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Swiss News

Stadler and the new Class 501 'Girunos'

Stadler in Bussnang (TG) is building 29 RABe Class 501 'Giruno' units for the Gotthard line. As Stadler celebrates its 75th anniversary in Bussnang on 18th May 2017 the first completed train set will be on show there. First running trials will take place on the normally unused line Sihlwald – Sihlbrugg of the SZU, followed by ETCS Level 2 trials on Gotthard and Lötschberg Base Tunnel routes and between Mattstetten and Rothrist. Proving trials for certification will then follow in the second half of 2017. A curious process is necessary to assemble these 11-car trains. Bodies come from Bussnang, bogies from Winterthur. They are united in Erlen, a station on the Romanshorn - Weinfelden line. The assembly hall in Bussnang is too short for 11-car units, and the new trains are normally indivisible, so an efficient solution was to move the coach bodies to Erlen, where full siding length is available. Stadler owns four standard gauge transporter flats normally used to deliver narrow gauge vehicles; these were adapted so that the bogie-less new 'Giruno' coaches could be loaded on them, taken to Erlen in special trains and there assembled on the new bogies. The loads are some 20cm 'out-of-gauge' but the journey, 13 km via Weinfelden, involves no bridges and tunnels, and has SBB approval. Traction comes from Stadler's own electric shunter Eea 936 131. This too is unusual; it was bought by the PTT (SwissPost), as Ee 3/3 No. 14, later ran for some years on the CJ, often at Tavannes, and was then rebuilt for Stadler, which is also licensed as 'rail operator' and can thus run this, and a sister engine No.133, on main lines.

Competition?

The concession for main line passenger services at present operated by SBB comes due for renewal in 2018. Two competitors have made known an interest. The SOB, as already reported in *Swiss Express*, wishes to operate a new service Basel – Gotthard (old route) – Lugano, and a line Zürich – St Gallen - Chur. Now BLS is reported to have put in a bid to work Biel – Bern – Interlaken. The Federal Transport Office, which must allocate the concessions, is opening a conciliation process to examine the potential for these two operators to effectively 'compete' with the SBB. However, SBB's CEO Andreas Meyer has publicly declared that the present service network is so tightly planned and integrated, that this form of competition/dispersion of business can only increase costs without benefits. We will see.

Luzern Derailment.

On 22nd March a serious derailment occurred on the approach to Luzern station. The fourth car of a Trenitalia Class 610, operating an EC Milano service, derailed and fell sideways pulling down the catenary. Fortunately only seven passengers were slightly injured, however operational consequences were severe. Luzern's three-track approach, sharply curved through a cutting, was blocked and power supply was interrupted throughout the station. Removal of the train after evacuation was difficult requiring the use of non-rail cranes and collateral damage was unusually heavy.

With the exception of the metre gauge Zentralbahn/Brünig services all rail operations were suspended for five days. SBB's crisis planning; the Luzern staff, and an armada of hired buses, were exemplary. All available resources and staff were mobilised; whilst readers' letters and TV interviews were full of praise. This incident again demonstrated the weakness of the Luzern situation. The standard gauge approach to the station is through a 180° curve and the Gutsch tunnel, three tracks each signalled for two-way running. Using this approach are trains from Immensee via Küsnacht, from Rotkreuz (Gotthard and Zürich lines), Langnau (Bern), and Olten. Operations are at best difficult; at times heavily overloaded. A project exists to make Luzern a through station with a tunnel under the lake to join all routes again (except Langnau) on the north side. Currently costed at CHF1.9 billion, despite trial borings and detailed plans, the project is not yet in sight of realisation. This incident will again raise the urgency of such a solution as Luzern struggles to handle some 163,000 passengers/day. Why this incident occurred will raise questions. Although simple failures are probably likely (broken switch/point blade, or wheel/axle defects) the Class 610 tilting trains, new in 2009, suffer already from a bad reputation with failures and unpunctuality on the Gotthard route. In March nineteen were in service, 12 with SBB and 7 with Trenitalia (FS). Uninformed speculation is already rife within the less self-restrained element of the Swiss press. *Swiss Express*, along with other more responsible journals, will await the outcome of the formal inquiry.

