

RhB might-have-beens : the Tirolean connection

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The Tirolean Connection

Mike Polglaze continues his account of projected metre gauge routes by considering the extension of the Engadine line into Austria.

On 25 June 1904 a proposal was made to the RhB by the directorate of the Austrian Vintschgaubahn (VSB) to connect the two lines together. No agreement was reached, although several schemes were put forward by both parties. As a result, the Mals-Landeck section of the VSB was not built; had it been constructed the VSB would have been standard gauge. At this time the proposed terminus of the Engadine line was Martinsbrück.

The Austrian Project

From the station at Nauders (1300m above sea level[asl]) the route follows the continuation of the Vintschgaubahn track to Pfunds (31%) and the narrow track connection into the Engadine along the righthand valley with a ruling grade of 28%. The valley floor would be reached at Ramosch station. The line would be approximately 12km long and be worked by the RhB.

Approximately 12km of this project would be on Swiss soil but it has two disadvantages:

- a) The RhB Unterengadin line from Ramosch would be cut off from all traffic.
- b) There would be considerable difficulties in construction.

The Swiss Project

The line from Martinsbrück to the border would be 5.45km long and would have been built according to the regulations of the RhB. The ruling gradient was to be 13% and the sharpest curve 160m radius.

From Martinsbrück (1081m asl) the line was to follow the left side of the valley, 20-45m above the Inn River. As km 2 and km 2.5 there were to be tunnels, respectively 200m and 300m long. Two galleries at Val Modin and Val Zipla would protect the line from avalanches. At

km 5.15 the line would reach Alt-Finstermunk station and after another 300m would reach the Swiss-Austrian border. The track on Austrian soil was to be 3.06km long and built to RhB standards. From Alt-Finstermunk (1091m asl) the line was to be level as far as Shalkhof. Three dangerous avalanche areas in God del Chaste were to be avoided by a tunnel 420m long. After passing the Schalkalp the line would fall on a 13% grade to Hinter-Rauth (km 1.84). From km 3.34 to 3.64 the line would again follow the Inn and run on the level into Pfunds, crossing the Inn at km 4.24 on a bridge with a 44m span arch.

The station at Pfunds was to be made into a Customs station. 58.4% of the route would have been laid on a 13% grade, the remainder would have been level. As much as 68% of the route would have been straight, the remainder would have been on radii between 160m to 400m.

The Middle Project

An amalgamation of the above

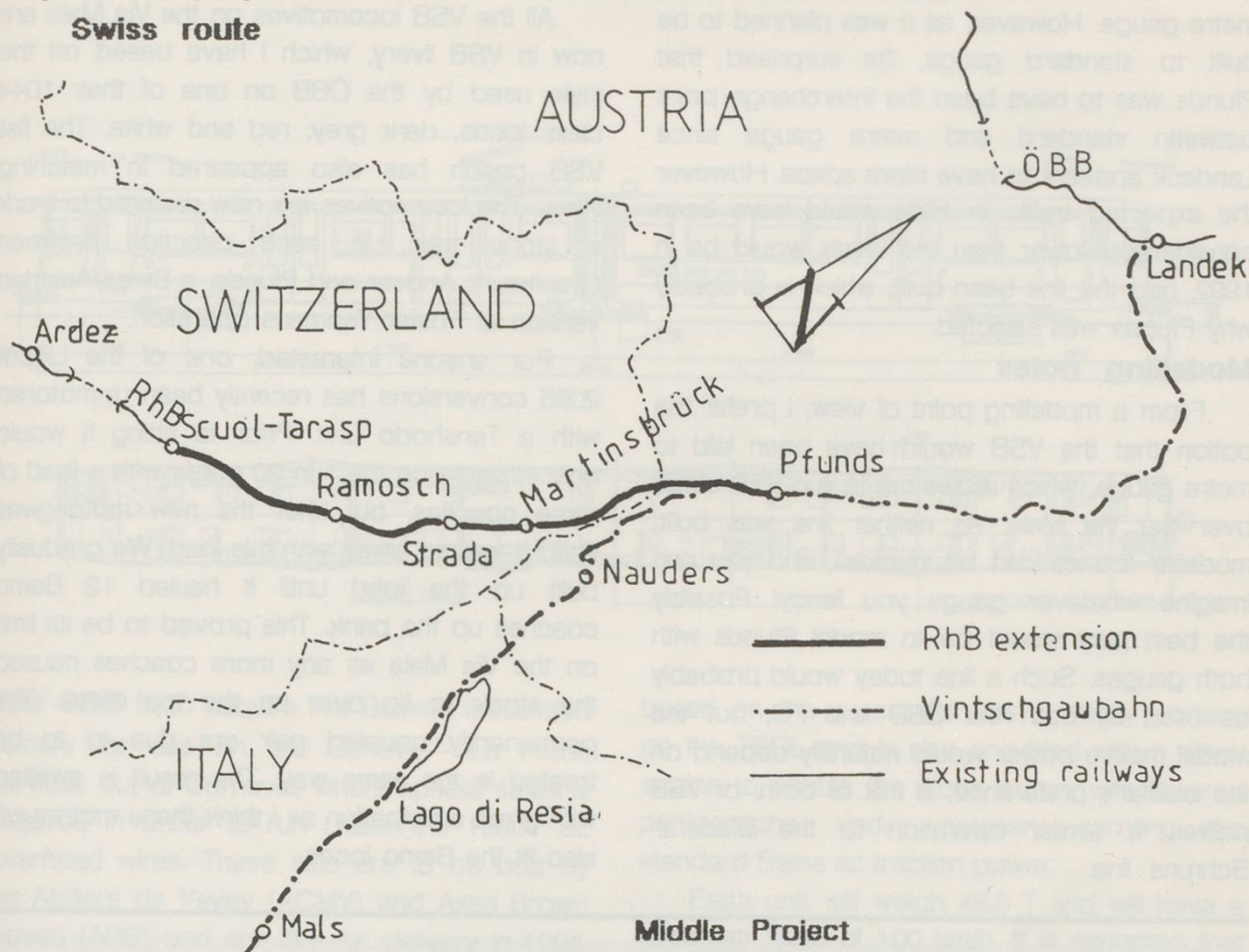
The VSB line.

