

Swiss news

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Swiss News

First, the good news: FABI (Finance for rail infrastructure) is safely home.

In a referendum on February 9th the Swiss electorate voted by a majority of 62% to 38% in favour of the Federal Council's proposal to reserve CHF6.4 billion for new investment in rail infrastructure up to 2025. The vote also secured the means by which this will be financed, some of it coming from fuel and road tax income. Opposition from automobile and road lobbies was inevitable but ineffective; indeed, in Basel, Genève, the Vaud and Ticino the majority was over 70%. In Basel this does not surprise; and if Genève and Ticino traditionally loved their cars, the inevitability of a good public transport network is still recognized. There remains some grumbling that the funding of highway projects has no such reserve, but most controversial was a detail: the limitation of tax claims for commuters to CHF3,000 per year. In some cantons this is open-ended, and some claims appeared abusive. After all, even a 1st Class General Abonnement, that is, an annual all-system pass for some 23,500 km of trains, PostAutos, boats and many trams and mountain railways, only costs CHF5,800, (a 2nd Class GA costing CHF3,550), so deducting more than this is surely a luxury! As you know British commuters pay much more, a Swiss newspaper informed its readers that a Basingstoke – London commuter pays about CHF6,000 (£4,076) for just their daily treat. On such incidental things motions are made or lost, but in this case the FABI programme was clearly approved. It is sorely needed, as network capacity is tight.

Then (perhaps) the less good news...

The big departure indicator panels at busy stations are to be digitalized. SBB has just invited tenders to replace, by new large digital displays, the electro-mechanical indicators we know well. Those are the ones with the intriguing roll-down effect and typical clatter as the panels change. The platform indicators will also have to change. The advantages are many: better visibility; rapid updating; easier to give information on disturbances, etc; networking with other on-line information; lower maintenance costs, and a use of best available technology. *And yet...* I have spent many happy moments watching them roll over, but when I hear a murmur that on the digital screens, advertising can also be incorporated, I make for cover.

...and now the really bad news.

It has also come out, in the Swiss press, that the SBB intend to drop the second-hand from their classic clocks. Now this is heresy with a vengeance. The fascination of watching the second hand do a round in 59 seconds and then stop, while the minute hand jumps ahead, will be in danger. How will we amuse our tourists and children at the station in future? Surely this deserves a Referendum! See *Boyd Misstear's article on page 13.*

SBB competes with itself!

SBB has launched a new low-cost coach service between Zürich and Munich in competition with the German

long-distance coach operator MeinFernbus. Because of on-going delays by DB in improving their section of the rail corridor between the two cities, the coach services are around 45 minutes quicker than SBB and DB can manage. They are also significantly cheaper. If the coach service is successful we wonder if the InterCity rail service may face abandonment. Is this the shape of things to come on other corridors?

Zürich – Stuttgart improvements

DB, and the Lander Government of Baden-Württemberg, reached agreement in February to introduce an hourly InterCity service between Stuttgart and Zürich from December 2017. However, this will result in the withdrawal of the two-hourly regional service between Stuttgart and Siegen in order to free up paths. However, passengers will still be able to use local tickets on the inter-city trains to Siegen at no extra charge. DB notes that despite stopping at intermediate stations along the route, the new service will retain the existing three-hour Stuttgart - Zürich journey time. The service will use some of the new double-deck rolling stock that DB ordered from Bombardier in 2011.

SBB – Profits down, Passengers up

In 2013 SBB's profits fell to CHF238.2m as its operating expenses climbed by over 4% to CHF8bn, mainly due to an increase in track access charges and additional expenditure on network maintenance. Higher investments drove its debt load up by CHF665m to CHF7.5bn whilst operating income rose by 1.8% to CHF8.32bn. SBB Infrastructure recorded a deficit of CHF72.3m compared with a surplus of CHF37.1m in 2012, the year in which it carried out a network audit that revealed the need for higher levels of maintenance work than previously forecast. However during 2013 SBB carried more than a million passengers a day for the first time with ridership up by 3.7% year-on-year, mainly due to improved services in the west of Switzerland. SBB Cargo made a profit of CHF14.7m, its first in 40 years of separate accounting, thanks to significant improvements in its cost structure following a reduction in the number of service points and staff, improved production systems, restructuring of the fleet and administration, and acquisition of new customers.

Attention in and around Zürich.

