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Swiss News

RhB- Urgent note about change of closure.

The closure for the period between March 2018-2019, with substitute buses, between Scuol and Saglains (announced in *Swiss Express No.133*) has now been revised to be 12 months later, starting March 2019. Whether this reflects an error, or a reprogramming for whatever reason, we do not know; the announcement was carried in several Swiss publications.

SBB/CFF major closure.

In March we learned that from 7th July to 26th August the SBB/CFF Puidoux-Chexbres – Lausanne line (the famous descent through the vineyards overlooking Le Léman) is to be closed for tunnel reconstruction and track realignment. The services to and from Zürich and beyond will reverse in Fribourg; shuttle services will operate at half-hourly intervals from Fribourg to Puidoux and then Vevey, reversing again to reach Lausanne. An alternative route to Genève is over the Jura line via Neuchâtel. It is probable that this will affect many SRS members on their summer holidays, especially if they are using Genève airport.

Severe weather causes havoc.

Severe north-westerly gales bringing cold Arctic air confronted moist air coming from the south during December 2017 and January 2018, resulting in a paradox that seriously impacted on travel in Switzerland. Below 1,500m we had the warmest January since records were kept, 3-4°C above the monthly average. Storms and heavy rain raged, leading to line closures with catenary damage; fallen trees, and landslides. Above 1,500m there were exceptionally heavy and repeated snowfalls, with up to 4m of snow in the southern mountains leading to acute avalanche conditions. This ensured that many rail lines in these high places, like MGB to Andermatt, were closed for safety, whilst the Visp-Zermatt line was simply swamped with snow and inoperable. The storms were in late December and twice in January. Most unusual was to see a Class 460 hauling an IR train stuck in deep snowdrifts near Bex in the Rhône valley. Line closures were everywhere; the impact was the worst, over the whole country, for several years. A list of all blockages would be too long, but notable ones in early January, some lasting many days, were; Zermatt (as noted) cut off for several days during the peak New Year season; TPF to Bulle; CJ above Tramelan, (then later almost all its lines); the old Gotthard Mountain Route; the Tösstal; lines serving Linthal, St Imier, Lyss, Konolfingen, Simmental, Beinwil, Immensee, Vallorbe; Spiez-Interlaken; Wengen-Kleine Scheidegg; Klosters-Davos; Lenk-Zweisimmen (here a gale overturned one coach of a local train on 5th Jan.); Giswil-Interlaken Ost; Gstaad-Château-d'Oex; Aigle-Les Diablerets; the RhB's Bernina Pass, and parts of the SOB. We are used to snow - for the mountain lines, it is a basis for their business. This however was a winter to remember. A modest irony is that US President Trump attended the World Economic Forum in Davos in early January, where he saw at close quarters the increasing effects of rapid climate change on an Alpine region, something he professes not to believe. Swiss President Berset took the opportunity to make the issues clear to him. Perhaps it helped, but Mr Trump (plus many of his entourage of over 1,000!) was ferried in-and-out of the mountain resort by US

Air Force helicopters – others (including the Swiss President who finished-up travelling into Davos in the cab of an RhB standby loco) had more difficult journeys! Interestingly, in late 2017 a UK TV production company contacted the SE Editorial Team for advice about where best in January to go to see how Swiss railways fight the snow battle in the Alps. We commented objectively, but if they came as planned, they got more than expected! The roads fared no better. Blockages and accidents were widespread. Then, after these two storms, a third broke out on 21st January and if anything was worse. Heavy snow, and heavy rain at lower altitudes, caused closures, avalanches and landslides. The old Gotthard line was closed for 3 days; the motorway was blocked by a landslide. The MGB was closed above Fiesch. On the BLS the Kandersteg – Ausserberg route was closed by avalanches, with a 'Lötschberger' trapped above Lalden. The MGB Oberalp-Pass and Sedrun sections were closed for several days. The regular landslide by Oberried destroyed the bridge on the lakeside road, but the much higher rail bridge survived so the ZB ran extra trains. Finally, on 22nd January a 'Domino' set derailed completely on the BLS above Lommiswil near Solothurn, with just the driver and one passenger on board. The site was inaccessible from the road, so a rail crane was needed and the line was closed for six days.

SBB delays.