Better Luzern News

Trolleybuses are back in Emmenbrücke. The northern approach to Luzern by road was for three years a daily chaos of construction, diversions and traffic congestion. The last will not get better, but the first two are now almost finished. A consequence is that the trolleybus Lines 2 and 5, between Emmenbrücke and Luzern, have resumed service on a much improved routing. Line 2 (end station Sprengi) now serves Emmenbrücke Bahnhof, while Line 5 turns at the south end of Emmenbrücke Bhf, heading towards Kriens. Together they give a high-capacity frequent service to Luzern, which has been sorely lacking.

BLS Cargo now part owned by SNCF

In 2015 BLS bought back from DB Schenker Rail the 45% share in its subsidiary BLS Cargo that the German state-owned operator had held in the company. This followed the decision by DB Schenker Rail to terminate its contract with the Swiss company regarding the operation of intermodal services across Switzerland. On 16th February BLS announced that it had now sold the 45% stake on to SNCF Logistics, another state-owned organisation. SNCF Logistics is already active in the international rail freight market through its Captrain subsidiary. Apart from the French holding, the Ambrogio Group have a 3% share in the business, with BLS having the controlling 52% of the shares. The real interest lies in the integration of marketing and operations between BLS Cargo and the SNCF Captrains subsidiaries in both Germany and Italy. Surprisingly Captrains claims to already be second only to the national state

operators DB Logistic and FS MerciCargo. It has on-hire new Siemens 'Vectron' locomotives, seen operating in and around the Ruhr district. These are now likely to run in BLS-Cargo service.

SBB Historic in financial problems

In the last 15 years the contribution paid by SBB to SBB Historic has reduced by CHF500,000 at a time of increasing costs, and a requirement from SBB's Estates Department for SBB Historic to pay market rents for the numerous premises it occupies. Also the costs of equipping working museum pieces with modern technology to allow main line operation is taking its toll on restricted finances. All this means is that SBB Historic is investigating ways to save money and to cut-down on overheads. One idea that has come under criticism from various groups associated with the organisation's conservation programme is to put some 10 of its lesser-used 'working' fleet of 38 locos/EMUs into 'cold' storage. Taken aback by adverse comments from some of the volunteers who spend time keeping the collection in working order, it has now decided to review the decision.



Ae3/6 10601 prototype of this standard class, when still running in Delémont in 1969. Photo: Bryan Stone

Legal delay holds up Zürich – Gotthard improvements

The Zugersee line between Zug and Arth-Goldau, the direct access route from the Zürich area to the Gotthard, is a serious bottleneck. Not only is it still partly single line, but limited clearances prevent use of double deck trains. Work on improvements should have started in 2016, but objections from residents en-route have held this up. A recent court ruling rejected the complaints, essentially based on fear that in future increased freight traffic would follow, but the objectors' group has now appealed to the Swiss Supreme Court. A new start of work is not yet fixed.

SBB win a German contract - to operate in Switzerland!

Services on the 19km line between Erzingen (Baden) and Schaffhausen, all bar 200m of which is in Canton Schaffhausen, are currently operated by DB who actually owns the majority of the route under a 19thC treaty. Although the line is in Switzerland, and mostly used by local Swiss residents, these services have been put out to tender by the German Lander of Baden-Württemberg. This has been

won by SBB Deutschland, who will commence operations (probably with THURBO GTW EMUs) in December 2017.

'Freunde Schweizer Schmalspurbahnen'

This is a little-known preservation organisation, founded in the 1990s and based in Langenthal (BE), that over the years has quietly been assembling some items of metre-gauge rolling stock. The main item in its collection is the 100-year-old Be2/2 electric railcar 'Melchnau' that used to run on the Langenthal-Melchnau Bahn, the 12km line that became part of the ASm and was closed south of St Urban-Ziegelei in 1982. The 5km of track between the ASm's current terminus and Melchnau was lifted some 2 years ago to become a walking/cycling trail. The FSS had acquired the railcar in 1999 and stored it in the old loco shed at Melchnau until 2009 when it had to move it to a less secure locations. In Feb. 2017 the FSS was able to purchase the railcar's old home for CHF40,000 and will use it as a base to restore the vehicle.