The opening in June of the new underground connection to Oerlikon will lead, just as this edition is in readers' hands, to far-reaching changes in train services in the Zürich region. The Swiss Timetable valid for a year to December 2014, has virtually a double content for those services, as most tables change radically. Many trains will no longer reverse in Zürich HB and connections, also between mainline services East and West of Zürich, such as to Chur and St Gallen from Genève, Bern and Basel, are also changed.

Companies prepare bids for Gotthard tunnel contracts.

With the Gotthard Base Tunnel expected to open in December 2016 companies interested in freight transport contracts linked into trans-alpine operations are preparing their bids. Commercial vehicles up to 4m high will be able to use the tunnel on specialist rail freight vehicles. Lohr,

a French company, has developed a prototype for transporting vehicles on the Gotthard route, the Modalohr. SNCF has already ordered 105 of these transporter wagons and Lohr plans to build 500 more, with 185 designated for the Swiss market. The French group VIIA Transhelvetica hopes to manage the transport of these trains through the tunnel and believes that 100,000 trucks could go through the tunnel in this way. However, VIIA Transhelvetica faces competition from established German and Italian-Swiss companies, and Lohr's Modalohr prototype faces competition from CargoBeamer.

Capacity on the Gotthard Route.

Not everyone knows that the freight traffic on the Gotthard route, much of it transit between Italy and Northern Europe, traverses Northern Switzerland by a quite different route to the international passenger trains. The common point in the north is Basel, where, from the DB's Badischer Bahnhof the freights cross the Rhein and turn east to Rheinfelden, Frick and the Bözberg route, and just before Brugg turn south over the Aargauische Südbahn, to Rotkreuz, and then Arth-Goldau. There the passenger, who has gone from Basel via Luzern, sees them again. The opening of the Gotthard base tunnel requires that the approach routes are improved for both clearances and capacity from a budget approved in 2013. There is however also heavy freight traffic to and from Zürich Limmattal yards, and the Mägenwil regions. On average 108 freight trains daily use the section east of Basel between Rheinfelden and Mumpf. There are also 171 passenger trains. Planning suggests some 400 trains daily in future. Present headways of 4 minutes are therefore being reduced in this section to three minutes, with signalling and layout improvements. Work will occupy 7 months, spread from mid 2015 to late 2016, and cost CHF25m. Planned is capacity for 217 freights, and 181 passenger trains daily, a technical estimate because commercial and operating scenarios after the Gotthard opening are still to evolve. Afterwards, Eiken – Brugg will be tackled, with a separate project for complete renewal of the 2.5km Bözberg tunnel. **Swiss Tip:** If you like a good lunch and seeing a lot of freight trains, the restaurant at the former Schinznach Bad station located adjacent to the south portal of the Bözberg tunnel (it is approached by road from Schinznach village) is an excellent establishment. Its speciality is Rösti. What more could one wish?

Gotthard Tunnel opening.

The official public inauguration, after a formal event for invited guests, will be on 4th/5th June 2016, with a great public event. The first proving trials have started, at first with withdrawn rolling stock as experience with the Lötschberg tunnel showed that dust from construction was present much more than expected, and the test rolling stock suffered severely. Trials of signalling (ETCS) systems will be in mid-2014. High-speed running will include trials in early 2016 with an ICE-S of the DB Systems division.

The Gotthard Tunnel open, but no trains?

An interesting tale... The saga of the 29 trains for the Swiss-Italian services, for which tendering is in process,

continues. SBB has had severe trouble with its Bombardier double-deck InterCity train order, where a two year delay is now expected. It refused in January to pursue talks with the three companies tendering for the Gotthard trains, saying that no offer met the specification. This produced uproar, because the companies had invested heavily in their projects, for a small series, and the specification was rumoured to be more than challenging. Next the SBB suggested as substitute a follow-up order for more Class 610 Pendolini, of which a small series is now on order to bridge the period until the new Gotthard and Ceneri lines are opened. Here the Federal Transport Office (BAV) intervened. They told the SBB that the Class 610 will not be legal after 2020 because tilting trains do not comply with the standards of access for handicapped and wheelchair passengers. An exception had, it appeared, been made for SBB earlier because fast services on the old Gotthard line require technical solutions (i.e. tilt). Logically, when the new tunnel opens, straight and fast, this need for tilt falls away. SBB are now stuck. What comes next is anybody's guess. This BAV ruling also appears to involve the popular and successful Class 500 stock, with its ability to tilt, that are currently undergoing an expensive mid-life heavy overhaul. Has the BAV really thought this through? Well, a Swiss saying is *"that the soup will not be eaten as hot as it is cooked"* - it might apply here.

