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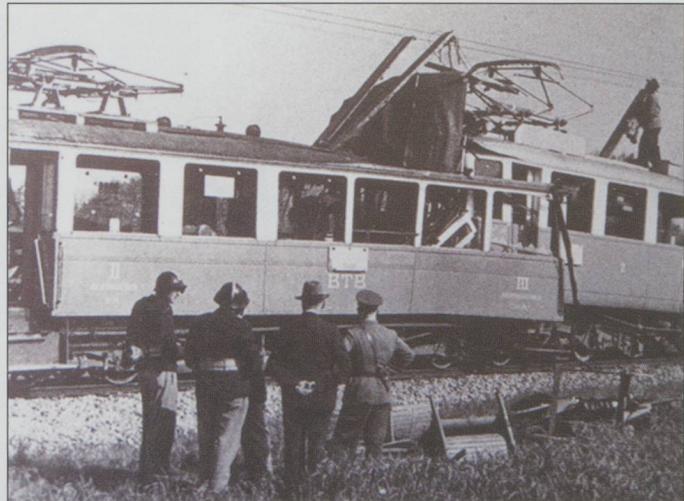
SWISS NEWS

The first 'through train' in the Gotthard Base Tunnel

On August 30th, for the first time, a diesel-hauled scratch composition carrying invited guests ran, largely unannounced, from Bodio to Erstfeld, through the 57km length of the Gotthard Base Tunnel. The passengers were mostly representatives of the companies in the Consortium Alptransit AG, which built the tunnel. The private event marked completion of the raw tunnel, to be handed over two days later to the technical team, Transtech Gotthard, for installation of electrical, signalling and other systems. The journey was completed mostly at 40kph, and partly at walking speed, while passengers went in some sections by bus. SBB is due to start final running trials in mid-2016, and the Base Tunnel should be open for 200kph, running with scheduled services as from the 2016 December timetable change.

SBB maintenance arrears now apparent

The BAV (Bundesamt für Verkehr - Federal Transport Department) has severely criticized SBB for coming back in August to demand CHF80m for specific immediate track repairs. It is a curious tale. SBB Infrastructure delivers each year to the BAV a report on the condition of 'way and works'. In the report of 2012 there was no mention of the defects now concerned, so no extra money was budgeted. The problem appears to be two-fold. SBB-Infrastructure were caught out in Spring 2013 by several cases of brittle rails, one provoking a derailment, others being discovered and replaced in an emergency programme, including closure and diversions, on the NBS high speed line Olten – Bern. A new ultra-sonic test vehicle was obtained (Sperry Rail SRS 241) and this discovered a number of defects, especially cracks and brittle areas deep inside rails. These were not all new; the programme showed up defects which, as SBB Infrastructure now admits, go back up to 15 years where maintenance was deferred or reduced. The BAV is now asking whether the annual report can be relied on, and has withheld discussion until the circumstances are cleared up. The BAV asks whether this is likely to be an on-going problem, or whether one-off treatment will suffice. Safety is, it is insisted, not an issue, but one wonders what would have happened if the defects had not been found. Since however all lines suffer the constant demand for more trains and higher speeds, we may guess at the answers. The matter is serious as a substantially increased long-term budget for rail maintenance and renewals was recently approved in Parliament. Schweizer Eisenbahn-Revue (10/2013) first uncovered the story.



BTB (now BLT) 1951 head-on-crash. Photo from: Bryan Stone
Signalling safety

A recent major interview with Andreas Meyer, CEO of SBB, by the Sunday newspaper 'Schweiz am Sonntag', gave a new light on this subject. Normally it is the BAV (Bundesamt für Verkehr), the Swiss federal safety authority, which lays down rules and requires the railways to respect them. Meyer has however revealed that he had to convince the BAV to invest money in safety on secondary lines. He has obtained funds to make more secure some 1,700 locations by greater use of ZUB (automatic train stop), but that 3,400 such sites were identified by the SBB. Even the agreed programme will cost CHF 50m and take until 2018 to be completed. Equally, level crossing safety programmes, where many accidents still occur, have been speeded up. As on other rail systems, there are a great many locations where simple installations do not imply risk. Indeed, many minor railways ran for many years perfectly legally without the protection of absolute block systems, or signals, or with hand points without interlocking. Undoubtedly there were accidents from time to time; a head-on collision in 1970 on my local line was due to a booked crossing (in the timetable, and having force of law), being overlooked. A similar and very destructive collision had occurred on Whitsunday morning in 1951 on what is now the BLT, just 1km from where I now write. Meyer considers that the 1,700 locations now being dealt with, will substantially reduce the residual risk. However, he is also clear that ETCS level 2, the EU's standard with no fixed signalling, and with automatic control of train speed and location, due to be installed on all main routes by 2035, will render all the present measures redundant in time.