During March SBB passengers in the German speaking part of Switzerland experienced unusual amounts of late running, or even cancelled trains, with consequent loss of connections. The exceptionally bad weather had abated by then and no single reason was obvious for the spate of problems. On many heavily utilised lines, a single late running train can cause problems with the stability of the timetable causing major knock-on effects. As we have noted previously the growth in rail travel in Switzerland is putting the system under intense pressure.

SBB. New Bombardier Class 502 double-deck units enter service.

On February 26 the first Bombardier Intercity double-deck train entered public service, one of four sets at first, between Zürich, Olten and Bern via Burgdorf. We have heard often enough that they are 4 years late, with Bombardier building three extra sets as a penalty. There were two potential concerns prior to the launch. One obstacle concerned software deficiencies, causing delays when trains are being prepared for departure. These have seemingly been cured. The other major potential problem was a legal complaint by representatives of the disabled, that access for wheelchairs does not meet laid-down standards. This last potential delay evaporated, as the Federal Court ruled against this injunction and in favour of the SBB. The launch was popular, and well reported in the Swiss media. All the 59 trains should be in regular service for the 2020 timetable. (See P.33)

A 'Girona' flies.

One of SBB's new InterCity Stadler Class 501 'Girona' (*Buzzard*) EMUs was tested on 2nd April, Easter Monday, at 275kph in the Gotthard Base Tunnel. *It flew!*

Massive BLS rolling stock order.

Following Stadler being selected in May 2017 by the BLS as the preferred bidder for what is to be the operator's largest

ever rolling stock order, on 15th January, the company formally signed the contract for the supply of 52 6-car FLIRT EMUs. The delay was due to arranging the necessary funding agreements from the BLS board, the Cantons and the Federal Government. The contract is for 24 units for RegioExpress services and a further 28 units for Bern S-Bahn services. Production is due to commence in early 2019, with the units scheduled to enter service between 2021 and 2025. As the new fleet enters service Class 565 and 566 units will be progressively withdrawn together with other older rolling stock.

Hupac/Chinese cooperation.

Swiss Intermodal operator has been active in the Chinese rail transport market for some ten years and since 2015 has had its own local subsidiary company based in Shanghai. It has also launched its own international freight train to transport chemical products from China to Europe. At the end of 2017 it announced that it had entered into a 2-year supply contract with Chinese rolling stock builder CRRC, to supply a fleet of new 19m flat wagons that will be designed and manufactured by CRRC subsidiary CRRC Shandong. This company will also carry out EU certification, and wagon registration with the BAV (Swiss Federal Office of Transport).

RhB speed record.

One of the RhB's measures to improve its services is the introduction of higher train speeds. As with most metre-gauge railways the RhB was originally built for economy rather than speed, as was much of its earlier rolling stock. However, some parts of the infrastructure are open to improvement and the lifting of restrictive speed limits. Even so, your Swiss News Editor was surprised to learn that an 'Allegro' EMU, with a test car and freight wagons in tow, had recently attained a speed of 132kph (some 82mph) between Chur and Untervaz. Perhaps the Glacier Express will soon be able to live up to its name!

Emergency action following derailments.

The derailments at Luzern and Basel, of high speed trains approaching stations (and both fortunately travelling at low speed) have not yet been clarified. However, SBB has unusually taken its own measures without waiting for the reports. Both derailments took place on double-slip points, and SBB has made known that these will be rebuilt forthwith. The double-slip is that crossing which allows straight or diverging routes from each trailing leg, to each facing leg. It involves four sets of moving point blades, each with its motor and interlocking, and demands great accuracy of construction. With many components within its short length, it also needs frequent maintenance. It may only be traversed at reduced speed. Often used where space is limited they are, by the way, called in German an 'Engländer' and in French an 'Anglais'. This is a historical legacy as today they have practically disappeared in Britain. SBB has 45 such crossings in use. There are others on BLS (a most aesthetic layout at Spiez eastern end) and on RhB, and many more on local narrow gauge lines..

The 'New Kursbuch'.

The 2018 Timetable produced by the VCS and partners is a success, with over 10,000 copies sold by early 2018. With the vindication of this initiative we are assured that it will appear again next year.

SBB train lines now numbered.

