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SWISS NEWS

SBB bows to criticism and other ticketing developments

From June 1 SBB adopted new rules, which allow train conductors to use increased discretion when they discover ticket and fare irregularities. The storm of complaints in Switzerland (and elsewhere) led by the VöV over the 'no tolerance' procedures applied since last year, had led to a fierce resolution from Pro Bahn, the users' interest group, to Parliament, demanding a relaxation. SBB's Andreas Meyer has confirmed that '*longstanding and faithful customers must not be penalized when they make a genuine mistake*'. Among other measures, a help line number is to be given on all ticket machines, since this is the source of most such errors. Others arise in on-line ticket ordering by smart phones. SBB has released figures which put the matter into proportion. In 2011 SBB's 1m passengers/day were provoking 850 'irregularities' daily, then in 2012 some 1,200 cases were dealt with, a sharp increase which was not justified by greater real fare evasion. Although SBB took the lead in announcing its more flexible practice, the new ruling will apply for all public transport. The SRS therefore feels justified in having passed on to the Association of Public Transport Operators (VöV), a copy of its own warning article to members. The more accommodating practice for ticket controls is not yet entirely clear, but the on-train and back office staff have been told to treat passengers like customers. It will be like the good old days! Moving-on, the development of the various Tariff Associations around the urban centres has been a great advantage for users and for public policy. However, there was always the potential problem of what happened where they met. Like Brunel's broad and Stephenson's standard gauge, where this happened difficulties could occur as their rules are often different. Well, as their Zones have expanded some have now met and the problems have surfaced. Particularly matters such as alternative routes are causing trouble where tickets are not always valid where the trains actually go. Some obvious nonsenses are now being sorted out, and also the rules for tickets purchased on-line are being reviewed, where some of the most hateful situations, of good faith against strict ruling, had emerged. These too are being treated more sympathetically.

Last minute tickets

Linked with the change of tack over ticketing that is reported above, the SBB announced that from the 1st July passengers who run out of time and are not able to buy a ticket for a SBB long distance train prior to departure, will be able to purchase tickets from train

staff on the platform. This 'service' will cost an additional CHF10 and the new rule is limited to staffed long-distance SBB trains, and will not be available on trains on which passengers are responsible for validating their own tickets. We wonder how this will operate if several potential customers approach the conductor on the platform seconds prior to departure time. Literally, time will tell.

What's in a name?

SBB have announced that in future two superfluous marketing names will be abandoned: RailCity and Mehr Bahnhof (More Station), plus their equivalents in the other languages. Both of these were intended to promote the new shopping centres in stations, but the SBB says that they are no longer useful because passengers expect to find shops in larger stations anyway. So Bahnhof, or Gare, or Stazione, will in future be the name - which is what most said anyway!

Brienzer-Rothorn Bahn

Last winter's main full workshop overhaul involved No.6, one of the 1933-built engines that was completely reassembled after renewal and repair. The 2013 season's 1891 veteran should be No.2, whilst there is increasing concern about the condition of No.7, which will also need heavy boiler repairs.



Another rainy day at Speiz.

Photo: Bremgarten

The weather

Up to June 2013 it was in Switzerland, the wettest and coldest on record - we talked like Mancunians about the weather! The consequence has been, more than ever, a series of land and mudslides; minor derailments; washed-out bridges and walls and at altitude, deep snow. The late snow is wet and heavy, and not only a source of avalanches, but also a heavy cost for the tourist railways which re-open annually in spring after digging out and repairing. If these lose a couple of weekends by late opening, and suffer some quiet days under heavy rain, it is hard to rescue the season. Foreign tourists make commitments, so group bookings are always important, but Swiss summer day-visitors decide at best, the

night before. They are a big part of the business on lines like the Schynige Platte Bahn or the Brienzer Rothorn, both now facing a tough year. A severe rock fall in the Tschanfigg closed the Arosa line for a month, while other slides have occurred far away from the obvious mountain valleys, like in the Thur valley, near Yverdon, and near Immensee. Since many slopes are now saturated, there will be more. Be reassured. If it didn't rain, Switzerland's green meadows and forests might be a brown desert, like Arizona.

