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SWISS NEWS

Zürich's Durchmesserlinie

Following the opening of the new underground station Zürich HB, the station was only served by the S2, S8 and S14 services - see December's Swiss Express. From December 15th these were joined by four long-distance services in each direction: IC Genève Airport-Bern-Zürich HB-St. Gallen; IC Brig-Bern-Zürich HB-Romanshorn; IC Lausanne-Biel-Zürich HB-St.Gallen and IR Basel-Frick- Zürich HB-Zürich Airport that use the station. Whereas the journey times for the IC trains will be shorter, the Basel-Zürich Airport, journey will be 5-6 minutes longer than the previous service, which travelled directly between Zürich Altstetten and Zürich Oerlikon, without serving Zürich HB. In addition, the new half-hourly S19 service Dietikon-Zürich HB-Effretikon will use the new station. In the peak hours this service will be extended westward to Baden and Koblenz (AG) and eastward to Pfäffikon (SZ). This will bring the usage of the new facility up to 11-12 trains/hour in each direction with platform times being kept to a minimum as, unlike in the main station, no reversals will be needed. However, with Zürich HB now having four separate stations, for the casual passenger changing trains it could prove quite challenging to find the correct platform. Now, like many city stations the world over, Zürich HB is not only a place where trains arrive and depart, but also a major retail operation. There are now around 180 retail, service or refreshment outlets on three different levels within the complex. About the only thing you cannot buy at Zürich HB is furniture...

Since the opening, the new Durchmesserlinie regularly features in the Zürich press with two issues being particular subjects of criticism. The first, is that the gradients on the approach routes are too steep for a single Class 460 locomotive on a loaded train to master. Double heading for the whole journey will be necessary and ten more locomotives are required. This was not a design fault as the layout was planned for use by the powerful, new Bombardier Inter City EMUs, however these are now several years late. Once delivered this problem should be alleviated. The second criticism is that there is no facility for trains from Chur or Lucerne to utilise the new station and provide through connections to the airport and beyond. Only trains using the old lakeside line can access the new station, trains coming out of the tunnel between Horgen and Zurich have no access. The SBB has noted that this connection was never foreseen and not necessary for planned day-to-day operation. A further serious problem that has arisen (*and has even featured in 'New Civil Engineer' magazine in the UK - Ed.*), is cracking appearing in the viaduct section of the line that runs to the west. This appear to be caused by lateral forces that should have been anticipated at the design stage, or picked-up during the required checking procedure that all structural engineering projects should go through. That they were not is a problem that requires investigation by the Swiss authorities, whilst to solve the cracking, a costly retroactive strengthening repair is now in progress.

Punctuality

The disturbance caused by the building and commissioning of the Durchmesserlinie and its associated infrastructure has had other effects, as have other heavy engineering works. During last year, disruption and delays have taken place in many places, particularly on the Gotthard line and its approaches; on the high-speed line between Olten and Bern (closed most weekends with over 26 km of track to renew) and on the Jura line, where the big viaduct at Boudry has just started a major renovation involving single line running. Punctuality standards fell to 85% in October compared to the target of 89% for 'Right Time' arrivals - deemed to mean within 3 minutes of schedule. However, this is only for SBB; although booked connections, also between different operators, local lines and PostAutos are protected by strict rules (so that you can travel more confidently), delays have a knock-on effect. The rules also determine when connections can be broken, less of a crime when the interval timetable is strict, but nevertheless a menace late at night - your correspondent waited nearly an hour for a late evening Brünig train in Luzern, after disorder on the Gotthard, and found the experience less than cheerful! A different problem is when as in Olten four routes meet, all with long-distance trains to and from Basel, at sometimes 2 minute headways, and with S-Bahn in between. Normally it works extraordinarily well, but when it doesn't it is easy to quickly become a statistic. Winter brings its crop of snow, point failures and other issues, but with good preparation these seldom cause havoc. Regular travellers will know that regular and frequent, rather than very fast, is the basis of most Swiss services, and 'Timetable stability', that is, the capacity to recover when things go awry, is a high virtue.

