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Swiss News

Summer service disruption.

By the time members read this, the summer of 2018 will be almost over. Those who travelled around Switzerland may well have found their summer journeys either unusually interesting, or irritatingly disturbed, according to priorities. From mid June to late September, an emergency timetable covering the whole country, including minor railways, was in force. Trains were diverted, retimed and sometimes cancelled. SBB had a large staff of customer advisers on duty. With the direct line from Basel to Olten through Tecknau largely closed for relaying, Basel passengers were treated to trips over the 170-year-old Hauenstein line and tunnel built by Thomas Brassey for the opening of the Swiss Central Railway in 1858, a story recently covered in *Swiss Express*. Across the country some thirty individual sites were under reconstruction or relaying, involving 55 km of track, renewal of 92,000 sleepers and 130,000 tonnes of ballast. Over 90% of rolling stock diagrams had to be altered, with some unusual results in places.

This was an unprecedented programme, with dramatic effects; the closure of Lausanne – Puidoux-Chexbres, with diversions via Vevey could delight some, whilst the cancellations and blockages around St Gallen were an annoyance. So was the 9 week closure of the SOB south of St Gallen for tunnel repairs. Such disturbances of Switzerland's ordered travel may arise more frequently, as arrears of maintenance; platform alterations for handicapped access, and also capacity improvements are now demanding attention and expenditure. The only advice is to look online first - here the emergency timetable was fully available. The SRS has tried to keep up with advanced notice, but printing deadlines and late, fragmented information mean we can rarely give timely warning.

SBB's problems with Gotthard old and new.

It has been discovered that, although an intensive traffic of all kinds was operated over the old line until 2015, clearances in some tunnels are in reality now dangerously tight. From the 30th of April 2018 intermodal trains using the full profile were prohibited and all must now take the base tunnel. This is not in itself unusual, but for SBB it imposes a severe constraint upon operational flexibility. Although passenger trains are not directly affected, some seasonal and extra trains will have to take the mountain route to release capacity for intermodal in the base tunnel. This story again raises questions of what expenditure may be necessary in future to maintain minimum standards on the old route where substantial track and signalling simplification has already occurred.

Passenger services using the Base Tunnel suffered severe problems over Easter and Whitsuntide, when the Class 503/610 'EuroCity' sets on the Milano service either failed or were not available. The timetable with its connections broke down accordingly. For those who suffered the 'Cisalpine' period with the notoriously unreliable Class 470 Pendolini, this has an unpleasantly familiar ring. The introduction of the (again Italian built) Class 503/610 was supposed to be far more reliable. Rolling stock here as elsewhere is still tight, but delivery of the Bombardier Inter-City and Stadler 'Giruna' train sets should bring relief – as they are Swiss-built.

Costing the Rastatt blockage

What did the disastrous seven-week blockage, caused by the

collapse of DB's Karlsruhe - Basel main line at Rastatt cost rail operators and users? Hanseatic Consulting (HTC), a reputable group in Hamburg, was commissioned by users to produce a cost analysis. This was done, based on the cancelled and diverted freight trains, and the resulting revenue loss, or additional costs directly resulting. Some 8,250 freight trains would normally have passed over the line. In practice only about one third could be run on alternative routes, sometimes with heavy delays and severe cost penalties. The cost was estimated by HTC at about €2 billion. This does not include the DB's own losses, nor the indirect costs to industry and trade of delays and cargo loss or diversion. HUPAC alone considers it lost 3,000 trains. Much cargo was carried by Rhein barge, and road haulage took some, but not only in Switzerland, some diverted to France and Austria. The upheaval in trade and in manufacturing across Europe's connected economy will never be costed out completely – and the monumental legal battle has scarcely started!

Joint demand for cheaper rail access prices.

Although otherwise competitors, SBB Cargo, BLS Cargo and the Association of Public Transport Operators, came together on the 19th of June to demand cheaper access prices for their trains, as well as a better system for prioritisation of goods traffic. The cargo rail companies would like to see a similar situation to Germany where access charges for freight have been reduced by up to 50% to encourage more freight to use rail. The freight operators would also like to see their trains given the same priority as passenger trains. With Switzerland's high labour costs delayed trains increase these.

SBB and special events.