From Nauders (1330m asl) the line was to fall towards Parditsch where a spiral tunnel was envisaged. The route would then cross the Stillen Bach and the road, then pass under the Norbertshöhe in a tunnel, emerging at 1311m asl. The next station would be Martinsbruck (1038m asl) where the connection to the RhB was to have been made. From here the line would have been mainly in tunnel, running to Finstermunz (1160m asl) and Pfunds (970m asl).

The RhB line.

Coming from Scoul the line was to cross the Inn at Saraplana, then run for some 6 to 7km on a falling gradient of 5-6% to the junction at Martinsbruck. About 1km of the RhB line would have been on Austrian soil.

Map of the projected Swiss route



Statistics

Austrian Project

Border Station	Nauders (1330m asl)
RhB Line	Ramosch-Nauders
VSB Line	Mals-Nauders Nauders-Pfunds- Landeck
Ruling grade	RhB 28% falling
Length of RhB line	12.7km
Cost	8,500,000

Swiss Project

Border Station	Pfunds (970m asl)
RhB Line	Scuol-Pfunds
VSB Line	Mals-Nauders-Pfunds Pfunds-Landeck
Ruling grade	RhB 13% falling
Length of RhB line	31km
Cost	15,000,000

Middle Project

Border Station	Martinsbrück (1330m asl)
RhB Line	Scuol-Martinsbrück
VSB Line	Nauders-Martinsbrück Martinsbrück-Landeck
Ruling grade	RhB 6% falling
Length of RhB line	19.2km
Cost	11,600,000

Note. The currency was not shown as either SFr. or OsSch. but as these were taken from a Swiss source we can assume SFr. - pre 1914

The Cooks' European Railway Map (1991-92) shows an electrified line running from Merano to Mals, which was possibly once the start of the VSB. This section of line, together with the unbuilt part from near Nauders to Mals would be in Italy today, following the border changes after World War I.

Having driven over the road from Landeck to Scuol a few times, it certainly would have

been a spectacular run, whether on standard or metre gauge. However, as it was planned to be built to standard gauge, I'm surprised that Pfunds was to have been the interchange point between standard and metre gauge since Landeck appears to have more space. However the expected traffic in 1904 would have been considerably lower than the levels would be in 1992, had the line been built, which is probably why Pfunds was selected.