Gotthard Base Tunnel

Last October 30th marked the completion of track laying in the Gotthard Base Tunnel, allowing diesel-powered trains to travel right through both tunnels. Installation of the overhead catenary and the electricity supply will be completed in mid-2015 with system testing and full trial running then taking place.

The official opening, under the title 'Gottardo 2016' will be on June 2nd that year, with all the seven members of the Federal Council in attendance, together with 1200 invited guests including many from outside Switzerland. On June 3rd it will be the turn of the workforce to celebrate the completion of the project, as part of a major event planned to be open to the general public when special trains will run through the tunnel. This will be part of a large-scale cultural, eating and drinking party planned for June 3rd and 4th in both Erstfeld and in Biasca. The budget of CHF12m for the party means the general festivities will be of a 19thC exuberance. The celebrations are meant to demonstrate at home and abroad that Swiss investment in the new Gotthard tunnel and its approach routes are part of a European network, and that rail-based transportation, Swiss and European Union policy, and future economic expectations for this century, all come together here. The costs of the opening party are being met from the NEAT budget, as well as from SBB and local sponsors, but it is significant that the planned building costs were in fact less than estimated leaving a margin to

ensure the opening was properly celebrated. Timetabled services will start with the December 2016 timetable change. The work on the complementary Monte Ceneri tunnel, the start of which was delayed by a court action brought by the losers over the award of the contract, should be ready as planned, for operation by 2020. In late October 2014 the courts also rejected the second related legal action, brought by Talgo against the award to Stadler of the contract for 29 high-speed EMUs for use on the Gotthard route, so that Stadler can now start work on this element of the overall project. However, although delivery of this stock for December 2016 is endangered, the ten new Class 503 'Pendolini' currently coming into service should help.

Gotthard historic route

The Federal Council has recommended that the historic Gotthard route be retained, with the SBB bound by its concession to operate long distance traffic providing services at least until 2017 - a year after the opening of the Base Tunnel. It is recognized that traffic will fall sharply when the new tunnel opens, but land use, economic and tourist planning and local access, require the route being kept. However, a reduction of facilities such as track and systems simplification, and perhaps reduction to a single track is expressly authorized. This is the basic legal arrangement but in practice a number of factors apply. Although the SOB made a bid for paths and rights on the line (which was rejected), SBB will probably run local trains, whilst SBB Historic also intends to run regular services on the old line, with connections from outside the area. Andermatt, along with the developers of the major infrastructure improvements taking place there, and the ski and mountain region all above Göschenen, have plans for promoting the route. It is also foreseen that the local communities left aside in the past when stations were closed to improve line capacity, such as Amsteg, Gurtellen, Wassen, Ambri-Piotta, Giornico etc., could see new opportunities for regaining stopping services. The travel situation, at those typical holiday times when the Gotthard motorway is severely congested, is a severe burden on local people in such communities. Goppenstein typically has been severely depressed.

SBB's new Bombardier stock delayed again

Bombardier and SBB issued a joint statement on November 19th 2014 to announce agreement that the CHF1.9bn order for fifty nine 200kph double-deck Inter-City and InterRegio EMUs, due for delivery in 2014 will now definitely not enter service before 2017 - the last in 2020. Three additional train sets will be delivered free as compensation following delays to the order originally placed in 2010. Two trial sets are now in-hand, one was due for assembly in Germany last December, a second at Bombardier's Swiss Villeneuve (VD) works in February 2015. The agreement is dependent upon the two prototypes fully meeting their specification during trials in spring 2015. This means a serious shortage of traction power and rolling stock in the meantime, since withdrawals of older stock without air-conditioning will continue.