New Works

A visit at the end of last year showed that on the Bern-Neuchatel line works for deviation (bypassing the troublesome Rosshäusern Tunnel with a new one), and doubling between Gümmenen and Rosshäusern were under way, but not on the embankment/viaduct section. On the BLS Bern-Belp-Thun line, trains with two NINA units are too long for the platforms at Seftigen, and a recorded announcement before the previous stations, at Burgistein and Uetendorf, tells passengers that the doors will not open in the rear unit. To eliminate this problem a new station with a single track and one longer platform is being built to the north of the level crossing. Another station being relocated is at Marthalen between Winterthur and Schaffhausen. This is being built to the south of the existing one. On the RhB, a new loop is under construction between Saas and Kublis on the line through the Prättigau.

New 511s on intercity trains?

As we have reported previously there is a problem with the new Bombardier trains that have been delayed by up to 2 years. Also the Class 460s are going into a programme of heavy overhauls. All this means that the SBB has a severe shortage of rolling stock for its Intercity trains so some of the new Class 511s, although they are commuter sets, will increasingly be pressed into longer-distance service.

How long do tramlines last?

Public debate about road works in Basel in February 2014 brought out the information that of the BVB's 127 km of track some 6.1 km are renewed every year, plus occasional out of course repairs. The life of a tram rail is on average 36-years, however sharp curves, steep bits where heavy braking and acceleration are needed, and complex point-work wear faster.

The new low-floor trams seem to be more destructive, but long-term values are still lacking. Relaying usually means road closure, and also renewal of the sub-structure, so it is unpopular with some roadusers. Historically I recall that the British approach had been leave it until it gets insufferable - then close it down!

Bodensee S-Bahn?

A joint Swiss, German and Austrian organization comprised of authorities around the Bodensee has called upon their governments to consider upgrading routes along the northern and southern shore of the lake, to provide capacity for half-hourly regional services. The organisation proposes setting up a joint infrastructure fund involving national, regional and local governments. As well as funding, the group is also calling for much closer integration of fares and train operations around the lake. The group argues that the allocation of responsibilities is currently so complicated that it is almost impossible to develop a coherent vision for the regional rail network. Currently the majority of the German section from Lindau to Friedrichshafen and Radolfzell is non-electrified and single track. The Lindau – Bregenz (Austria) – St Margrethen (Switzerland), and the Konstanz – Romanshorn – Rorschach lines are electrified, but are also largely single-track.

Multi-National operation for British freight traffic

The intermodal freight service from Daventry, England, through the Channel Tunnel and across Europe to Novara, Italy, has recently been upgraded from twice to three times weekly. The service is 'operated' by Danish company DFDS Logistics, however it is hauled to France by GB Railfreight, where it is then handed over to a consortium of Belgian State operator SNCB and Swiss SBB for its trip through several countries. In practice it is usually an SBB loco that hauls the train from Calais to Italy, normally via the Lötschberg Tunnel.

Red Bull

As we reported in a recent Swiss Express a heavy traffic in this product has grown in recent years, and now provides ten or more daily freight trains. The energy drink is put into cans, ready for sale, at Nüziders in Austrian Vorarlberg, and in Heerbrugg in the Swiss Rhein valley. Block trains are run to the container ports of Bremerhaven and Hamburg for overseas shipment. Some take the single line route through Romanshorn to Konstanz, but capacity is restricted and traffic has grown rapidly, leading also to noise complaints along a line with otherwise little freight. Now six or seven trains daily are being routed through Buchs-Sargans – Walensee - Zürich – Basel, which can also handle longer and heavier trains, though capacity there too can be difficult. There are also several trains a week to Mannheim and Köln, where northern European distribution takes place. Many of these trains are worked by DB-Schenker locomotives.

