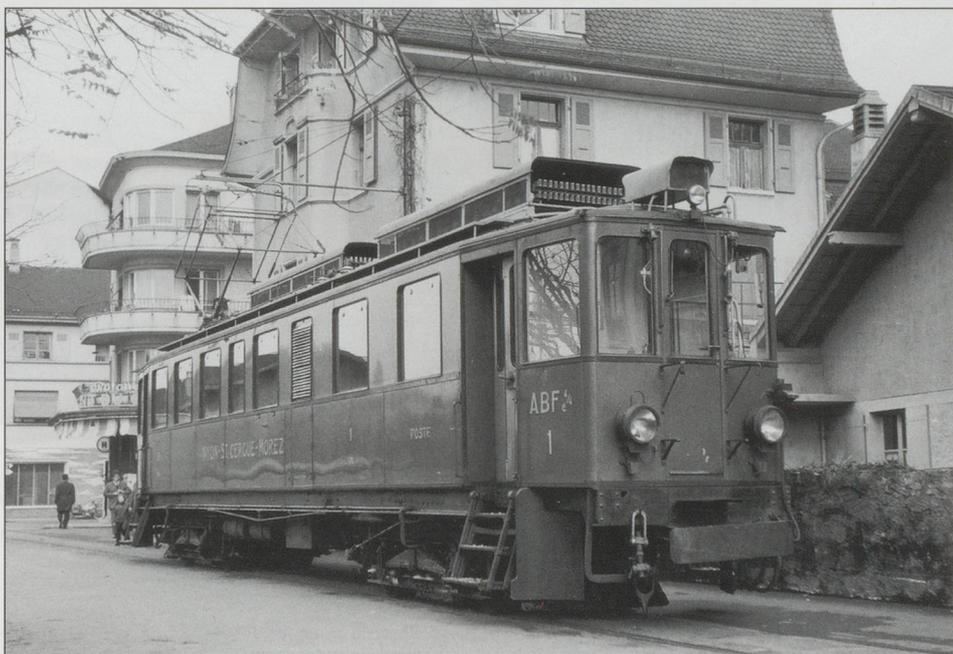
At the present terminus of La Cure, trains straddle the Franco/Swiss border. It has frequently been suggested that the line should be re-laid 2km into France to serve the very popular ski and mountain sports resort of Les Rousses, although its former roadside alignment would not be practical today. With a population of over 3,000 Les Rousses would be the largest community outside Nyon on the NStCM, and at the height of the winter and summer tourist seasons its population can increase many-fold. Extending the line is seen to be comparatively easy and the French authorities see this as a way of easing the acute traffic problems Les Rousses suffers. Discussions are apparently well advanced to make this railway an international route once again.

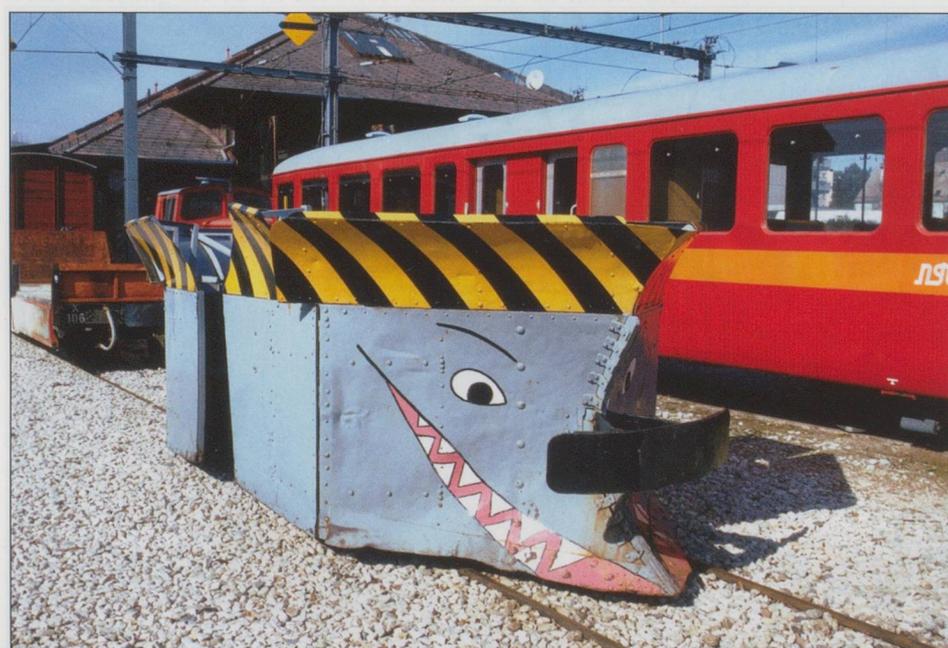
Top: Railcars 10 & 11 meet in the snow in the late 1960s.

Middle: ABFe 4/4 No 1 does some street running.

Bottom: ABFe 4/4 No 10 squeezes next to a classic Renault 8 in the 1960s.

All photos: Bryan Stone





The background to all this programmed and proposed development of the NStCM is interesting. Now an integral part of the TPN – Transports Publics Régionaux Nyon-Ouest Vaudois – the concession for the line was originally granted in 1912, although it was first proposed in the late 19thC. Construction soon commenced on the project, however the advent of WW1 slowed the work so it was not until 1916 that it was opened to St-Cergue, with trains to La Cure following in 1917. The line was electrified from the start at the unusual voltage of 2200V dc, before the present operating voltage was adopted in the 1980s. The section to Morez via Les Rousses, jointly run with the French Chemins de fer électriques du Jura, did not open until 1921. In the early 1960s the line was on the brink of closure, with its original rolling stock and infrastructure in need of replacement. Twenty years of prevarication between Communes, Canton and Confederation followed before a decision was made in 1982 to keep the railway and purchase the Be4/4 units that still form the backbone of its operations. By this time the original motorcars were 70 years old. Today there are around twenty-six return trips a day between Nyon and St-Cergue (seventeen extended to serve La Cure) whereas 40 years ago, with closure a possibility, only nine return trips a day operated over the line. Now an integral part of the community by the time of its centenary the lower section of the NStCM should be seeing some 60+ return trips daily. ☞

Top: Be4/4 NO 203 at the depot in 2005.

Middle: XTm 251 of the NStCM at the main depot.

Bottom: A scary looking snowplough at the depot.

All photos: Ron Smith