A difficult autumn for the RhB

A glorious period of Indian Summer weather (called in German the 'Old Wives' Summer') broke on October 22nd, when heavy snow and storm-force winds resulted in the Klosters-Davos and Chur-Arosa lines being closed intermittently throughout the day, as snow-burdened trees fell on the catenary and were cleared away. In addition the Filisur - Bergün and Filisur-Davos sections were also closed because of a locomotive defect. Within two-days the sun was again shining, but the Julier Pass road from Tiefencastel to St Moritz had also been closed by a spate of accidents, many with motorists unprepared for winter weather. The only way in and out of the Engadine for vehicles was the Vereina Tunnel between Klosters and Saglains, where its car trains were correspondingly busy, but kept going. Three days earlier, when your correspondent was in Celerina, the Albula trains were being worked by Ge4/4 III locomotives; an Allegra was on the Davos - Filisur shuttle; Pontresina - Scuol trains were worked Ge4/4 II (611 series); and freight trains were mostly with Ge6/6 II (701 series). Allegra sets were conspicuously not on the Albula line, but on the Bernina.

The RhB has confirmed its intention to operate the Albula line with reversible railcar sets, but has reduced its order for 7 seven-car sets to 6 six-car sets plus driving trailer. The RhB confirms that the driving trailers will be reinforced for use in snow, will have a 10 tonne axle load, and carry a large, robust plough for protection. This counters criticism after the Tiefencastel accident, that locomotives are better equipped for collisions with compacted snow or rockslides. The saving of a train set comes from tighter turn arounds in St Moritz, where incoming trains will be used without layover for the next departure. The bus service introduced last summer (in place of a Davos train-section) between Davos, Lenzerheide and Chur, to connect with the Glacier Express, was not a success as only 800 passengers used it in the whole season. In the future Glacier Express passengers from Davos will be routed by local train to Filisur to connect with the premium operation there. It is not anticipated that overcrowding on the local services will be an issue.

PostAuto News

PostAuto Schweiz has announced that from the December 2014 timetable change the Alpine Ticket surcharge will be abolished. This surcharge was introduced 15-years ago and was intended to help reduce the deficit on a number of mostly seasonal tourist lines in the mountains. The acceptance of this surcharge has never been good with passengers using the Swiss Pass, All-line Day Tickets or a GA, often having problems to understand why they must pay extra. PostAuto Schweiz transports over 130m passengers annually, clocking-up over 100m km in the process. Their safety record is very good, with few accidents recorded and zero passenger deaths in 2013, and for the first 10 months of 2014. However, November 2014 was not a good month for them in Kanton Aargau. Early in the month a driver on the route from Brugg (AG) to Frick became ill descending the Bözberg, but fortunately two passengers managed to bring the bus safely to a halt. A few days later, the early morning Endingen-Niederweningen PostAuto was involved in an accident shortly

after leaving Endingen. The driver of an oncoming truck lost control of his vehicle and collided with the side of the bus, and then crushed a passenger car. Two passengers in the PostAuto were killed, and several badly injured, with the Endingen-Lengnau road being closed for several hours.

Night Trains go

The 2nd November saw the withdrawal of the sleeping car/coucheette services from Zürich and Basel to Copenhagen, and of the car-sleeper services to Hamburg and Scandinavia from Lörrach-bei-Basel. Operated by DB subsidiary CNL they were deteriorating rapidly in a vicious circle of low standards, poor punctuality and low maintenance, but the reality is that in the last ten years ridership has collapsed, with DB also insisting that there is no justification for investment. So the CNL operation in Switzerland joins those evocative trains of memory with the great blue Wagons-Lits sleepers in the early morning at Göschenen or Kandersteg, and with the exchanging of sections after midnight in Bâle SNCF...

Problems looming for Oil Traffic...

With the ever-increasing number of passenger trains on the network, capacity for freight traffic is in danger of becoming limited. The Swiss Association of Oil Importers recently highlighted the problem of reaching their member's oil terminals. With most station improvements made with passenger services in mind, the track for holding, or shunting freight wagons is often no longer available. They cited Bettwiesen (TH) where additional costs of CHF4.5m were incurred to reinstate track after restructuring of the station. They also noted that serving oil terminals in at Vaud/Valais will become problematic from 2017 once the new Genève-Annemasse S-Bahn comes into service as it will reduce both the track capacity, and time available at La Praille for shunting oil trains there. The Association warned that, should the movement of oil by rail become too inefficient, members would have to consider the use of road transport.