Brienzer-Rothorn Bahn

On 17th June 17 this Abt rack railway will be 125 years old. Two weeks beforehand, on 26th May, some 10 members of the SRS, led by Chairman John Jesson, and also with Anthea Chapman, a niece of Roy Dungleison will be at Brienzen and Planalp stations to share in the inauguration of a memorial seat to Roy the co-founder of the Society. The SRS, together with the BRB, are placing this at Planalp in the new station area. Regarding their rolling-stock the BRB assures us that H2/3 No.5, dating from 1892, will be back in service after a workshop heavy overhaul, and that H2/3 No. 7 from 1932 will, with its new boiler from Crewe, England, be back in service this summer. No 12 one of the 'new' engines has also been overhauled. The BRB has been working steadily to complete its track renewal on the lower section. Some years ago most of the line was still operating on the rails laid in 1891-2, and this could not long continue. Impending need to renew the legal concession before 2018 meant extensive re-laying of the 77 km long railway. The money was raised mainly by subscriptions, and is on schedule, but not without cliffhanging moments of avalanche and storm damage. The upper high alpine section is to be tackled next.

MOB-MVR

Part of the Montreux - Glion - Rochers de Naye line also reaches its 125th Anniversary this year. The first section between Glion and Caux (described in SE125) was opened, also as a steam railway, just 6 weeks later than the BRB. It too used 800mm gauge and Abt rack but, unlike the BRB that was never electrified, its steam locos disappeared in 1938.

DFB

Another Jubilee not to be missed is the 25th Anniversary of the reopening of the first sections of the Dampfbahn-Furka-Bergstrecke, the Society which operates on the line Oberwald – Gletsch – Realp that was made redundant when the Furka-Oberalp Base Tunnel was opened.

Bankruptcy sale of locomotives

An unusual press advertisement appeared in Switzerland during February and March. The Association Swisstrain was formed to take over and preserve various historic locomotives.

It had run into financial problems following which the *Betriebsamt* (the Public Office for Debt Recovery) of La Chaux-de-Fonds has offered various Swisstrain locomotives for sale. The seven engines included a Be4/6; an Ae3/6^{II}, and the prototype Ae3/6^I No.10601. All were in poor condition.

Zürich buys Bombardier Trams

On the 2nd March Zürich public transport operator VBZ signed a CHF300m contract with multi-national rolling-stock builder Bombardier, to supply 70 Flexity low floor LRVs with an option for a further 70. The seven-section vehicles have an open design to improve passenger flow and increase capacity by around 20%.

Genève-France Tram Extensions

It was reported in the last issue that the Genève's Line 12 is to be extended from its current terminus Moillesulaz on the Swiss-French border to bring trams into the centre of Annemasse in Haute Savoie. The construction started this February with the demolition of the customs office to make way for the line. The first phase to Parc Montessuit will open in 2019, with the second phase to Lycée des Glières opening in 2022. Of the 3.3 km extension only a few metres will be in Switzerland.

Basel - BVB

The extension of tram Line 3 to St.Louis (3.1km into France) is on schedule with proving trials starting in August 2017 and public service commencing with the new timetable in December 2017. New trams ordered for the extended route will be the second series of Flexity units from Bombardier, shorter and more adapted to the steep gradients in the Old City of Basel (the Leonhardsberg is 1 in 12). No.6001 was delivered in Dec 2016; the production series comes in mid-2017, when progressive withdrawal of more of the older trams will commence.

BVB trams in Sofia

In January the first of 28 '*Cucumbers*' were sent from Basel to Sofia, Bulgaria. Before you ask, we should explain that this was the nickname given in Basler-Swiss dialect for the Series 659 – 686 units of the BVB. They were built in 1990 by Schindler, Pratteln, as Be4/6, in 3 articulated parts, and the ends were asymmetrically tapered to respect limited clearances in Basel Old City. Hence the name. They are being replaced in Basel by the new Flexity trams currently being delivered, that are noted above.