Special events in Switzerland mobilise substantial transport resources. In June 2018 SBB announced that they have programmed 450 extra trains to run between June and September. This is through the period noted above when major route closures will also be in effect. Other railway administrations might say, with some justification, that these two demands are incompatible. The extra trains are for events as diverse as the Pope's visit to Genève, and the street parade in Zürich. These operations require some 1,000 additional shifts for drivers and train conductors, and are scheduled to move some 2m passengers. Special trains and group travel are a flourishing year-round business, but only get the headlines when football fans disgrace themselves. The resources required demand agility, but are more readily available in summer when business, commuter travel and freight, are less. Your *Swiss News* Editor was in Britain when a certain Dr Beeching ruled that BR 'had no time for that sort of thing'!

Switzerland – best in Europe.

According to the 2017 European Railway Performance Index recently published by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Switzerland's rail system remains the best in Europe with an overall rating (out of 10) of 7.2. This puts it ahead of Denmark (6.8 points), Finland (6.6 points) and neighbour Germany (6.1) and allows the country to retain its top spot awarded in previous BCG assessments (2015 and 2012). At the bottom of the list is Bulgaria, with 1.9 points. Although Switzerland achieved almost full marks in intensity of use, one of the three criteria assessed, it had dropped marks in quality. Here Finland and France were in front both scoring 2 points out of a potential 3.3 - Switzerland scored 1.8. For traveller

security, Denmark, Luxemburg, Great Britain and the Netherlands all fared better than Switzerland. *Swiss Express* has commented in the past on issues with on-train theft, generally involving Switzerland's high flow of tourists who are often less alert than regular travellers. There was a link between the public cost and the railway system's performance, the report noted. Switzerland and Austria (also a top tier railway and investor in Alpine tunnels) topped the list here. The report also pointed out that Switzerland was among the countries that got relatively high value for money for its railway system.

BLS breaches the billion.

In its annual report published in April the BLS revealed that the company's rail, bus, and lake shipping services had breached the 1 billion passenger/km barrier for the first time, and that passenger numbers are expected to grow by 10m/year between 2018 and 2030. Ridership growth was partly driven by the three-fold increase in services between Brig and Domodossola since BLS took over responsibility for the route in December 2016 showing that the previous poor service had restricted the latent demand for travel in this area.

BLS v SBB.

Swiss Express readers will recall that BLS and SBB were making competitive bids to the BAV (Federal Transport Office) for the right to operate InterCity services. BLS bid for Basel-Interlaken, Zürich-Brig and other services. The BAV offered Olten-Burgdorf-Bern and Bern-Biel. Although BLS originally formally objected to this much-modified offer, in June they decided not to pursue an appeal, preferring to await a revised procedure for awarding services that the BAV are apparently working on. However, SBB are now appealing!

SOB and SBB.

On a happier note the BAV has awarded the Basel-Zürich-Locarno-Lugano service via the old Gotthard route and the Bern-Zürich-Chur service to the Sud Ost Bahn with a December 2019 start. The SBB will be co-operating with the incomer on these operations, which will be co-branded SOB-SBB.

Long distance buses licensed to operate in Switzerland.

For several years, long distance buses have been licensed on routes to and from Switzerland, but not internally. The Federal Council has now licensed Eurobus (in conjunction with German operator Flixbus) to operate three domestic routes to compete with the SBB: Chur-Berne-Sion; Zürich Airport-Basel EuroAirport-Lugano, and St. Gallen-Biel/Bienne-Genève Airport. The start-up fares are a lot cheaper than the SBB fares, but the journey times are considerably longer. Halbtax and GAs are accepted, but all pay a seat reservation fee.

Crane jib spears FLIRT.

On the morning of the 26th of May, shortly after 09.00 an SBB FLIRT operating the S29 Regio service from Turgi to Aarau, was struck head-on by the jib of a construction site crane being demounted at the side of the track. The 10t, 57m long, jib slipped when being lifted down by a road crane and swung across the SBB tracks just as the S29 was approaching at 110kph. The driver saw what was happening and applied the emergency brakes to bring the train down to 40kph before impact. At the last second she sought safety. Luckily, apart from

suffering shock, the driver was unhurt. All 45 passengers were unhurt. As there was no risk of fire, passengers remained in the train until the SBB rescue train arrived from Brugg. Damage to track and overhead wires was minimal. Buses replaced local services until around 16.00. Zürich - Berne IR services were diverted via Birr and Lenzburg. The special steam trains from Brugg to Wildegg, in connection with the Brugg roundhouse open day were also diverted.