...and solved for some Sugar Beet Traffic

Late in 2011 SBB announced further plans to rebuild Niederweningen station. These foresaw that handling sugar beet, the only remaining wagonload traffic there, would be discontinued as there was no place in the scheme for the loading equipment. The only alternative for the farmers was to transport their sugar beet to Siggenthal-Würenlingen, some 14 km away, or by road all the way to the processing plants in Frauenfeld or Aarberg. However, in October 2014 it was announced that after consultation with the farmers, a solution had been found and that sugar beet traffic by rail would continue. Sugar beet volumes from this location are around 10,000t (about 200 wagonloads) annually.

More Sugar Beet news

The 2014 sugar beet harvest was unusually heavy with around 1m tonnes of rail traffic expected to be moved by the season's end in December, to the two factories in Aarberg and in Frauenfeld. Much of the traction was by Re4/4 II, some taken out of store with the Ae6/6s of

former years being absent for the first time in decades. On the Sursee-Triengen line a train of 1,632t, made up of 24 SBB Eaos wagons was loaded at Triengen station and hauled to Sursee on October 10th by Am 843 068. From there two Re4/4 II took over to go to Frauenfeld. The metre-gauge Yverdon-St Croix (Travys) and BAM (MBC) lines are now the only ones still moving sugar beet in Eaos wagons, riding on narrow-gauge transporter trucks. The transfer to standard gauge metals taking place at Yverdon and Morges respectively. Members might consider planning to call-in to see such operations, that are now becoming rare, in progress.

Rigibahnen develops links with China

The Rigibahnen is being pro-active in developing markets to attract tourists. In March 2009 it formed a 'twinning link' with Mount Emei Shan in China, and from this has seen an increasing number of Chinese tourists coming to visit the Rigi and use the railway. Apparently there are many similarities between the two mountains. As a part of building upon this link, last year a large piece of Rigi rock was sent to Emei Shan, arriving there on the 29th September for unveiling at an International Travel Expo. The 3t, 2.7m x 1.4m stone was presented by officers of the Rigibahnen and the Mayor of Arth Goldau. On the same day, an 8t stone from Mount Emei Shan started its journey from there to be installed on the summit of the Rigi in the first half of 2015 in the presence of representatives from China.

Taking the bus?

Liberalisation of long-distance bus services in Germany has caused DB some pain, with a flurry of new services, very low fares, and an obvious loss of rail custom. Some others run on foreign worker routes such as Albania and Serbia to Swiss industrial centres. PostAuto has a partnership with German operator 'Mein Fernbus', that offers cheap rides to Germany and Milano to the annoyance of SBB. Inevitable, was some political pressure to allow deregulated long-distance buses in Switzerland, but reactions were unsympathetic. For a start, congestion on Swiss motorways is at record levels, with little chance of this being relieved. Secondly, the votes of public money for rail-based comprehensive mobility are still an assurance of public loyalty to rail, also at political levels. Thirdly, since rail overcrowding is already a problem on some key routes, SBB, BLS and others are reluctant to see lower fares. There may indeed be separate markets to serve, but don't expect things to change dramatically.

Basel Trams

The extension of BVB's Line 8 from Kleinhüningen (Basel's Rhein harbour district) to Weil-am-Rhein in Germany, came into full operation from the new timetable in December 2014. Work is shortly to start on extending Line 3 from the frontier at Burgfelden to St.Louis in Alsace. The first of the new Bombardier 'Flexity' trams No.5001, was delivered in September 2014, with the second arriving in November, and these started running in late 2014 on Lines 8 and 14 respectively. Readers will recall that the Burgers of Basel voted to have these new vehicles equipped with ergonomic wooden seating and

this has been provided along with the revised green livery that was also chosen by the public.