Even in Switzerland...

There was major disruption over the weekend of 13th-14th July on the Zürich Hbf - Zürich Airport route after a crane toppled onto a passenger train during track work near Oerlikon station, its jib slamming into the passenger train. The incident caused significant damage to the train but no injuries to passengers on board; one worker suffered a hand injury. With two tracks unavailable and slow running required on the adjacent track, the service to and from the airport was significantly reduced, with only trains between Zürich and St Gallen, and those on S-Bahn line S16 using the route. The SBB website described the incident as an "operational malfunction" whilst the conductor on the train from Chur to Zürich, our correspondent was on board, described it as "exceptional engineering works"! Who says the Swiss do not have a sense of humour?

Who owns the railway infrastructure?

Although, as in the EU, Swiss rail infrastructure and operations are, both organizationally and in the accounts, kept apart, the main rail undertakings in fact own their infrastructure, even if open-access freight operators use them successfully. A joint body, Trasse Schweiz AG, a subsidiary of SBB, BLS, SOB, and VöV (this is the Association of Public Transport Operators), today allocates paths to potential users. There are few complaints. Since 2010 a group of experts has been observing performance and developing proposals nearer to the EU Directives, which require total separation and neutral use of Infrastructure. Two have become known. Existing informal supervision should be replaced by a Rail Regulator Office, competent to resolve conflicts and impose sanctions, and the company Trasse AG should be transferred to the Confederation and given a clear legal mandate for allocating paths on the standard gauge network. It is not at present suggested that complete separation of infrastructure and operations should be introduced, but passenger operations and infrastructure should each be vested in self-accounting holding companies, as is already the case at SBB Cargo and BLS Cargo. This debate will go on a long time yet. A more controversial idea arose in recent talks on future freight

transport legislation, that in future passenger traffic should not always have automatic priority over freight, but that long term network user concepts for train paths for both should be developed.

The Ae6/6 story – the last gasps

Gordon Wiseman's detailed analysis in June's SE was as close to the then reality as possible, for it was a moving target. When these notes appear many more will have been cut up, often recently at Ecublens, and the last Ae6/6 sugar beet season is about to start. Look out around Yverdon, Aarburg and Frauenfeld. Along with those being used on the gravel trains, these should be the last. We'll see.

Approval for a 4m-clearance 'Gotthard' corridor

The Swiss Federal Council has, at long last, finally approved a CHF940m scheme to create a second route through the country, that will allow 4m corner-height road trailer units to be sent by rail across the Alps. The CHF940m scheme, due for completion in 2020, is an important component of the Swiss modal shift policy, and will involve upgrading 20 tunnels on the Basle – Gotthard – Chiasso/Luino route together with signalling and catenary alterations, plus adjustments to platform canopies at stations. At CHF350m the most expensive element of the project will be gauge clearance in Aargau's Bötzberg tunnel. The Swiss government will also fund (through a CHF230m loan to the Italian Government) gauge enhancement of the Luino Ranzo – Gallarate/Novara line on the Italian side of the border. This is regarded as essential to the overall project. The gauge enhancement works will complement the construction of the Gotthard Base Tunnel, due to open in 2016, and the opening of the Ceneri Base Tunnel, scheduled to open 2019. Capacity on the existing Lötschberg – Simplon 4m railway corridor route is almost exhausted.