Crane jib accident.

Photo: Robert Amstutz

Progress on the Bözberg tunnel.

As work on the tunnel progresses some 846,000t of spoil has to be removed from the site; of this some 500,000t are being transported by train to the Wildegg Cement Works via Brugg, using three-train-pairs/day. At Wildegg, some spoil will be used for cement manufacture and some to infill an old quarry. At Bözberg the thirteen-wagon-long trains are headed by a Re4/4 loco with a diesel shunter at the rear. This pushes the train onto the non-electrified loading siding. On leaving for Brugg, the shunter pulls the train onto the main line and, without stopping, the Re4/4 raises its pantograph and takes over propulsion. Using rail to remove the spoil has increased the project cost by some CHF6m, but has relieved the surrounding villages of 56,700 heavy truck movements. A further 30,000t will be used to level up the tunnel floor. The remaining spoil is contaminated and will be removed to a special waste site.

Luzern.

There was an important breakthrough for the long-term future of operations at Luzern when the Federal Parliament revised its Transport Plan for Infrastructure and re-opened consultation on improvement proposals for this constricted station site. The city was greatly encouraged to find that their requirement for a new station in Luzern, for which the plans foresee a tunnel under the lake and a two-level through station on the present site, is now considered the only realistic solution for the region. Assuming agreement, planning will now move ahead with a view to realisation in the 2030 programme.

Internet in SBB trains.

SBB has embarked on a project to offer fast download free internet in its trains, with more details available later in 2018. Indications are that it will not be a WLAN solution, but probably a telephone App.

More ticket offices to close.

SBB will close a further 21 ticket offices in 2018/9 claiming that as an increasing number of customers buy their tickets via

telephone Apps, the Internet and ticket machines they are underused. Among those to be closed are Küsnacht am Rigi (SZ), Erlenbach (ZH), Turgi (AG), Münchenbuchsee (BE), Palézieux (VD), St-Maurice (VS), Zürich Tiefenbrunnen, and the halt at the federal technical college in Renens (VD). Personal observation at Turgi is that it is rare not to have to queue at the ticket office as there are many customers enquiring about trains and connections, but this does not reflect in the sales statistics. Following these closures, only 1 in 5 SBB stations will have a ticket office.

Station-to-station baggage transport.

Very discretely SBB has reduced the number of stations offering this apparently unprofitable service by almost one hundred. Some popular Swiss ski resorts such as Melchsee-Frutt (OW), Flumserberg (SG) and Grindelwald Grund (BE), as well as the spa town of Bad Zurzach (AG), are affected. SBB recommends customers to use the door-to-door luggage service, which is a lot more expensive.

Free tourist travel in Canton Neuchâtel.

A member has noted that if you stay overnight in Canton Neuchâtel (hotels and most B+B's), you are entitled to free journeys on trains, trams, buses, etc. within the Canton during your stay. The pass also gives access to various "tourist" attractions. A similar arrangement also applies in Basel Stadt (and includes parts of Basel Land).

Heads roll at PostAuto.

PostAuto Switzerland has rocked the country with revelations of illegal or innovative accounting, which enabled PostAuto to receive too much subsidy. Under political pressure, the CEO of Swiss Post has resigned and the upper management of PostAuto Switzerland have been fired.

Tulips under a cloud.

The popular flip down tulip seats outside Aarau SBB station are showing signs of wear and tear. The City's announcement that they are soon to be replaced has been met by protests from the good citizens of Aarau



Tulip seats outside Aarau station.

Photo: Robert Amstutz

'Guardian Angel' at work.

On the Zug S-Bahn network is a halt by the name of "Schutzengel" ("Guardian Angel"). One evening in May the driver of an approaching InterRegio service spotted a man lying on the tracks as his train approached Schutzengel. Despite full emergency braking an accident was imminent but, at the last second, the drunken man rolled off the track. Truly, the halt lived up to its name.

RhB Vintage Train.