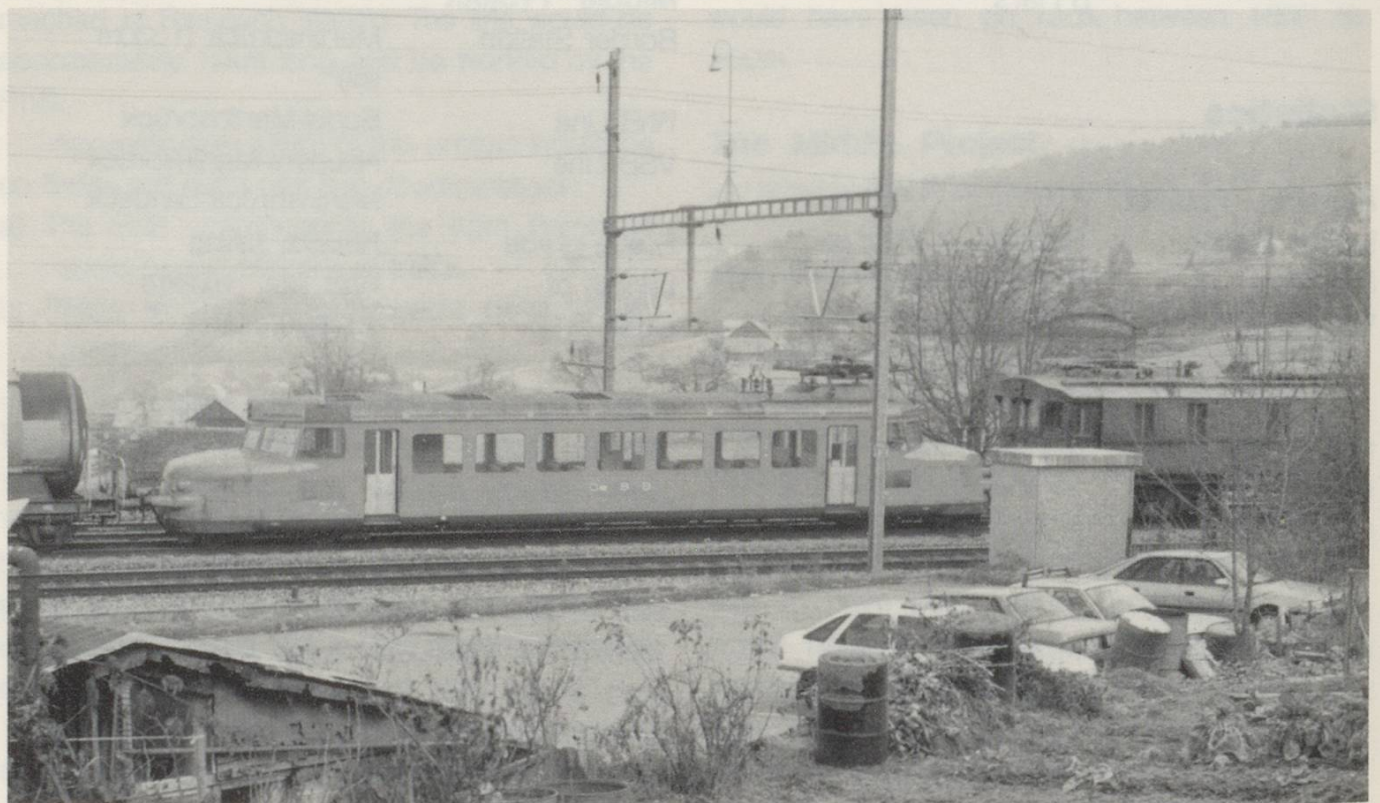
Modelling notes

From a modelling point of view, I prefer the option that the VSB would have been laid to metre gauge, which allows me to run VSB stock over the Via Mala. As neither line was built, modeller licence can be invoked, and you can imagine whatever gauge you fancy! Possibly the best ploy would be to model Pfunds with both gauges. Such a line today would probably be used by both the ÖBB and FS, but the model motive power would naturally depend on the builder's preference; a mix of both, or VSB power, a similar operation to the Bludenz-Schruns line.

Via Mala

All the VSB locomotives on the Via Mala are now in VSB livery, which I have based on the style used by the ÖBB on one of their 1044 class locos, dark grey, red and white. The first VSB coach has also appeared in matching livery. The locomotives are now rostered to work a stone train, in each direction between Granitwerk Andeer and Pfunds, a Swiss/Austrian version of Foster Yeomans operation.

For anyone interested, one of the Lilliput 2095 conversions has recently been re-motored with a Tenshodo unit. Prior to fitting it would only struggle up the 1 in 20 grade with a load of three coaches, but after the new motor was fitted it walked away with this load. We gradually built up the load until it hauled 12 Berno coaches up the bank. This proved to be its limit on the Via Mala as any more coaches caused the stock to tip over on the top curve. The permanently coupled pair are due to be treated in the same way. The result is awaited with great anticipation as I think these motors will also fit the Berno locos..



OeBB RBe2/4 *Red Arrow* No.202 and unidentified De4/5 at Spiez

Photo Les Heath