An unexpected maintenance problem

In May the NBS (Neubaustrecke), the high-speed line between Mattstetten and Rothrist, was unexpectedly interrupted. Following incidents with rail defects elsewhere, a wider intensive survey showed that on the NBS, that was only opened 9 years ago, serious degradation of some 30 km of rails had occurred. Reasons were not apparent, but the need for urgent action meant that the NBS was closed at night and over three weekends in May. During one of these a works train damaged one of the long and expensive high-speed turnouts near Wanzwil, where the Solothurn line branches off. This extended a blockade into the peak Monday traffic on May 13, with foreseeable disorder. A further complication was that the Lötschberg Base Tunnel was closed, by long arrangement, on May 4, for a legally compulsory safety test involving a simulated

'incident', with some 1,400 people, two trains, and rescue services. This exercise is required every 6 years, and was successful. Both of these lines have alternative routes; for the NBS the old Olten-Mattstetten main line through Burgdorf, prettier but more leisurely, which the heavy freight traffic via the BLS takes anyway, and for the Base Tunnel, over the old Lötschberg line through Kandersteg. Delays and irritation for passengers were however extensive. The SBB is left wondering what is still in store on the NBS.

SBB and FS head towards co-operation

In June the CEOs of both the SBB and the Italian State Railways (Trenitalia) signed an agreement to introduce improvements to customer services by the end of this year, strengthen reliability from next year, and upgrade rolling stock by 2015. After the termination of the Cisalpino joint venture, relationships between the two operators became somewhat strained as each took responsibility for their own sections of the Zürich – Milan route. The immediate outcome of the new agreement is the ability for First Class passengers of either operator to use each company's premium class lounges, then from this autumn international online ticketing will become available. From June 2014, departures times of Zürich – Milan EuroCity and Zurich – Lugano InterCity services will be adjusted to enable passengers to connect with Trenitalia high-speed trains from Milan. From 2015 almost all Milan services will be operated by ETR 610 Pendolino units. This action coincides with the start of Expo 2015, which will be staged in Milan. In addition, the two railways have set out new uniform standards for customer satisfaction, punctuality, and the quality and availability of rolling stock. Only time will tell if this plan succeeds.



Hanspeter Zweifel, the singing engine driver.

Photo: courtesy of the Glarus website

The singing engine driver

Hanspeter Zweifel, 55 years old, is from Linthal, in Glarus, Chairman of the local Council (Gemeinde-president), an SBB engine driver, and he has his own band. Early in 2012 he and 22 year old office assistant

Selena Beyeler won a competition among SBB staff for a new publicity song, 'Welcome Home', to be used in advertising spots from mid-2012 on. What was not expected, was that on release it quickly swept the board in the Swiss hit lists, to first place in the i-Tunes, and 9th in the singles hit parade, leaving the usual electronic clamour far behind. The sensation has now somewhat died down, but the song can be heard most evenings on the Swiss TV channels. SBB is advertising that, wherever you go and whatever you are doing, SBB is looking after you, your partner, your family and bringing you 'home'. The campaign is by all appearances successful, and the tune, unlike much we are today forced to hear, does not tire. Hanspeter and Selena have now done many SBB publicity tours, and he is apparently always being asked by passengers for autographs. But then, some of us are old enough to remember that other old favourite, the waltz tune of many years ago, 'Wir fahren mit den SBB', which my daughters even sang in primary school.

Changes of heart

In the June Swiss Express we described the curious clash, where German refusal to ratify an aircraft noise agreement over Zürich Airport had led to a stalemate on Swiss money for electrifying the DB line (mostly through Germany), from Basel to Schaffhausen. The Nationalrat (lower house) in Parliament swept this aside and included CHF100 million for the work. There is a small budget for connections to the European high speed and TGV network, assured in Basel, and this will be tapped. Interesting to me is how the Swiss politicians from left to right happily described the diesel railcar operation (with very modern DB units) as '*out of date, noisy, polluting, unreliable, anachronistic*'. They don't have to live with your 'Pacers' or 'Sprinters'! Behind the decision was the intention (basically agreeable to DB), that SBB will then work the service and integrate it into the whole complex of services north of Zürich, and along the Rhein. The Ständerat (upper house) was later less charitable and the project is again in the balance.