Not closing yet

More is now clear on the review of unremunerative lines, which the BAV had demanded. A year ago, the ultimatum at first was - if it doesn't take 50% of its direct costs in fares, to either close it or explain why this should not happen. This of course involves the Cantons, who under present law subsidise running costs for most such

services, but renewal and replacements usually involve Federal funding. There was, as we reported, uproar, with over 300 sections under threat; but the outcome now is that the threshold is 30% and that the BAV does not demand replacement, but an assurance that a serious review at least every ten years will be made. There may be some minor, and possibly overdue closures, but these are not currently evident.

New Pendolini

As expected in May SBB ordered from Alsthom the eight additional 610s, due for delivery from late 2014. To make the deal palatable, Alsthom is building them as 'an overrun' on a series of twenty units presently being built for Poland. The Class 470s should go (if they last that long) from the December 2014 timetable change and the Gotthard should have 610s until the new fleet from Bombardier enters service. The 610s will be completely compatible with the first, now nearly 10 years old, series and also for multiple-unit running. The various modifications that are partly required by new international standards are in areas that do not affect the international license to operate.



A busy Basel Station.

Photo: Malcolm Bulpitt

Central Park or Central Station?

In a referendum on 22nd September last Baslers voted against a project to roof-in the west end of the Basel SBB station and build a public park on it. It was, for various reasons the best decision, as SBB had said they would be unable to improve the station under the inevitable pillars; passengers complained about the dark and being walled-in as at Bern; one reader's letter referred to London Euston, Birmingham New Street and New York Penn Central, as bad examples where speculators and their architects forgot passengers. The project is dead. It has however had a signal effect. Basel SBB station has a long history of being adapted to catch up with demand. It was built in 1860 when trains had been running already for 16 years from France into a station near today's City Hospital, whilst trains for the Olten

line had left from a provisional station near today's Engelgasse. In 1860 these two approaches were connected, their terminals closed, and through running could first start. The present building dates from 1906, when the French railway was completely realigned, substantial track improvements were made, levels altered and long level crossings removed. In the 1970s a new, supremely ugly regional postal sorting centre, now redundant, was built over one end. Then in the 1990s new platforms, and a new footbridge with shops, cafés, etc., which soon proved too small, were built. At the western end a large international parcels office was demolished, allowing platform extensions. The former French station Bâle SNCF, once a separate establishment with ticket sales, and customs and immigration checks, all now gone, but which has more trains than ever, is now largely unstaffed and most uninviting. The whole is now a monumental site, historic, fascinating, very busy, confused and congested. Also outside, conditions are less than ideal, unless you really enjoy trams close up. The rear (south) side is worse. Today it is Switzerland's third busiest station, after Zürich HB and Bern HB, with 108,000 passengers daily, increasing steadily, and what to do next is a puzzle. The 'Central Park' proposal has had, therefore, one good result. For the first time in many years, city planners, SBB, user groups, and adjacent residents and businesses, are being brought together to plan the future. The main 1906 building is protected, and City authorities are proud of it (no Euston Arch demolition here), but major improvements in people flow, public transport access, cycle provision (there are thousands every day parked outside), are now taking shape. First is a new high capacity subway on the west side of the existing footbridge.

