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Swiss News

A European crisis

As many were returning from summer holidays, the news broke. On Saturday 12th August, near Rastatt on the DB double-track mainline from Karlsruhe to Basel, the trackbed and rails sank into a hole resulting from a partial collapse of a new tunnel under the track. The new tunnel is part of the works to build a future underground four-track mainline at this location. Why the collapse occurred, was not an immediate issue. It was clear however that no trains would run, at first for two weeks, then four. On 24th August we learnt that the re-opening couldn't take place before 8th October. The ICE and regional passenger trains were stopped at once. There is a bus link between Baden-Baden and Rastatt, but passengers are warned of delays between 90 minutes and four hours. Freight trains also stopped, and that was, in a European context, dramatic. It is a Swiss crisis too. If there is one EU corridor which, for freight, really works, it is Rotterdam – Genova a route that embraces both the Lötschberg and Gotthard Base Tunnels. On the 14th August your correspondent was in Flüelen where one container train was 'at anchor' in the station and in a long day we saw no Gotthard freight trains at all. I learned that the Lötschberg, that normally operates at full capacity (and with the overflow going up to Kandersteg and the old route) was similarly still. All transalpine freights were at first held back, no cargo being accepted.

What it means is drastic. Some 200-freight-trains-a-day use the Rhein Valley route, mostly heavy intermodal and rolling highway. This has been a success for European policy, which also supports the Swiss legal obligation (the Alpen-Initiative) to get heavy loads off the Alpine Highways and onto rail. Competition between various rail operators is strong; much Northern Europe/Italian cargo has transferred from road to rail, especially on intermodal services. The traffic embraces two main components: deep-sea containers with overseas trade, mostly from Rotterdam, some from Antwerp, to and from Switzerland and Italy, plus a substantial share of inner-European EU trade across the Alps. The competing specialised operators have locomotives, personnel and rolling stock to handle their traffic, and use access time slots on the main lines.

All this stopped on 12th August. Of the trains normally using the DB Rhein Valley line, some 80/day run for SBB-Cargo. Around 20 are for BLS Cargo. HUPAC is a major user, and there are the private rail operators. Alternatives were few. Some BLS cargo has been routed through Alsace on the SNCF, which is a shareholder in BLS Cargo. BLS and HUPAC had at least the Rolling Highway trains between Freiburg-im-Breisgau and Novara, several trains daily, which were unaffected. An alternative, but capacity limited, route for Gotthard traffic is via Schaffhausen and Stuttgart, where DB was trying to move trains with an assortment of unusual motive power. Within two weeks, about half the cargo on offer was being handled on the various N-S corridors, but with inevitable delays and high costs, whilst some of it was going far to the east through Bavaria and over the Brenner Pass. For the usual level of business, locomotives and train crews cannot be provided; and in some cases the diversions required diesel locomotives. Train weights and lengths were restricted. The operators' own motive power and drivers are

also not generally licensed for alternative routes. Some cargo was re-routed by road; but again, forwarders who have committed to intermodal rail cannot, at short notice, mobilise fleets of European trucks and qualified drivers. The most valuable immediate help came from Rhein shipping; some 13% of Swiss foreign trade uses the Rhein ports at Basel, served by three container lines. They carry around 100,000 container units annually. Capacity was again scarce, and complicated by summer low water levels on the Rhein (meaning less load capacity). However, the container terminals have introduced 24-hour operation, and additional ships were chartered. South of Basel this will protect some rail traffic.