Between the 13th of June and 26th of October the RhB are using one of their 1929-built 'Krokodil' locos, plus a vintage coach set, on the Davos Platz - Filisur shuttles as part of the daily regular service. In the morning it forms the 10:18 departure from Davos, arriving at Filisur at 10:53, returning as the 11:06 from Filisur. In the afternoon it forms the 16:18 from Davos, arriving at Filisur at 16:53 and forming the 17:06 return from Filisur. As this service is part of the ordinary public timetable normal fares apply. The timings do however allow for a stop at every station since the vintage set does not have any facilities to handle "Halt auf Verlangen" requests! Although there was some prior publicity at the end of last year this operation has not been widely promoted and SRS members David Stowell and Stephen Painer discovered this almost by accident when in Chur. More details on <https://www.rhb.ch/de/erlebniswelt-bahn/dampf-nostalgiefahrten/historische-fahrten>

BLT/WB Waldenburgbahn.

This little 750mm gauge railway, between Liestal and Waldenburg (now part of Basel Land Transport), is to be re-gauged to metre-gauge and completely modernised, as its infrastructure is inadequate for today's needs. Work starts in Autumn 2018 and should be completed in 2022. Stadler have now submitted a bid to build ten new train sets for the planned much improved operations. A decision on the contract is planned for October. A casualty of the widening, apart from some old houses along the severely constricted alignment, will be preserved 0-6-0T steam engine, G3/3 No. 5 'Gedeon Thommen'. This veteran was built in 1902 in Winterthur and survived electrification in 1953, at first on display and then, privately restored in occasional operation. What happens to No. 5 is now resolved. At Talhaus, adjacent to a celebrated historic inn that is a favourite excursion destination, a museum is to be built to house the locomotive and two coaches. No 5 will have a last overhaul, and work one last time with a special train (not carrying passengers) from Waldenburg to Talhaus and back on the 23rd of September this year. Then it awaits its new home in the museum. The Cantonal Lottery fund is advancing CHF650,000 to build the museum. A further WB G3/3 is in the Swiss Transport Museum, the Verkehrshaus, in Luzern. Editor's Note. *It would be theoretically possible for No. 5 to run on the Welshpool and Llanfair line in Wales.*



WB No.5 at Bad Bubendorf.

Photo: Bryan Stone

TRN/CMN.

Following urgent repair measures on one of its elderly BDe4/4 railcars, built in Italy in 1950, Transports Régionaux Neuchâtelois a subsidiary of Chemins de fer des Montagnes Neuchâtelois has restarted services (stopped by a Federal order

following axle breakages) on the line from Le Locle to Les Brenets. It is difficult to understand how long these soon-to-be 70 years old vehicles will be expected to maintain the service on their 4km long metre-gauge branch, although a second vehicle is to be repaired. Decisions will have to be made on either replacement rolling stock, or the suggested conversion of the line to standard gauge to enable SBB services that terminate at Le Locle to be extended to Les Brenets.

TPC/ASD.

The TPC's Aigle-Sépey-Diablerets line was closed by snow and avalanches in January and only reopened in April. There were severe blockages and infrastructure damage on its often isolated route along forested mountainsides.

Montreux Oberland Bernois.

As previously speculated in *Swiss Express* it is now confirmed that the two MOB locomotives, Ge4/4 Nos.8002 and 8003, will be sold to the RhB at a date yet to be announced. Major modifications to the locos will be required as they are adapted to the RhB standard 11,000 V, 16 2/3 cycle power supply.

RhB Snippets

Despite the RhB planning to undertake major work in the Lower Engadine in 2019, as of June 2018 there was little information available for those planning to travel whilst the major works take place. It is quite possible that the eastern end of the line from Susch to Scuol/Tarasp will only be served by a replacement bus service. Stored at Landquart on 28th June were six assorted driving trailer vehicles and six assorted intermediate trailer vehicles for the new push-pull sets for the Chur-St Moritz service. Out of interest, the livery of older locomotives and rolling stock, that have a probably limited lifespan and will soon be heading to the scrap yard, is fading to pink rather than the RhB's conventional red.

Ferrovie Autolinee Regionali Ticinese.

The cross-border Centovalli line between Locarno and Domodossola was blocked near Camedo on the 1st of April 2018, following a landslide which also killed two car passengers on the adjacent road. Reopened on the 4th of April it was again closed four days later after further storm warnings, to be reopened for a second time some days after that. As always check before travelling as this sub-alpine region is well blessed with heavy thunderstorms that can severely disrupt transport routes.

Freight returns on TMR.

