

Freight traffic

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Frontiers Broken.

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In freight traffic, the past year was marked by the start of the subsidiary company Swiss Rail Cargo Köln and the beginning of the buildup of the company Swiss Rail Cargo Italy. With this setting of switches, SBB Cargo breaks out of the national borders on the north-south axis. In domestic traffic, «Cargo Domino» opens up new perspectives. These positive developments are counterbalanced by line disruptions in the South, and by an economic downturn. These led to a significant decrease in traffic.

International business lagged – domestic business improved.

With 9.73 billion tonne-km (previous year 10.53 billion), and 54.9 million transported tons (previous year 59.0 million), freight traffic had to accept a noticeable decline in traffic in the business year 2002, thus falling back to the 1999 level. With CHF 1,076 million (previous year: 1,151 million), also the freight traffic revenues – including internal transports – were on the decline (–6.6 percent). The unsatisfactory result is due on the one side to the repeated, long-lasting line interruptions in the South, and on the other to the bad economic situation. At Chiasso, freight traffic on the main transalpine artery was strongly restricted for four weeks following an accident on 21 February. Twice, the line Luino–Bellinzona had to be completely closed, each time for nearly three weeks, after landslides on 22 February and 3 May. Finally, inrushes of water on 1 December forced the total closure of the tunnel Monte Olimpino II on the line Chiasso–Albate, for an indetermined period of time. The consequence: Loss of traffic to the road and to the Brenner axis. The cumulated losses in turnover amount to at least CHF 20 to 30 million.

Transit traffic the most strongly affected.

SBB Cargo felt the cumulation of these negative effects the most strongly in transit traffic, where traffic performance went down from 5.96 to 5.26 billion tonne-km, or by 11.8 percent. In the import/export business, the decrease, with 12.5 percent, was in the same order of magnitude. Domestic traffic, however, showed an increase of 3.2 percent to reach 2.35 billion tonne-km (previous year 2.28 billion).

Broken down as per client sectors, SBB Cargo registered the strongest declines in the sectors wood/paper/glass which react strongly to the economic situation (down by 20.3 percent) and with the business partners and forwarders (down by 20.6 percent). The commerce sector, more resistant to fluctuations of the economy, was more stable (+/-0.0 percent). Gratifying increases could be registered with the sectors agriculture (+2.8 percent), and construction (+8.1 percent).

The subsidiary company Swiss Rail Cargo Köln GmbH (SRC Köln) contributed 113 million tonne-km to the traffic performance. It mostly concerns transports of mineral oil and chemicals, as well as intermodal traffic.

A weak economy and line interruptions put a damper on transalpine traffic.

Transalpine traffic decreased by 10 percent because of the unfavourable economic situation and the four long-lasting line interruptions at Chiasso and Luino. Wagonload traffic was the most affected. The decline with the rolling road is due to a shift from the Gotthard (corner height 3.8 metres) to the Lötschberg (corner height 4.0 metres) and thus to the new company RAlpin, in which the SBB holds a 40 percent stake.

In million net tons*	2002	2001	Change
Wagonload traffic	8.61	10.42	- 17.4%
Unaccompanied combined traffic	11.19	11.25	- 0.5%
Rolling road	0.87	1.30	- 32.7%
Total	20.67	22.96	- 10.0%

*rounded figures

Transit traffic dominates the operating performance.

More than 50 percent of the operating performance of SBB Cargo is furnished in transit traffic through Switzerland. The economic slump in Germany and Italy therefore has a dampening effect also on the result of SBB Cargo.

In billion net tonne-km*	2002	2001	Change
Operating performance in Switzerland			
- Domestic	2.35	2.28	+ 3.2%
- Import	1.29	1.39	- 6.7%
- Export	0.71	0.90	- 21.3%
- Transit	5.26	5.96	- 11.8%
Operating performance abroad	0.11	-	-
Total	9.73	10.53	- 7.6%

*rounded figures

Swiss Rail Cargo, North and South.

To prepare for the implementation of the strategy of growth on the north-south axis, SBB Cargo could set two important milestones. In the North, this ripened on 24 June 2002. After an intensive time of preparation, the subsidiary company Swiss Rail Cargo Köln GmbH (SRC Köln) could be founded. SBB Cargo holds a 51 percent majority, other shareholders are «Häfen und Güterverkehr Köln» (HGK) with 44 percent, and Hupac SA with 5 percent. In a phased procedure, SRC Köln relieved the predecessor company S-Rail Europe (Joint Venture between SBB Cargo and Hupac) and from the timetable change on 15 December 2002, it assumed full responsibility also for the traffic formerly handled by S-Rail Europe.

SRC Köln in the first place develops freight business on the axis Western Seaports-Cologne-Basel, and in cooperation with the mother company SBB Cargo, further towards Italy. Thus, SBB Cargo offers border-crossing transport responsibility out of one hand. While in the first days after the foundation of SRC Köln, ten trains were operated daily, this number could be doubled until the end of the year. The operation concept is based on a systemized timetable, meaning that trains are evenly distributed over the course of the day, allowing a very economical use of resources.