Belfort - Delle Service Plan

Swiss Canton Jura and the French Region of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté signed an agreement on the future passenger services for the Belfort Ville – Delle line due to reopen December 2017 (although some in France speculate it will be delayed till 2018). The Chemin de Fer de l'Est opened this line originally in 1873 and the 22km section between the border and Belfort closed in 1992 for passengers and for freight in 2006. The line is currently being rebuilt with four intermediate stations and will be electrified with the French 25kV system requiring CFF/SBB to use dual-voltage rolling stock for the trans-border services. CFF/SBB will extend ten of its hourly services between Biel/Bienne

and Delle into France to the Belfort-Montbéliard TGV station, where passengers continuing to Belfort-Ville need to change to a French service. SNCF is planning to run at least six return trips between Delle and Belfort-Ville, and probably more between Belfort-Ville and its TGV station. It is estimated that 1,800 passengers will use the line each day. SNCF has promised to offer smooth connections to the high-speed trains, but it will be interesting to see how the Swiss regular interval timetable can be coordinated with SNCF's rather irregular one.

CFF/SBB and SNCF Joint Venture Founded to Manage Léman Express

The Swiss and French national railway companies have set a joint venture company *Lémanis* to manage the operations of the future '*Léman Express*' service in the Genève region, once the CEVA project commences operation in 2019. The company is owned 60% by CFF/SBB and 40% by SNCF. The plan is that Swiss drivers will run trains through to Annemasse, where SNCF drivers will take over.

TGV Lyria Paris Diversions

Gare de Lyon in Paris was closed on 18th/19th March when the signalling controlling its tracks was modernised and all the services were either re-routed to other Paris stations or cancelled. A limited TGV Lyria service ran from Gare de l'Est, which was the terminus for the Basel-bound trains before the LGV Rhin-Rhône opened in 2011. The services to Basel and Zürich ran over the LGV Est non-stop past Strasbourg to Mulhouse with the same journey time as normal. However, the direct Lausanne-Paris services were cancelled and ran via Genève and these services had also to go around Paris from the south to get to their destination adding about 50 minutes to the Genève-Paris travel times. The Paris-Venice '*Thello*' Night Train, that traverses Switzerland at night, was also cancelled. It is a regular victim of engineering works, which happen often at night.

Hupac's 50-years

Hupac is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2017; the joint venture having been established in 1967 in the Ticino, by four transport operators and the SBB with a starting capital of CHF 500,000, has grown into a market leader in intermodal transport with operations throughout Europe. In 2016 Hupac's rail operations across Switzerland saw a 19.4% increase to 450,862 road vehicle shipments carried. Across the whole of its European operations it carried a total 737,311 road vehicle shipments, an 11.5% year-on-year increase. Hupac operates a network of more than 100 trains each day between Europe's main economic areas and between the harbours and the hinterlands. The Hupac Group comprises 17 companies based in Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Russia and China, and has a workforce of 400 employees.

Crossrail (not the London one !)

This operator has in recent years been much in evidence operating North-South transit freight on the BLS-Lötschberg – Domodossola route. Rumours that it could not continue have emerged, and it seems from reports in Switzerland that it may withdraw completely from Italian operations, and to

a large part from Switzerland. The locomotives, personnel, and operations, were in February being managed by SBB Cargo (probably on an interim basis), including the extensive banking for DB trains which have used the old Lötschberg line through Kandersteg. Reports suggest that the five Re 430 locomotives will be sold to Widmer Rail Services. The majority shareholder in CrossRail is the German logistics and Rhein shipping organisation the Rhenus Group, which is making no comment.



185 580 (Crossrail) and 3 more at Brig. Crossrail used the old Lötschberg line for many trains. Photo: Bryan Stone

An unusual steam special

SBB Historic's C5/6 2-10-0 No. 2978 is a familiar sight on specials. Another member of this group soon to reappear on the main line is Eurovapor C5/6 No. 2969 about to run again after over 40 years following a huge restoration effort that Swiss Express has reported on. Recently announced, is a double headed special on 21st October 2017 on the old Gotthard route as far as Bellinzona. See the SBB Historic website for details.