December 2013 timetable changes

The principal changes concern northeast Switzerland, where a 30-minute interval service will be realized on some routes. An innovation is the S4 service, a circular trip from St Gallen via Buchs, Sargans, Ziegelbrücke, Uznach (reverse) Wattwil – Herisau – St Gallen. It will be worked by SOB FLIRT sets, the whole circuit taking 2 hours, 54 minutes. Somehow I imagine it will appeal to SRS visitors with a SwissPass! On the Brunig line, with the new Class 150 and 160 units in service, the timetable will be re-cast to give shorter Interlaken – Luzern journey times, and also save one of five rostered train sets. The use of the 72 year-old Class 110 veterans on some InterRegios between Meiringen and Interlaken will now definitely stop. On all ZB routes there will be many detailed changes. Also, the partial opening of the new Zürich underground line, allowing through running from the west to Oerlikon without reversal, will produce many changes that will mainly have to be implemented in mid-2014. This will be a challenge as

the timetable is normally held stable, with changes only agreed with consultative and political bodies from each December for 12 months. The Lyria TGV service between Zürich, Basel and Paris Lyon will be again modified, and strengthened by diversion of the single present Bern – Neuchâtel – Paris, to run Bern - Basel - Paris. A by-way in the Jura will see an interesting change; the red BLS GTWs now running in the Emmental will be given to SBB and used for a new service between Moutier-Solothurn, connecting with a recast service from Moutier and La Chaux de Fonds to Biel. The irony is that Moutier – Solothurn was, until only a short while ago, run by the BLS with these units. There are again important changes on the Gotthard, sadly more out of desperation. The Class 470 operated EuroCities workings get a 30 minute later slot and additional 15 minutes running time between Zürich and Milano plus easier turn-rounds. Connections to Italian high-speed services radiating from Milano will, it is hoped, be more secure. Also in the south the TILO S10 service, that has run from Bellinzona to Como since 2008, will be cut back to Chiasso. Loadings to Albate and Como had not exceeded 300 passengers/day, not enough to justify the CHF3m subsidy being paid to run into Italy.

Paying Respects

All over Switzerland on Friday August 2nd at 14.00, train drivers sounded a long blast on their whistles. It was the tribute, organized by their union, to their colleague the 24 year old driver of the RegioExpress, killed in the collision at Granges-près-Marnand, near Payerne, four days earlier, whose funeral was taking place at that moment. Reports from Zürich said that the Hauptbahnhof echoed with train whistles, a most moving moment, and many waiting passengers applauded. According to the report by the Swiss accident investigation service (SESA), the rail crash at Granges-près-Marnand was the result of human error. The local train passed the starting signal at red prior to the collision. The safety equipment was working normally but visibility was poor. It is understood that the units involved will be largely scrapped. The total amount of damage is around CHF8m

SBB Rolling stock policy

Recent criticism of overcrowding, but also of stock withdrawals, brought some interesting figures to light. According to seasoned observer Walter von Andrian of Swiss Railway Review a passenger rolling stock reserve of around 25% was normal into the 1990s, before new legislation required stricter cost control. It is now at around 7% to 8%. Circumstances have however changed. Productivity is much higher, and far more trains are now composed of fixed composition multiple unit sets. Members will have seen that attaching extra

cars, or shunting in stations, is now greatly reduced. SBB insist that they can still, as they are legally required, handle sudden and seasonal demands, including big events such as Federal Gymnastics and Music meetings, or a Zürich Street Parade, for which 100 extra trains were run. The acute capacity problems are different: they occur in the peak hours on commuter services around Genève or Zürich. In fact, some relatively modern rolling stock has been withdrawn, for example, the RBDe 561 units inherited from the Mittel-Thurgau-Bahn, as these were non-standard and did not justify special maintenance. Other vehicles, however, have long lives; the still greatly loved Mark IV InterCity stock is mostly nearly 40 years old, but is again being re-furbished.

New rail noise pollution reduction scheme approved

The Swiss Council of States has followed the Swiss National Council and approved a law to reduce rail transport noise. New limits will be placed on sound pollution, which will ban the use of certain braking mechanisms from 2020. The Swiss claim their trains make less noise than other nations and that the country is ahead of its European neighbours in terms of rail noise pollution. The new limits are due to be introduced in 2020, so that non-Swiss operators have time to adapt to meet the new requirements. Some CHF1.52bn is to be made available for the project; CHF76m will be used for sound absorption; CHF40m will be spent on developing quieter rolling stock; CHF51m will be spent filling in gaps in walls designed to reduce the noise, and other costs will total some CHF185m.

Must freight and passenger traffic compete for capacity?

