

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2016)
Heft: 126

Artikel: BVB line 8 to Weil am Rhein
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854038>

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BVB Line 8 to Weil am Rhein




BVB Line 8 tram at Schiffplände.

Photos: Bryan Stone

A most interesting talk by Thomas Ruff, former operating director of Freiburg im Breisgau tramways, at the Basel Tram Club, brought some behind-the-scenes information about of such border-crossing projects. First, not only BVB-Rules apply. In Germany, with its 1.6 km extension from the Swiss border, there are separate national legal instruments for passenger transport; for highway standards and use; and for trams. In Switzerland trams are covered by a section of the Railway Operating directives. The State of Baden also has its own tramways inspectorate. From the start BVB employed a specialist in German transportation law, as this was not only outside its own experience, but Weil am Rhein had no tramway knowledge of its own. Technical incompatibilities abounded. Basel Stadt has many tight curves, also on Line 8; the minimal radius of 15m was exceptionally allowed in Weil. The on-the-street section requires under German law brake lights, warning indicator lights, and a three-lamp front end; these were not installed on Basel trams, so the 28 Combinos and the 61 Flexities are now adapted. Maintenance of tram stops, track and lights and signals had to be covered by special contract. For track maintenance in Weil, a protected joint fund, Weil and Basel-Stadt was created, into which each pays €60,000 per year.

Police and other regulations in case of accidents had to be clarified, as BVB drivers in minor incidents, after making a report, can drive on, leaving matters in the hands of a supervisor to resolve matters with police and involved persons. This keeps things moving, however in Germany this would have been tantamount to hit-and-run! Then, the Weil

Fire Brigade had to be taught procedures in connection with catenary and roadside fires or incidents. The Swiss Federal authority for tram drivers (the 'license') did not meet German standards. This also required retraining and therefore a double license. And then there are Border Police and customs issues! These are no different to those applying for years to bus services: no dutiable goods on local transport, thanks to Schengen no special people controls, but the right to spot-check as required. Regrettably the opening fell with an exchange rate shift, which intensified the already heavy shopping traffic of Swiss to Weil's many shopping centres and Malls. Smuggling, mostly of foodstuffs and alcohol, became a serious problem. So also was road traffic, with congestion, and poor vehicle driver discipline, blocking tracks and preventing schedules being maintained. From being sceptical however, the Weil Council is now convinced, for this spring they have launched a project for an extension to the centre of Weil, which is beyond the existing terminus at the station. 

BVB Line 8 tram at Bankverein.