A radical change of route

The route between Lausanne - Renens will, from December 2015, be completely reconstructed taking some 10 years - even Network Rail never managed that! Other works in the station are also due. A regrettable consequence is SBB's plan to suspend the direct services by ICN along the Jura line between Basel, Biel, Neuchâtel and Genève, though the Lausanne service, shifted by 30 minutes, will continue. Genève passengers from Basel (of which there are many) will be sent to Bern to change onto the NE-SW expresses. As might be imagined, this was unwelcome in Basel and other places that are currently en-route. Canton Jura, which loses its most prestigious connection to Genève (and the airport)

from its cantonal capital Delémont, is in uproar. Partly the complaints have direct practical reasons; Laufen and Delémont for example are hubs for PostAuto services all over the northwest. Break the 'Takt' and you disrupt life, which has come to depend on it, especially schools and local industry. A further uncertainty is the final outcome of the long campaign to have the line from Basel to Delémont finally raised to mainline double track standards. What was once a backwater is now a busy commuter route, still partly single line with the crossing places in the wrong places for today's interval timetable. The result is that delays are increasing. Local interests fear that the temptation after ten years may be to forget the through Genève trains, and with them the double-track project. Remember that Cantons are part of the consultative process for timetables, and today pay for local services. There is a Swiss saying that "*the soup is never eaten as hot as it is cooked*". Once again, we shall see.

Heavy new railway works

These are a theme of this issue. On June 5 the Swiss Parliament concluded its debate on the future railway infrastructure budget. The Cabinet had proposed a programme with CHF3.5 billion up to 2025. No, said the Parliament: it will be CHF6.4 billion. Behind this is a broad public awareness that the system, as so often described in *Swiss Express*, is too tightly stretched at peak hours resulting in capacity, punctuality and goodwill all being tested. There are now 19 major projects in the programme, known as FABI, or Finanzierung und Ausbau der Bahninfrastruktur, up to 2025, for which approval was voted. The Parliamentary vote depended also upon the way the means are to be provided. Two proposals were approved: an increase in Value Added Tax of 0.1%, until 2030, to be reserved for rail infrastructure investment, and a reduction to CHF3,000 per year (about £2,000) in the deduction allowed to commuters in their tax declaration. This is a refined proposal, because it will affect high-income, long distance commuters more, and also fall heavier on private car users. With this right-wing politicians (traditionally in league with road builders and auto-importers, and against taxes) was indignant, but the proposals reflect the mood of the country.

Excellence costs money

The Swiss are proud of their public transport system and as individuals they use the integrated network more than any other population in Europe and probably the world. However excellence costs money. In 2011, the Swiss government subsidized the SBB and all the other railway operators to the tune of CHF10.20billion. Over the system some 40% of operating costs in 2011 was covered by directly generated income, whilst uncovered

costs climbed by CHF113m compared to 2010. Overall the cost of operating all of Switzerland's railways rose to CHF17.23billion in 2011.

Signalling safety

In October 2011 there was a serious collision north of Olten station, when a Domino-unit off the Läufelfingen line overran a signal, and collided with an Re 4/4 II-hauled relief commuter train on the main line from Basel. Considering the wreckage, which I saw shortly afterwards, it was remarkable that only two were slightly injured. The Swiss accident investigation unit SUST has issued its report confirming the worst, that after the stop aspect had been overlooked, the accident was then caused by inadequacy of the outdated signalling system. There was no automatic train protection, no adequate 'overlap' beyond the signal, and once on 'the wrong side' the train could not have stopped in safety. The report notes that re-signalling at Olten was already being done, but all are aware that on some of the minor lines, signalling does not give complete protection, and requires full vigilance from train crew. The Läufelfingen line is one of these, and this time it failed. These situations are known, and disappearing fast, but with a good safety record in the gentler past they have dragged on too long today. The recent Neuhasen accident was not dissimilar, as is the one reported below.



Photograph from swissinfo.ch website. Courtesy: LeMatin.ch

Fatal crash at Granges-Marnard

At around 19.00 on the evening of Monday 29th July the 18.00 RE from Lausanne to Payerne was involved in a head on collision with a train operating a Lausanne S-Bahn S21 service in the reverse direction near the station of Granges-Marnard in Canton Vaud. The station, 8km south of Payerne, has a passing loop on this secondary SBB line and first reports indicate that the southbound S21 service should have been held here for the RE service to pass through without stopping. It would appear that the southbound train had left the station and then came into conflict with the RE service on the single line section. At the time of writing it appears that the driver of the RE train was

killed in the impact and some 35 passengers were injured, five seriously.