They already do. In August 2013, however, the Verband Oeffentlicher Verkehr (Association of Public Transport Operators) published new figures showing an estimated growth of freight traffic of 35% up to 2030. This will vary by regions, with growth of 48% foreseen in the west of Switzerland; 39% on the Lötschberg route; 30% on the Simplon and 39% on the Gotthard. The region Basel, already a major freight transit route, may have growth of 33%. It all sounds very promising, but the rail network capacity to handle this traffic is not there. The planning for track utilization already allows, with the strict use of interval timetables, for paths for freight to be identified, but this is not enough on the main axes. The study has now re-launched a debate about guaranteed freight train paths, and the likelihood that passenger trains, today always with priority, may increasingly have to give way to freight, at the risk of delays. Some infrastructure improvements will yield greater capacity, signalling, avoidance of conflicting movements, (such as flat

crossings of passenger and freight routes, which are numerous) and also measures to speed up freight to optimize use of available paths. Stopping a heavy freight to allow a lightly loaded FLIRT to slip through the junctions is not only economically doubtful, but causes disproportionate delays in freight train running, and leads inevitably to on-going troubles. The increasing number of private Open Access freight operators whose cost control is vital to existence, are already troubled that a missed 'slot' can easily involve an hour's wait. A major complication is that many passenger train slots are secured under contract by regional transport authorities, as S-Bahn and similar services. These, with 15 and 30 minute intervals and heavy peak traffic, take a disproportionate part of capacity in their regions, but off-peak loadings are often light. Readers who like to see freight trains may note that the heaviest trafficked routes are Basel – via both Olten and Frick to the South; Geneva – Lausanne; the 'Jura-foot' line through Neuchâtel; the Lötschberg and Gotthard and Aarau – Zürich. Pressure is mounting for these to have guaranteed freight train slots.

Not in Switzerland - but a historic Swiss connection

The remote and often lonely single line between Besançon and Le Locle has been enjoying an extensive renewal of track and infrastructure, trains having been replaced by buses throughout last summer. The service, normally operated by modern SNCF DMUs (see P10 in *Swiss Express 115*), resumed at the end of August. The historic connection is that this was the first railway into La Chaux de Fonds, giving a connection to France two years before there was a link from this area to the rest of Switzerland. That tells us something about the patterns of trade and culture at that time.

Speeding up commuters

In August 2013 SBB announced a pilot project on the line between Basel and Delémont to facilitate passenger flow at busy times. Platforms are marked with door locations, and trains with fixed compositions stop at exact points so that passengers can choose where to wait and board, without elbowing. It isn't new; international studies show that it can work, and Japan is quoted. Do I not remember something similar at Liverpool Street on the Shenfield line platforms? Behind it all is the search for seconds, to improve punctuality and capacity utilization. Problems arise when trains with different formations serve the same platform, as is often the case.

Profits up and down

In the first half of 2013 the Swiss property and rail company BVZ (the holding company of the MGB) recorded profits of CHF1.88m up 5.6% from the

previous year. Revenues at CHF62.8m, and costs at CHF49.3m, have both remained stable in 2013, with operational profits expected to rise significantly, compared to 2012 when they were CHF23.1m. However the SBB recorded a 27.8% drop in year-on-year profit to CHF100.8m in the same period, despite reporting a 2% increase in revenue to CHF4.05bn. SBB says the fall was mainly due to an increase of CHF97m in train path prices, and higher expenditure - CHF70m - on maintenance activities. SBB Cargo returned a small profit of CHF2.6m for the first time for a number of years, thanks to the latest round of restructuring measures introduced in 2011. This compares to a loss of CHF 22 million a year ago.



Waldenbergbahn passing through Hölstein.
A newer Waldenbergbahn unit arriving Liestal Bhf.



