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SWISS NEWS

News from the Graubünden

The RhB's 2011 Annual Report shows a move from a loss in 2010 to a small profit. As most of its operations are heavily subsidised by both the Confederation and the Canton this was really a notional figure simply indicating its efficiency. 2011 had been a difficult year with an overall 7% reduction in overnight stays in Graubünden and a significant decline in usage of their luxury trains, the Glacier and Bernina Expresses. Overall the system saw marginally fewer trips but income had remained stable due to fare increases whilst increasing revenue protection was also important. The move into profit was linked to the introduction of a number of short-term economy measures along with more efficient use of resources. Like many railways the RhB was finding the economics of local freight operations to be an issue. It currently receives some financial support from the Confederation to sustain such traffic but this is due to be withdrawn in 2014. Maintaining operations during the last winter had been difficult due to the natural changes that had been occurring to snow conditions. Climate Change is now recognised by the RhB as an issue that is resulting in some 'winter events' becoming more severe, these leading to problems with sustaining parts of their 100 year old plus infrastructure. The collapse of part of the approach to the Brusio viaduct and the necessary repair work was an example of this. Plans are in place for major works to protect, where possible, against some extreme events and included in this was the raising of one bridge over the Rhein by some 4m to be above potential flood surges. A decision has been taken to construct a new Albula Tunnel, some 30m away from the old one, as the most cost/effective solution to the on-going problems with the existing structure. This work is planned to start in 2020 with completion in 2024. It was considered that for the economy of the region the introduction of the "Retica 30" plan (30 minute headways on all major routes) was essential and the RhB was working to achieve this. It was stressed that there was a total interdependence between the SBB and the RhB, especially regarding the importance of inter-connections at Chur and Landquart in any improved timetable. The SBB was already stretched regarding capacity on its main lines, but its investment and operational problems should not be seen to compromise the need for improved services into and around Canton Graubünden. Already relying on its Website to communicate with actual and potential customers the company is increasingly using new forms of Social Media such as Facebook, Flickr, You Tube, Twitter, etc. to promote its services and keep in contact with its customers, especially younger ones.

SBB has some good news...

The first two members of the new fleet of Class 511 high performance 6-car 150m long double-deck units went on trial in the early summer. Primarily intended for Zürich (and later, other suburban services) 50 are due for early introduction with 29 at present planned for the Zürich network, and 21 for Regio-Express services elsewhere. This order will be extended so that altogether 45 will be available for service outside the Zürich region. Some of these will run a new service from Wil via the Rhein Valley to Chur starting in December 2013; others will be needed in Aargau for the Olten – Brugg – Wettingen route; and yet more are for the now urgent capacity increases planned for the Genève-Lausanne line (see P. 31).

...some not so good news...

A less happy story regards the new long-distance high-speed double-deck trains, called for the moment IC200 and IR200. The Swiss courts have upheld a formal objection by the body representing the disabled, that the SBB's (and Bombardier's) plan to provide wheelchair accommodation on these sets only in the Restaurant area is unacceptable. Such access, including to WCs, must be provided in normal accommodation. As we reported in the

June magazine this redesign will put the project back by several months. It has now come to light that Bombardier themselves have made an unrelated design error, which will add between 12 and 24 months to the acquisition process. These trains are, needless to say, urgently needed as high quality stock is at a premium. The first eight of the 52 units on order should come from the Görlitz plant in Germany while the remainder are due to be built in Switzerland at Villeneuve (VD). Perhaps SBB should have gone to Stadler with the order.

...and some even worse news

In June it was announced that SBB Cargo is to close 128 of the 500 freight loading stations on the network with the loss of some 200 jobs although no redundancies are planned. Originally 155 loading stations were earmarked for closure. Wood, cement and agricultural loading bays will be particularly affected. The closures will target irregularly used facilities, or those that are used for small amounts of freight. As SBB has often pointed out just 10% of their customers generate some 90% of their revenue. Canton Berne will be particularly affected, with 32 of the 82 loading stations in the Canton scheduled to lose service. Criticism about the resulting increase in road journeys was diffused by Frau Leuthardt, the Transport Minister, who commented that since the rail traffic at these places was minimal, it was not really an issue.

