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Swiss Railways Organisational Changes.

Neil Wheelwright



This view of Aigle in 2007 shows the three different liveries that existed then.

Photo: Paul Sanderson

In a follow-up to my article (*Swiss Express* No.131 – September 2017) on some of the less noticeable changes taking place on Swiss railways, a couple of articles in recent copies of the *Schweizer Eisenbahn Revue* caught my eye reminding me of the significant organisational changes taking place.

However, firstly, some statistics to add to my previous article:-

	1982	2016	Increase
Swiss population	6.4 million	8.4million	31%
Passenger Km (billions)	10.31	20.39	98%
Passenger km per route km	2.02 million	3.83 million	88%

The amazing increase in train frequency and through routes can be seen from comparing the timetable graphics for the two years – especially for the Zürich area. These can be found at - <http://www.sma-partner.com/de/ueber-sma/downloads>

The specific article that triggered my interest concerned Canton Argau placing the BDWM (now only the Brem-

garten-Dietikon railway – which will also be the operator of the Limmatalbahn once completed) and the WSB (Wynental und Suhrental Bahn) into a single company. Previously, we have also seen the EBT group (itself a combination of several previously separate companies) merged with the BLS (although without its long distance services) to, effectively, become Canton Bern's 'State' railway. When I first visited

Switzerland in the early 80s, the Appenzellerbahn (AB) and St Gallen Gais Appenzell Bahn (SGA) were under common management, but separate entities 'on the ground'. This grouping has now been expanded into the Appenzeller Bahnen, which includes the Trogenerbahn (which makes sense given the planned cross-St Gallen service), the Rheineck-Walzenhausen Bahn and the Rorschach Heiden Bahn, giving a single railway company for the Appenzell half-cantons. It also manages the nearby Frauenfeld-Wil Bahn.

The post-merger position at St Gallen, Appenzeller Bahnen (ex Trogenerbahn) Be4/8 No. 35 and (ex Appenzeller Bahn) BDeh4/4 No. 12 on the right. The AB platforms here are being rebuilt to create a through station.

Photos: by Neil Wheelwright except where shown



To my mind the oddest of these merger-manifestations has been the creation of TRAVYS (Transports Vallée-de-Joux - Yverdon-les-Bains - Sainte-Croix), which combines the standard gauge Vallee de Joux, the standard gauge, but DC operated Orbe-Chavornay (possibly to be converted to Swiss standard electrification for through services to Lausanne), and the Yverdon-St Croix metre-gauge line, plus the Yverdon bus company. Three more disparate railways would be hard to find! Some changes have been more subtle. The Transports Public du Chablais (TPC) has long managed the narrow gauge lines operating out of Aigle, plus the BVB from Bex, although this has now become a much more combined operation with a common livery, new common rack standards and a common electrification voltage for the Aigle lines. Just to the west, the MOB group became the MVR (Transports Montreux-Vevay-Riviera) including the CEV (Chemins de fer électriques veveysans), the MGN (Chemin de fer Montreux-Glion-Rochers de Naye) and some funiculars, although the identity of the operations has so far remained separate (except for the CEV and Montreux 'suburban' service) albeit with some commonality of livery.

Other changes can be seen in the BAM (Bière - Apples - Morges) becoming part of Transports de la région Morges-Bière-Cossonay (MBC), which includes a bus company and the funicular at Cossonay. Similarly, the TMR Transports de Martigny et Régions owned 43% by town and 42% by Canton Wallis consists of the Martigny-Orsières and Martigny-Châtelard railways and includes bus and trucking services. Before anyone thinks this is a Francophone trend, we should add that the 750mm gauge Waldenburgerbahn (WB) has been merged with Baselland Transport (BLT) - and the information about the WB's metre-gauge rebuilding project clearly emphasises 'Zusammenarbeit mit Gemeinden/ Kanton/ Bund', the cooperation with the communities, the Canton and the Government.

Why the changes? The cantons now distribute the subsidies to local transport, whether locally raised, or from central government as its agents. This has given them an even greater interest in trying to reduce costs especially at a management and administration 'back office' level, as has long been the case in merged 'parallel' commercial organisations.

Orbe station with Travys (ex Orbe-Chavornay) Be2/2 No. 14 with Travys branding and ex-OC De2/2 of 1902.



Travys (ex Orbe Chavornay) shunting loco Ee2/2 No. 2 in Orbe showing old and new branding.



Travel integration at Orbe, with Travys (ex Orbe-Chavornay) Be2/2 No. 14 with Travys branding, Travys bus and ex-OC De2/2 of 1902 still with only OC marking.

They now also have a greater interest in pushing towards some common purchasing decisions. However, before anyone thinks that this will reduce the variety of rolling stock to be seen, they should remember the 1980s when many






narrow-gauge systems were dominated by the then standard design of unit built in the late 1950s and 1960s. Also in the Romande many railway companies were already making combined orders, especially in the days of 'Vevey' manufactured stock. More recently this has been the case with the new Stadler produced units. I suspect that the cantonal authorities also prefer to deal with as few organisations as possible, so providing a single 'private' railway company in their area saves time and effort. On the subject of cantonal interventions, I've also seen an article

about a report from the BAV (Bundesamt für Verkehr – the Swiss Federal Office of Transport) that noted the complexities in the Swiss fares system (have they seen ours?), caused by the various Tariff areas having different rules (e.g., age limits, definition of 'day tickets') and sometimes making travel beyond the boundaries more complex than necessary.

I can only see more 'mergers' coming, in an attempt to simplify and reduce the costs, of local transport. That said, the merger in the early '2000s' of the SOB and BT into the 'New SOB' seems to have been a more commercial decision than a political one (unless anyone knows differently) and this once-local organisation is now flexing its

muscles on the Swiss national scene. This is also the case with Bern's, canton owned, BLS. As an aside, the RhB, already long-seen as Canton Graubunden's 'State Railway', is using the refurbishment of the newest locos to include the addition of the cantonal crest to their front panels. A nice touch, but perhaps a subtle political statement as to who pays the bills. Given that it is metre-gauge there is little possibility that this large operating organisation will, like the SOB and BLS, seek to become an across-the-board operator in Switzerland, challenging the SBB! 

1. TPC (ex-AOMC) Bt 532 in new TPC livery, ex-AOMC Bt 132 still in AOMC red and ex-ASD BDe4/4 No. 403 in the bay platforms at Aigle.

2. MBC, ex-SBB Re4/4II No. 420506 awaiting its next duty at Morges and is an example of a minor railway expanding into areas competing with the SBB. The green livery is derived from the MBC predecessor, the BAM.

3. An older Appenzellerbahn train at Herisau headed by ABDe4/4 No. 41.

Photo: courtesy of Bristol LMS Society

4. Stock in two old BAM liveries at Apples on 12th September 2009.

Photo: Mark Barber