New trains for St Gallen cross-city link

The Appenzeller Bahnen and Stadler Rail announced earlier this year a CHF60m order for seven, 145-seat, Tango light rail vehicles to operate the new line, which is

being built to link the Trogen to St Gallen Trogenbahn operation with the St Gallen to Appenzell service of the Appenzeller Bahn. The works involve a new tunnel to bypass the short section of rack operation on the Appenzeller Bahn's exit from the city. The vehicles will be assembled at Stadler's Altenrhein plant in St Gallen canton and are due to be delivered in time for the opening of the new tunnel in 2017. Removing the rack section will speed-up the service to Appenzell and has allowed the purchase of standard tramway rolling-stock, rather than having to purchase specialist equipment. Linking the two existing services (both of which are now part of the wider Appenzeller Bahnen Group), that currently terminate either side of the main station in the city is projected to increase ridership by some 50%.

St Gallen unit moves west

Ex Turbo Stadler GTW 2-car unit No.526 741-4 was working the single-rack Sissach-Olten via the old Hauenstein Tunnel at the end of last year - complete with publicity material about the new St Gallen S-Bahn services on the luggage racks! This 18km line is one of the biggest loss-makers on the SBB system and until recently was the preserve of (for Switzerland), a fairly tatty un-renovated NPZ/Kolibri unit that operated its hourly service. This section was built as part of Switzerland's first main line and was primarily concerned with taking through traffic from Basel to Olten. As it takes a steadily graded climb south from Sissach the line and its stations are often above the villages. Local traffic on the line is sparse, despite it being included in the Basel S-Bahn system as route S9, and the valley is unusual in having a parallel PostAuto service that better serves the communities. It is assumed that as the 10 year old GTW unit is some 20% lighter than a 20 year old two-car NPZ unit, and hence will be more economical to operate, it has been drafted-in to help keep the losses down.



Former Turbo, now SBB, 3-car GTW at Stein am Rhein.

Photo: s'Murmeli

News from Small Railways

ASm: On Dec 9th 2012, the new 2km line from Niederbipp to Oensingen was opened. Figures now published show a most successful launch. 780,000 passengers used the new line in the first year, and the daily and weekly averages are still rising. In addition, the better connections at Oensingen to InterRegio trains, which reduced journey times in the direction Olten, Aarau and Zürich, have led to an 18% growth in journeys over the whole network between

Langenthal and Solothurn. Traffic growth and operation of the new line, which with all timetable improvements led to 11% more train/km was realised without additional motive power or personnel.

JB: The brown wooden-bodied He2/2 No.9 of the JB, long used as snow-plough engine and often standing by Eigergletscher depot, has now been withdrawn and is exhibited alongside the Luzern – Bern road in Bowil at the premises of Steck AG, who have built various small specialized locomotives and tractors for railway use.

MIB: During the period when the MIB was not a public railway, but ran to serve the Bernese power generating company BKW at Innertkirchen, motive power consisted of battery driven railcars. One, No.5, is on display at the Innertkirchen power station, and another, No.4, is at the VHS in Luzern. However No.3, nicknamed 'Trudeli', a small 12-seat two-axle car in MIB stock from 1931 to 1977, also still exists. It was sold to the Bruchhausen Museum Railway in northern Germany, restored and used mainly for maintenance trains. In 1997 it was out of use, but was again restored in 2003. Now it is offered for sale, and the hope is that it will get back to Switzerland.

MOB: Hopes are slipping that the originally planned four train sets of change-of-gauge rolling stock for through trains between Interlaken and Montreux to be in service from 2016 can be realized. Plans at present are for three sets, with 10 cars rebuilt and a further 16 new vehicles. With these, and a journey time of 190 minutes, a two-hourly interval service cannot be provided. The critical point is the construction, in Zweisimmen, of the stationary gauge-changing installation. At a time of austerity in Canton Bern financing for this is being opposed vehemently by three Cantonal councillors, who consider it to be a luxury. One of these has long been a notorious opponent of the MOB, and lives in Zweisimmen. The uncertainty is causing more trouble, because the MOB intended to make this the moment of changeover for all its operations, introducing automatic couplings throughout, modernizing its fleet and rationalizing operations. New railcars from Stadler have already been ordered. A definite political decision on the future of the project is to be taken this spring.