The BLT – politics, more trams and a success story

In the Swiss News Editor's neighbourhood the BLT (Basel Lines 10, 11 and 17, and lots of buses too) made news this year. Its nineteen new Tango trams are all in service and, as an SRS member in Britain also detected and reported to me, an order has just been placed for another nineteen for delivery between 2014 and 2016. In addition, the tragic-comic local political deadlock of paying for double track on Solothurn's short section of Line 10 from Ettingen to Flüh, has now been resolved, and it will be operational by 2014. Local politics can be very frustrating. The BLT is Basel Land's transport system, and I know it well, whilst the BVB is the equally reputable Basel Stadt operation and there has been over 30-years of through running. For years a new short connection, the Margarethenstich, (just 250 m long) has been planned to allow BLT trams from the Leimental (Lines 10 and 17) to run direct in the peak hours on the BVB Line 2 to Basel SBB. This would save several minutes, relieve the inner city network, and have the advantage of continuing in future (now as BVB Line 2), to the Basel Badischer Bahnhof. The planning is approved, the money voted. Now, however, the BVB and BLT are at odds about working the through line, as the BVB insists it becomes an inner-city route (theirs), while the BLT considers it a logical extension of their Leimental line (ours). Heads will soon have to be banged, or the Parliament will block the credit. The remaining 44 Schindler trams (the 200 series) of the early 1980s, which are now showing their age. Some have run around 5m km. One Tango replaces two older units in tandem, so the gain in efficiency and energy is considerable. Local politics aside the BLT has had another successful year, reaching some 50m passenger journeys for the first time, nearly 5% more than a year ago. The reasons are simple: increased frequencies and capacity in face of a growing demand. Forty years ago my local service, Line 10 to Rodersdorf, needed half a page in the national timetable; today it has 35 pages, and trams run on weekdays at 7½ minute intervals, with additional ones in the peak hours. The whole operation, with suburban and rural buses, its outer-suburban tram routes and a turnover of CHF91.6m, booked a profit of CHF2.7m in 2012. This is a well-run and very dynamic undertaking, with high customer loyalty.

Policies and commuters

The Federal Statistics Office (BFS) has produced data confirming some success with public policy to reduce private car commuting. Shifts are slow but evident. From

2000 to 2011 automobile commuting fell from 58% to 55%, a break in a longer rising trend. Public transport's share rose from 26% to 29%, while cycles and pedestrians remained at 16%. Approximately 3.7m employed people had a daily journey to work. Troubling is that the daily journey to work takes on average 30 minutes, compared to 23 minutes in 2000. This is not due to congestion, which affects automobile commuters, but to longer journeys. That means more agglomeration spread, and wider economic influences like house prices in outer areas. 10% of all commuters have a journey of over an hour. These figures, which are national, should be regarded with caution as public transport use is more significant in Basel and Zürich, although a switch is now evident around Lausanne and Geneva after decades automobile preference. Long distance commuting increased sharply on routes like Zürich – Bern and Basel – Zürich, as train speeds and frequencies improved. Some 50% of commuters travel in two daily periods totalling just five hours. Many have dreamed of spreading this load, for outside these peaks load factors drop back to 30%.

BLS new engine

Last spring the new 187 002, a Bombardier TRAX AC3 series, (delivered to Railpool, but hired by BLS) arrived and was put into trial running, often around Neuchâtel. This is the first 'Hybrid' or 'Last Mile' locomotive designed to run on the electrified main line in freight service, but also to work with an on-board diesel generator into non-electrified works and sidings.