RhB - Punctuality

The newest InfoRetica from RhB describes 'Punctuality as a key project'. First, a quotation from CEO Renato Fasciati: *'Punctuality is a part of our promise to our customer. Apart from sensations, impressions and a safe and comfortable journey, the expectation is to arrive on time, for work, homecoming, holidays, or at the airport. Punctuality is at the heart of our business, and a basic requirement of customer satisfaction'*. RhB punctuality is measured against a 3-minute tolerance. In addition, the statistic is weighted for train loading; heavily loaded trains have more impact on the results. At the end of 2016 the result was 95.8%; but in really busy times it slips, in July last year to a regrettable 83%. The objective of this year's campaign is 91% for all passengers. All the staff are invited to study processes (like giving the 'right-away', or ensuring passengers join the whole train instead of elbowing in the middle) which have a bearing on achieving this. Customer satisfaction is regularly measured. In most areas on a scale 0 (worst) to 5 (best) answers are generally in the 4 to 5 range. Overall 4.3 is achieved, but some aspects like toilet cleanliness or luggage space score lower. When I think back - open platforms, wooden seats, long waits at crossing points, chronic unpunctuality on busy Saturdays, as it was even in the 1960s, we have all come a long way.

RhB – Coping with Events

What happens when, instead of the usual 3,200 daily average of passengers from Chur to St Moritz, some 14,500 turn up? This is a regular problem for the RhB, as events such as the Engadiner Ski Marathon can attract around 13,000 participants most of whom do not want to drive in the winter. The extreme load this year fell with the Ski World Championships. All passengers were allocated seats from Chur on regular and booked extra trains; these were distributed between Zürich and Landquart on the SBB trains. There are not only the extra passengers for the event, but of course the regulars plus normal winter visitors, so much tact and good humour, in several languages, are required. With far off memories of BR Western Region's regulation tickets to get to Cornwall in the 1950s, your correspondent is always amazed at how well it works. And, of course, another problem is that the RhB has to turn out anything with wheels to keep things moving. But at least the Preda-Spinas tunnel works are suspended in the winter season.

RhB - Bus Service

A new bus service: but a very special one. As part of its pattern of Bernina and Glacier Express services, the RhB has introduced from Easter 2017, until 2nd October 29, a luxury PostAuto service between Tirano and Lugano. Some 280,000 passengers annually use the Bernina Express service, many now making a day long outing, newly possible with the Gotthard Base Tunnel, by SBB between Zürich and Lugano, by PostAuto to Tirano and then via Chur back to Zürich.

BLS News

Some members may know the handsome old station building of the Spiez – Frutigen company that was bypassed when the Lötschberg line via Kandersteg was opened on 15th July 1913. It was a chalet at a small terminal station, some 200m from the present one, on the road to the village, its tracks still connected and electrified. As of March 2017 the preserved Ae8/8 No. 275 is stored there, and the Lötschberg centenary exhibition of rolling stock was held there. This building has again been renovated and is from spring 2017 to be the BLS Visitor Centre, also a point for visits to the Base Tunnel. Also on the BLS the Federal Transport Office (BAV) has approved CHF85m for the renovation, between 2020/2022, of the Weissenstein Tunnel on the Moutier - Solothurn line. This ends a long debate, and should secure the line's future for some 25 years.

Lugano

Readers are warned that SBB/FFS Lugano Paradiso station is closed during 2017 for complete rebuilding. CHF13m is being invested in raised platforms and a central footbridge, with lifts and improved access to the Lugano Monte San Salvatore Funicular. A replacement bus runs the 2km to the main Lugano station.

Rolling Stock News

- **MGB.** This metre-gauge operator came to a CHF23m agreement last December with Stadler for the supply of seven small locomotives. Four will be HGm2/2 diesel-electric rack and adhesion locos for infrastructure and track maintenance

work: two Tea2/2 electric shunting locos; and one Gm2/2 diesel-electric shunting loco. The Tea2/2s will be able to operate under battery power when off the catenary. The seven engines will share as many design elements and components as possible.