Freight traffic north of Milan in SBB hands.

SBB Cargo is less advanced in the implementation of the strategy «South». Since 2001, SBB Cargo has been planning to improve quality and punctuality through a very close cooperation with FS Trenitalia Cargo, thus also creating the prerequisites for a growth of volume. Concretely, the setting up of a common business unit «Transalp» was started, destined to gradually assume the handling of all the border-crossing freight traffic Switzerland-Italy and to offer it out of a single hand. After an encouraging initial success on the dead-end line Chiasso-Lecco, this strategy did not prove promising. Despite intensive efforts on both sides, it was not possible to achieve the urgently needed sustainable improvements in productivity and punctuality. In December 2002, the SBB therefore decided to withdraw from the joint project with Trenitalia.

In the future, SBB Cargo's focus of cooperation with FS Trenitalia Cargo is directed to transports to central and southern Italy. For the transports in the greater north-of-Milan area (from Brescia via Milan to Novara), however, SBB Cargo founded an Italian subsidiary in early 2003, the Swiss Rail Cargo Italy S.r.l. (SRC Italy). The goal is from 15 December 2003 to operate the first freight trains in the free network access mode (open access) in the area north of Milan under the responsibility of the SBB subsidiary.

New products launched.

In domestic traffic, the strategy of SBB Cargo aims at a moderate growth with the help of new products. In this respect, the market introduction of the new product «Cargo Domino» in the late summer of 2002 constituted a milestone. «Cargo Domino» is a product of combined road-rail traffic. The collection and/or delivery service between the client and the railway is effected on the road, the long-distance transport on the railway. The core part of the system is an innovative transshipment device which radically simplifies transshipment from road lorry to railway wagon and vice-versa. It can do without expensive terminals taking up so much space. In combination with the network of Cargo Express, SBB Cargo can thus offer a genuine door-to-door transport in overnight service, and can significantly extend transport service to regions outside the catchment areas of freight stations and private sidings.

First clients have been using Cargo Domino since mid-2001. The positive experiences of this pilot phase made it possible to tie a first extension package to the extent of CHF 32 million. This buys for SBB Cargo 200 container-carrying wagons and a total of 270 sliding platforms, insulated containers and cooltainers. Further types of containers will be leased as the need arises. The clients of Cargo Domino mainly include the large-scale distributors such as Coop, Usego, Manor, Migros and Waro, which can thus supply specific networks of stores directly from the distribution centres without intermediate transshipment. The tendency of the large-scale distributors to reduce the number of distribution centres will open up further potentials for the Cargo Domino system.

Custom-made offers for trainload traffic.

In connection with the takeover of the Lokoop transports, SBB Cargo split up its trainload system by offering its clients the following two different quality levels:

- With the quality product «Cargo Train flexi», the client can profit from additional services and a high flexibility in the transport arrangement (time windows, volumes);
- With the basic product «Cargo Train fix», the client renounces additional services and orders volumes and time windows as per fixed plans, allowing SBB Cargo a yet more economical production, reflected in a more advantageous price.

Concurrent with the timetable change of 15 December 2002, SBB Cargo introduced the day network for Cargo Express. This functions along the same principles as the Cargo Express Night Network: By shunting only once, short transport times can be achieved between the major freight stations in domestic traffic. For the transport of perishables and other time-critical goods, the railway can thus offer a genuine alternative to the road.

New locomotives.

For the first time since the legendary «Crocodiles», the SBB has taken locomotives into service that are purpose-built for freight traffic. The Mark Re 482 from Bombardier is a dual-voltage locomotive that can be used both on the Swiss and the German railway networks in border-crossing operation. It is primarily earmarked for traction on the Cologne-Basel-Erstfeld (-Chiasso) axis, but can also be seen to pull other trains in Switzerland and in Germany. The first series of ten units was taken into service in mid-June 2002. Of the follow-on order of 40 units, passed in August, the first three were already delivered in December. Each of the new freight train locomotives roughly costs CHF 4.5 million, around 30 percent less than the universal locomotive Re 460 procured from 1991 onward.

In the Industrial Works Bellinzona, the first Re 420 (newly Re 421) was successfully transformed into a dual-voltage locomotive and can be deployed on the German and the Swiss networks in cross-border operation, like the Re 482. Transformation of a further batch of, for the time being 12 units, has begun.

For the border-crossing traction Switzerland-Italy, the dual-voltage technology is not sufficient. Because of the different current systems, dual-current locomotives for 15 kV alternating current, and 3 kV direct current are needed. In April, the SBB approved a credit of CHF 100 million for the procurement of a first batch of 18 dual-current locomotives for traffic Switzerland-Italy. The call for tenders according to WTO rules was terminated in the year under review, awarding of the contract will take place in the spring of 2003.