A top level meeting in late August brought SBB, BLS, DB and SNCF together to optimise emergency rail operations, but the reality is that for rail carriers, half the traffic must be refused, and much of the rest is only carried at heavy costs and with delays. The financial consequences cannot be estimated yet; SBB alone talked of a loss of CHF100m; but the losses of private rail operators, forwarders and industry may also be disastrous. They resorted to petitions and open letters to Governments complaining about the lack of alternative routes. In the meantime DB also has to bear its own loss for access charges and its own traffic, and also make good the damage. And this was in the holiday season; by September European trade with Italy had increased, yet observations during that month on the approaches to the Gotthard Base Tunnel showed no more than one or two trans-alpine freight services in each direction, daily. On the Lötschberg route none were seen during one half-day. Probably the Brenner Pass route was full of trains at the time. Time will tell, but after the line reopened on the 8th October, how much of the hard-won rail transit traffic can then be won back? The president of HUPAC, and whose own intermodal units are a familiar sight on the Swiss Alpine routes, has warned that this event will destroy trading confidence for a long time to come. Two immediate conclusions are being drawn. One is local Swiss; plans for a new Rhein Container Terminal for barge-rail-road transfer in northern Basel, already advanced, are likely (despite some right-wing political objections) to be pressed forward to give greater capacity. The other is more difficult: the present services for transalpine rail freight already suffer track and system capacity, despite the Base Tunnels; and the absence of diversionary routes in critical locations is known but was never so clearly demonstrated. It will be a long road back to normality.

SBB/BLS/SOB

During the summer a fierce debate was in progress on the attribution of new Concessions for long distance passenger traffic from 2020. The SBB have much to lose, the SOB is looking for chances to expand and the BLS still has ambitions of becoming a mainline operating company again. At the end of October the BAV decided to put off a decision on splitting-up the SBB long-distance services monopoly for 2 years. They did agree with the SOB proposal.

SOB: Zürich/Basel-Arth-Goldau-Gotthard Bergstrecke-Bellinzona-Lugano/Locarno; Bern-Burgdorf-Olten-Zürich-Ziegelbrücke-Sargans-Chur. This proposal would see the SOB operate these routes with its own rolling stock, but they would be marketed with the "co-branding" of SBB and SOB.

BLS: Operating RE services between: Bern-La Chaux de

Fonds; Bern-Biel; Bern-Olten. Also a handing-over of regional services: Neuchâtel-La Chaux de Fonds-Le Locle; Biel-La Chaux de Fonds, and Sonceboz-Moutier-Solothurn. This is a strange list as some of these services are already BLS operations, and Sonceboz-Solothurn was in their charge until recently. They are clearly not satisfied and in mid-September 2017 applied for concessions to independently operate from 2022 the routes: Basel-Bern-Interlaken, and Basel-Bern-Brig. For this they are offering substantial investment in new trains, with WiFi, catering, and on-train ticket sales. Clearly the dust will take a long time to settle. A further suggestion from SBB, which BLS has greeted, is to rationalise workshop capacity, whereby it may save itself the cost of the newly planned Depot at Chliforst west of Bern.

The 'Kursbuch' lives on.

Following the decision of the SBB, supported by the Federal Office of Transport, that the 2017 edition of the Kursbuch, that was published for the December 2016 timetable change, would be the last it now appears that a printed version of a Swiss transport timetable for 2018 will appear in December 2017. This 'pseudo-Kursbuch' is being produced by VCS (Verkehrs Club Schweiz) and Pro Bahn - both lobby groups for public transport. The initiative came from Hans Meiner, one of the pioneers of the Taktfahrplan, who after retiring from SBB became Vice President of the IGöV, an interest group for public transport. In this role he gained the support of SBB for the new Kursbuch. It will be on sale at main stations. The new printed timetable is to be one-volume only - trains, boats and mountain access transport - with the two bus volumes having been dropped. It will sell at a cost of CHF19. Many Swiss, and not just regular travellers, lamented the demise of the Kursbuch and this initiative stems from this fund of potential public support. Although the SBB has a comprehensive website in place like many of its ilk it is not as user-friendly as it could be, and many potential travellers do not have the means to access it. The return of a printed timetable is therefore to be welcomed. Let us hope that it is successful.

SBB-Gotthard Route.

