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SMALL STATE S-BAHN




1. Lichtenstein castle overlooking Vaduz. Photo: Ron Smith. 2. OBB 1116 234-4 and 1016 006-7 off Wien Zurich at Buchs service. Photo: Ron Smith. 3. A MAN bendy bus belonging to LIEmobil. Photo: David Stevenson. 4. Lichtenstein parliament building. Photo: Ron Smith. 5. Another local bus. Photo: David Stevenson. 6. 11125 at Buchs on Wien Zurich train in 2010. Photo: Ron Smith

At the beginning of December 2012 the Liechtenstein government agreed a CHF50m commitment to the first stage of the CHF100m 'S-Bahn Flach' project to improve the line through the Principality and introduce a half-hourly regular interval S-Bahn service, between Buchs (SG) and Feldkirch, Austria. Currently there are some 9km of single-track line through Liechtenstein that is operated by the ÖBB. The Austrian National operator serves a station at Schaan-Vaduz (3km from the tiny capital Vaduz), and two others at Schaanwald and Nendeln, with just ten stopping trains a day in each direction. The line is also busy with international freight services and a number of through InterCity passenger trains between Zürich and various Austrian destinations including Wien. The 'S-Bahn Flach' project results from a 2008 agreement between the governments of Fürstentum Liechtenstein (FL), Austria's Vorarlberg Province (A) and Switzerland's St Gallen Canton (CH) - hence FL.A.CH - to improve public transport across the three-nation Rhein Valley area in order to relieve the increasingly congested road network. Public transport in Liechtenstein is provided by publically owned LBA - Liechtenstein Bus Anstalt - which operates as LIEmobil over 15 routes with its fleet of 39 vehicles, carrying some 5m

passengers annually. Some services run into Switzerland and Austria, but these are increasingly subject to traffic delays making them a poor alternative to private transport. Although the total population of Fürstentum Liechtenstein is only 36,000 it is the HQ of numerous organisations due to its low-tax regime. Many well known companies, such as fixings manufacturer Hilti, also have factories there that employ numerous cross-border commuters, whilst the neighbouring areas of Switzerland and Austria are experiencing an economic boom. There are just five road bridges crossing the Rhein along the 25km border between Switzerland and Liechtenstein, resulting in congestion and delays to traffic (including bus services) being common in the peak hours.


The first stage of the 'S-Bahn Flach' scheme involves double tracking the line between Tisis, just over the border in the Vorarlberg, and Nendeln including the reconstruction of the stations at Schaanwald and Nendeln. This work should allow the proposed enhanced service, still to be run by the ÖBB, to commence at the end of 2015. The second stage, costed at CHF100m, is for SBB to double-track the Buchs-Sevelen section of their line down the Rhein Valley to Sargans, in order to allow a half-hourly local service on this route that is currently a traffic bottleneck.

This work, including modernising the stations on the route, is scheduled for completion by the end of 2018. The SBB station at Sevelen is the nearest to Vaduz at only 1.5km from the Liechtenstein border and just another 1km from the centre of the capital; also the Swiss station at Trübbach is right on the border (the Rhein) and adjacent to Balzers, one of the larger communities in the Principality. In the longer

term (2025) there are Swiss plans to improve the local services south from Sargans through Bad Ragaz and Maienfeld to Landquart and Chur. The Austrians also have plans in the shorter term to upgrade their already frequent services on the ÖBB line from Feldkirch, along the east bank of the Rhein to Dornbirn and the Vorarlberg Provincial Capital of Bregenz. 

INNOTRANS Ron Smith looks at the Swiss presence at the 2012 exhibition

Innotrans is probably the world's largest rail transport exhibition. It is held in Berlin every two-years (see www.innotrans.de). In 2012 it was larger than ever. The Berlin Messe site was fully used, covering 161,420 m2 with 2,515 exhibitors from all over the world. There were 126, 110 attendees during the trade-only days of 18th to 21st September with the public being admitted to the outdoor displays on the 22nd and 23rd. Innotrans is the showcase for all the latest developments in technology, hardware, software, track, electrical equipment, cables, and of course new trains and trams. Switzerland was well represented particularly with the Stadler presence. A growing market segment is for new open access operators, who may not be ordering in the large quantities that national operators can, but are looking for something special to differentiate them from the incumbent operator. A good example is the Stadler built version of their FLIRT electric units for Czech open access company Leo Express, who now operate between Prague and Ostrava from last December's timetable change. These five very high quality trains will have 160kph top speed, and their 237 seats are divided into 212 "Economy", 19 "Business" and 6 "Premium" classes. The latter are in a small compartment with luxury leather reclining seats with leg/foot rests, individual lights, screens for films or TV, and electrical sockets. Newspapers, beverages and so on will be provided by a hostess. The new trains will be quite a contrast to some of CD's rolling stock! Double-deck trains for the BLS and German operator ODEG were there, as was one of SBB's hybrid shunters. Also on display were a Re450 Zurich S-Bahn set and a Re4/4 locomotive, both of which have been refurbished. Modalohr displayed their new profile intermodal wagon that will allow 4m high (at the corners)

road vehicles to be carried within many existing loading gauges, as the present Gotthard route through Switzerland. This is proving a little controversial, as it appears to negate some of the arguments put forward for the Base Tunnel. However, this is not serious as track capacity constraints and factors make the new Gotthard tunnel a vital necessity. Other intermodal wagons were on display on the outside tracks. The future of rail freight must lie in attracting road freight to use rail intermodally. The sheer volume of new ideas, manufacturers, trains and technology present at Innotrans meant that it was impossible to see it all. It is a great sign of the vitality and drive that is in the industry today as it adapts to environmental, lower cost, and flexibility demands, plus shorter term ordering and delivery schedules, and all to a higher quality level than ever before. Innotrans is certainly impressive, and huge – and not all serious, as a 1925 built 0-6-0 tank engine gave very popular cab rides up and down the tracks that feed the rail section! 

1. Stadler unit for BLS.
2. Stadler unit for Leo Express.
3. Stadler unit for ODEG.
4. Stadler tram for Stuttgart.
5. Stadler shunter SBB 923005-3.

All photos: Ron Smith