Following the timetable change in December, all IC and IR

train lines are numbered. This is not a train number, but refers to the particular line. The result is that for example IR16 can appear in a station running in both directions at the same time, and making different stops. A little confusing!

PostAuto Nordschweiz discontinues pocket timetables.

At the timetable change in December 2017, PostAuto Nordschweiz announced that they were no longer printing pocket timetables. Cost was not the principal factor, this was that the vast majority of passengers now use the SBB on-line timetable. For the handful of passengers requiring a printed timetable, PostAuto Nordschweiz will provide a printout on request. In Canton Aargau, Regionalbus Lenzburg no longer prints paper timetables, whereas AAR bus+bahn offers a condensed timetable in credit card format which easily fits into a purse, wallet or the season ticket cover. Regionale Verkehrsbetriebe Baden Wettingen on the other hand continues to offer printed timetable booklets.

Self-driving Electro-Buses in Canton Vaud.

Following Sion and Marly, Canton Vaud has authorised the experimental use for 2 years of two self-driving electro mini-buses by the transport organisation MBC (Morges-Bière-Cossonay).

Hydrogen bus experiment in Brugg ended.

During summer 2017 the decision was taken to discontinue the 5-year experiment with hydrogen powered PostAutos in the Brugg area. We had a report on this at the introduction. Running the buses in daily traffic apparently brought no new positive benefits, or negative disbenefits, to light. The hydrogen filling station in Brugg has been demolished and one of the vehicles can be seen at the Swiss Transport Museum (VHS) in Luzern. It is interesting that this experiment has been terminated at the same time as other European transport operators are starting to plan their own hydrogen-powered bus and rail services.

TILO and Italian optimism!

As we reported, the hoped-for opening of the new TILO service between Mendrisio SBB/FFS-Varese FS was delayed. On 8th January 2018 the first direct trains between Varese, west of Milano, and Mendrisio on the Gotthard main line, ran half-hourly as advertised. Alternate trains then run north to Lugano, or south to Como FS and Albate. In June 2018 the Albate trains will, they say, run to Milano Malpensa Airport. By all appearances it will take a while for services to settle down. The Italian network northwest of Milano is being reviewed, and the plans for implementing these changes seem rather optimistic.

PostAuto - Gathering clouds?

We all have dramatic memories of yellow buses on Alpine passes: Swiss Post buses are iconic - for the Swiss and visitors. The legendary skill and welcome of the drivers, the punctuality, and the technical standards of the vehicles, all invoke admiration. PostAuto CH is a subsidiary of SwissPost, and carries in fact more passengers than do Swiss trains; but most journeys are short. Not always known, is that many yellow PostBuses, although meeting all national standards, are operated and leased by private companies, local or regional, with their own staff, and operate under contract to PostAuto. The structure of contracts and payments is complex. PostAuto must tender for its route licences; other bus companies exist, so there is real

competition, although not everywhere. The contract partner is normally the Canton, which defines the service level required. Knowing something of franchising for British rail services, the SRS reader may imagine that some difficult bargains are made, since Cantons may expect more than their budget allows. PostAuto must also remunerate its local partners. Subsidies take many forms; about CHF350m is paid yearly by the Confederation for such bus services. It all seemed very orderly, but now something has gone badly wrong. On 6th February 2018 we learned that PostAuto CH has been concealing some of its income in its bookkeeping, so that its operating profit appeared lower. Hence its negotiating position with customers, suppliers, and for subsidies, was stronger. An undeclared sum of CHF78m, accumulated between 2008 and 2015, has been identified. The Federal Transport Office has now demanded this as a refund against perhaps unjustified subsidies. Enquiries from Parliamentary level downwards, including criminal investigations, are only just starting. The CEO and Finance Director have both been fired. This has the makings of an unpleasant affair with wide implications.

Trains too busy?

A member who used the MGB between Brig and Andermatt during good alpine weather for skiing last December, reports that the MGB trains on the route had difficulty with time keeping due to skiers using them for short hops between stations. Every train that was used stopped at every possible halt, often for some time as skiers clambered on and off with bulky equipment. Also it was reported that on Christmas Eve trains on the line to Rochers de Naye were running late due to a surfeit of families going to visit Father Christmas in his grotto at the summit. *And most of us thought he lived in Northern Finland...*

SBB - buffets and beer.