SBB opens new intermodal depot.

In April SBB cargo opened a new CHF11m intermodal depot in the Ticino at Cadenazzo near the Italian border. The existing freight yard there is at capacity, and so an additional depot was needed. A reach stacker capable of trans-shipping up to 40t containers or swap bodies serves four 220m sidings. This is the eighth SBB cargo intermodal depot in Switzerland connected by overnight trains in the wagon load sector. It will avoid heavy lorries having to traverse the Alps; help reduce the level of road traffic in this fragile environment, and will also provide additional traffic on the existing wagon load services, improving their financial viability.

RhB/SBB

On the mixed gauge section between Chur and Domat-Ems, the traction current is at the RhB's 11,000V. The computer-controlled modern locomotives of the SBB are built for 15,000V and have trouble with this, so an old Ee3/3, latterly 16383, has been kept at Chur to handle Emserwerke trips. Trials in May with a new hybrid Eem No.923 001 have resolved the problem. Another Ee3/3, a long line of which, plus several Em3/3s and Bm4/4s, were standing this summer in Biel yards, will now disappear.

On BLS KISS becomes DOSTO

As reported in the June magazine the first Class 515 double-deck DOSTO unit was delivered in March to the BLS. These are a series of 28 new four-car EMUs, based upon Stadler's KISS design, and the prototype was delivered just 2 years after the CHF494m order was placed. The need for new stock is a consequence of a sharp increase in ridership on the BLS Bern suburban routes, a trend that shows no sign of abatement. The series introduction is planned to start this September on the line S31 Münchenbuchsee – Bern – Belp, with the stock then appearing on line S1 Fribourg-Bern-Münsingen-Thun at the end of 2012. As the fleet builds up the units will be introduced on line S3 Biel/Bienne-Bern-Belp and line S6 Bern-Schwarzenberg, with the last units arriving at the end of 2014. In parallel to the introduction of the DOSTO units a programme of platform extension is in hand, so that two such trains, together 200m long, can serve these routes. The specification includes 6 MW of installed power and an acceleration of 1.32 m/s/s, or 0 – 100 km/h in only 22 seconds. Your Swiss News Editor remembers that on express workings his cherished Gresley A4s needed nearly 5 minutes for this. The new Stadler trains are considerably more comfortable than the NINA units they replace, and are also a jump ahead of the SBB's Class 514s now entering service in Zürich.

New trains for international services

In April the SBB issued a tender for 29 new 250km/h multi-system EMU trains for use on international services between Germany, Switzerland and Italy via the Gotthard Base Tunnel. This is due to open in 2016, although the fleet of new units will not be fully available for service before 2017. The specification is for 400m-long single-deck conventional trains operating at up to 225kph, that will offer around 70% more seating than the ETR 470 Pendolino tilting trains currently used on Swiss/Italian services. These unreliable units are due to be phased out by the end of 2014. Their poor performance since 2000 has seen a 50% fall in patronage on the international trans-alpine corridor. Interested parties will have six months to submit a bid, which may include an option for maintenance by the manufacturer. The contract is expected to be worth around CHF800m and it is hoped that some units may enter service from 2016. It is understood that SBB is not seeking tilt capability for the new units, as it believes this would offer only minimal reductions in journey time. The problem for SBB is what to do in the two year plus hiatus and this can probably only be solved by the use of conventional locomotive-hauled trains using equipment that meets Italian specifications. As at this time, when elderly Re4/4 II are hauling conventional passenger coaches (including the much-loved Panoramic cars) over the Gotthard, this route may become for a year or two a place of nostalgic pilgrimage – something that was never intended. Here too another question has arisen, as the Federal Transport Office now demands that at least one set of doors should give direct wheelchair access at platform height of 55 cm. This is a serious design constraint for the current rolling stock, and is not assured at stations everywhere even if wheelchair lifts are in operation, as these require time and personnel at the critical moment. Taking a system-wide view, it is apparent that a sea change is again now in the air. Although locomotive-hauled express trains will not disappear for a long time, with Class 460s and refurbished EW-IV stock still providing services like Basel/Zürich – Brig; Genève – Brig; and Zürich – Chur for some time to come, a new pattern is nevertheless being set. Equally FLIRT and Domino EMUs are taking over many secondary lines, with Re 4/4 II (apart from those on Gotthard trains) suddenly seeming quite rare. During the coming few years the picture will probably be rather unstable, as waves of re-equipment come in and, equally, markets and needs change. Variety there will be, but different to before.