Waldenburgerbahn

This little railway, not far from Basel, is little known to many. It is the only 750mm gauge line in Switzerland, opened in 1880, and runs from Liestal (with a cross-platform connection with SBB) just 13km to Waldenburg. It was steam worked up to 1953 and is now using seven, second-generation, BDe4/4 EMUs built in 1985. When it was electrified, three units were enough! Expenditure of CHF270 million is now planned, to buy 14 new units to be delivered from 2018 that will be

needed to cope with predicted traffic growth. The decision was taken that conversion to metre gauge is not needed, however, the new trains will be 20cm wider than the current stock, and part of the cost is to improve clearances. This is difficult, as the line uses a very narrow right of way alongside the road that serves the valley, but this expenditure is considered appropriate, as almost the whole railway needs heavy repairs and adaptation to contemporary access legislation for the handicapped. Waldenburg station and workshops will be completely renewed.

AB Steam engine

For the last 10 years the Appenzellerbahn 'Steam Club' has been restoring former RhB G3/4 No.14. The boiler, completely overhauled by Firma Soder in Dintikon (AG), is now complete and has been matched up to frames and the engine should be ready to run in Autumn 2014. If this firm can now reliably do heavy boiler repairs this will in future facilitate much steam overhaul work.

BOB. Tunneling starts...

August 2013 saw the start of a new 703m long tunnel being built under the Buechiwald, between Zweilütschinen and Lütschenthal at a cost of CHF36m. This section has for many years been subject to earth slides and blockages, and also the new alignment will be straighter to allow 70kph running. It should all be complete by early 2016 but during the works, delays and bus replacements should be expected.

...but no more Nostalgia-trains

The weekend of 24th/25th August saw the last special trains, headed on those days by rod-drive electric loco HGe3/3 No 24, to run on the metre-gauge BOB lines between Interlaken Ost, Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald. These trains started in 1976, on the initiative of the Model Railway Friends of Zweilütschinen whose building is located adjacent to the BOB workshops. At the time HGe3/3s were still working and several 3-axle open platform coaches were also still in service, though little used. Also for prolonged periods the former RhB G3/4 No. 11 was stationed at Zweilütschinen, where it ran on the non-rack section to Interlaken, along with Ballenberg Dampfbahn's HG 3/3 No.1067, a former Brunig engine that could run on the rack sections. Eventually No.11 returned to Landquart for restoration, but in recent years the Ballenberg Dampfbahn has continued to run specials with No.1067 over the BOB lines. Several things have now happened. The BOB is no longer prepared to keep and maintain its historic rolling stock; the demand for the vintage electric trains fell away, and now the track layouts have been simplified with the result that run-round loops and adequate signalling for these peripheral operations will

no longer be available. Agreement has been reached that a HGe3/3 will go to the Blonay-Chamby Museum Raiway, together with the so-called 'Emperor' saloon of the BOB. One 3-axle coach goes to La Traction, which already has three BOB coaches, and two more go to the Ballenberg Dampfbahn's. Finally, the last HGe3/3 will be restored and exhibited at Zweilütschinen.

Langenthal station to be rebuilt

No one would call Langenthal station a beauty, built as it is in the 'functional concrete' style so beloved by some and deplored by many. However, the need to raise platforms, rebuild the subway and transfer the signalling installation ('Domino 55' - control now going to Olten), mean that in total CHF40.7m has been allocated to a substantial rebuild. Major work starts January 2014 and the task should be complete by Autumn 2015. Langenthal has however another claim for attention: it is one of a small number of stations run almost entirely by SBB trainees, and very successfully by all accounts.

A Musical for a Tunnel centenary

The Hauenstein base tunnel on the main line between Basel and Olten was opened in 1916, relieving the old line and the original 2.5km Hauenstein Tunnel built in the 1850s by Thomas Brassey Building the new line, however, was not easy, and the centenary of the 'breakthrough' was celebrated during August and September with an Open-Air Musical, written by local authors and performed in a quarry near the southern tunnel mouth. Most performers were amateur singers and players. Such open-air theatre is not unusual in Switzerland, from the Tell-plays in Interlaken and Altdorf, to the summer stages in Thun and elsewhere. The story brought together Italian labourers, romance and hardship, and an awareness of local history, and proved very popular.



BRB No.6 at Alpweg.