Following a landslide on the 13th of January, which completely blocked the road over the Forclaz Pass that links Martigny in the Rhône Valley with Finhaut and Le Châtelard in the upper Trient Valley, Transports de Martigny et Régions reintroduced a limited freight service on its parallel metre-gauge line. With road access only being available via a long diversion through France railcar BDeh 4/4 No. 501 hauled a short freight comprising a box van and a flat car each Tuesday and Friday (and other days if required) from Vernayez to Finhaut. The box van carried foodstuff and everyday goods, whilst the flat car carried palletized goods and building materials. Postal/parcel services were maintained via the use of the multipurpose compartments in the railcars that operated the regular passenger services that also saw a massive surge in demand. TMR also kept a train set on standby overnight in case of emergencies.

The road was closed for some two months during which these emergency services were maintained.

FLP Lugano.

Lugano local service operator FLP has awarded Stadler a CHF47m contract to supply nine seven-section low-floor tram/trains to operate an improved service provision on its 12.3km line between Lugano and Ponte Tresa. This suburban service currently carries some 2.5m passengers/year, a 70% increase since 2010. These air-conditioned vehicles will have a capacity of 600 passengers/train as against the 340 passenger capacity of the current units built in 1978. Improvements also include CCTV for improved security and multi-functional spaces for wheelchairs, bikes, buggies, etc. Long-term plans for the FLP include a new direct 4km long link between Lugano and Mollinazzo, including a tunnel under Lugano's main station and an extension from Mollinazzo to Manno.

BDWM and WSB fusion approved.

On the 19th of June the AGMs of the BDWM (Bremgarten Dietikon Wohlen Meisterschwanden Bahn) and WSB (Wynental und Suhrentalbahn) formally approved the fusion of both companies to form the company 'Aargau Verkehr'. Apart from continuing to operate its existing rail and bus lines, it is foreseen that from completion in 2023 the new company will operate and maintain the Limmattalbahn currently under construction between Zürich and Killwangen.



Wengen rebuilding.

Photo: Derek Askew

SPB and WAB.

Both the Schynige Platte Bahn (SPB) and Wengenalpbahn (WAB) rack railways celebrate their 125th anniversaries this year. They both belong to the Jungfrau group, as does the BOB. Close neighbours in their valley, they could scarcely be more different. The SPB has a simple, limited task: carrying passengers from Wilderswil up to its summit station, where a restaurant, Alpine garden and spectacular views of the great Bernese Oberland mountains are offered. It is also the starting point for a favourite walking tour over the Faulhorn to First, above Grindelwald. The SPB closes for winter. For railway lovers, it offers a real pleasure, as almost all its equipment is 100-years old; the small four-wheeled rack engines date from electrification in 1914, and a few similar machines of the WAB date from 1908. Travel on the SPB and encounter what an electric motor of 1910 looked, smelled and sounded like. It has also renovated its steam loco No 5 of 1894, it run several times this summer. The WAB is quite different; it has a busy summer trade; valley connections at Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald; a major skiing business at Wengen and Grindelwald; it is the only connection to the Jungfrau group, and

handles all supplies and freight for Wengen, Grosse Scheidegg, and Jungfrauoch. It has been extensively modernised and has a steadily growing, tourist-based, business. All this summer work has been taking place at Wengen station to lower the tracks in order to provide step-free access to the WAB's trains. As Wengen is no longer a regular passing place it appears that Platform 2 will be used by both up and down trains, also helping to make access easier. *See photograph on P25.*

JB Cable Operations.

The Jungfraubahnen has finally been given permission to build the V-Bahn from Grindelwald Grund to Eigerglacier and there is now only one objector who is refusing to sell the required land. The green-light was given on 4th June by the Federal Office of Transport (BAV). Work has started at Grund, Männlichen and the intermediate stations on the replacement gondola (GGM), which will use the same base station as the V-Bahn. The GGM will not operate during summer 201 and presumably the replacement will be in service from the start of the 2019/20 winter season. To gain permission for the V-Bahn, now renamed the '*Eiger Express*', the JB has had to guarantee a 365-day hourly service with the Wengernalpbahn (WAB) between Grindelwald and Kleine Scheidegg. After lengthy negotiations, the BAV has responded to objections by requiring modifications, including shorter pylons, and colour-camouflaged cabins.

Swiss Steam Excursion.

On Saturday the 21st of April Fredy Landenberger and his team at Steam Adventure Tours organised one of their steam-hauled excursions, something that they have been doing over the last 22 years. Using historic former SBB steam locos A 3/5 No.705 and C 5/6 No.2978 and a rake of beautifully preserved historic coaches they ran a circular tour from Zürich Hauptbahnhof that covered various lines to the east and north of the City.