Concession cancelled

Swiss railways, most of which were built by private promoters, are not built by Act of Parliament as was the case in Victorian Britain, but under authority of a concession, granted with conditions, by the Transport Department, only occasionally with specific parliamentary involvement. The concession is for a limited period, often 100 years. Many concessions lapsed because the original promoters couldn't build or open their line. At first Cantons had the right to award concessions, and the confusion of rival schemes was immediate and self-defeating. Subsequently the Confederation stepped-in to ensure co-ordination and planning. Disasters and bankruptcies still occurred, but basically it's a sound system that is still in place. Promoters are required to show their operational and financial competence and to apply the laid down standards. Procedures allow for mergers, common in recent years, and sale of the line, as when public ownership is involved. Failure along the way can also result in the concession being withdrawn. That is rare, but can apply when a private line, typically a mountain or secondary line, fails to maintain standards. However, operators can apply for their concessions to be cancelled. This will not be done light-heartedly; losing money is not enough reason. A case must be made, also with user and political interests, that there really is no point in continuing. Such an example occurred recently with the 5km section of metre-gauge line from St Urban Ziegelei to Melchnau that opened in 1917. Although regular trains run from Langenthal to St. Urban (6.5km), then on another 0.5m to its tile

works (Ziegelei), beyond there passenger trains have not run since 1982. There were one or two excursions, which frightened the chickens, and the overhead wire had to be turned on. Freight had also stopped, and so the concession, at the application of operator ASm, has been cancelled by the Federal Transport Department with the agreement of Cantons Bern and Luzern. As can be seen, closure alone is not the issue; it is a legal process directly relating to the terms on which the line was authorized, built and operated, which releases the applicant from all obligations. Most people in Melchnau won't notice any difference.



ASm service to St Urban Ziegelei at St Urban, March 2010.
Photo: Jakob Jäger

BLS Upgrading

The line from Bern to Neuchâtel, a thoroughly conventional, mostly single track mix of Bern S-Bahn and country branch, does not often feature in these notes. However, it has been an international route and saw blue Wagons-Lits cars and TGVs. In April a significant step was taken to improve its performance when, to symbolize start of work, the 'first sod' of a new alignment was dug. This will include a new 2.1km double-track Rosshäusern tunnel, which will eliminate a slow bottleneck and raise line capacity, whilst Rosshäusern station will be realigned and rebuilt. The whole project will be completed in about 2 years. Interestingly, the concept of a faster connection between the Bern region and Paris is again in discussion.

Restructured timetable for the Swiss Romande

In the eight years since 2004 SBB/CFF has seen a 34% rise in passenger numbers using services between Genève/Lausanne/Montreux and on connecting routes. As we have reported previously in *Swiss Express* the north shore of Le Léman is rapidly becoming the major growth area in the country. Even with this growth in usage the share of Public Transport in this area is 30% less than in northern and eastern Switzerland, so SBB/CFF is now planning to revamp its operations in the area to both cope with the growth, and to encourage more people to take the train. From December 2012 the RE service frequency between Genève and Lausanne will be increased to ½-hourly, calling at Coppet/Nyon/Gland/Rolle/Allaman/Morges/Renens(VD) en-route, with one service each hour then going on to Vevey and the other extended to Palézieux and Romont. To introduce this service Nyon and Morges will lose their stops on most of the ICN services between Genève Aéroport and Yverdon-les-Bains, although some early morning/late evening operations will still stop at these stations. Nyon and Morges will retain their stops on the twice an hour IR services between Genève-Aéroport and Brig, although Gland and Renens will lose theirs. A new rush-hour service between Genève-Aéroport and Lausanne (continuing on to Brig) will also miss out the intermediate stations, whilst the hourly Genève-Aéroport – Lausanne – Bern-Luzern service will not now stop at Palézieux and Romont. However, an hourly Bern-Fribourg-Romont-Bulle service will split at Romont with a portion going on to Palézieux. In the long term it is planned to extend this service direct to Vevey on the

route of the Train-des-Vignes. The hourly Genève-Aéroport-Genève-Lausanne-Bern-Zürich-St Gallen IR service remains as before. The changes result in at least six passenger trains an hour in both directions linking Genève with Lausanne.