The SBB has now announced measures to reduce the maintenance costs of the old 'mountain route'. In future maintenance will not be preventive, but 'curative', that means taking action when something is needed. The speed limit in the summit tunnel has been reduced from 140kph to 120kph whilst 106 sets of points have been taken out of service and clamped. Double-track will remain for the moment, but crossovers remain only at Gurtellen, Göschenen, Airolo and Lavorgo. A separate problem is a threatened collapse of a retaining wall, also carrying a Cantonal road, near Amsteg. Since February 2017 single-line working on the outer (river side) track has been in force. This was extended until October, and a long-term solution to the problem had not yet been solved at the time of writing. Between Göschenen and Airolo certain loading gauge restrictions on freight traffic have been applied since April 2017 for a combination of technical reasons. In addition to all of this the change in passenger service provision on the old 'mountain route' has resulted in an 8% fall in traffic on the MGB's 'Schöllenenbahn', between Göschenen and Andermatt (now reported as down to an average of 950 passengers/day) in the first half of this year. Prior to the changes on the old route traffic on this line had apparently already been on a downward trend. Also during

this time period the SBB reports that the number of passengers traversing the tunnel section of the 'mountain route' has unsurprisingly reduced to around 500/day, probably all of them tourists. It is assumed that this figure is just for the hourly RE service operated by the TILO 170+ seat 4-car FLIRT EMUs. This is an average of 20 people/train. Given that most will be tourists travelling in the middle of the day many services must be running empty! Hopefully the summer-only, once daily, 'Gotthard Panorama Express' will carry more. There is little local economical activity between Canton Uri's Upper Reuss valley and the Ticino's Valle Leventina south of the Alpine Massive as these low passenger loadings indicate. These substantial reductions in traffic must raise questions regarding the long-term future of both these operations in a Switzerland that is becoming much more cost-conscious regarding its transport operations. Although this substantial shortfall in through passenger numbers must be of concern to the operators there has been an increase in the number of freight trains using the old route since June 2017. This is partly due to a decision to ban all open freight wagons carrying loose materials from the Gotthard Base Tunnel. The ban has been prompted by concerns over the level of dust that has been causing problems in the new facility. CCTV recording has shown that the combination of high speeds and the restricted clearance has been 'sucking-out' fine particulates from the open wagons. Only a change to carrying such materials in fully enclosed rolling stock will put paid to this unforeseen operating problem. The 'mountain route' is required as a viable alternative corridor should operating problems or capacity constraints affect the new base tunnel, but the cost of its day-to-day operations must be a headache for the SBB and the Federal Office of Transport. Expect further changes.

Monte Ceneri Base Tunnel.

We now have a provisional schedule for the opening of this base tunnel, which is the key to the Gotthard Base Tunnel's full service line improvements. Current plans indicate that between 2017 and August 2019 will see the completion of the tunnel, installation of rail equipment, and the commencement of the approval process. Then between spring and autumn 2019 trial running will commence leading to the official opening and handover to SBB in September 2020, with public services starting at the 13th December 2020 timetable change. As with all major projects these dates are not fixed in stone.

Chemins de fer du Jura.

Unit Bef 4/4 No.641, a heavy railcar used on freight services, has been scrapped. This, one of many second-hand units profitably used by CJ, was originally ABe4/4 No.487 of the RhB and ran on the Arosa line in its 1500V dc power supply days.

DB wins Swiss Contract

It was announced in September that DB Regio had, following a competitive tender, won a six-year contract from Baden-Württemberg and Canton Schaffhausen to exclusively operate cross-border services between Singen and Schaffhausen. The route was previously operated jointly by DB and SBB subsidiary Turbo. The new contract commences with the December 2017 timetable change and will be operated by DB Class 426 EMUs.

Grimselbahn?

We reported on the project of a metre-gauge tunnel under the Grimsel Pass, forming a through narrow gauge connection between Zentralbahn at Meiringen and MGB at Oberwald. This proposal would have used a tunnel required for a new 380 Kw power supply cable forming part of the Swiss grid. Whether such a rail project would be useful, or operationally feasible, was not clear but it is now irrelevant. A weak market for electricity has led Swissgrid to delay a decision on the need for the link until at least 2027.

"Caspar Honegger" meets Nicholas Riggibach on the Rigibahn.