Photo: Bryan Stone

BRB No 7

Another boiler overhaul candidate is Brienz-Rothorn-Bahn No 7, which was stopped last winter when the firebox was found to be in a poor condition. After awful weather during the early summer of 2013 that resulted in a lack of visitors, money at the BRB is naturally tight so No 7 will have to wait. The BRB had another disappointment when No 6, which had been completely

overhauled last winter, could not be completed in time for the summer season. Not only were some jobs still outstanding, but as the fitters of winter are the footplate men of summer (when the priority is to keep everything running, especially whenever there is a sunny day), things had to be put on hold and No 6 lay idle. Last summer more use had to be made of the diesels with both Nos.10 and 11 working passenger trains, something normally to be avoided.

Don't forget the handbrake

Last summer we were surprised to see parked Re4/4 II and Re6/6 of SBB Cargo with a conspicuous placard in the cab-window, saying 'Handbrake applied'. It seems there had been some expensive mistakes made, where locomotives being hauled with the hand brake still applied had rubbed flats on wheel sets. As long as they remember to display the placard...



One of the newest SBB Cargo 923 Hybrid locos at Ins, near Biel
Photo: Mario Stefani

Withdrawals – or perhaps not

The deliveries of the new Stadler Eem 923 for SBB Cargo had by mid-2013 reached 923 020. A consequence has been the withdrawal of three more Ee3/3s, 16390, 16423 and 16425. At the same time the rapidly dwindling fleet of Em3/3 6-coupled diesel shunters was reduced by seven, and like the Bm4/4 they are scheduled for early disappearance. Despite being scheduled for withdrawal various reports keep coming of Class RBe 540 railcars being used for mainline trains. The acute rolling stock shortage is at the root of this, but with maximum speed of 125 km/h, these 50 year old units are really not up to it any more. Most have been withdrawn, but this summer they were regulars on services between Chur – Zürich, Zürich – Romanshorn, and Zürich – Basel via Frick. A curious note in the August stock list under 'Entering Service' was 11465, 11470, 11488 and 610 496. These are nothing less than our old Ae6/6 friends, resuscitated and called out to gallop again with the posse. One was seen in Brugg on a container train in September, however, several more have been scrapped.

Graubünden News

During August the Bernina line traffic (both the Bernina Express and Regio trains) was handled equally by the new ABe 8/12 units or the older ABe 4/4III motor coaches. On the Filisur to Davos line the shuttle service was normally worked by one of the new ABe 4/16 units – normally No.3103 – although sometimes the older reserve set was used. Trains on the Davos to Lanquart service were being hauled by a variety of motive power including ABe 4/16 units, Ge 4/4I locos and even a Ge 6/6. The engineering works in the Davos area are still on-going with many new signals still covered with black plastic awaiting commissioning, and from 31st August, Platform 1 at Davos Platz was taken out of service whilst rebuilding takes place with all trains using platforms 2 and 3 until further notice. The Davos – Jakobshornbahn cableway was closed after Sunday 1st September for complete rebuilding before the start of the winter season. Apparently both sections are to have new top & bottom stations and the new cable cars will carry 100 passengers, double the capacity of the old ones.

Schwingfest success

The Federal Wrestling Championship is an event that takes place every three years. One of the country's most popular events, this year it was in Burgdorf on the 30th August and 1st September. Some 400 extra trains were run, mainly to the west and to Zürich and the northeast, for over 250,000 passengers. In addition there were the 60 or so daily scheduled trains, including those to the neighbouring Emmental, the real heart of Swiss wrestling. The usual stories of shortage of stock seem not to have come to fruition, as trains were run at 10 minute intervals each way at peak times on the former east-west main line between Bern and Olten.

VHS Luzern

Alfred Waldis, founder of the Luzern Transport Museum (Verkehrshaus der Schweiz) died on July 10 2013 in Luzern, aged 93 years. Until recently he was always a familiar figure at Annual Meetings and special events. He had been a stationmaster, but had done much to prepare a collection and to put down proposals that it might be in Zürich. In 1957 he was asked to set up the museum, on the present site, then still a swamp. Things moved fast, and in 1959 it was opened, becoming in its first year Switzerland's most visited museum. He was incidentally responsible for having the d/s Rigi set aside for the museum when it was taken out of service; it is now in the main square of the museum. Its interest for British visitors is that it was built on the Thames in London by Ditchburn and Mare in 1847, steamed to Strasbourg, dismantled and sent on the new railway to Basel, and then by oxcarts to Luzern for reassembly, to work over 110 years.