Centovalli trains upgraded

A few years ago SSIF, the Italian partners in the joint Centovalli operation from Domodossola to Locarno, introduced panorama trains based upon Skoda components to upgrade their input to the service. FART, the Swiss partner is now having Bombardier at Villeneuve upgrade five of their seven two-car ABe4/6 units dating from 1992/3 with a new central coach to form ABe4/8 units. Following the work the units will have 80% of their accommodation in low-floor areas, be air-conditioned, have more luggage space and have improved First Class accommodation. They will be used on through services marketed as the 'Centovalli-Express', which will be supplement-free, unlike the SSIF panorama stock where a CHF2 additional fare is payable. In parallel to this Swiss upgrade the SSIF has ordered from Skoda a further 4-car ABe 12/16 panorama set for 2013 delivery.

ZB Finches take flight

The first of the Zentralbahn's (ZB) new Class160 three-car FINK (Finch) units were delivered to the operator in the spring. The first public services (still as an extended trial) should have started in June, and by the time you read this in September there may be less work for the remaining Class110 DGe 4/4 units at Meiringen. A visit on May 1st found 110 001, 002, 003 and 021 all in use on the Meiringen – Interlaken Ost Inter-Regio workings, with Class 101 locos taking the trains over the top to Luzern. The six-car Class150 ADLER (Eagle) units for the long distance services will arrive later, resulting in the familiar operations of running round, and changing engines soon belonging to the past. So also will be the exhilarating rush through the Luzern suburbs, over level crossings on busy city streets, for this November the tunnel between Luzern HB and Kriens will enter service. Track is already laid and systems are being tested at the time of writing.

Swiss Cascades

In Britain the DfT approach to cascading railway equipment is that the poorest performing branch line gets the oldest trains when these are replaced by newer equipment on more popular routes. In Switzerland it was good to see that the struggling Basel S9 Sissach – Olten line, which recently has been saddled with awful, run-down, one class Domino 2 car sets (rejects from the former MThB Turbo adventure), was re-equipped in June with new Stadler GTW sets. These have entry and toilet access for the handicapped, along with two class accommodation – all the line needs now is some new passengers. Hopefully the 'upward cascading' of modern equipment to the line will encourage these to turn up.

Davos Platz Reconstruction

On the 18th April a ceremony marked the start of a two year, CHF40m, project to rebuild Davos Platz, used by over 1m passengers annually. The station building will be completely renewed; platforms raised; ramps built to the island platform; a subway to the Jakobshorn cable car, and for rail operation a complete renewal of the 1959 signalling and interlocking installations. In the quiet season between April and June 2013 the section between Klosters Platz and Davos Platz will be completely closed to allow major work on the station, track and catenary at the station to take place and to also allow the renewal of the lining of the Klosters tunnels.

A helping hand from the CJ

Our rail photographer friend Mario Stefano from Neuchâtel was a retirement job. He is retained for passenger surveys on the public transport network of Canton Neuchâtel, to ensure a fair sharing of

subsidies and revenues for the various operators providing services. He calls it, 'Compter les moutons' – 'Counting sheep'. It provides some interesting moments such as on 14th June at La Chaux de Fonds, when Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ) railcar No.560 141 arrived towing CJ diesel tractor No.232 182. Now the CJ runs into La Chaux de Fonds as it is the western terminus of its metre-gauge main line. However 560 141 ran in on the SBB's standard gauge line from the Sonceboz direction, the explanation being the SBB urgently needed a shunting tractor at Le Locle, and the CJ was able to help. But the CJ's standard gauge is far away, up at Porrentruy, on the Bonfol line, from where 560 141 that normally works its passenger service, had come from. Mario permitted himself the (purely rhetorical) question - why had the national network to be bailed out at such effort by a far off local line?