Steam tour locos at Zurich HBF.

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

LWM.

At the beginning of June new cabins were inaugurated on the Wengen - Männlichen Bahn (LWM). These incorporate a railed balcony on the roof, accessed via a spiral staircase from within the cabin and there is a CHF5 supplement for using this balcony. The staircase will be removed during winter operation to increase the cabin capacity.

BLM.

The Governing Council of the canton of Bern has granted CHF23.89m in loans for the rebuilding of the railway from Grütschalp to Mürren (BLM), enabling the requirements of

the Disability Act to be fulfilled. The BLM must replace their old fleet with modern low-floor vehicles and work is also required on the track work. Completion is by 2026. Canton Bern is solely responsible for the financing of the work. Because Mürren can be accessed by the Schilthorn cableway, the Federal Government is not involved in the cost.

Blonay-Chamby.

It is hard for some to realise that this museum railway celebrated its 50th birthday in 2018. Its birthday party was at Whitsuntide 2018, when a large selection of treasures, both steam and electric, including outside guests, were in service or on display. Your Swiss News Editor was prevented for personal reasons from attending, so perhaps an SRS member can supply impressions. I know them as an immensely devoted team of volunteers doing a professional job at a high standard.

Spanisch Brötli Bahn mock-up to be scrapped.

The city of Baden (AG) owns a tractor and wagons mocked-up to represent the original Spanish Brötli Bahn. It is in need of expensive repairs and the City Council has decided to scrap the vehicles at the end of 2018. This has led to an emotional protest locally, with the council asked to review its decision.

New Aem 940s arrive.

The first of forty-seven Class 940 hybrid diesel/catenary locomotives, scheduled to haul works trains and for heavy shunting was delivered to the SBB by builder Alstom in April. It was seen on test in the Olten/Bern/Neuchâtel area. These engines are powerful, with 2000 Kw electric drive and 900 Kw diesel engines. They will replace the existing diesel and electric heavy shunters, some up to 50 years old, at present at work on the system, including the hump shunting in Zürich and Lausanne yards. A Swiss 'railfans' website quickly identified No. 940 001 as the SBBs ugliest loco. However, do not be surprised to see their predecessors around for some time yet especially the veteran Class 840 (Bm4/4) that a number of private operators have bought. These operators contract for track work and local haulage tasks on the network.

'New' Class Ae477 locos.

Two curiosities turned up in late April when two former DR Class 142 electric locos, sold out of service in Germany, were bought by a Thayngen operator and are now being equipped with Swiss fittings for local service as Class Ae 477. Based in the northwest of the country they will also be used for track maintenance contracts. It is not the first time that engines from the former DDR have run in Switzerland, as the SOB once had a number of DR 142s on its strength. These also ran as Class 477.

Old Re 4/4 II locos withdrawn.

It is not easy to track down the final demise of old RE4/4 II as they disappear from service, and it is pointless to try in *Swiss Express*. It is understood that several Re4/4 II have recently been physically scrapped - but are still in the official register. More of this once-numerous class are immobilised, yet others have been taken for overhaul! The expectation is that those of SBB Cargo will progressively be withdrawn, and the status of those of SBB passenger traffic is now declining as new rolling stock, at long last, is relieving the pressure. But they are still useful and, as noted, some are still receiving workshop heavy overhauls. It will be a long time before the last one is finally withdrawn from service.

Successful year for Albula Railway Museum in Bergün.

The Bahnmuseum Albula in Bergün announced at its AGM in May a 25% increase in visitors, and a balanced financial result. 21,538 visitors were recorded in 2017. This is a result which makes the Albula Museum one of the best attended in Canton Graubünden. Special events, particularly reflecting the UNESCO World Heritage status of the Albula line, and the children's tours with a special programme, are very successful. An historic RhB train with 'Crocodile' Ge6/6 No.415 and historic coaches runs on Sundays from June to September. The Museum is also expanding, with the insulation of the roof and upper floor loft allowing a new exhibition area and improved customer facilities to be opened in 2019. As is usual in Switzerland the Museum opens from Tuesday to Sunday. Check www.bahnmuseum-albula.ch for exceptions and winter opening.

Good and bad news on the Vierwaldstättersee.