Bergün Museum and the RhB

A special exhibition opened in the museum this spring of the RhB photo collection of Gian Brüngger. A long-standing employee of RhB he photographed, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, all the rolling stock, often in several stages of development or decline. This was a rich period. Many historical locomotives, including the small rod-drive engines and the Ge6/6 crocodiles, from the opening or electrification, were still in daily work, money was tight and the workshops performed wonders to keep them going. In the meantime traffic was growing and demands were severe. This collection does not show an exhibition world, but everyday operations, often from behind the scenes. It is now recognized as a significant historical record. Check on the website if you are visiting, because it cannot be displayed throughout the year. Special displays have been on the energy supply

system to the RhB; electric railways may seem obvious, and there is all that water power, but how is it actually done? And a particular treasure is the museum's example of a Hipp'sche mechanical disc signal, one of the last of over 150 examples which were finally replaced in 1987. There is one preserved (but not in service) on the Wiesen Viaduct of the Davos – Filisur line, on the inside of the curve.

Christmas events...

A Christmas bonus for the Chur-Arosa line was the resumption of services from December 20th, following the emergency engineering works necessitated by a landslip. On Christmas Day, BLS staff were handing out free Kambly biscuits to passengers in the Langnau area. Also on the run-up to Christmas free press-out cardboard models of the Kambly biscuit liveried loco, No.465 004-9 were available in the booking office at Langnau.

...and Christmas closures

Although last winter was one of the warmest in Switzerland for 100 years, the line of the Alps divided those regions north with no snow (and crocuses in February), from Graubünden and Ticino, which had more snow than anyone remembers. Total closures were rare but the RhB Albula Line was closed for 3 days at Christmas, with trains diverted via the Vereina tunnel and extended journey times. In the Ticino the FART/SSIF Centovalli line was severely affected by snow and had to close during the Christmas-New Year period.

TPF Developments

Some years ago, Bulle station was a collection of rustic buildings mainly of dark wood, with narrow and standard gauge tracks and an ancient depot all in happy confusion, and its platforms all at rail level. Then the concrete people looked in and by 1992, a new main building and depot, platforms, and a bus station, had taken over - functional but devoid of any trace of charm. The latest project is to give up the existing station and railway land and develop a new travel hub with buses and trains, depot, workshops etc., all northwest of the present site, with a pedestrian precinct giving access to the historic old town. Long-distance buses and private cars will go underground. The cost to the TPF is some CHF60m, of which much comes from selling the existing site. Plans include 1000 apartments, 600 jobs, and 1300 parking spaces. Another TPF priority is to rebuild Châtel St Denis station; this is outside the village centre, and involves reversal of the Palézieux trains, with delay and costs. The land is in a high-value area, so the project is to move away, realign tracks for through running without reversal, and cut the overall journey time by 15%, all for completion in 2017.

Signalling – the old ways are still with us

In an era when large areas of rail networks are controlled by large, and often remote, signalling centres it is nice that some historic ways of operating are still practiced. Ramsei is a station on the BLS Burgdorf-Langnau line, and the junction for the short branch to Sumiswald-Grünen. The signalling is worked in the old traditional fashion; a railwayman walks round setting the points by hand, and the stationmaster clears the colour-light signals from a panel in a kiosk on the

platform. There are S-Bahn trains from Bern via Burgdorf every half hour, running alternately to Langnau and Sumiswald-Grünen, with a shuttle connection to Sumiswald-Grünen from the Langnau trains. Fortunately the junction points are at the north end of the station; at the south (Langnau) end, trains are all routed to and from the same platform, so there is normally no need to change the points at that end - otherwise a bike would definitely be necessary! Incidentally SBB don't get rid of their old signalling frames as fast as Network Rail; at both Küssnacht am Rigi and Travers, existing mechanical signalling frames have been left in the station building after replacement by electric points and colour-lights.



620 065 3 at Ramsei.

Photo: Bryan Stone

Oustrail - French-speaking cantons defend rail funding

Swiss rail association Oustrail, representing the country's French-speaking cantons, began action in January to support the CHF6.4 billion Federal rail infrastructure financing plan for investment up to 2025. The plan, subsequently approved, was facing opposition from road haulage and motoring interest groups. Oustrail organised an extraordinary general assembly at Blonay, to which Transport Minister Doris Leuthard, and other politicians involved in the area of transport investment, were invited. The area is due to receive just CHF 6m of the rail funding, some 0.9% of the total, despite the local transport corridors being heavily overloaded. Movement is split 50/50 between rail commuters and road commuters, but the rail lines are already full to capacity. When the approved funding materialise the MOB (trading as 'GoldenPass') is planning improvements on its route to enable some operations to run at a 15 minute headway.