A helping hand from the CJ. Photo: Mario Steffani

Bulle – Broc: 100 years old

Switzerland still has a railway that runs to a chocolate factory, though the wish of its founder M.Cailler that it would be standard gauge was always frustrated. It is 4.6km long, metre-gauge, 900V dc, and has a frequent regular passenger service. A heavy traffic of standard gauge wagons is handled to and from Broc-Fabrique via Bulle by transporter wagons, and the whole enterprise is in the hands of Transports Publics Fribougeois (TPF). The stations are jewels - the view of Gruyère castle on its hill is unbeaten. The line's centenary was celebrated over the weekend of the 23rd/24th June and as is the custom in Switzerland everyone joined in to make it a success; the factory; local schools; the Communes; the railways, and the Blonay-Chamby came along with a steam engine. If you don't know the district, it is all one great *Swiss Tip*; the Broc line, which only takes a few minutes of your day to visit (unless you do the Chocolate factory tour), is splendid. There is a demonstration by Gruyère cheese dairy at the station of that name, and the village and castle up the hill are another world. The MOB runs a dedicated train on selected days (shown in the timetable), direct from Montreux via Montbovon to Broc, including the factory tour.

“Die Feste feiern wie sie fallen”

Mention of the Bulle–Broc centenary brings to mind the happy Swiss saying 'Die Feste feiern wie sie fallen' that translates as 'celebrate the events as they occur' or - if there is an excuse for a party let's have one! In this context there will be many railway celebrations in Switzerland this year. In addition to Bulle-Broc there has been the centenary of the Jungfraubahn; the MOB100@Lenk; our friends on the RhB had a big party in mid-June for the 100-years Illanz-Disentis, and in September the Sursee-Triengen is also a centenary case. It would also have been the centenary of the interesting tramway, now long closed, from Meiringen to Reichenbach (for the Funicular to the falls) and the Aare Gorge. There are more.

MOB – Becoming “legal”

For those who like diverse liveries the MOB has much to offer, however, a correction has been imposed. The marketing phrase

'Golden Mountain' may sound splendid, and is used liberally on the rolling stock, but GDe 4/4 No.6005 has now appeared with the full title 'Compagnie du Chemin de Fer Montreux – Oberland Bernois', because that is what in the company register the railway is really called, and so should be properly identified on its rolling stock. The familiar abbreviations BLS, RhB, TpF, etc. are not free inventions but officially approved and registered codes, and may not be altered. It has taken a while to catch up with the MOB. Incidentally, the titles 'Golden Mountain' and 'Golden Pass' date almost from the origin of the line, were always used in English, and refer to the line's Alpine crossing at Les Cases into the Gruyère country. They are not a historical Swiss name.

The Rigibahnen acquires another Cable Car operation

In May the Rigibahnen (RB) and Rigi Scheidegg AG (RSAG) announced that they are talking about the potential for the RB to add the RSAG's Kräble-Rigi Scheidegg cable car to the railway operator's portfolio of transport on the 'Queen of Mountains'. The 1745m line that rises 880m from the Kräble station of the former Arth-Rigi Bahn was opened in 1953. Its two 15-passenger cars date from 1983 and new investment is needed to upgrade these and other parts of the operation. The two organisations already work in close co-operation but they consider that the way forward to develop the tourist potential of the Rigi; to secure future funding for improvements, and for operational efficiencies, is for the creation of a more comprehensive business unit. The plan is for the RB/RSAG merger to take effect from 2013. The cable car is the transport link that enables tourists to complete the circuit of the upper slopes of the Rigi by riding the train from Arth Goldau, via Kräble, to Rigi Staffel, then back to Rigi Kaltbad from where they can then walk along the 6.6km former track bed of the RSB (Rigi Scheidegg Bahn) to the top station of the RSAG to return down to Kräble. Currently the RSAG is outwith the useful Rigi Day Card (and the Swiss Pass) so it is hoped that joining up with the RB will bring this operation within their ambit. The 1931 demise of the metre-gauge RSB was one of the earliest line closures in Switzerland. RB already operates the Weggis-Rigi Kaltbad cable car.