No, not bear M13 but a safer one in Bern. Photo: Roy Marriott

Exit M13

We have reported previously about the exploits of Bear M13 in SE Switzerland but sadly on 19th February it had to be shot. M13 was scavenging in the valley of the Berninabahn in the Puschlav, and had obviously awoken early from hibernation, so that the only place below the snow for a snack was in the villages. In Miralago it met, in the morning darkness, a girl on her way to school, who was terrified. Following this incident

the decision was taken that as M13 had now so lost its normal shyness, it had become a public danger. Although there were protests, the bear was tracked down and shot.

A sad centenary

Your Swiss News Editor's first visit to Switzerland was in 1951 and he still remembers the yellow trams of the STI on the quayside in Thun. By then they no longer ran to Interlaken, but the full name of the tramway was still the Rechstuflige Thunerseebahn Steffisburg-Thun-Interlaken (not just the STI), indicating that the route was on the right bank of the Thunersee. The 9.4km section from Beatenbucht to Interlaken had closed before WWII, but it is fascinating that in one or two tunnels of the old road there still hang some of the catenary fittings. The line was then progressively cut back to just an urban tramway between Thun and Steffisburg, before final closure came in 1958. This line enjoys something of a cult status among tram lovers, and the regional bus company which is its successful successor, is planning a centenary celebration in Thun this October to recall its opening in 1913, and its subsequent history.

Big locos for small railways

Canton Vaud operator TRAVYS has recently bought Re 420 603 from the BLS in order to move timber and refuse from the Joux valley to Vallorbe. It will replace former Mittel Thurgau Bahn railcar ABDe 538 316 built in 1965, that had been used for the work. The Class 560s that now operate the passenger services in the valley are not able to couple to the freight vehicles. In the same area of Switzerland, Transports de la Région Morges-Bière-Cossonay (MBC), the parent company of the metre-gauge Bière-Apples-Morges, has also purchased a similar loco (Re 420 506) from the BLS to haul 170,000t of stone annually the 21.3km from Morges to Gland. The stone traffic originates on the BLM at Apples and up to now has moved by road. There is a return traffic of 100,000t annually of soil. This loco has been out-shopped from the BLS Depot at Spiez in the grey/green BAM livery.

Totgesagte leben länger

This Swiss-German saying, that those expected to die may live longer, is like Mark Twain's letter to a newspaper noting that the obituary notice of his decease was 'greatly exaggerated'. It seems to apply to the SBB workshops in Bellinzona, the one-time main workshops of the Gotthardbahn, and later the centre for repairs of many electric locomotive classes. In 2008 SBB Cargo went there to announce its imminent closure, and Nicolas Perrin, head of SBB Cargo, was abused and physically chased out by the staff, who immediately went on strike with considerable popular local and political support.

Finally work was redirected to keep the shops going, but now the SBB Passenger Division has taken over. Mme Pilloud, the Passenger Manager, sees the workload in Bellinzona assured for 10 to 15 years. There will also be a 'Centre of Competence' for training and quality control for southern Switzerland, including the new line being built between Mendrisio and Varese in Italy. Political implications are important. Readers will recall that the Swiss Constitution requires that all cantons and regions should be treated fairly and Tessin/Ticino has often complained that it feels 'out of sight, out of mind'.



Cargo's 484 016 at Giubiasco on 20th January 2011.

Photo: Mark Barber

What happened at BLS with DB-Cargo?

First, the context is unhelpful. In 2012 a month of heavy traffic was lost with the Gurtnellen cliff-fall on the Gotthard route. Then, the European economy is not yet back on its feet, and cost pressures continue. Last year's transalpine cargo fell from 40m tonnes to 37.5m tonnes, a fall of 6.4%. Swiss transit rail freight fell by 7.5%, whilst rail's share fell from 63.9% to 63.2%. Public policy is however to transfer road cargo to rail, and substantial subsidies are paid to support intermodal services. Of these 'Rolling Highway' piggyback operations, in which BLS is heavily involved, lost over 11% of throughput. BLS Cargo made a book loss in 2012 of CHF1.8m so the rate negotiations with DB Cargo were correspondingly difficult. This concerned mainly the BLS/DB Cargo traffic, which had reached nearly 50% of the Gotthard freight volume, and some 26% of BLS' total freight traffic. This was the point at which DB Cargo withdrew and obtained a deal from SBB Cargo. BLS will necessarily reduce sharply its Gotthard commitment of traction with about 80 jobs being lost, of which 60 are locomotive drivers. BLS is satisfied that its overall financial position will now improve. Most of the staff will transfer to SBB Cargo, who will now carry the DB Cargo traffic. The BLS however has started to fight back. On its own route it has contracted now to handle some 3,000 container trains to Melzo in northern Italy, for Rotterdam-based ERS. Complications are firstly, that DB, through a