Following a review of SBB's catering policy from spring 2018, products from smaller Swiss breweries are to replace the bland Heineken 'EuroBeers' previously on-offer from on-board catering outlets. These breweries include Schützengarten in St Gallen, Rosengarten in Schwyz and Falken in Schaffhausen, who have been chosen to supply their own regional specials. The main contract is with Feldschlösschen, in Rheinfelden - although owned by Carlsberg it is still very much a Swiss brewery catering to Swiss tastes. Today there are many regional beers in Switzerland that in local markets are generally more popular than the mass-market 'international' products. Fortunately SBB have now recognised this trend.

Erstfeld Crocodile now in Zürich Seebach.

For many years, when travelling on the historic Gotthard route, we looked out for SBB 'Krokodile' Ce6/8 II No.14270 on its plinth outside Erstfeld depot. Times change. The space was needed, and No.14270 has gone as an exhibit to Bombardier's site in Zürich Seebach. Later it will be moved to be a permanent exhibit in Oerlikon.

Erzingen-Schaffhausen-Singen.

The DB line between Basel Bad. and Schaffhausen is electrified between the border station of Erzingen, and Schaffhausen, and carries a half-hourly SBB service. It also hosts DB's Basel Bad - Schaffhausen - Singen service that only stops at Schaffhausen in Switzerland. DB operates the infrastructure so, unusually for Switzerland, the double track line has

right-hand running. At two of the intermediate stations, Wilchingen-Hallau and Neuenkirch, there is double-wire semaphore mechanical signalling, with reversible working on both lines. These are probably the only places in their own country where SBB passenger trains are mechanically signalled. The SBB uses modern, fast accelerating EMUs on the route, whilst DB uses elderly and slow diesel equipment. Sometimes the mix does not work very well with the SBB workings being delayed by the poor running of DB services. Ironically, the DB trip between the two Swiss cities is only scheduled to take 1 hour (and the SBB website offers that journey), as against a 1hr 40min. journey by SBB with a change in Zürich; however the SBB ticket machines in Schaffhausen do not sell DB tickets!

St Gallen Hbf.

This station building has recently undergone extensive changes along with the linking of the AB and TB metre-gauge tracks. The old booking hall now just contains a sushi bar and a restaurant, and the SBB Travel Centre has been moved to the ground floor in an adjacent part of the building. The eastern subway has now re-opened, complete with a large glass cube located next to the old booking hall to shelter the stairs and escalators leading down into the subway.

Breakthrough at the Eppenbergtunnel.

On 2nd February the boring machine broke through to open-out the tunnel. Construction is on time and it is expected that the tunnel will be in operation for the 2020 timetable change. Increased capacity between Aarau and Olten will allow the introduction of four direct trains an hour between Zürich and Bern, as well as two trains an hour between Zürich and Biel and on to Lausanne.

Tunnel des Cretes.

Located between Vevey and Montreux this 320m tunnel is the last to be altered to allow the introduction of double-deck trains on the Rhône Valley line. To allow the track to be lowered the northern one will be taken out of service between December 2017 and December 2018. All trains will be using the track on the 'south' (lake) side, with some late night services replaced by buses. In December 2018 the process will be reversed, with both tracks scheduled to be available from December 2019 and the works completed in Autumn 2020. Double-deck trains will be introduced between Lausanne and Brig from December 2018 after one tunnel track becomes available.

No new alignment of the Bern - Fribourg line.

The Schmitten - Flamatt section of this main line is often unstable requiring emergency repairs. Despite this, and after a detailed analysis, the Swiss Federal Council has decided not to approve a new alignment that would have avoided the geologically difficult area.

Stations being rebuilt.

Rebuilding work at Chavornay CFF/SBB, scheduled for completion in early 2019, includes the island platform being lengthened and raised with a new ramp to the existing subway. This is to be provided on the station building side and a ramp on the other side. The old awning has been removed for refurbishment and will be extended when it is replaced. During reconstruction, Lausanne-bound trains are using a temporary timber platform. On the BDWM, Bremgarten West is also

being rebuilt with the addition of a subway. At Montbovon, where the TpF joins the MOB, a retaining wall has been built on the valley side of the station to enable the platforms to be extended towards Zweisimmen. Schloss Laufen am Rheinfall, on Zürich's S-Bahn Line 33 between Schaffhausen and Winterthur, is being rebuilt with a raised and lengthened platform and new lighting. The only services stopping between 24th March and 28th October are during daytime hours.

