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SWITZERLAND'S OTHER RAILWAYS

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SWISS URBAN TRAMWAYS

By N.P. Wheelwright

NEUCHÂTEL

Neuchâtel TN — Compagnie des transports en commun de Neuchâtel et environs

Of the five urban tramway systems this is the one most easily classified as a light railway. It is referred to by TN as 'Train Regional' and the service also appears the SBB timetable. Only two short stretches of street running remained on a system reduced from over 29km at its peak to less than 9km by June 1984, which makes it the shortest of the urban systems. Most routes were replaced by trolleybuses, including the route up the hill to the SBB station.

The remaining route, No 5 — built in 1892, runs from Place Pury in Neuchâtel, along or near the lake for much of the way, to Colombier and on to the terminus at Boudry. At Colombier the original 'railway' station building remains making it one of the more photographed locations.

The route is single track with passing loops — utilising right hand running — at Port Serrieres, Auvernier and Colombier. Although the current fleet has no need of it, a turning circle remains at the Place Pury terminus and accounts for the only section of street running. The other section was in Boudry but this has recently been removed. A little under half of the route is on private right of way, the remainder being segregated roadside running.

The line was slowly modernised during the 70's, the track relaid on ballast with flat bottom rail, some realignment in connection with road improvements, modern catenary erected, automatic colour light block signalling with radio control installed and even lifting barriers installed at Areuse. These all add to the impression of a railway.

The main depot at Evole is visible across a shallow bay on the lake from the Place Pury terminus. The depot caters for TN's bus and trolleybus fleets as well as for the trams although these are now limited to 3 or 4 tracks. The track layout is such that it provides a passing loop if required. A second depot is located at the Boudry terminus. Until 1984 this was a small two road building, apparently out of use, but an adjacent siding often contained one of the departmental vehicles. The old depot has been demolished and a new four road depot built on the site. The turning circle was also removed, the cars terminating by the entrance to the depot. This is at the side of the building away from the street, behind the inevitable 'kiosk', making the tram almost invisible. One hopes that the adage 'Out of sight — Out of mind' does not apply to route 5 in Boudry.

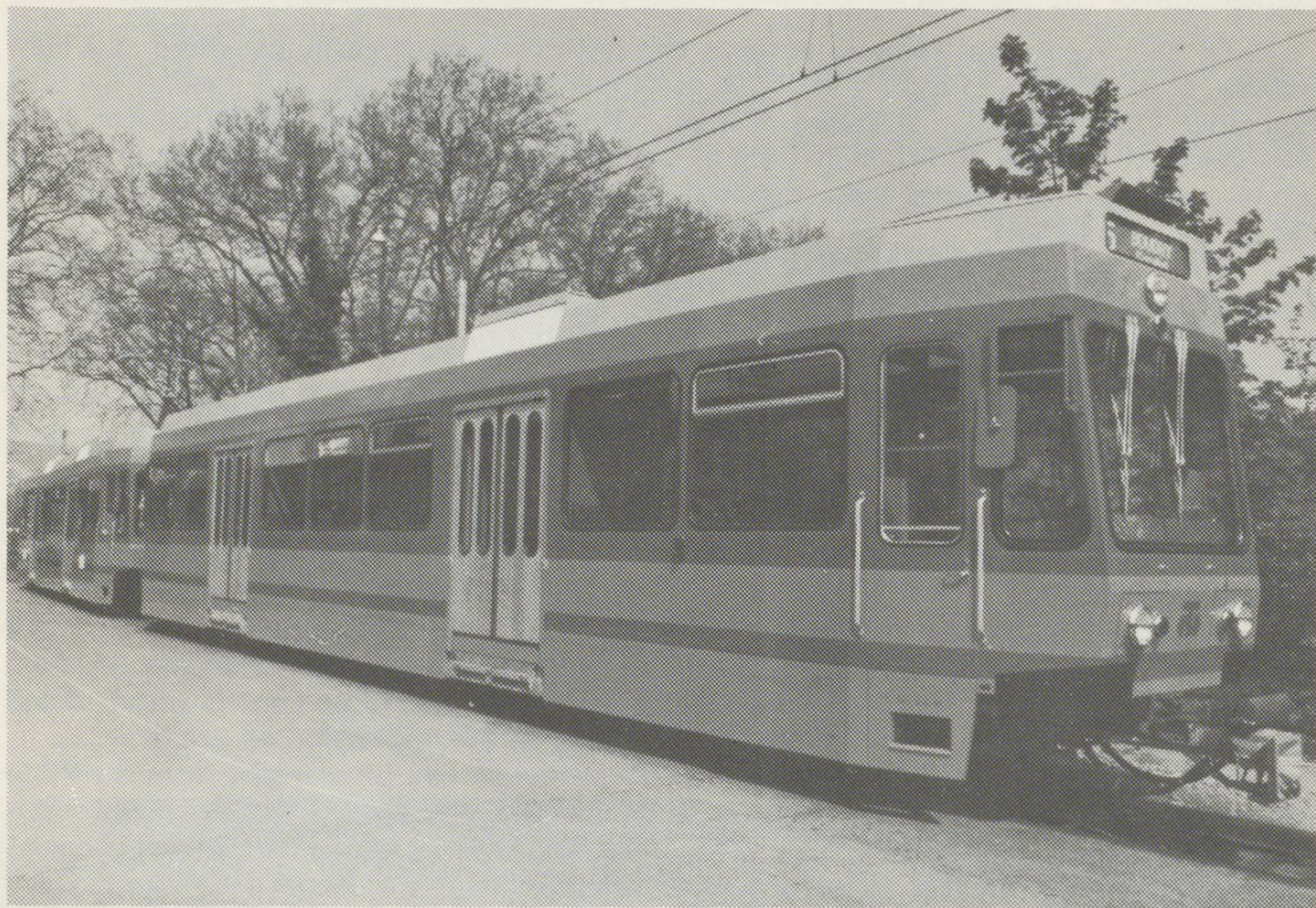
Until June 1984 Areuse was the terminus for a shuttle service to Courtaillod. This was a short single track branch, about half roadside running, with runround facilities at Courtaillod. This was also the site of a pw materials yard and a large Dutch barn style depot holding stored and preserved vehicles. The branch remained in use until the stock was transferred to the new depot.

The rolling stock consists of four double ended Be4/4's and matching single ended Bt's built by Schindler (Schlieren) in 1981, apparently there are further cars on order. Most services are run by a power car plus driving-trailer but single and triple car workings are scheduled. After about 8 p.m. the route is worked by two 1947 double ended Swiss

Standard bogie cars, a version which only TN ever used, with a suitably smaller capacity. The Areuse-Courtaillod shuttle was the last regular use of the ex Genoa single articulated cars of 1942 vintage.

The Schindler cars are impressive and give a good ride over the well maintained track although the driving trailers give a noticeably better ride than the powered vehicles.

The traffic on the route appears healthy although two of the trolleybus routes carry a higher number of passengers. The SBB Neuchâtel-Yverdon line also has stations at Serrieres, Auvernier, Colombier and Boudry but runs quite high up on the hillside, often visible from route 5, so that the two routes serve the upper and lower sides of the villages with the TN route being more frequent and more convenient for the town centre in Neuchatel.



Triebwagen Be4/4 and Bt of Neuchâtel and TN.

Photo: Neuchâtel



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