12th August 2017 marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of rack railway pioneer Nicholas Riggibach and to mark the occasion the Rigibahn AG held a special event at their Arth Goldau station. In addition to steaming their historic rack steam loco No.17 they were pleased to welcome "Caspar Honegger" an 1877-built engine from the Internationale Gesellschaft für Bergbahnen, later Maschinenfabrik Aarau, the company founded by Nicholas Riggibach. Originally built for Textilmaschinenfabrik Rütli "Caspar Honegger" is the last remaining loco to have come out of the Aarau works and is today owned by Serge Bourguinet, who also owns preserved Ae4/7 No.10997. The visiting loco together with RB No.17, and helped by ARB electric railcar No.6, made the return trip from Arth Goldau thanks to Martin Horath and the Rigibahnen team, along with the Stiftung Rigi Historic under whose protection they operated. As will be seen in Mario Gavazzi's photo, a wooden statue of Riggibach also turned up to ride on this special trip.



Glacier Express – The beginning of the end?

The Glacier Express operation, arguably one of Switzerland's premier tourist operations, has been attracting fewer passengers each year with numbers down from 260,000 in 2008 to 188,000 in 2015. This fall in customers of over 20% has also been matched by a poor financial performance. There are many reasons for the decline in passengers. These include: the increased cost of the trip for incoming tourists due to the strength of the Swiss Franc as the trip is now seen as being very expensive; the reluctance of modern-day tourists to spend a full 8-hours just sitting in one seat watching the world (with no glaciers in sight!) go by; a perceived reduction in the standards of catering; etc. In the past European and North American tourists in the country for a week or more used to accept the long journey more readily than the influx

of Asian and Far Eastern visitors, who seem reluctant to spend a whole day of their short (usually only 2 or 3 days) scheduled time in Switzerland experiencing just one item on their 'must-do' list.

In an effort to address the falling numbers and revenue the operators (RhB and MGB) announced in August the formation of a jointly owned subsidiary Glacier Express AG, to be based in Andermatt, and charged with 'refreshing' the product. The number of summer return journeys over the whole line will be reduced to two, whilst to cover the core 'mountain' section there will be daily St Moritz-Brig and Zermatt-Chur workings. Two of the Chur-St Moritz workings will be dedicated Glacier Express trains, the other will be stock attached to a Regional Express working. This schedule will require six rakes of coaches. It appears that Andermatt is to be promoted as a destination for travellers from either end, to either terminate their journey there, or use the connection to the Gotthard route at Göschenen to travel to Luzern or Zürich. The new short workings will also allow tour companies to offer curtailed trips linked into road transport operations that will return their clients to their hotels rather than have the hassle of taking their luggage on the long trip. The new operation is also to be targeted at getting the Swiss to return to use, at least a segment, of the service. Currently the Swiss are normally conspicuous by their absence.

Two of the current coaches are to be reconfigured into a new, more expensive, "Excellence Class". One wonders why, if the current fare is seen to be prohibitive? The current First Class accommodation is also to be upgraded to make it more distinctive than Second Class, and this too is to be 'refreshed'. Finally they are going to experiment with a photo stop at Nätschen, a station that is currently being rebuilt with extra platform faces and an underpass. This will simply add to the extended journey time. Who knows if this strategy will work? Canny travellers already use the local service, which is cheaper and less crowded, rolling stock often still has opening windows, and allows a more 'Swiss' experience as these trains are used by the local residents. The up-side of the changes is that there will be more paths on the route for these standard service trains. Seasoned railway observers believe that within a few years just one notional through train a day will be all that remains of the main operation and curtailed rides on a Brig-Chur 'Glacier Express Shuttle' will cope with remaining day trip tourists. "Sic transit gloria mundi!"

CMN/TRN.

This delightful little 4km long metre-gauge line between Le Locle and Les Brenets was summarily closed until further notice by the BAV on 28th July 2017. The elderly Italian-built railcars BDe4/4 Nos.3 and 5 (dating from 1950) had suffered three broken axles, and one derailment, during the earlier part of this summer and inevitably the Federal Transport Authority intervened. Two similar vehicles (Nos.2 & 4) operate works trains on the operator's line to Ponts de Martel. What will happen now is uncertain. *Swiss Express* has reported plans to replace the metre-gauge vehicles, and even rebuild the line to standard gauge, but now your correspondent wouldn't be too sure of its long-term future. There is a replacement bus service, but it takes longer and the winter weather up in the Jura near the French frontier is hard and can result in problems on local roads. There is a photo of No.5 on P25 of the September magazine.