Station closures.

From the December 2017 timetable change Transports Publiques Fribourgeoise (TpF) have closed the stations at Siviliez, between Romont and Palezieux, and Estavannens, between Bulle and Montbovon. Estavannens had the 'distinction' of being considered the worst station in Switzerland by your Swiss News Editor a few years ago!

'Smoke free' zone experiment at SBB stations

Starting 1st February six SBB stations: Basel SBB; Bellinzona; Chur (in cooperation with the RhB and PostAuto); Neuchâtel; Nyon and Zürich Stadelhofen, will become predominately no-smoking zones for a period of several months. SBB hope to improve safety and cleanliness at the stations as well as improving the waiting time quality for all passengers. It is hoped that the results will assist SBB in formulating a standard 'smoking' policy for all its stations. Whereas in Bellinzona, Neuchâtel, Nyon and Chur there will be smoking zones on the platforms (similar to the zones on Deutsche Bahn platforms), in Basel SBB and Zürich Stadelhofen the platforms will be 'smoke free'.

'Digital Champion Award' for Swiss ticketing app.

Most SRS travellers have passes, or still value, and often treasure, a recognisable ticket. Your News Editor's rail career started with selling Edmonson card tickets when a very junior member of BR's staff. For everyday use however, and including all processes of fare collection and registration, today's regular customers and service providers are looking to more digital personalised solutions. So this news item caught our eye. The Transport Ticketing Global Fair in London is the leading international event for public transport ticketing. At the 2018 event a young Swiss firm, FAIRTIQ AG, from Bern, won the 2018 'Digital Champion' Award for its Digital Ticketing App. The award was for a solution which 'meets highest demands for customer-friendliness' and which, as the jury verdict said, 'ticks every box in terms of providing a customer-centred solution, removing friction, reducing costs and moving with the times'. Other features included facilitating ticket purchase and travel generally. It was noted that this App already has two years of sound operating results in daily practice, and is not simply another prototype. Essentially it recognises a passenger's click on boarding, notes the journey's end and selects for charging the best tariff from those available, thus overcoming the complexity of different tariffs which may be in use. Swiss users in some thirteen tariff zones and regions already have 2-years' experience of FAIRTIQ, which is apparently installed on some 100,000 I-Phones. It is being expanded in early 2018 to public transport journeys over the whole of Switzerland. FAIRTIQ's CEO Gian-Mattia Schucan, whose start-up company this is, was delighted with this encouraging result before an international forum.

Vierwaldstättersee - *m/s Diamant*.

In the March 'Swiss News' we reported the incident on the 7th December 2017 when the SGV's CHF15.5m ship the *m/s Diamant* struck a rock near Kehrsiten and settled in the water with lower deck flooded. Next day it was patched-up by divers, pumped out and brought to a dry dock in Luzern. An investigation has shown that the incident was probably due to human error with none of the ship's operational equipment being 'at fault'. The Swiss Public Prosecutor's Office is now involved. The ship was subsequently moved to the SGV's shipyard on 9th February for repairs to take place. These are anticipated to take until the end of May with the ship scheduled to return to service for the summer season. The hull is damaged over 23m and the ingress of water has resulted in major damage to a large amount of operating equipment. The cost of the work is now estimated to be in the region of CHF2.5m. This should be covered by insurance, but the estimated CHF150,000 loss in potential revenue will have to be borne by the company.

SBB Class 193 'Vectrons'.

Siemens has now delivered more of the 15 'Vectron' freight locos ordered for SBB Cargo International. These are 'hybrid' mainline multi-system electric locomotives that also have an auxiliary diesel power unit for local use. Their immediate use will be in Switzerland and Northern Europe, with many sighting reports from Basel Bad and Muttenz. SBB Cargo International indicates that they will principally replace elderly Re4/4 Class 420, and Re6/6 Class 620 engines.

Railcare Class 476 'Vectrons'.

