

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2017)
Heft: 131

Buchbesprechung: Swiss tram and trolleybus systems : past and present [Martin Fisher, Neil Wheelwright]

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Swiss Tram and Trolleybus Systems - Past and Present

Authors: Martin Fisher and Neil Wheelwright.

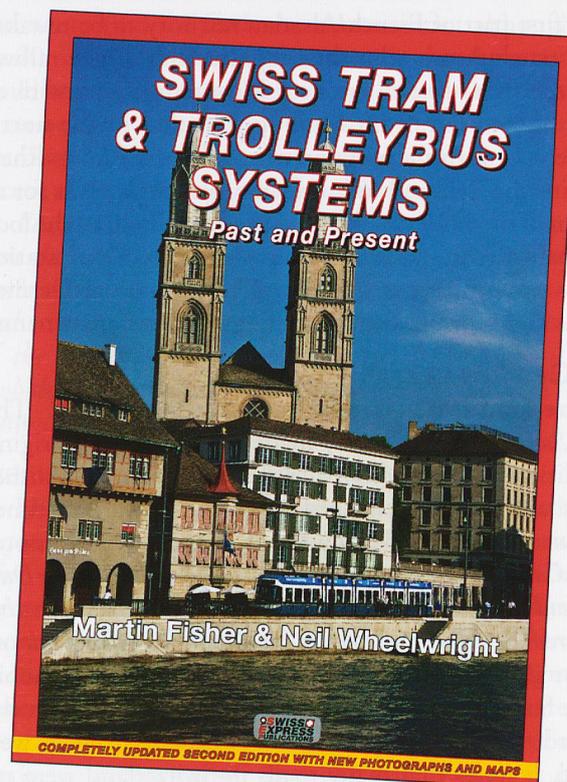
Published by: Swiss Express Publications.

ISBN: 978-0-9926812 -7-2.

104 pages and approx. 380 colour photographs.

Price £14.50 – including postage – from SRS Sales.

Due to severe space constraints in the June edition of *Swiss Express* our review of this fully revised edition of Martin and Neil's book, that includes many more excellent photographs, did not feature an image of its cover. For those who missed this we have included it here. 



And finally...

Switzerland - A Different Country. A Change of Address

Der Beobachter

One of our members, an Anglo-Swiss, recently moved across the River Aare from one side of the valley to the other, a distance as the crow flies of some 4km. You can easily see one village from the other; they share a common boundary, the river, and are in the same canton, Aargau. Although he has been resident in Switzerland for many years he had not realised the consequences that such an apparently simple move can result in.

Suddenly he lives in a historically Protestant (Swiss Reformed Church) area, whereas for the last 31 years he has lived in a historically Roman Catholic community. This may sound irrelevant to the vast majority of people he grew up with in England where one's religion – or lack of it – barely affects their way of life. However, even if people are not regular churchgoers, in Switzerland it affects many aspects of local life and attitudes. For example clubs and societies can be affiliated to different governing bodies depending on the local religious affiliation. Football teams can play in different leagues. Even the list of candidates for the forthcoming cantonal elections is different, as to some extent these can also follow the religious tendencies of the area in which the politicians are standing, and also the voting affiliations can differ. He no longer receives the same edition of the regional daily paper, as he has moved politically and to some extent economically – in just 4km - from the Baden area to the Brugg area. To make matters worse, for the first time in his 68 years he no longer lives in a community with a railway station and is fully dependent on the PostAuto getting him to the mainline station of Brugg.

Moving less than 3 miles in the same English county could put one in a different political area, but the other subtle changes that our friend is experiencing would not be present. Also in many English villages these days the residents would rejoice in his frequent bus service. However, he is pleased that there are some good points with his cross-river move. The new neighbours have been very welcoming; the local wine is just as good this side of the Aare and, very positive, local taxes are some 10% lower. This latter point may be a surprise to residents in the UK where we live in one of the most centrally controlled states (especially financially) in Europe, but in Switzerland the level of income tax you pay is determined (within certain parameters) by your Gemeinde/Commune. The Swiss equivalents of our Parish Councils determine what they need to spend and set taxes accordingly. An example of this financial independence from Central Government is that in Aargau the cantonal government changed the accounting rules that the local communities have to apply to depreciate assets e.g. buildings, equipment, etc. from 2017. Assets need to be depreciated over fewer years than before. This, coupled with the need for more investment in essential services, has forced local communities to have to go to the residents and propose local tax increases. In our colleague's new village it amounted to an increase of 6.5% on local taxes. At the annual public budget meeting, the Gemeinde explained why this was necessary and, after a little discussion, it was approved. In looking through the regional newspaper it appears that in no community residents have turned down a reasoned request for a tax increase. 