Photos: Bryan Stone

October saw the opening of the new double track sections between Ettingen and Bättwil on BLT's Line 10 allowing a basic ten-minute frequency to Flüh from the start of the new timetable. This was overdue after inter-cantonal finance differences between the three Cantons involved (Basel Land, Basel Stadt and Solothurn), with the local population the sufferers, so relief was apparent. However, the long-awaited connection planned to be built between Line 10 and BVB Line 2 (the Margarethen link) is still subject to right wing agitation in the city government against new tram lines, this time made worse by other political differences and with demands for a referendum. We do not yet know if it will come about, although the Federal Government, which provides most of the money, regards it as the best financially justified project at present on its books.

Setback for Bern trams

Such things can happen in Swiss politics. A carefully and thoughtfully planned project by Stadt Bern (supported by the Federal government) to relieve the acute congestion in the city by converting Line 10 from bus to tram, will not now be implemented. The project had been contested, as is often the case with public transport questions, by right-wing political interests, and a vote had to be held in all three communes involved. Although Bern City voted 61 % in favour, Ostermündigen voted 53% against, and Köniz 61 % against. Overall the votes cast would have given a clear majority in favour, but the 'No' from the two extremities means that the project is now dead - at least in this form. Bern, and of course commuters from outside, will still have the traffic problem. A completely new project will be necessary in Ostermündigen as the now urgent rebuilding of the station had been incorporated into an interchange with the planned new tramway. However Köniz has at least approved the extension of tram Line 9 by 1.4km to Kleinwabern.

New metre-gauge rolling stock -

Some twelve of Switzerland's smaller railways have been busy placing orders for new rolling stock generally with Stadler, now one of the few companies left in Europe with

the ability to build narrow gauge – and rack-equipped – heavy-rail rolling stock. Several factors have driven this spate of orders including booming passenger traffic, the need to meet access regulations for the mobility impaired, and the increasing energy and maintenance costs required to keep older rolling-stock in service.

1. Zentralbahn: The ZB has ordered five more Class 160 3-car 'FINK' (Finch) EMUs from Stadler for delivery in late 2016. These will allow the retirement of eight 45-y/o units that are used on the Luzern S-Bahn services.

2. Wengernalpbahn: The first of the WABs six Bhe 4/8 units (No.145) ordered from Stadler for use between Lauterbrunnen and Kleine Scheidegg, went into service in December. The remainder are due this year. They are similar to the four 3-car units (Nos.141-144) delivered in 2004 for the route up from Grindelwald.

3. Berner Oberland-Bahn: This line, along with the WAB part of the Jungfraubahn (JB) Group, has also contracted with Stadler a new tranche of EMUs. The order is for six 3-car ABDeh 8/8 units to be numbered Nos.321-326 and will enable 1965-built Nos.304-308 to be withdrawn from passenger service, along with 1979 vintage No. 309. This will enable No.304 to replace 1949-built No.303 as the snowplough and works train reserve unit. Booming traffic has resulted in a 'stay-of-execution' for some other older units on this line.

4. Jungfraubahn: This element of the JB Group has four low floor 3-car units on order that are similar to their existing 'front-line' units. These will enable all of the BDhe 2/4 units that date from between 1955 and 1966 to be withdrawn.

5. Chemins de fer du Jura: the CJ is another operator struggling to cope with increased demand especially between Saignelégier and La Chaux de Fonds. Sixty years-ago in steam days this section had five daily trains and was only busy on one day a year at the Saignelégier horse fair! It has ordered, for delivery in 2016, five new power cars to run coupled to the 1985-vintage driving and trailer cars. With the arrival of this equipment it is expected that the 'new' units, together with the four modern Abe 2/6 GTW sets, will be able to cover the timetable in the future. In the interim the CJ has had to take additional measures to cover its needs by buying four railcars from Frauenfeld – Will-Bahn (FW). One has been allocated for spares; the other three are now CJ's Be4/4 Nos.615-617. As the 1985 units are currently due for heavy repair, the FW cars will cover the line's immediate needs, and subsequently it is planned that they will be used to handle the CJ's freight traffic. This is currently covered by the ex-RhB (Chur-Arosa) units Nos.641 and 642, and the ex-Biel-Täuffelen-Ins 1947-built BDe 4/4 No.621, units that are, not surprisingly, at the end of their useful lives.