Zentralbahn changes

From the introduction of the December timetable changes Interlaken-Luzern expresses now cross at Kappeli instead of Brunig Hasliberg, and at Sachseln instead of Giswil. The earlier arrival time at Luzern gives some better connections. At the end of 2013 the new double track section north of Giswil (km28.8 to 27.7) appeared to be complete, with signals illuminated on both tracks, but all the trains were using the eastern track, the other was barriered-off with the catenary earthed. At Giswil station, terminating locals from Luzern now use track 1 into the bay platform next to the station buildings. Tracks 2 and 3 serve an island platform, the only one accessible from both directions. Until December,

Interlaken-Luzern expresses crossed in these platforms, but as they now cross at Sachseln trains in both directions only use track 3. Tracks 4 and 5 serve an island platform only accessible from Luzern. The only trains shown to depart from these are two in the early morning. The Interlaken-Luzern trains are now being operated by 7-coach Class 150 'Adler' units, with sometimes a single or double, Class 160 'Fink' unit(s) is substituted. At the end of December hauled coaches, in various liveries, were stored in sidings around the line. Two Class 110 locos were stored in sidings between Alpnach Dorf and Sarnen, whilst 110 021-3 was at Luzern, on the same siding as the canteen coach. During the winter the Luzern-Engelberg express service has been worked by a Class 101, plus push-pull coaches including a panorama car. This may have been for the duration of the busy skiing season. Whereas the older stock was coupled together using the standard coupling with jumper leads, the newer class 150/160 units have fully automatic coupling heads incorporating the train control lines, and are presumably incompatible with the earlier stock.

540s almost gone...

Although a number of Class 540 railcar sets are still around, their use on the current 11 diagrammed services will practically finish in June. One surviving regular working will then be the daily Prison train between Bern Weyermannshaus and Zürich Bassersdorf - no queues for a last trip on that! No doubt some units will turn up for a while, but the class is now at the end of its life. These were the lightweight 1400 series railcars of the early 60s, designed to run the fast trains on routes like St Gallen - Genève, following on from the 'fast lightweight' pre-war trains, and the early post-war Re4/4s. Their début on the specials of the EXPO 64 was impressive, but they failed to satisfy. For a while they were used as light locomotives (the accommodation locked-up), but as the Re4/4 II rolled in they were then quickly cascaded to secondary services. For some years they have been in use as reserve sets, peak-hour relief, and second-league Zürich commuter trains. A short while ago on a Sunday morning I found one replacing a DB ICE between Bern and Interlaken. The nostalgic feeling soon wore off!

...as have the last Ae6/6s.

They were dead but wouldn't lie down. After the official 'last day' on 17th December 2013, for at least a week occasional movements were reported. No.11419, a splendid red 'Canton' engine, still with its chrome lining, was on a sugarbeet train on December 19th but by Christmas it was all over. Ten engines were stored at New Year in Däniken yard and were later taken one after another to Kaiseraugst for scrap.

BLS introduce 'Last Mile' locos

As SBB finally phases-out its Ae6/6s a new generation of locomotive enters service with BLS Cargo. This is the Class 187 'Last Mile' electro-diesel built by Bombardier as their model F140 AC LM, three of which have been ordered by BLS. The locos are rated at 5.6MW when working off the 15kV overhead supply, but they can also work in

un-electrified yards, etc. using their 240kW auxiliary diesel engine. The first working in March was to haul new multiple units from the Stadler plant at Bussnang to a non-electrified freight terminal in Visp.

A3/5 No.705

The 'queen' of the Swiss steam fleet, the 109 year old 4-cylinder compound 4-6-0 express engine No.705, had an unexpected outing last December 7th, which I only heard of later. She was used for what was called 'a British travel group', (the Railway Touring Association), and ran a three-coach train from Olten, over the old Hauenstein line, to Basel, then to Delémont, Tavannes and Biel. I wonder whether the British connections were brought out? The original Hauenstein, from Sissach to Olten, was Switzerland's first main line, planned by Robert Stephenson, and the summit tunnel was built by Thomas Brassey. Queen Victoria's special train for her visit to Luzern went over the route in 1868. Although No.705 has an outside Walschaerts valve gear, for the low pressure cylinders between the frames, the valve gear is of British origin, Joy's Patent, as used on many Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway locos. This was for some time used by SLM, and still exists on the original Brienz-Rothorn engines.