On the 26th of May the SGV introduced into service on the Vierwaldstättersee the 300-passenger catamaran *ms Bürgenstock* built to operate the new hourly Luzern-Kehrsiten service introduced to give fast access to the recently re-fashioned and re-opened Burgenstock Resort. See P40 in *Swiss Express* March 2018.

On the 9th of May, while on a service from Brunnen to Beckenried, SGV's 1932-built *ms Mythen* lost her port-side propeller and part of its drive shaft following a call at Gersau. Although water flooded the stern tube the vessel's safety systems worked and there was no danger to the 40 passengers, or of the ship sinking. Following emergency repairs at Gersau the ship returned to the SGV's 'Shiptec' yard later the same day. The ship had undergone its regular winter maintenance schedule when the failed connection was apparently OK. The SGV commissioned the use of a diving robot to attempt to recover the missing components from the depths of the lake but, unfortunately this exercise proved to be unsuccessful. In the shipyard, in addition to the missing components being replaced, the entire powertrains of the ship were dissembled and rebuilt as a part of the CHF40,000 investigation and repair work. Following official examinations and test sailings the *ms Mythen* re-entered service on the 9th June.



ms Bürgenstock.

Photo: Ernst B Leutwiler

New ship for the Hallwilersee.

On the 24th of May the two halves of a new ship were delivered by road to the SGH, the company that operates the summer boat services on the Hallwilersee. Once the two sections had been brought together she was subsequently

named *ms Delphin* (Dolphin) and entered revenue earning service on 6th June. The 78t *ms Delphin* was constructed over a three year period by the LUX shipyard, located on the Rhein at Mondorf north of Bonn in Germany. Once completed sailed under her own power up the Rhine to Muttentz harbour near Basel. Here the upper deck and other equipment was demounted and was placed onto one low-loader road vehicle, while the hull and lower deck were loaded onto another. The convoy moved by night to SGH's lakeside base at Meisterschwanden where the 34m long ship with a beam of 6.5m, could be quickly reassembled. The ship joins four other vessels on this pretty 8.5km long lake that lies on the border of cantons Aargau and Luzern.

New cross-border Routes?

National and local authorities in both France and Germany are soon to commence work on studies to assess the viability of reopening two cross-border lines between south-western Germany and eastern France. The lines would support new services as well as increase operating flexibility in the event of disruption on heavily used trans-European freight routes as happened in Germany last year. One route to be studied is the former route between Rastatt, Germany and Hagenau, France. This line could be used by a new Saarbrücken - Hagenau - Rastatt - Karlsruhe passenger service, as well as a diversionary route for freight traffic. Current rail links between Germany's Saarland and Baden Württemberg are poor to non-existent. The 7km German section from Rastatt to Wintersdorf (on the Rhein) still exists and is owned by Karlsruhe area tram-train operator AVG. In France a short section remains in use to serve industrial sidings near the Rhein at Beinheim, but the 22km Roeschwoog - Hagenau section is currently disused and would need to be completely rebuilt. The 15km final link in France, between Schweighouse and Obermodern for a through Hagenau-Saarbrücken service to operate, was abandoned many years ago. The old railway bridge across the Rhein is still in use as a road bridge for cars and light vans. Two options are possible: reconstructing it for rail use, or the construction of a new road/rail bridge. The second route under consideration would be the reconstruction of a through line between Freiburg-Breisach-Colmar. The Freiburg-Breisach section is part of the Breisgau S-Bahn operation that is currently being electrified, but would need major upgrading. The route from Neuf-Brisach, across the Rhein in France, to Colmar is still in-situ, but as a lightly used freight-only line. The main issue here would be the construction of a new cross-border bridge over the Rhein and its adjacent canal, but this would be less of an issue than the major works required for the other proposed link 100km north. With EU Interreg funding possibly on offer one of these proposals may come to fruition.

Cherry-picking in Switzerland?

AllRail, a little known group who claim to speak for new entrants into the European rail market, is calling on the Swiss government to open-up its domestic passenger rail market to full competition claiming that passengers would benefit. This announcement came after the BAV (Federal Transport Office) did not award BLS all the routes it recently applied to take over from SBB. It is actually unclear if BLS, a long established railway company, is a member of AllRail. This group appears to represent a number of 'free market' start-up organisations. A number of this type of organisation have apparently gained a reputation of simply using EU legislation in order to move

in on the territory of long-established 'National' operators and 'cherry-pick' their profitable long-distance inter-city routes. It appears that in some cases removing the profitable elements of established organisations' operations has been to the detriment of the overall service provision they have been expected by their governments to provide. It does appear that in Switzerland (which is outside the EU) the BAV is being more cautious in applying policies that may in the long term be to the overall detriment of rail passengers across an established national network.