PostAuto's Scottish Buses.

On 20th May a new double-deck PostAuto was put in service in the St Gallen region. It was supplied by Alexander Dennis Ltd of Falkirk, Scotland, and as far as is known a first for Switzerland. It is the precursor of some 19 such buses ordered from this UK builder, each one costing CHF 600,000. PostAuto's previous double-decker buses were built by Neoplan or MAN, but both of these German companies have now withdrawn from this sector of the market. Alexander Dennis (your correspondent knew Dennis lorries a long time ago in Britain, and they still built splendid fire engines) is now Britain's biggest bus constructor, and also builds for Asian customers.

News from the Graubünden.

RhB 1 - New Albula Tunnel. This is a long job, but it seems to be on course. News on progress (some from RhB Headquarters) is that over 2,000m have now been bored. On the Preda side, the 1,190m to the 'cavern', which is in an area of difficult and fracturing rock, should have been completed in September, while the drilling on the Spinis side in the granite Albula Massive had almost reached 1,000m. This leaves still 3.5 km to be bored. The winter season demands that work is suspended to resume, snow permitting, in April. Additionally, a deteriorating stone bridge at Spinis over the Bever river has been replaced by a new and realigned steel and concrete structure, all of course in conformity with the UNESCO world heritage rules. Thanks to SRS member John Davis for this information.

RhB 2 - St Moritz Station. A great celebration, on August 26, marked in best Swiss style (bands, speeches, Apéro, public festival and rolling stock exhibition) the completion of the new St Moritz station. The renewal cost was CHF66m and embraces subways, the station approach and a new bus terminal. There are now five platforms, covered ways to the buses, and special waiting area for coach parties in connection with the Glacier Express. With clearance of former sidings and yard tracks, space becomes available for redevelopment, which will support the role of the station in St Moritz. As with the Albula Tunnel project the UNESCO World Heritage recognition of the Albula and Bernina lines means that great care has to be taken to protect both the quality and the 'environmental atmosphere' in order to support local recognition of the UNESCO status.

RhB 3 - An Icon disappears. What the railwaymen called a "Mohrenkopf" (*), or UC-Class silo tank on a two-axle flat car is no more. The RhB once had 100 of these. Really the end was in 2016, but a few were in infrastructure maintenance - the last four in Thusis. Now it's all over. They were built between 1954-69, at first to deliver 1.25m tonnes of cement and concrete to the Albigna Dam project in the Val Livigno, in full trainloads from the Untervaz works near Landquart. More projects followed, last of all delivering material to the Sedrun access point for the Gotthard Base Tunnel. Even today the RhB has no shortage of cement transport contracts, but these are now handled in intermodal tank containers mounted on conventional flat cars. (* "Mohrenkopf" - what the Swiss call that dome shaped marsh-mallow cake coated in chocolate. The English literal translation is not today admissible!)

Remisenfest Hochdorf – 2017

On the 2nd/3rd September the association Historische Seethalbahn (www.historische-seethalbahn.ch) organised

its annual two special days at Hochdorf on the SBB's Seethalbahn. Every year a new programme is put together by the committee and numerous volunteers. This year the two resident steam locomotives operated special trains between Hochdorf and Eschenbach and Hitzkirch and in addition Dampfbahn Bern organised a special train with their Eb 3/5 No.5810 'Habersack'. As always the preserved Seethal-Crocodile De 6/6 No.15301 was the star-of-the-show. Additionally a special exhibition was organised by model train operators.



Mario Gavazzi's photo shows Eb 3/5 No.5810 "Habersack" of Dampf-Bahn-Bern at Hochdorf.

Post-2030 Network Planning.