New shunting vehicles and «more quiet» freight wagons.

The fleet of shunting vehicles is being renewed and standardized. SBB Cargo receives 40 diesel locomotives of the series Am 843, built by Vossloh in Kiel, which will also be procured for the divisions Infrastructure and Passenger Traffic. After the phased delivery starting in the autumn 2003, they will allow the regional Cargo teams a more economical production.

For the first time in ten years. SBB Cargo took bigger series of new freight wagons into service. In the year under review, delivery of 150 refrigerator wagons (series Hbbillns-uy) and of 120 grain wagons (series Tagnpps) started. These meet the latest requirements of the food law and replace the older aluminium wagons dating from the 1970s. A further call for tender was issued for the procurement of a 100 more grain wagons, 200 container wagons (series Sgnss), as well as 200 sliding-wall wagons (series Hbbillnss) and for 270 containers for the Cargo Domino product. All the new wagons are equipped with low-noise brakes with synthetic brake pads. This allows for noise reductions of around 10 decibel, which the human ear perceives as a reduction by half.

Derailment detectors: backlog in retro-fitting.

In the service plants of «Cargo Service Rollmaterial» (G-SR) the retro-fitting of 623 special wagons for mineral oil products with derailment detectors started. The costs amounting to around CHF 1.3 million were charged to the dangerous goods fund. The fitting of derailment detectors to 623 mineral oil wagons is part of the agreement between the federal government (UVEK), the Swiss Association for Chemical Industry (SGCI) and the SBB for the reduction of the risks associated with the transport of dangerous goods, signed on 27 June 2002. By signing the agreement, the SBB had committed itself to terminate the retro-fitting of the 623 tank wagons with derailment detectors until early 2003. A backlog has built up in these works because of insufficient availability of the wagons to be fitted out. Until the year's end, only about 400 tank wagons could be equipped.

Client satisfaction improved.

The satisfaction of Cargo clients could again be slightly improved as against the previous year and reached 7.47 points (previous year 7.38) out of a total of 10. The main contributors to the higher rating were the billing services and the Client Service Center (KSC). The reorganisation of the KSC with the arrangement by trades and the buildup of a telesales department for small and occasional clients thus bears the first fruits. SBB Cargo got lower marks in the customer advisory service. One of the reasons is the fact that new criteria were included in the survey. For instance it was also asked for an assessment of the «contribution to transport and logistics concepts». Another reason is a high staff fluctuation following the reorganisation of sales by end of 2001/ beginning of 2002.

In the area of punctuality, SBB Cargo has reached the targets. Overall, 91 percent of the freight trains were punctual, i.e. their delay did not exceed 30 minutes. This is one percent better than the set target. In domestic traffic, traditionally more punctual, even 93 percent of the trains reached their destination within this time margin.

Reorganisation implemented without creating social hardship.

By the end of the year, the workforce of SBB Cargo counted 4,929 full-time jobs (previous year 5,182). The reduction could be absorbed by natural fluctuation and with a job reduction programme in the second half of the year. This was SBB Cargo's reaction to the slump in the economic situation. 113 employees were concerned by the reduction programme, both in SBB Cargo headquarters in Basel and in the regions. The reduction was achieved without creating social hardship and according to the SBB principle that there must be no dismissals for economic reasons. The major part of the reduction concerned employees in the regions who were sent into early retirement. The others concerned were assisted and furthered in the SBB project «Chance».

Per 1 March, SBB Cargo sold those of the Cargo Service Center warehouses which had no direct connection to railway transport, to the European logistics concern Rhenus Alpina. For the 41 employees who were transferred to the new owner, the provisions of the collective labour agreement with SBB Cargo continue to apply.

Outlook forebodes suspense.

The strategic goal of a strong growth on the north-south axes is a matter of great concern also in the year 2003, despite a difficult start into the new year with a weak economy and the important tunnel of Monte Olimpino II near Chiasso still being closed. The setting-up and further development of the subsidiary companies Swiss Rail Cargo in Germany and Italy has top priority. To achieve this, it is necessary to consolidate and expand the sales in Germany, and to (newly) build up the sales in Italy. On the German Rhine axis, SBB Cargo shall develop production further. In Northern Italy, it is a question of a step-by-step buildup of the own production capacity from zero.

In the Swiss transport market, SBB Cargo wants to strengthen its position. The project «New Wagonload Traffic» is an important element thereof. The Cargo Express Day Network and Cargo Domino must be developed further in order to sustain the development in domestic traffic which has been positive despite the bad economic situation. These efforts are destined to achieve a moderate growth in Switzerland.

The decision of the SBB to operate own trains in Northern Italy in Open Access has brought much movement into the market. SBB Cargo expects that in the course of the year 2003, competition among the freight railways will become yet keener and that perhaps further new competitors will push their way into the market, both in Switzerland and in Northern Italy.