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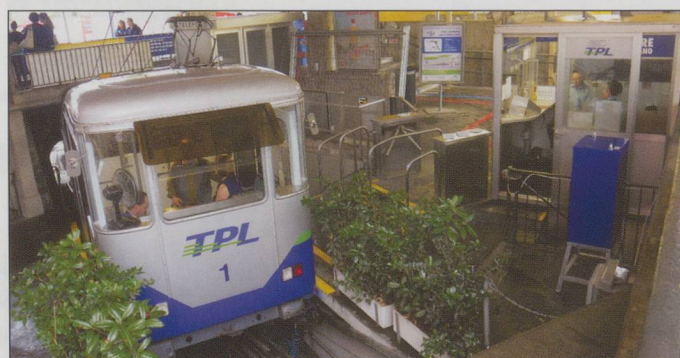
Last day in Lugano

Mario Gavazzi



The two cars cross at the intermediate passing loop.
All photos: Mario Gavazzi

A very wet Sunday August 3rd was the last operating day for some 28-months of the 'funicolare' that forms the essential link between Lugano Città and Lugano Stazione FFS. The station is over 50m above the busy historic centre of the community, and from 1886 the 220m long funicular has performed an important service operating at up to 5min. intervals, one of the most frequent in Switzerland. The original operation was by the water ballast system (as is still used by the funicular between Lynton and Lynmouth in Devon, England) where a tank on the car at the top was filled with water at the same time the tank on the bottom car was emptied. The upper car, with its extra weight, then descended hauling up the lower one. Simple, effective, but slow. The braking system was controlled by a hand-operated device acting through a cog wheel onto a Riggerbach rack laid between the tracks. The original 40-seat open-sided cars were replaced in 1929 by new 48-seat enclosed cars built by Von Roll, but the water ballast operation remained. In 1954/5 the old operation shut down to be replaced by conventional electrical operation (and the rack was removed) using the 75-seat cars, again from Von Roll, that have remained in operation until this summer. Four days after their final trips for the TPL on 7th August the old cars were lifted out of the cutting in which the route runs to be taken away on their final journey. The haulage cables however are off to find another life in either Ecuador or Myanmar (Burma) where they will be re-used by a charity to construct short suspension bridges to help farmers access their fields in remote, rugged, areas. During the closure period the Station (itself being renovated) will be linked to the lower part of the city by a dedicated 'FuniBus' service that will serve the Cappuccine stop in the Via Peri just a short walk from the 'funicolare termini' in the Piazza Cioccaro. The buses will run at 7 to 10min. intervals and they are decorated in a special livery that features an image of the old funicular cars. 



TOP: Car No. 1 is lifted out.
MIDDLE: Car No. 1 at the top in the SBB station concourse.
BOTTOM: The replacement bus service.