Railcare is a rail operating company owned by Co-op Switzerland. It has operated with Class 465 locomotives hired from BLS, and Class 186 from Railpool, but is now taking delivery of its own 'Vectrons'. One of these, No.476 451, worked a freight train on 4th January from Hunzenschwil to Felsberg (RhB), running on the three-rail, mixed-gauge, section from Chur to the chemical factory at Domat-Ems that is shared with the SBB. However, this section is supplied with RhB's standard power at 11,000 V 16 2/3 Hz. Since many modern locomotives that are built for the SBB standard 15,000 v 16 2/3 Hz cannot handle this lower voltage, as could previous generations of locomotives, SBB still keeps one or two 'old timer' Ee3/3 shunters in Chur (and also uses Class 840 diesels) to run on this route. This 'Vectron' trial is good news as the last Ee3/3s (only 8 left on Jan 1.) are some 70-years old and will not last forever.

BLS: Lötschberg route's record year in 2017.

The Lötschberg route, including both the Base Tunnel and the original route, is heavily in demand. Freight traffic, which had reached 33.6m gross tonnes in 2016, reached an all-time record of 35.7m gross tonnes in 2017. Additional traffic came at least in part, from the summer 2017 closure for rebuilding of the Gotthard route Italian outlet, through Luino to Novara, normally a busy freight route. It is likely also that the Lötschberg traffic mix was less affected by the DB's Rastatt tunnel collapse in August 2017. Overall, the Lötschberg carried 54% of Swiss transalpine rail freight last year. This is all the more remarkable as 21km of the Lötschberg Base Tunnel is only single track, although 14km of second track tunnel exist, but without rail installations. All this was a result of short-sighted political attitudes in its planning phase. The BLS,

especially the operating centre at Spiez, achieves daily miracles in sustaining a gross overload of passenger services and heavy freight, but there is a limit, even when some traffic, as a costly relief, goes 'over the top' using the 27% mountain grades of the original route. In 2019 the BLS will present to Parliament its demand, with the already authorised planning support, that the long overdue double-tracking be included in the forthcoming investment budget.

BLS Cargo.

As noted in the previous news item the DB main line to Basel via Karlsruhe was closed for 7 weeks in late summer 2017. The effects were at once disastrous. About a third of BLS cargo was blocked, and less than half of this could successfully be diverted. Some of this reached Switzerland via the (unsuitable) route through the Black Forest and Singen, and more through France using their partner SNCF Logistic. Other operators, especially SBB Cargo and HUPAC, were even harder hit, as were their customers. Some through cargo was transferred from trains to Rhein ships to bypass the blockage. The costs and liability will occupy the courts, but BLS was able, thanks partly to using new Vectron multi-voltage engines later in the year, and by developing new traffic sources, to reduce costs and generate a sound result. Turnover was 6% up on 2016 at CHF203m of which a surplus of CHF3.5m was generated. 17,529 block trains were run on the system - or 50 per day.

The closure of the Rheintalbahn emphasised the importance of rail-borne goods traffic to the European economy, as well as the weakness of the present railway system. BLS Cargo has recommended better coordination among the infrastructure companies as to the timing of major closures, the preparation of emergency plans, and the harmonisation of national rules concerning train lengths, height and weight, as well as the requirements pertaining to locomotives and crews. It is suggested that the introduction of a standard operating language (such as English, already aviation's 'common language') across the European rail network would improve communications, especially in times of crisis.

SBB Cargo.

The provider of national freight services within Switzerland has problems, and these resulted in a CHF27m loss in the first 6 months of 2017. Although full trainload traffic is encouraging, the 2016 plans to streamline the remaining wagonload operations have not yet brought improvement. The plan has not succeeded in offering reliable economic services even though schedules were tightened up, and further service points were closed. A real challenge is in the legacy of the former common carrier obligation which, coupled with equality of treatment for all users, lead to a dispersion of resources to serve factories and depots in many diverse places. Much has now gone, but high costs and labour-intensive low-traffic densities are severe obstacles. We can expect further economies and SBB Cargo has already announced that it intends to reduce staffing levels by 760 full-time positions within the next 5 years. It is anticipated that most staff reductions will be achieved by people retiring, or taking new jobs elsewhere on the system. The days are far behind us, when every station had a goods yard, a shunting tractor, and a siding for the local mill or factory - and staff to match.

Jungfrauabahn has another record year.

