

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2018)
Heft: 136

Artikel: Basel SBB on a Sunday
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853785>

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Basel SBB on a Sunday

John Jesson



MRCE 189.106 arrives from the Muttentz direction.

All photos: John Jesson

Like a lot of large stations around Europe, Basel SBB does not see freight trains. Yes, there are a few using the bypass lines at the south side as they travel to and from France but, by and large, Basel SBB is freight-free. It was somewhat surprising then, when running into Basel SNCF after a visit to the museum at Mulhouse on Sunday 24th June, to see a pair of freights in the SBB station. Fellow SRS member Boyd Misstear was with me – so we investigated.

While we made our way between the two adjacent stations (rather a trek at the present time due to reconstruction work), one of the freights departed, leaving a BLS Re4/4 'Brownie',


which then left light engine. It soon became apparent that this was a planned operation, as there was a succession of freights reversing at Basel SBB. It would appear that this was occasioned by engineering work on the usual direct freight route between DB's Basel Bad and SBB's Muttentz yard to the east of Basel. This is a North-to-East curve that joins the passenger route just south of the Rhein Bridge.

There is no difficulty in moving any freight traffic between DB's Basel Bad and Basel SBB, as any such trains simply follow the busy passenger through line linking the stations over the Rhein Bridge. However to get the trains from Basel SBB to Muttentz required that they crossed just about everything in the station throat – and freight trains take quite a time to do this. These moves seemed to be about every half hour. Most of the movements were 'top-and-tailed', so that light loco movements were kept to a minimum and, because of their length, they were using platforms 4 and 5. Inevitably passenger trains had been re-platformed – we saw a German ICE in one of the dead-end platforms, an unusual occurrence. We watched the working for quite a time at the eastern end of the station, enjoying the novelty of watching freight at this



Two 460s on a train is common enough, but three?



location. Included in the mix was one of the RoLa trains from Freiburg to Novara. This stood in the station for a lengthy period, during which time the doors on the accommodation coach were released and we saw lorry drivers having a quiet smoke in the doorways, rather illegally, as Basel SBB is supposedly smoke free. On this day anything seemed to go! 

1. Railpool 186.183 is now hauled out towards MuttENZ on the back of the intermodal it had worked in from Germany.
2. BLS 485.007 at the head of a RoLa train in platform 4.
3. SBBC 482.000 waits in pfm 5 with an intermodal.
4. The ChemOil-liveried SBBC 482 departs towards MuttENZ with its intermodal.
5. On its way to Novara – across everything.
6. As a change from red, black and white, how about yellow, black and white? 521.017 carries an advertising livery for the Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz.



7. Railpool 186.183 at the French end of the station. Behind it is the SNCF train we had arrived on.