holding, DB Schweiz, is a 45% shareholder of BLS Cargo. Secondly, SBB as operator for DB Cargo comes directly into competition with DB Schenker, which is also active in the Alpine transit market. How did SBB succeed with DB Cargo? There is no suspicion of price dumping, it is largely a reflection that SBB Cargo can, at least on the Gotthard line, obtain a higher productivity with the added mass of this new business. Nevertheless SBB Cargo International made a loss of CHF11m last year, so a potentially profitable deal with DB must be most welcome.



SBB ICN RABDe 500 043 at Killwangen-Spreitenbach.

Photo: Phil Weaver

The ICNs, or Class 500

These forty four sets of tilting stock are mainly used on the Jura line, from Basel and Zürich to Lausanne and Genève on the Gotthard to Lugano and back. They are universally popular with both staff and customers. They entered service between 2000 and 2002, in time for the Swiss Expo, which was on their Jura line, have proven to be highly reliable and are diagrammed intensively, with short turn-rounds. Each train set is made up of 7-cars, 3-firsts and 4-seconds, including a small restaurant and point of sale area. Busy times find two sets in multiple. In 10 to 12 years of work several units have reached close on 5m km, and in June SBB announced that the fleet will now be put through a complete overhaul at Yverdon workshops over the next 5-years. This will particularly involve the bogies and running gear, motors, inside and access doors and quality of furnishing. Bad news (for the old-fashioned and well brought up) is improving reception for mobile phones! SBB have made clear that the Class 500, as well as the double deck IC-2000 trains of Mark IV stock, and the fifty nine new Bombardier trains that are on order, will form the basis of high quality services in the next decade.

Basel wants an Underground

The railway history of Basel is complex, not only because of three countries meeting just down-river. Prosperity and the economic cluster-effect have long burst the national boundaries, with transit, commuting, and regional rail freight business all increasingly moving over almost notional borders with many moves requiring reversals and generating congestion. Automobile traffic

into the city and its industries is self-defeating and is now actively discouraged. There is simply no space for it. There is a successful Regional S-Bahn, but the existing historic lines are far from ideal so heavy investment is necessary. The most advanced plan is for a new tunnel connecting the SBB Bahnhof with the DB's Badischer Bahnhof (that is on Swiss soil), to allow through running across the city with a city centre underground station. A branch to the SNCF near St Johann is also planned. In May this took a big step forward when the Federal Government approved the project, with a budget first for planning purposes, to which the city (itself a Canton) must find funding of its own. The problems if nothing is done are formidable. Already the Autobahn section from the French and German borders to the rest of Switzerland, strategically the route from Northern Europe to Milano and the south, is blocked on a daily basis, this partly with local traffic.



One of the RhB's power stations, this one just up-river from Thusis.

Photo: Tony Bagwell

RhB uses home power

At the Annual General Meeting of the RhB in mid-June, it was announced that the RhB now operates entirely on power generated locally by the Cantonal water-driven power plants. This might once have been self-evident, and early electrification here and elsewhere always meant the railway making its own electricity. However, rising demand and limits on water resources have long meant that Switzerland, once proud of its independent 'white coal', buys power elsewhere. What has changed is that, despite heavier trains and better services, more efficient use of power, together with improved water generation plants utilising more pumped water storage for peak times, along with a positive political commitment, have changed the situation for the better. 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes items from Mario Gavazzi, Jakob Jäger, Michael Donovan, Duncan McKay, s'Murmeli, Christian Ammann, Philip Nalpanis, and others.