The Sugarbeet Campaign

The 2013 sugarbeet campaign was another success. Some 16,100 wagon loads, totalling 715,000t of beet, were hauled by SBB to the factories in Frauenfeld and Aarberg. This was 51% of the 2013 beet crop.

Ballenberg Damfbahn

At the time of preparing this edition there was no news after the depot fire in November 2013. The steam train season should start on 6th July with a trip from Interlaken to Giswil but the website was closed for reservations and the last news was that surveys of the damage were still being completed. G3/4 No 208 was damaged in the fire, but HG3/3 No.1067 seemed to have escaped. HG3/3 No.1068 is being restored after 40-years as a static exhibit in Meiringen it was apparently severely damaged. Unfortunately the appeal for funding of No.1068's restoration had already been falling behind. All the work on these locos is being done by volunteers, so this setback must be very disheartening.

BLS/Emmentalbahn

Switzerland has a new railway, the Emmentalbahn GmbH (ETB), formed to operate the lines from Sumiswald Grünen to Huttwil and Wasen. The concession, formerly with the BLS, has been transferred to the ETB, which will operate tourist/museum services and also service a factory 2 km up the Wasen branch. The resources of the Dampfbahn Bern and the museum depot in Huttwil are behind this project, which has support of local authorities.

End of 1500Vdc at Genève

The SBB is currently in the process of changing the power supply to the line from the French frontier at La Plaine into Genève from 1,500V dc to 25kV ac, so in the future there will only be two voltages in use in the area. SBB's lines are of

course electrified at 15kV. The line from Genève Eaux-Vives to Annemasse was electrified by SNCF at 25kV in 1986. However, as a spin-off from the new CEVA suburban line that will link Cornavin station to Eaux-Vives (see reports in previous editions of Swiss Express) and continue to Annemasse, this line will be operated by the SBB and re-wired to the Swiss 15kV system, changing to the SNCF system once at the French town. To mark the end of dc operations in Genève, that will see the replacement of the five Bem 4/6 EMUs purchased for the isolated service to La Plaine, there is going to be an event on 5th/6th July. It is currently planned that the former Paris-Orleans railway 4-8-4 (SNCF 2D2 5525) and SNCF's 2D2 9135 steam locos will be present, along with an SBB Ae8/14. Preserved French CC6500s are expected to run specials to Genève as well. It has recently been announced that the CEVA project is now running two years late and is not expected to be fully operational before 2019. Apparently legal issues, that were not resolved until 2013, and unexpected difficulties in drilling the Champel tunnel have been identified as the reasons for the delay.


Closed for the season

The rack railway up Monte Generoso will be shut for the whole of 2014 during the complete reconstruction of the hotel and restaurant at the summit of the line. The railway and the summit facilities are owned by the MIGROS retail organisation. It is planned to re-open in 2015.

Switzerland and Italy agree gauge enhancement funding

Under an agreement signed in Bern at the end of January the Swiss and Italian governments have agreed plans to upgrade the line between Luino and Gallarate/Novara at a cost of some €120m. The money will be in the form of a grant to Italian infrastructure manager RFI under an agreement to be signed with the Swiss Ministry of Transport. The inter government agreement also includes a provision for Italy to spend €40m on upgrading the line between Chiasso and Milan. The work on both lines should be finished by the end of 2020, when the entire Gotthard Base tunnel project, including the Ceneri Tunnel, is due for completion. This will allow the carriage of 4m semitrailers on the entire route through Switzerland to Gallarate/Novara via Luino and Milan via Chiasso.

Sad news

Finally, we have the sad duty to report the death on the 15th February of Bramble, the Swiss railway dog. She was 14 years old, a great age for an Irish Setter, and had been bred by Bryan Stone's daughter Susan who is a renowned breeder and show judge in Switzerland. After a career in the show ring Bramble retired to live with Bryan and for over 5 years accompanied him as he journeyed around the country on his GA. She even acquired from the SBB her own dog version of this pass. Two years ago Bramble retired again to Susan's kennels in the Bernese countryside. Bryan is still asked by some train conductors "Where is the dog today?" 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from Jakob Jäger, Michael Donovan, s'Murmeli, Boyd Misstear, Michael Farr, Mario Gavazzi and others.