- **RhB.** It has been announced that all twelve of the RhB's Ge4/4 III locos (Nos.641-652) are to receive heavy overhauls in the next two years with No.644 being the first to enter the works. The cost of this exercise is some CHF10m. In addition to the necessary maintenance they will receive new safety and braking systems; equipment to make them capable of multiple operation; better headlights; whistles rather than horns; and (most importantly?) a large cantonal coat-of-arms on their fronts.

- **WSB.** The five new 3-car units ordered by this Canton Aargau operator from Stadler will apparently be some 20m longer than the company's current units at 60m overall. To avoid having to extend the length of its depots the design allows the company to split the units. WSB is to merge with the BDWM in 2019.

- **SBB.** Due to a combination of the need for fewer locos to work trains over the Gotthard route and the introduction of more efficient freight train planning some 20 Re4/4¹¹ engines have recently been placed into storage at Biberist. Another six locos are also stored at Full near Laufenberg.

- **SBB Cargo International.** New 'Vectron' locomotives on order for north-south transit traffic and will be certified for Germany, Austria, Italy and for Switzerland. The locomotives will be ordered by, and leased for 15 years from, a new company, Locrail Holding. This was formed in 2016 by Reichmuth Infrastruktur Schweiz AG, itself a holding of the private bank Reichmuth in Luzern. SBB Cargo International will act as technical partner for ordering, acceptance trials and general rail management.



One of the new hirings, 193 259, on a Swiss fuel tank train.

Photo: Mario Stefani

- **SBB Cargo International.** Misfortune has befallen No.189 282. Working a freight train near Dinslaken, Nord Rhein Westfalen (Germany), it collided at 02.36 on 12th January with a half-tonne automatic cash dispenser which had been stolen and, too difficult to break open, dumped on the railway to try it with a train. It worked, but engine and track

were heavily damaged, and the line was closed for over 5 hours. The loose banknotes were collected by the Police.

- **DB.** Two unusual 'guest units' were working in Switzerland in January and February. DB's ICE4 No. 9004 was on trial, mostly around Burgdorf, undertaking ETCS signal system trials. Two cars of the DB's new IC2 'Südwest' series were also on test, behind a Class 420, around Bern and Lausanne, with a view to their regular use between southern Germany and Switzerland in the future.

- **SBB.** Also on test in this period was RABe 502 203, (see picture in Spiez in SE 129) one of SBB's new Inter City units delivered by Bombardier and intended to enter service during 2017. Contradictory reports have been received as SBB's CEO Meyer considered that an entry in service in 2017 was not expected! Bombardier plan to deliver 23 complete trains this year. Watch this space.

- **BDB.** Like a Phoenix arising Ballenberg G3/4 No.208, heavily damaged in the 2014 Interlaken depot fire, is now overhauled; she should have run an inaugural service in Spring 2017 (date still awaited) by the time this is published.

- **Green engines?** Many readers will remember when Swiss engines, especially of the SBB, were brown or green. Many more colours have since appeared. According to the official lists, where most are shown as red, or in SBB Cargo livery, or have instantly unforgettable advertising colours, there were at 1.1.2017 still some survivors of the past. 420 161, 430 364 and 620 046 are still in original dark green, having survived a number of overhauls. 420 108 and 109 are still in original Swiss Express livery, orange/light grey. These once had the UIC's automatic couplings for the new tilting trains EW III, still in use on the BLS, but quickly lost them. Things can change quickly; 420 108 was unserviceable, and in January (as I warned in SE 129) SBB Cargo put into store 20 Re 420s as a result of the new wagonload service plan. These will not yet be scrapped, as the diversions with the rebuilding of the Cadenazzo-Luino line in 2018, may again provoke a power shortage.) Although many older engines still carry their former numbers, typically 111xx series or 116xx series (SBB), or 161 et-seq. (BLS) on plates or bodywork letters, these are now officially not valid; the entire stock is recorded under the standard international numbers, which we now normally use.

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from Michael Donovan, Jakob Jäger, Ron Smith, s'Murmeli, Glyn Jones, Ilkka Huotelin, and others. 



G3/4 208 Ballenberg now back in Service this summer after fire damage and rebuilding.