If you have used the horrendously expensive route up to

Jungfrauoch recently (possibly being one of the few Europeans on the train), you may feel that there were already enough visitors up there! Yet the increasing demand rewards the recent investments made by the JB Group, as 1,041,500 passengers rode up in 2017 - 13:6% more than 2016. Other positive results from the JB lines include: Lauterbrunnen-Mürren 655,000 (+6.7%); Harderbahn 448,500 (+30%); and Grindelwald - First 497,000 (+17.8%).

RAlpin.

These familiar trains of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) on low-floor flat wagons (in German and French, 'Rolling Highway'. We used to call them Piggyback), between Freiburg im Breisgau (D) and Novara (I) via the BLS route, are subsidised by the Federal Government, at some CHF35m annually. This subsidy reflects public policy, supported by popular vote in favour of the Alpine Initiative, which aims to reduce the volume of HGVs in Swiss highway transit traffic. RAlpin's 2017 traffic of 100,000 HGVs represents 6% growth in rail carryings, and HGV road transit traffic is indeed falling, though not enough. Improvements at the Freiburg terminal will permit more rational operations, allowing the subsidy to be reduced to CHF25m. The service between Basel and Lugano, which only attracts some 9,000 HGVs per year, will be stopped.

BLS Lötschberg Heritage Specials – Summer 2018.

In March, BLS announced that it would run five 'turn-up-and-travel' heritage train services on the route Burgdorf - Bern - Belp - Lötschberg mountain route - Brig on the following five summer Sundays. Haulage by Ae6/8 No.205 on 10th June and 9th September. Haulage by Ae4/4 No.251 on 8th July and 14th October, and a railcar trip using Be4/4 No.762 on 12th August. It is apparently planned to use an all 2nd-Class consist of opening-window EW1 stock on the loco-hauled trips. It is scheduled to be operated as a normal service train allowing boarding and alighting at all stops with normal fares and reservations only needed for groups of ten or more. Loco haulage via Belp is unusual, as is the planned stop at long-closed Blausee-Mitholz. A 10-minute photo stop is planned at Hohtenn on the outward runs. The outward schedule is: Burgdorf 07.46, Zollikofen 08.03, Bern 08.12 to 08.21, Belp 08.38, Thun 09.04, Spiez 09.15, Mülenen 09.22, Reichenbach i.K 09.25, Frutigen 09.31, Blausee-Mitholz 09.39, Kandersteg 09.49, Goppenstein 10.06, Hohtenn 10.11 to 10.21 (Photo stop), Ausserberg 10.28, Eggerberg 10.33, Lalden 10.36, Brig arr 10.43. The return: Brig 14.58, Lalden 15.04, Eggerberg 15.07, Ausserberg, 15.12, Hohtenn 15.19, Goppenstein, 15.25, Kandersteg 15.42, Blausee-Mitholz 15.50, Frutigen 16.00, Reichenbach i.K.16.05, Mülenen 16.07, Spiez 16.15, Thun 16.26, Belp 16.48, Bern 17.02 to 17.08, Zollikofen 17.15, Burgdorf 17.26.

Zürich trams.

With the December 2017 timetable change, Line 8 has been extended at its northern end. From its previous terminus at Hardplatz, it follows new 'gutter-running' tracks across the Hardbrücke railway bridge, with a stop at the SBB Hardbrücke station. At the northern end of the bridge, it takes a ramp down to join the Line 4 tracks just before the Schiffbau stop. It follows Line 4, beneath a concrete flyover, to Escher Wyss

Platz, where it turns left on to Line 17 tracks that it follows to the turning circle at Hardturm, where Line 8 now terminates. At the Wernholzli terminus of Line 17, a siding leads from the turning circle into a recycling centre. This is served by the tram system hauling refuse containers on special trucks.

Cooler in the Zürich S-Bahn?

During a period of 4 weeks in January/February 2018 the SBB reduced the temperature in one coach of some ZVV (Zurich Transport Authority) DPZ+ RE 450 train sets from 22C to 20C. These coaches were specially marked and surveys of passenger reactions were made. The SBB chose this period for the survey since passengers would have been wearing winter clothes and therefore should not feel too cold. Should this experiment prove acceptable, and all DPZ+ trainset heating be reduced to 20C, the SBB calculates an energy saving of some 1.6 Gigawatt hours, equivalent to the annual energy consumption of 400 households.