A cabin descends from Rigi-Scheidegg to Kräble.

Photo: RSAG

Bearing-up on the RhB

Train 1276, the 21.49 all-stations from Scuol, is not normally too exciting; the evening is quiet in those parts. There is time to think of times gone by, like when in 1908 the last Swiss bear, as we were told, was shot not far from Scuol, photographed, and stuffed - to appear much later in the National Park Museum at Zerne. However, on the night of April 30th, just 2 minutes out of Scuol at Ftan-Baraiglia, events caught up with train 1276. The driver knew he had hit a large animal on the crossing. That sadly, isn't unusual, especially in winter, when deer come into the valleys. He reported to the RhB dispatcher, who raised the local hunt

supervisor. What transpired was that train 1276 had not hit a deer, but a bear, and not just any bear. This was Bear M13 that had made the front pages of *'Bild'* a few days before. It had come out of hibernation, slipped over the Italian border and become known by robbing two beehives, being shot and stunned by a drugged dart, fitted with a radio transmitter, and was now loose again. The hope was that M13 would keep at a safe distance and cause no trouble. The problem was, that there were all the signs, but no blood or injured bear. Where was M13? A wounded bear is a potential danger. The next day M13's radio signal was picked-up and he was spotted, walking stiffly but apparently intact and not severely hurt. He made off afterwards, but remained under observation. By the time you read this we do not know what will have become of him; most go back to where they came from. So after 100 years bears, multiplying in the Italian Süd-Tirol, are finding their way into the Engadine and the Müntertal, and have been occasionally spotted by tourists. Once or twice bears have become too hungry or inquisitive and have had to be shot. Policy is to hope that their natural caution will keep them out of trouble. This was the first-ever recorded encounter with a train; perhaps M13 will pass it on, that flashing lights and a bell really do mean 'keep off'. The train driver, meanwhile, has a story worth telling.

STOP PRESS. Bear M13 was seen in the Bernina area in July.

Oil traffic to return?

The 2011 insolvency of Petroplus, the oil company that owned the Cressier refinery at Cornaux, near Neuchâtel, cut short a regular traffic of two or more daily block trains of oil tanks from the now silent yards. Varo, a Genève holding company has bought the plant and its installations, re-engaged the labour force and arranged supply contracts, so it is hoped that rail traffic can re-start during 2012 as production resumes.

The Shipping News

CGN on Lac Léman is a very pro-active organisation. One of their successes is the very strong passenger response to the new Nyon – Evian (France) fast-ferry service (Route N3), an intensive shuttle service across the lake that is enhanced at holidays and sunny weekends. This success partly reflects the housing pressure in the booming Genève region, that is obliging commuters to live further out, whilst leisure travel is also increasing. In another move a CHF24.8m restoration of the 1907-built paddle ship 'Vevey' has been given the go-ahead. In May 2010 she was taken out of service under order of the Federal authorities and laid up in Geneva due to her poor condition and need for heavy repairs. 'Vevey' has now been moved to dry dock in Lausanne, where the work will take two years. The ship is popular with both the CGN (due to being economical and efficient in service) and passengers, if less so with purists as she was converted to a diesel electric ship from a steamer. She is undoubtedly an elegant ship and can rightly be called a representative of the 'Belle Epoque'. On the Vierwaldstättersee a sophisticated new diesel yacht with large panoramic windows, glass roof and observation lounge has been commissioned. It is to be used for lake tours and private parties, as opposed to the regular scheduled services for which the steam and bigger motor ships are used. This is a new venture and undoubtedly meets a need as well as releasing the bigger vessels for their regular work. It is however a difficult time as the shipping services on the Vierwaldstättersee and in the Berner Oberland, lost passengers in 2011 due to a mixture of exchange rate woes and bad weather. This year they are all trying hard to generate new business. Incidentally, together with Glarus, Luzern has statistically Switzerland's heaviest rainfall so the glass roof will be an asset! 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes items from Ron Smith, s'Murmeli, Jakob Jäger, Michael Donovan, Boyd Misstear, and others.