SBB's long-term planning for the period 2030/35 is in full progress, based on the premise that the railway is a means of mass transportation. Services are being developed along the routes where overloading is already threatening such as: Genève-Lausanne-Yverdon; Bern-Thun; Olten-Zürich-Winterthur; Zürich-Luzern, or can be forecast. The standard service is to be every 30 minutes, with every 15-minutes on the busiest routes. The future priority will not be on shorter journey times, but upon frequency and capacity. An example is the use of 'Category N' equipment (the Class 500 tilting trains); as these reach economic life expiry this category will disappear, meaning lower speeds on the Jura line, but allowing high capacity double-deck trains and a better harmonisation of freight and passenger schedules. Little-used halts on main lines will be closed, not for cost reasons but because they reduce system capacity. It is clear that this work is still only a master plan matrix; it incorporates presently known infrastructure improvements, but others may follow, or even obtain priority within the planning process. Solving congestion at Luzern is an example, as is the Lötschberg base tunnel double-track. Detailed timetable consultations between rail providers and Cantons are far down the road, but the basic precepts are clear, and will also determine further infrastructure and rolling-stock investments.

Stadler Progresses their 'Giruno'.

In *Swiss Express No.131* we showed a photograph of the new 'Giruno' InterCity EMU RABe 501 001 travelling through Spiez during its first trials. Stadler tell us that on 2nd July it traversed the Gotthard Base Tunnel (the route for which it is intended) for the first time. Apparently all was well on these trial runs and it has moved to the UIC test circuit at Velim in the Czech Republic, to undergo a comprehensive series of tests prior to further trials in Germany, Italy and Austria, where it is intended that the class will also run. This

pre-operational process is long and sometimes laborious, but it leads in the end to the sought-after acceptance for regular services. SBB's chosen name 'Giruno' is, by-the-way, taken from Rhaeto-Romansch, and derives from a dialect expression for a variety of buzzard. Apparently Stadler has now named the type of train in its publicity as SMILE. Like its FLIRT and KISS type names this too is an acronym; Schneller Mehrsystemfähiger Innovativer Leichter Expresszug (Faster Multi-voltage Innovative Light Express). Someone at Bussnang has too much time to spare!

One new feature of the 'Giruna' EMU is that the coaches each side of the restaurant car (i.e. one for first class and one for second) have two doors set at different heights. This is to allow access for the mobility impaired from different height platforms that might be encountered on its international journeys. On 28th October 501 002, without seats but full of electronic equipment and sandbags, was seen at Martigny on test runs between Lausanne and Brig.

Bern Hbf.

Starting from the middle of this year, and until 2025, passengers at this, one of Switzerland's busiest stations, will have to share it with the construction industry. The main subway will be reconstructed, as will new platforms together with the existing ones being lifted to the current Swiss standard height of 55cm. In addition to all this work on the 'main line' operational side a new underground station for the RBS is also being constructed.

Appenzellerbahnen.

The line between St Gallen and Teufen, en-route to Appenzell, will be closed between April and October 2018 for its conversion to tram operation, and to implement the connections to the new Ruckhaldetunnel. In St Gallen the lines of the original AB and the Trogenbahn have now been connected and use two platforms at St Gallen Hbf, with part of the old SGA station becoming a parking area. A further project in St Gallen involving the line to Taufen is to return it in 2020-2021 to the former alignment that it used, prior to 1901. At this time the SGA line was moved to the south to accommodate a new freight terminal adjacent to the main line together with a set of standard gauge tracks to serve this. The old freight buildings and some of the standard gauge tracks are now to go, with the old SGA (AB) lines reinstated on the original straighter alignment. The redevelopment will involve construction of major new buildings and a new AB station located prior to the mouth of the Ruckhaldetunnel to serve the City's new quarter. Finally, in July the people of Trogen were introduced to the proposals for the development of a new station in their community.

Zentralbahn Major Works.