6. Montreux Oberland Bernois: Another Stadler order is for four 2-car EMUs that the MOB is proposing should become their Class 9000. These are planned to be powerful units with the ability to haul a complete Golden Pass train, and in the long-term more could be ordered to replace the MOB's Class 8000 locos. The first priority is apparently for the new trains to replace the 1970-built Class 4000 2-car EMUs. The MOB is so impressed with Stadler's design of the HGem 2/2 diesel and electric power hybrid locos ordered by the MVR and TPC (see below)

that they have now ordered three such locomotives, but as Gem 2/2 without the rack drive.

7. Transports Montreux-Vevey-Riviera (MVR):

This organisation is under the day-to-day direction of the MOB and operates the former CEV (Chemin de fer électriques veveysans) line from Vevey to Blonay and Les Pléiades. As the steep (20% - 1:5) section above Blonay is equipped with Strub rack this is operated by a small fleet of now quite elderly railcars. These can run down to Vevey, but the lower section (virtually a Vevey S-Bahn) is normally the preserve of its four early Stadler GTW 2/6 EMUs. Stadler is now to supply a number of 2-car rack-equipped EMUs - Class 7500 - that will be able to work the entire route, enabling the older vehicles to be disposed of. In time it is anticipated that more of the new units will be acquired enabling the fleet to be standardised with the GTWs being sold-off. Stadler is also supplying the MVR with a two-axle, Strub rack-equipped HGem 2/2 diesel and electric power hybrid for maintenance purposes.

8. Yverdon-les-Bains – Sainte Croix: Now part of TRAVYS the YStC is currently awaiting new rolling stock from Stadler to allow it to increase its frequency to two trains an hour. There are three 3-car EMUs on order that will work with the two Stadler GTW units already in service, but two older units are expected to go.

9. Transports de la region Morges-Bière-Cossonay:

This line - more familiar as the Bière-Apples-Morges - has ordered three 2-car trains, that will enter service utilising the line's existing modern intermediate trailer cars to form 3-car EMUs, plus one completely new 3-car unit. This fleet enhancement is to allow a half-hourly service to come into force from the December 2015 timetable change. Some existing units will be retained to maintain this improved service, but Be 4/4 No.15, formerly on the YStC, will be scrapped.

10. Transports Publics du Chablais: This organisation has announced plans to completely upgrade its Aigle Ollon Monthey Champéry (AMOC) subsidiary during an extended closure (up to 5-months) in 2016. Its 800V dc power supply will be converted to 1500V dc; the sections of Strub rack will be replaced with Abt rack (as on other TPC operations); a new interchange station with the SBBs St-Gingolph line will be built at Collombey; and also street running in Monthey will be removed due to a new alignment being built to take the trains into the main SBB Monthey station. In addition to all this infrastructure work Stadler will also be supplying seven 2-car rack-equipped EMUs to operate the service, along with a two-axle rack-equipped HGem 2/2 diesel and electric power hybrid for maintenance purposes.

11. Regionalverkehr Bern-Solothurn: This operator of several busy routes, that are part of the Bern S-Bahn network, is planning to call for tenders in 2015 for sixteen new train sets. These will replace the Be4/12 and Be4/8 units presently used on the S7 line to Worb Dorf.

Museum and Preservation News -

Kerzers: It is understood that the railway museum in Kerzers is to be closed and the exhibits disposed of.

Etzwil: A new arrival at this depot is interesting. It is the 1919 battery locomotive from the paper works in Cham, Kanton Luzern.