Trivapor News

We reported two years ago on the restoration of the paddle steamer 'Neuchâtel' being undertaken in dry dock at Sugiez (FR), near Murten Morat, by the Association Trivapor. During last August the vessel was lowered into the water after its complete overhaul and steam engine renewal. Fitting out and testing will now proceed with the target of entering paying service in summer 2014.

Glacier Express cut backs

From the 2014 timetable the relatively poorly loading Davos – Zermatt Glacier Express trains will be dropped. A luxury bus connection will run instead from Davos via Lenzerheide to Chur linking into a St-Moritz – Chur – Zermatt train. Through reservations will be available on these three daily services, which will be maintained following this change. In busy periods these three trains are often run in more than one section.

Minibars

If there is one thing always in the news, it is on-train catering. Minibars are a popular part of the Swiss travel experience, despite occasional failures, flat batteries, no water and so on. However, like restaurant and buffet-cars (and despite higher prices) they do not usually pay. Marketing people are always therefore tinkering with them. This time it's the turn of the Class 500 ICNs, which have a restaurant car but usually also a minibar. For 3 months last summer an unannounced test of operating without minibars took place. Uproar followed. In fact there is another problem; each set has its restaurant car, but where two sets are coupled (usual at peak hours) only one of these is opened. There is however no communication between the two halves of the train. Regulars know, and read the station indicators. The unwary in the wrong half would hope for a minibar. Readers' letters from the disappointed run in national newspapers have found a lively audience!

Yverdon shops and the Class 500 overhaul

We have reported that the 11 year old Class 500 ICN tilting trains are now undergoing a systematic heavy overhaul. Now more details are available. The 44 units, which have each run some 4.8 million km are well liked by passengers and are generally reliable. They mainly run on the Jura line through Neuchâtel, from Basel and Zürich/St Gallen to Lausanne and Genève, where they are most successful. More recently some were put on the

Gotthard in place of Pendolini, and there are a few fill-in diagrams such as on Basel – Chur. The CHF130m overhaul programme is to assure a further 12 years' intensive running. The Yverdon workshop has been designated as a 'centre of excellence' for this work, which normally takes 22 days per set, with completion due in 2019. The ICN team consists of 160 staff from the 520 employed at Yverdon. In parallel the workshop is currently completing the conversion of 116 NPZ railcars into 'Domino' sets, followed by upgrading 113 Class 450 double-deck Zürich S-Bahn units. From 2014 to 2020 the 20 year old Class 460 locomotives will pass through for a major overhaul. By then overhauls of the Class 610 tilting train sets, at present on the Lötschberg line, will also fall due. Out of interest work on the 44 ICNs requires tackling overhauls of 616 air-conditioning sets; 1232 doors; 88 transformers, and 352 traction motors. Some 9 km of carpets and 15 km of cable will be renewed, along with 2464 door opening push-buttons.

Not the last lever frame

In *Swiss Express* 113 our Swiss railwayman friend s'Murmeli indicated that Bad Zurzach station housed one of the last mechanical interlocking signal and points lever frames (a Bruchsal G' installation dating from 1904) in Switzerland. As we report in this edition this frame was taken out of service on 29th June. So was this the end of an era? Maybe not. We now understand that there is still one in service, albeit not on a public route. It is apparently located on the east side of Biel/Bienne marshalling yard, and also controls semaphore signals. Its replacement is scheduled for 2018. That might be worth a visit.

Finally...

According to an interview with Thierry Lalivé d'Epina, a former President of the management board of SBB, he claimed Swiss train services are some 40% cheaper than UK services. One of the reasons he put forward for the lower cost of operating services in Switzerland is that the operating and infrastructure organisations are under the same company rather than being split as in the UK. He was using this comparison as a warning to Swiss politicians that following the EU road of separation would be a mistake. 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from Mario Gavazzi, Jakob Jäger, Michael Donovan, Pete Arnold, s'Murmeli and others.

Swiss Tips: Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

Fancy a walk with a difference? The SBB has recently completed a major overhaul of the great reinforced concrete viaduct over the valley of l'Orbe on the line between Vallorbe and Le Day. For those with a head for heights there is a public footpath suspended underneath the tracks between the arches of the viaduct. Enjoy! 

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