During 2018 an 8-week closure between Interlaken and Brienz is planned. The dates are yet to be fixed. Ten tunnels and eleven over bridges are to be completely renovated, along with essential work on the drainage, track and catenary at a cost of some CHF50m. This section of the Brünigbahn was the last to be completed in 1915, prior to which (from 1889) the Brünig line was connected to Interlaken by steamer. The route occupies a splendid site along the north shore of Lake Brienz. The tunnels and bridges were built to a loading gauge allowing standard gauge wagons on metre-gauge transporters to be hauled, something that later would become a substantial source of business following the construction of the

Meiringen-Innertkirchen Bahn, completed in 1926. This was built as an industrial line to serve the Bernese Electricity Generation Company's new installation at Innertkirchen bringing all its constructional materials and generating equipment by rail from Interlaken. Until recently, the aviation fuel for the Swiss Air Force base at Meiringen also came by bulk tank wagons on metre-gauge transporters to Meiringen. Today under the guidance of the Zentralbahn the line enjoys a heavy passenger traffic, both local and tourist. Unfortunately, the land on the north side of Lake Brienz is quite unstable and is notorious for land and rock slides. These conditions are steadily being made worse as a consequence of various aspects of climate change. No doubt a good replacement bus service will be put in place, but it would be an interesting exercise to also add a high-speed boat service to replicate the original operation.

New MOB/TPF Station.

Work commenced in July on the reconstruction of the junction station at Montbovon where the MOB main line connects with the TPF's metre-gauge line from Bulle. The work, due to be completed by December 2018, includes extending the platforms up to some 250m in length, providing access subways; improving provision for the mobility impaired and a general upgrade of other facilities. The station currently handles over 290,000 passengers annually, and the CHF32m improvement is also aimed at the introduction of longer 'Goldenpass Express' train formations. A new TPF Depot is to be included in the project and this will have the provision to house vehicles from GFM Historic.

MGB.

In mid-September another accident in Andermatt caused concern. A locomotive arriving on a passenger train from Disentis, was to run-around the stock to return to Disentis, a manoeuvre carried out throughout the world of railways. Having uncoupled from the train, it pulled forward and stopped waiting to reverse when the road was set. The driver then reversed - but the road was not set and the locomotive ran back into the coaches it had just left. Some physical damage and around 30 slightly injured passengers resulted. This, the latest in a series of shunting accidents in Andermatt this year, is now prompting questions from the BAV and others.

Jungfraubahn Group.

This organisation saw a successful start to 2017. In the first half-year passengers to Jungfraujoch increased by almost 25% up to 464,000. Overall the group's half-year profit increased by 17% to a best-ever CHF17m, a success put down to a sharp increase in Asian tourists.

Never Say Never.

The short former BLS (and others previously) branch from Sumiswald-Grünen to Wasen im Emmental was closed to all traffic 8-years ago. This was after the public passenger service closed in 1994. Although the basic infrastructure remained in place it was always thought to be problematical that any trains would run again. However, on 10th June 2017 steam trains of the Emmental Bahn/Dampfbahn Bern ran for the first time, and it is hoped to run monthly specials next summer.

Back Home.

After 48 active years on the Aigle-Ollon-Monthey-Bahn (as their No.112) and the Atterseebahn in Austria, the original

Sernftalbahn motor coach BDe 4/4 No.5 returned home on 25th July 2017, thanks to the Association Sernftalbahn. Prior to its journey to Switzerland No.5 had travelled to Romania to undergo external and cosmetic restoration. Our correspondent Ernst B. Leutwiler was the founder of this group that is dedicated to preserving the memory, and many artifacts, of this local railway that sadly was closed to enable road improvements in 1969. No.5 has joined its companion unit No.6 outside the Association's museum at Elm(GL). This can be reached by bus from Schwanden on the SBB's Glarnerland line.



SeTB BDe 4/4 No.5, passing through the narrow village of Matt.
Photo: Ernst B Leutwiler

Eurovapor C5/6 No.2969.