Bergün: A working Edmondson Card ticket-printing machine has been presented to the Museum by the RhB, who have now taken it out of service on the retirement of its last operator. Since 2008 Edmondson card tickets could not be used on the SBB, PostAuto services and most railways, but the RhB still accepted them for local journeys up to December 12th 2014. For example Filisur station sold them for local journeys. Of course, many museum railways, and also some enclosed systems such as funiculars, still use them, and as our last issue said, Nicolas Regamey, at his printing business in Lausanne, has secured two machines and prints with them still for Blonay-Chamby (where he is a leading volunteer) and for other customers. Your correspondent, like many SRS members, still feels that Edmondson cards are the only real railway tickets.

ZB Historic: Many members will have seen the forlorn HGe4/4 No.1992, withdrawn in 1996, in a quiet and dark corner of Luzern station. In 2011 she was taken to Engelberg, for restoration and she is now authorized to run on the ZB, making a first trip on 18th October 2014. Since Nos.1991 and 1992 were never really very effective when in service, and were often in trouble, her survival is perhaps the greatest curiosity.

Ballenberg-Dampfbahn Update: Following the November 2013 depot fire at Interlaken Ost new examinations of the damaged locos have been carried-out, especially by Federal Boiler Inspectorate. These have resulted in the boiler of G3/4 No.208 being lifted from its frames (for the first time since 1944) and sent to Dintikon workshops for renewal. It is expected back in 2015 when the chassis should have been restored and full reassembly can take place later in the year, although it will not be ready for operation. HG3/3 No.1067 was the least damaged and its boiler inspection was positive. It should be restored in time to be re-inaugurated at Swiss Steam Days in Brienz during the last weekend of June 2015. Steam trains are also planned to operate on Meiringen-Innertkirchen-Bahn and Berner-Oberland-Bahnen for its 125th anniversary.

Eurovapor Sulgen: It is pleasing to report that after the removal of the chassis, wheels, cylinders and motion of C5/6 No. 2969, scorched following the Depot fire in Interlaken in November 2013 to Eurovapor's Sulgen Depot, restoration after the fire damage is now completed. Twelve engineering apprentices devoted some of their professional training to the restoration project. The boiler, restored independently, has now received its insulation and cladding, and has been reunited with the chassis. The reassembly of the motion was in progress during last winter and it is now likely that No.2969 can be steamed during 2015, a remarkable achievement for a big engine after over 40-years standing as an outdoor exhibit.

Franco-Swiss loco gathering

Members in and around Genève on 25th August last year might have rubbed their eyes in amazement at some of the locos moving about the area. French rail enthusiasts had quietly arranged a meeting of eleven historic electric locomotives, in the ABB-Sécheron factory grounds in Meyrin-Satigny, off the line to La Plaine. The group included four Swiss engines (SBB/CFF Nos.10976, 11407, 934 555, and BLS No.208) whilst the French were represented by, amongst others, the huge 2CC2 3402 -

again in working order - the 1925 prototype for the Mont Cenis electrification and CC 20001, the first prototype 25 KV 50 Hertz locomotive in France, built by SLM. The organisers were assisted by SBB and BLS Historic, SNCF and Réseau Ferré de France, ABB, Stadler, and Alpiq.

Motive Power News. Class 540: Reports still come in that last survivors among these railcar units are pressed into service where circumstances prevail. Zürich – Sargans – Chur is an example, as is Zürich Airport – Basel. A few stand in strategic locations as fall-back reserve trains. In October 2014 No. 540 038 was on the Securitas prison train Bern Weyerhann – Bassersdorf (Zürich) – this operation is known colloquially in ‘Swiss-English’ the ‘Jail Train’.

EasyJet may pull your train: Re460 063 has received an advertising orange coat, and carries a prominent ‘EasyJet’ name and French and German slogans suggesting that they fly with Swiss punctuality (Hmnn!) . To have your name on an engine for a year costs CHF240,000. In addition to this it will cost CHF60,000 for the decoration and its removal.

Striped Re6/6: No.11626 is running with a set of stripes at each end, similar to those on the Ae6/6 ‘Canton’ engines. SBB Cargo, who account for the Re6/6s, claimed to know nothing of this when asked!