MOB orders dual-gauge rolling stock.

It was announced earlier this year that the Montreux-Oberland Bahn has ordered from Stadler a fleet of twenty coaches that will run on bogies that have the ability to gauge-change from metre to standard gauge. The new stock is for the 2020-Scheduled *GoldenPass Express* operation, that will run through from Montreux to Interlaken utilising the gauge-changing facilities, work on which has been on going in Zweisimmen since 2015. The coaches will be mounted on newly developed gauge-changing bogies, to be supplied by Alstom in Germany. These bogies will initially be mounted under existing rolling stock for a period of trials that are planned to start as soon as they arrive at the MOB. Extensive testing of the gauge-changing equipment will be required before it is approved for safe commercial operation. In particular, there is need to demonstrate the reliability of the facilities in winter conditions. It is currently envisaged that the MOB will haul the through-trains over their metre gauge, 900V DC line between Montreux and Zweisimmen using Stadler-built two-car Series-9000 units, whilst the BLS will supply appropriate equipment for the second stage of the journey along its lines.

MOB/RhB loco transfers?

During the spring there were unofficial reports circulating that the MOB were working on the sale of two (probably 8002/3) of its four 8000-Class Ge4/4 locos to the RhB. The MOB locos are identical in many respects to the RhB's Ge4/4III fleet (Nos.641-652). The electrical equipment would have to be replaced (MOB is a 900vDC system, the RhB a 11kV 16.7Hz AC system) as would the signalling system, but that would be a far more cost-effective exercise than acquiring new locomotives. It is understood that the RhB have plans to use the locos to 'top-and-tail' the Vereina Tunnel car-shuttle trains to improve the operational timekeeping and to ensure that this key link in the system is not compromised by a potential loco failure.

DFB - A new 'old' engine.

In 1990 some original locomotives of the former Furka-Oberalp Bahn were brought back from Vietnam, where they had been sent by France (the country's once colonial power) to serve on a mountain railway. They had barely survived the disastrous 1960/70s war, but today after restoration in Meiningen, Germany, they are the gleaming treasures of the

DFB and often feature in Swiss Express. Also brought back from Indo-China were two SLM HG4/4 tank engines (0-8-0T) built new by SLM Winterthur for export directly to Vietnam. These, which had never run in Switzerland, were in appalling condition, but some 50% was considered re-usable. From start of work in 2006, the first of these, future DFB No.704, has now been rebuilt, and should be in Realp Depot by early summer 2018. Sister loco No.708 is some two years behind. Public operation of No.704 should start after all trials and licensing this coming summer. This is an extraordinary achievement, and will give the DFB the two most powerful narrow-gauge steam rack locomotives in Europe.

Swiss Steam Days in Brienz.

This event takes place every 3-years, this year between 29th June and 1st July. Your Swiss news Editor and his wife will be there as it fortunately falls in our annual Brienz summer holiday. A highlight will be to see again ex-Brünig G3/4 No.208 of the Ballenberg railway, operational after 5-years of laborious overhaul. There will be a wide range of steamboats, steamrollers, traction engines and road vehicles, and of course the traditional short trips to Gäldried with a veteran locomotive of the BRB. I'll have a *Swiss Express* at hand, so let's hope we will get to meet some SRS members.

SPB.

The original SLM steam rack locomotive No.5 of the SPB makes several public trips (normal fares with supplement) up to the Schynige Platte from Wilderswil every year. Accumulated damage from time and weather demanded their tribute resulting in the engine being completely dismantled and rebuilt over the last winter. It should be back at work in summer 2018, but check first at www.verein-lok5.ch

Vicky in Switzerland

Between 29th March and 16th September the Historisches Museum Luzern is staging an exhibition that commemorates Queen Victoria's five-week visit to Switzerland in August/September 1868. For more information see www.historischesmuseum.lu.ch

Editor's Note.

Sometimes these reports contain prior notice of planned work and interruptions of normal services. These are without guarantee - see the first item! Readers must check locally, or on websites, when travelling to avoid disappointment, but also because such projects can change even at short notice. ■

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from other SRS Members including Robert Amstutz, Michael Donovan, Mario Gavazzi, Adrian Friend, and others.

502 402 on Bern to Zurich at Olten. See article on P28.

Photo: Steve Gliddon

