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SOUTH FROM AARAU



Jason Sargeson explores the operations of the WSB

Blue advertising livery on a Be 4/8. Photo Jason Sargeson

The AAR (Aargauer Agglomerations & Regionalverkehr) runs both bus and metre-gauge rail services in and around Aarau. Its two rail routes run under the banner of the Wynental and Suhrental Bahn (WSB) and these operate from Aarau to Menziken (22.0km) and from Aarau to Schoftland (10.2km). The lines are electrified at 750V dc and operate from depots at Aarau, Menziken and Schoftland. The communes in both of the line's namesake valleys began looking into rail connections with Aarau at the end of the 19thC, and in the case of the Wynental this was originally proposed to be a standard gauge line. In practice the line that was constructed, the Wynentalbahn (WTB) was a

roadside tramway that opened between Aarau and Reinach in March 1904 and was extended to Menziken the following May. The parallel valley had also opted for a roadside tramway and the Aarau-Schöftland Bahn (AS) started operation just over two years earlier in November 1901. Both lines used short tunnels under the SBB tracks to meet a joint terminal on the north side of the main line station. This operation only lasted until 1924 when the WTB moved its operations to the south side of the SBB Station, whilst the AS trains only moved there in 1967 after the companies had merged in 1958 as the WSB. Since that time the railway has taken several opportunities to move its tracks from the ever busier roads to new alignments.

Realignments first took place at Obermuhen and Gränichen, then in 2002 it took over the abandoned standard-gauge alignment of the former Seetalbahn Beinwil to Beromünster branch between Reinach Nord and Menziken, in order to avoid congestion through the centres of these two busy communities. In 2004 a diversion line at Muhen was brought into operation and finally in 2010 the line lost its on-road section between Aarau and Suhr in favour of a metre-gauge re-laying of the line along the former SBB link between these two locations. At this time Suhr station on the Lenzburg to Zofingen line was totally reconstructed to serve as an interchange with

Old and new stock in Menziken train shed.
Be 4/8 and Be 4/4. Photo Jason Sargeson



the Wynental line of the WSB. The same SBB secondary service also connects with the Schöftland line at Oberentfelden, although here each operation has a separate, but adjacent, station.

The line is operated with a mixture of rolling stock, some of it similar to units on the BDWM and RBS. The 12 Be4/4 units Nos. 15 to 27 dating from 1979 have all now gone through a modernisation process, where the WSB upgrades the original railcar and mates it with a new driving trailer supplied by Stadler, that has some luxurious 1st Class accommodation, to form Be4/8 sets. The WSB also has 8 Be4/8 sets dating from 1993 that are similar to units formerly operated by the BDWM and the RBS. By the end of 2012 all the old orange rolling stock should have disappeared and apart from some units with overall advertising the new silver livery with red and blue lining will prevail. The WSB also has two De4/4 electric locos dating from 1974.

The platforms and approach lines for the WSB at Aarau station were undergoing an upgrade in 2012 as a follow-up to the re-alignment onto the old SBB trackbed of the route to Menziken. This runs past a new two-platform station at Buchs AG through the suburbs of Aarau to Suhr, where it cuts under the SBB Zofingen - Lenzburg line to reach the massive new station at Suhr. Leaving here it continues beside the road, past fields of maize and wheat, following the river to Teufenthal AG then on to Reinach and the new route through this developing area to its terminal. There are a possible 18 stops on the line with several crossing points and a short length of dual track near Gontenschwil. Right hand running is favoured throughout and the 15 minute headway service takes some 40 minutes. The line terminates in the enclosed train shed at Menziken that also serves as the depot. The line to Schöftland sets off from Aarau in the opposite direction to the line to Menziken utilizing a 250m tunnel to emerge at Binzerhof. Trains run alongside the road through small communities before reaching Oberentfelden where it crosses the SBB Zofingen line on



TOP: Old and new stock outside Schöftland station. Be 4/8 and Be 4/4.

Photo: Jason Sargerson

MIDDLE: Be 4/4 in black livery at Unterentfelden Post.

Photo: Jason Sargerson

BOTTOM: Two newer units at Aarau Station.

Photo: Jason Sargerson



the level. The first fields of maize are seen at Muhen as the line follows the River Suhre through the countryside to Schöftland with a possible 12 stops en-route, the trip taking some 25 minutes. The 15 minute service normally runs-through from valley terminal to valley terminal via Aarau.

Until recently the WSB carried substantial traffic in standard-gauge wagons, transferred onto transporter trucks respectively at Suhr and at Oberentfelden. These operations were costly to run, the no longer modern equipment needed special maintenance, and increasing axle loads and size of freight wagons all militated against it continuing. Also users lose interest, and this is what has occurred on the AAR's WSB lines. After 110 years of operations the freight traffic, a tidy 33,000t (700 wagonloads in 2007) was halved by 2011, partly because of closure of an industrial plant. The remaining traffic, including seasonal sugar beet traffic, was no longer economic to provide equipment for. Freight services ended on the Schöftland line some two-years ago and on the Wynental line they finished after the 2012 sugar beet season. The fate of the two De 4/4's has yet to be decided. 

Jason's original article has been augmented with additional information from Bryan Stone and Jakob Jäger.

TOP LEFT: Descending into the tunnel under Aarau.
Photo: Jason Sargerson

MIDDLE LEFT: New Stadler driving trailer.
Photo: Jakob Jäger

LOWER MIDDLE LEFT: De4/4 No.45 at Suhr.
Photo: Jakob Jäger

BOTTOM LEFT: Trains crossing at Buchs AG.
Photo: Jakob Jäger

BOTTOM RIGHT: SBB & WSB trains call at Suhr.
Photo: Jakob Jäger