TpF: This operator has recently received new Stadler FLIRT RABe 527 197.

MVR - Mont Pèlerin

The 1.6km long funicular that runs from the western end of Vevey to Chardonne and Mont Pèlerin re-opened in November 2014 following a six-month renovation project. This line was opened in 1899, and as so often happens substantial work was needed to meet present operating and safety standards.

Pilatusbahn (PB)

What is usually considered impossible happened on 29th October at Ämsigen, the intermediate crossing station on the PB, which uses the Locher rack system to conquer the ultra steep gradient. With this system, conventional points are replaced by track sections that move laterally to connect alternative tracks. In this case four railcars were following on-sight at short intervals when the second one just tilted into the pit where the moveable track section should have been. No one was hurt, and in 90 minutes all was working again. The PB announced a ‘faulty manipulation’ of the moving section, which seemed obvious - but it shouldn’t be possible.

New service in Ticino

From the 14th December timetable change the SBB (as TILO) opened the first section, as far as Stabio, of the new cross-border rail link between Mendriso and Varese. This runs on 4.5km of the first (Swiss) 6.5km of the 17.7km line that was originally opened in June 1926, only to be closed by Italy’s then Fascist Government in May 1928. Construction problems on the Italian section, including a contractor dispute and arsenic-contaminated soil, have delayed completion of the route south of the border. The new TILO S40/S50 service starts at Albate-Camerlata in Italy, runs through Como to enter Switzerland at Chiasso, and then proceeds to Mendriso where it reverses to reach Stabio.

SNCF sells cut-price Swiss tickets

The SBB is not amused about the fact that SNCF, France’s state-owned railway company, has been selling tickets between any two Swiss locations cheaper online than the fare SBB charges. Prices differ by 8%, because SNCF is selling the tickets without Swiss value added tax, although the SNCF has stated that the price differences are due to ‘currency effects’. The Swiss Government is apparently unhappy about this procedure, although it appears that they can do a little about it. SBB is considering what course of action is open to it.


Fire on ‘Uri’

During a scheduled trip on Saturday 27th December a fire broke out in the engine room of ‘*ps Uri*’, Switzerland’s oldest steamship, at around 12.00. The fire, accompanied by heavy smoke, is believed to be linked to an electrical fault associated with the auxiliary engine. The ship was brought into the ship station at Hergiswil where firefighters and other emergency services were deployed. Fortunately none of the 89 passengers, or members of the crew, were injured and buses from VBL were laid-on to take the passengers to Luzern. The ship was towed to the yard of the Schifffahrtsgesellschaft des Vierwaldstättersees (SGV) at Luzern later that afternoon. It is currently anticipated that the ship will be out of service for an indefinite period. The workings it had been scheduled to perform have been taken over by the ‘Unterwalden’.

Back in Steam

The ‘*Neuchâtel*’, an historic single-deck paddle steamer restored after 40-years of inactivity, entered summer service in 2014 on Lakes Neuchâtel, Bienne and Murten, with an excellent start. As a member of ‘Trivapor’ (the association which restored her) your correspondent had intended taking a trip on her in late summer, however, this plan was frustrated by a defect in the boiler cladding that resulted in the ship being taken out of service. The defect allowed a local heat loss, which could have had serious effects, but the repairs were effected under guarantee and a good second season is now expected. The ship’s first season was helped when the entire Federal Council (the seven-person Swiss cabinet) including the President, who comes from Neuchâtel, made a much-publicized cruise in summer. See www.trivapor.ch for the 2015 programme.

SBB in Scotland?

It is interesting to note that on the front cover of Stena Line’s publicity material for the rail link to their shipping service from Scotland to Northern Ireland, they have shown an image of an SBB Class 510 ICN tilting train. It was publicized that the ScotRail franchise had recently been awarded to a subsidiary of Dutch State Railways from 2015, but do they know something that we don’t? 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from, Michael Donovan, s’Murmeli, Boyd Misstear, Mario Gravazzi, Robert Amstutz, Jakob Jäger, Ron Smith, and others.

