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Swiss Invest in new Equipment

Der Beobachter

The last year has seen a considerable amount of investment in new rolling stock by for use on the Swiss rail network. Much of this we have reported-on in Swiss News and this upsurge in orders has been welcome news to companies like Stadler and Bombardier, who had not seen order-books filling up as fast as they would have liked. The slow down in orders has not been just in Switzerland, with the result that Siemens and Vosslok in Germany, Alstom in France and the Italian and Polish manufacturers have also been feeling the pinch. Perhaps only CAF in Spain appears to have been working with full order books. Indeed there has been talk in the business press that some organisations were trying to sell-off their rail manufacturing divisions. The appearance in Europe of an expanding Chinese rail industry, that is now seeing its own domestic market slowing-down, has not helped the situation, and of course Japanese manufacturer Hitachi is now ensconced in the UK and looking for other business opportunities.

After a peak in orders for new train-sets in 2013 Stadler saw a falling away of new business over the following year, and with the discontinuation of the link between the Euro and the Swiss Franc earlier this year the company became quite concerned. Their business prospects were already damaged by the sanctions imposed on Russia by the West, following that country's 'invasion' of Eastern Ukraine as this led to a slow down in orders and concerns about the potential take-up of options by operators in Russia. Stadler did have a business plan in place that envisaged expansion in the CIS area and the Middle and Far East, but this was appearing to have been very optimistic. They have now switched their focus to developing their market in the US, UK and other European countries outside the Euro Zone. Apart from supplying further Trams to Transport for London for use on the Croydon Tramlink, they are apparently in discussions in the UK to be a potential supplier of the fleet of new "Pacer" replacement DMUs that the Department for Transport has now decided is required for non-electrified lines outside the main conurbations. Like the German Siemens organisation Stadler also have a manufacturing facility in the US, and are becoming quite successful in bidding for rolling stock for the ever-increasing number of LRT systems that are springing-up in a country that once turned its back on commuter rail services.

Stadler are one of the few companies in the world who have a production line that is geared-up to building narrow gauge rolling stock, not just for tramways, but for light and heavy rail as well. They are currently supplying several of the Swiss metre-gauge local railways

with new rolling stock. We have reported upon these orders previously in 'Swiss Express' and the first of this new equipment is now coming on-stream, resulting in older units being made redundant, with some of these changing owners in the second-hand market. It is understood that some more orders are now forthcoming from other companies as rail passengers are demanding better-equipped vehicles to ride in, with air conditioning, WiFi and electrical outlets for personal computers, etc. seeming to be the minimum standard in this day and age. The message to enthusiasts is that if you wish to ride on some of your old favourite units plan your trips sooner rather than later. The metre-gauge Zentralbahn has almost completely re-equipped its main line operation between Luzern and Interlaken with its new Stadler-built 'Adler' and 'Fink' units, whilst the RhB has a complete fleet of main line 8-car EMUs on order, also from Stadler, for its Albula line operation. In addition to this the RhB is currently out to tender for a fleet of EMUs to replace the units currently servicing its local train operations and it is probable that Stadler will be in-line for this order. As reported in this issue, new stock is to be acquired for the Waldenburgerbahn and again it is probable that this order will go to Stadler.

On the standard gauge network the BLS is out to tender for a new fleet of EMUs for its Bern S-Bahn services and both Bombardier and Stadler are currently building new suburban and main line double deck rolling stock for the SBB. At SBB their Infra Division have just announced an order for 47 shunting and local-service locomotives from Alstom. These will be electro-diesels with two diesel engines that can be separately controlled 'gensets', with delivery expected from 2018. They have also ordered 35 maintenance tractors (Baudiensttraktoren) from Windhoff for delivery from 2017. These will be diesel-electric powered, and also utilise two 'gensets'. BLS Cargo has recently ordered 15 multi-system 'Vectron' locomotives from Siemens, and SOB another private operator, is apparently preparing tenders for the supply of new EMUs for use on its Voralpen Express service. Going against the Europe-wide decline in the transport of post by rail (for example France has just withdrawn the mail-only TGV sets), SwissPost has started to take delivery of fifty-five new 23m long bogie vehicles. They are being built by Niesky in Germany and are classified as freight vehicles, rather than Z in the passenger series. The new wagons are classified 'Habbiillnss' and numbered 33 85 2891 001 to 055. They will replace all the remaining 2-axle vehicles in the SwissPost fleet. 