SBB loses Rapperswil sugar mill wagonload traffic.

Although it is located immediately adjacent to the railway, the Rapperswil sugar mill has unfortunately decided to change from rail to road transport. There were various factors in the decision, including the cost of renewing the track in the yard and the fact that their workers now need to have a valid railway tractor driver's certificate in order to shunt the few metres on the private sidings. These, combined with other issues, have made their use of rail transport too expensive.

Interlaken rebuilding.

The station building at Interlaken West is being completely remodelled. Work started in January 2018 and is scheduled for completion in April 2019. During June the station building was just a shell with the ticket office, Avec shop and florist being re-located to "Portacabins" in the former car park across the tracks. When re-opened, the station will include shops, station facilities and a walk-in clinic.

Winterthur Blocked.

Early on Friday the 15th of June a derailment stopped services in Winterthur, by blocking the main lines to both Romanshorn and Rorschach. A track-laying train comprised of several wagons, including cranes, digging, ballasting and tamping equipment, derailed on a crossing in a complex junction area, and caused extensive damage to track, signalling and the catenary. First hopes of clearing-up during Friday were over-optimistic. The InterCity trains for St. Gallen, one of SBB's prime routes, as well as services to Frauenfeld and Rorschach, and a number of commuter services in the Zürich S-Bahn system, were cut-back or replaced by buses, until Saturday evening.

Closure, and a first on the Uetliberg.

In the period between 3rd April and 11th May Zürich's S10 Uetliberg line was closed to rail traffic Mondays to Fridays between Ringlikon and Uetliberg to enable track relaying and rebuilding of the embankment in the so-called Ringlikon curve. As is now common the old wooden sleepers were replaced by metal ones so there is no longer the potential of pollution of the ballast in this environmentally sensitive area from wood preservative. For the first time in the history of the SZU, a rail replacement bus served Uetliberg. A conventional ZVV Zürich bus (weighing some 11t) ran along narrow unpaved forest roads on which a traffic-light system was installed to ensure that the bus and construction site traffic, as well as delivery traffic to the Uto Kulm hotel, did not meet. Although the regular SZU EMUs hold up to 400 passengers, the bus could only hold 62. This was widely publicised by SZU and no major problems were recorded.

Stadler Rail reports a good year.

For a time from 2015 the Swiss Franc was unusually strong, bringing predictions that serious problems were predicted for the nation's export industry, especially in engineering. This was no illusion as rolling-stock manufacturer Stadler's turnover fell from CHF2.5 billion in 2013 to CHF1.8 billion in 2015. Stadler was however one of the numerous Swiss companies that successfully rose to the challenge, and now three years later the consequences are apparent. The turnover has recovered in 2017 to CHF2.4 billion, and rising. The order book is full including, something unimaginable a few years ago, new fleets of trains for British operators. There are 58 FLIRT EMUs and DMUs on order for East Anglia and 52 EMUs for Merseyside. Another mixed fleet of trains has now been ordered for use in Wales. Several orders from the USA are in-hand, with a Stadler plant in Salt Lake City, Utah, creating some 300 additional jobs in 2017. Worldwide Stadler currently employs some 7,600 persons, 3,100 of those in Switzerland.

Locomotive fire in Brugg.

On the evening of the 9th of May a Re4/4 ii on a Zürich - Basel (via Bözberg) train caught fire whilst on a scheduled stop in Brugg station. Tracks 1 to 3 were out of commission for several hours whilst the SBB rescue train, the local fire brigade and the Cantonal Police dealt with the incident. There were no injuries.



Loco fire at Brugg.

Photo: Kantonspolizei Aargau

A deathly silence.

Thursday 3rd May was a quiet day in Le Locle CFF station. The electrical supply to the signalling system failed. Passengers were directed to replacement buses. The reason turned out to be a Beech Marten, which had nibbled through the insulation on the cable to cause a total failure. Trains were back in operation by evening, the Marten however not. These animals also like ignition cable insulation and it is not uncommon for them to visit a car parked outside houses and cause damage. Most Swiss insurers offer cover for Marten damage for a small premium. ☞

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.

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