Another restoration success. By the time this edition of Swiss Express reaches you the C5/6 'Elephant' (2-10-0) steam engine No.2969, which has been over 20 years as a rescue project, will hopefully have made a triumphant double-headed trip on 21st/22nd October, coupled to SBB Historic's similar C5/6 No.2978 over the old Gotthard from Erstfeld to Bellinzona and back. It deserves a longer note, for in 2013 the chassis and mechanism were caught, after restoration, in the disastrous workshop fire of the Ballenberg railway in Interlaken. Getting back on course required some heroic efforts as well as solid finance. Although your correspondent cannot be present, perhaps a member of the SRS was there and may be able to report on the event.

Stadler Rail.

CEO Peter Spuhler retires in early 2018, while maintaining his Chairmanship of the Board. Peter Spuhler (58) bought the traditional Thurgauer engineering company Stadler in 1987, when it had 18 employees and built specialised equipment for mines and quarries. Stadler is now 75 years old, and employs 7,000 with Spuhler still owning 80% of the share capital. Thirty years ago the Swiss rail rolling stock industry, formerly dominated by SLM in Winterthur and smaller builders, was breaking down, but demand for new generations of passenger trains was potentially high. Stadler's remarkable success results from developing new concepts, light, fast and robust, at first for local services and then, with the 'Flirt' modular construction, expanding into national and export markets. After these came new trams and, more recently, high-speed and double-deck Inter-City trains, as well as bespoke trains for narrow gauge lines and mountain railways, including small-series orders. In what was long regarded as a declining business, Stadler became very competitive, not only on cost but with delivery dates and reliability. Spuhler has undoubtedly also set the highest standards for customer service and partnership. When the stronger Swiss Franc threatened exports and margins in 2011

Spuhler, after 13-years in the lower house of the Swiss parliament, resigned his seat to see Stadler successfully through the challenge. The company continued to expand profitably, with 4,000 employees in factories abroad and with a still growing presence in Switzerland. As SE has reported, it is now building trains for the UK and has a major project in California. Spuhler, as Chairman of the Board, will now take responsibility for strategy, joint ventures and mergers, and for tendering on major projects. His successor as CEO will be Thomas Ahlburg, at present his

Deputy.

Summer Events.

It is unfortunate that many Swiss transport organisations do not give sufficient advance notice of potentially interesting events that are organised for specific anniversaries, and to bring-in additional visitors to their operations and the communities that they serve. On the weekend of the 2nd/3rd September the MOB line from Lenk to Zweisimmen hosted steam operations that formed part of a local festival highlighting the music, food, crafts and culture of the region. Also on offer were cab rides in a new MOB locomotive between Lenk and St Stephan and a miniature railway operation. On the MVR's Montreux-Les - Rochers-de-Naye line they were celebrating the 125th anniversary of the opening of the route between Glion and the summit. This comprised the operation, over the whole route, of two 'Belle-Epoque' return trips daily, between 3rd July and 3rd September and over weekends, between the 9th September and 1st October. In good weather the use of the open-sided historic coach BC16 was scheduled, as was the use of 1909-built HGe2/2 No.2. If any members sampled any of these trips please send us details and photographs.

Interlaken – back to the red flag?

Many readers know how the line between Interlaken West and East winds across the River Aare and through the houses of Interlaken and Unterseen. The convoluted route is a reminder of the first railway here, the Bödelibahn of 1874, built when the land was still open. The level crossing on the bridge to Unterseen is especially constricted. Twice in early July cars locked in a traffic jam were caught here on the crossing when the barriers came down. One vehicle was demolished after the passengers had fled, the other escaped unscathed as the train stopped some 20m away on the western side. The locals accepted it stoically – *'it's the tourists from the Middle East in hired cars – they've never seen a level crossing before'* was one resident's remark. Perhaps so, but the problem is not trivial, for although trains run slowly through some visibility is restricted and steel wheels do not pull-up easily on steel rails, especially when they are wet. Perhaps it really should be back to the red flag – for drivers!

Misplaced Photograph.

Sharp-eyed member Adrian Friend has noticed that in the brochure he recently received from tour operator 'Great Rail Journeys' the photo accompanying the description of a winter rail trip through Norway was of a double-headed Rhätische Bahn train over the Bernina Pass! 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from SRS members and other sources.