

150 years of trains in Switzerland : a railway country par excellence

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**DIEBAHN
BEWEGT
SEIT 1847**

**LE TRAIN
BOUGE
DEPUIS 1847**

**IL TRENO
MUOVE
DAL 1847**

150 years of trains in Switzerland

A railway country par

Although not really suitable from the geographical point of view, Switzerland has over 150 years developed into a real railway country. Here is an overview from the Spanisch-Brötli line to the Pendolino.

The topography was not exactly favourable for the introduction of railways in Switzerland. For very many years, transport of persons and goods had traversed the Alpine region by postal coach, boat and mule convoy. The first railway line came from France

*Jean-Louis Scherz**

in 1844 to Basle where the Strasbourg trains had their terminus. But this was on Swiss soil for a length of only about 1,800 metres.

The beginnings

The first railway link within Switzerland was opened on August 8, 1847, between Zurich and Baden. This line became famous as the Spanisch-Brötli railway. The name stemmed from the puff pastries which were made in Baden and highly esteemed by the population of Zurich. The new line meant that the servants of rich families no longer had

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to go to Baden on foot to cover their needs.

Other railway lines were opened and soon the whole country was experiencing a veritable railway fever. The first objective was to link the lakes, so that steamers could be used for further transport over the water. The result was a plethora of small lines, and the whole situation threatened to get out of control. The parliament of the new federal state postponed a decision as to whether railway construction should be a matter for the government or the private sector. In 1852 it was finally decided that the choice of routes should be transferred to the cantons while railway financing would be a matter for private companies.

Technical progress and the increased speed of travel quickly made the railway the most important means of transport. Soon railway lines criss-crossed the Swiss plateau, and the Jura hills were pierced by the first big railway tunnels. In parallel with the normal gauge lines which linked the big cities and crossed the frontiers, in the years leading up to the First World War a dense network of narrow-gauge railways appeared. This had the function of linking the main lines with the rural centres and regions which were difficult of access.

Up to and through the mountains

The 19th-century engineers put their minds to making their steam locomotives climb the mountains. Rack railway technology made it possible to reach the 5,906-foot high peak of the Rigi in central Switzerland. The wide variety of railway lines in the mountains also contributed to the development of

the hotel industry and gave Switzerland the reputation of being a mountain-railway country.

The endeavour to link northern and southern Europe by actually piercing the Alps remained a dream for a long time. But from the 1840s on, a fierce competition started between several large-scale projects. In 1869 an international conference organised by Switzerland decided that the St. Gotthard route should be the Alpine link between Switzerland and Italy. These two countries financed most of the work, which began

Jubilee events

May 10–11: Eastern Switzerland Jubilee Festival in St. Gall

May 24–25: Inauguration of railway station and second city tunnel, Aarau

June 14–15: Train parade at the Lausanne shunting yard

June 22–July 20: Exhibition of historical locomotives in Delémont (including trips)

August 8: Official festival inauguration and opening of the main hall in Zurich / Exhibition train and festival pub in Baden

August 9–10: Festival at the Limmattal shunting yard

August 22–October 26: Steam locomotive rides on the Spanisch-Brötli railway and model trains from throughout Europe, Lucerne

August 30–31: First Ticino Jubilee Weekend in Bellinzona (motto: The train and the city.)

September 6–7: Second Ticino Jubilee Weekend in Cadenazzo/Airolo/Capologo (motto: The train for free time.)

September 13–14: Third Ticino Jubilee Weekend in Biasca/Mendrisio (motto: The train yesterday, today, tomorrow.)

September 20–21: Fourth Ticino Jubilee Weekend in Lugano/Chiasso (motto: Transport and logistics chain in goods traffic.)

September 27–28: Fifth Ticino Jubilee Weekend in Chiasso/Mendrisio (motto: Good morning Italy.)



excellence

in 1872 and was completed in a record time of ten years. It included not only the piercing of a tunnel 15 km long through the Alpine continental divide, but also the construction of the precipitous access lines – with spiral tunnels on certain sections – which were needed to conquer the huge difference in altitude. The St. Gotthard line was inaugurated in 1882.

Nationalised and electrified

Until the turn of the century the Swiss railways were operated by a number of private companies with varying financial success. But the competitive struggle between these companies became excessive, so that the politicians had to intervene. On January 1, 1902, the country's principal lines were nationalised following a referendum. The network took the name of Swiss Federal Railways (SBB). In 1909 the St. Gotthard line was nationalised in its turn. A little under a century later, the Lake of Constance railway from Schaffhausen to Romanshorn will become the first SBB line to be privatised.

The First World War resulted in serious bottlenecks in the supply of fuel and lubricants. This had a disastrous effect on railway operations since the trains were still mainly pulled by steam locomotives. The attempts which had begun at the end of the 19th century to use electric power were intensified and this led to rapid development towards electrification of the network.

In the 1920s and 1930s, several types of electric locomotive were developed. Their silhouettes marked the Swiss railway landscape for many years. The features of the Crocodile Locomotive Ce 6/8, which was used for heavy transport in the mountains, obtained world renown, while the Ae 3/6 and the Ae 4/7 did most of the work on the other lines. Both types of locomotive remained in service right into the 1990s.

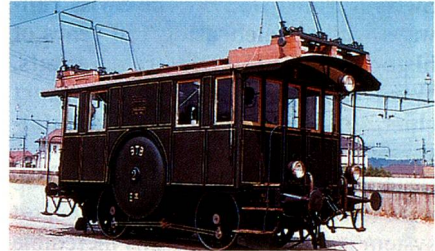
Same-every-hour schedule since 1982

Coaches made of light metal were introduced after the Second World War as were the first locomotives with all-axle drive (e.g. the Re 4/4 I). In 1956 third-class was abolished. A short time later, the luxury TEEs (Trans Europe Express) were introduced to link Europe's most important cities. These were later succeeded by the French TGV (trains à grande vitesse) and the German ICE (InterCity Express). In 1981 Geneva became the first Swiss city to be linked to Paris with these new trains, followed by Lausanne in 1983 and Berne in 1987. Since 1996 fast tilting trains – the Pendolino – run between Switzerland and Italy. In 1982 the Swiss railway network, which has more than 5,000 km of line, began running according to a same-every-hour schedule.

Switzerland is a railway country par excellence. It has one of the world's densest line networks. This is supplemented by a no-less expansive array of other means of public transport: postal buses, trams and city buses, boats, mountain railways and cable cars. The Swiss themselves are enthusiastic rail travellers. The number of rail trips per head of population in Switzerland is exceeded only by Japan. And the SBB comes at the top of the list of European railways in terms of market share – with 13.5% of passenger kilometres and 38.5% of freight kilometres. ■



Ce 1/2 (1888)



De 2/2 (1899)



Be 5/7 (1913)



Ce 6/8 (1921–1927)



Ae 4/7 (1927–1934)



RAe 2/4 (1935–1938)
(Photos: Photo-Service SBB)