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Swiss News

Swiss passenger services to remain an integrated system

Political policy for railways in Switzerland, as elsewhere in Europe, demands clear separation of passenger and freight business. Although not a member of the European Union (EU) Switzerland has adopted many aspects of EU freight rail policy, which was faced in the 1990s with a catastrophic decline in rail freight competitiveness, just when highway traffic was become visibly unmanageable. Switzerland's concern was to keep the Transalpine transit freight on rail and it found ready EU allies in both northern and southern Europe. The Alpine Initiative of 1994, adopted by national vote, placed an upper limit on highway transit volumes. Switzerland has invested heavily in infrastructure improvements, and has also subsidised transshipment terminals and piggyback (rolling highway) operations. Swiss Constitutional Law therefore overlaps with EU policy to stimulate rail freight competitively. In the EU, separation between infrastructure management and train operations, though not fully adopted by all member states, gives competing independent railway operators equal opportunities, with Open Access, to use the rail infrastructure to provide services. Many do; resulting in freight traffic recovering strongly across the continent. This policy was first applied for intermodal traffic, and later to all international rail freight. It showed an urgent need for harmonisation of access conditions, technical standards, authorisation procedures and much more. Switzerland has led in this work, which is far from complete. Today however, a couple of hours spent at Basel Badischer Bahnhof, or Spiez, or Arth-Goldau, will show how many competing operators can and do offer services, with block trains and modern equipment, many carrying intermodal traffic.

Rail privatisation has never been included in EU policy, although today's freight operators may be private or publicly owned. In Switzerland the state-owned body Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) competes, in fact, with national operators such as BLS, and with local railways like SOB, but how far these are really private (they are usually controlled by cantonal and other public interests), is something that even baffled Margaret Thatcher's advisers. They did indeed come to look! Privatisation of the SBB as a political act is not a serious Swiss theme. There is therefore no basis for comparison with British practice.

New policy for passenger traffic. In August 2015 the Federal Council published its proposals for the future of SBB rail passenger operations and infrastructure. A draft two years ago, foresaw a Holding Body with separated competencies for infrastructure and operations, such as the EU now proposed for all aspects of Member States' national rail operations. That idea has now been dropped. The Federal Council's proposal recommends total integration of rail passenger services with their infrastructure, and thus confirms the SBB's monopoly status on its network. What has happened to prompt this change? Three factors seem to apply. One is that there is, despite mandatory directives, still no unity of doctrine in

EU Member States themselves. Rather, the high-speed passenger services that are now well established in most EU countries demand, even with harmonisation rules, a high degree of specialisation and integration between rolling stock and infrastructure. Secondly, despite some grumbles, the present public transport system in Switzerland enjoys high esteem both nationally and abroad. Its contribution to mobility and economy, as a collective issue and not one of short-term profitability, is seen as exemplary. Then finally the Gotthard Base Tunnel, opening in 2016, is a factor. EU states and rail operators will enjoy open access freight rights, and other operators can contractually negotiate indiscriminately for paths for their international high-speed trains.

Size matters. For its other services, Switzerland can claim to be a small state with the equivalent of a National Metro public transport system, with an integrated Taktfahrplan (linked time table operations); frequent standard services serving all regions, close relations between public authorities, finance; operations and investments and a coordinated long-term policy. Metro and similar networks are not embraced in EU rail policy legislation. Although not an EU Member State Switzerland, due to the international treaties that it has entered into, an EU rail operator could complain to its Government, and thus to the EU, that it was being refused freedom of access. This is so far from present European reality, and the SBB network of 2,500-route km is small compared to others. Switzerland has various problems to solve with the EU, but this is not seen as one of them. Inter-running, although not in competitive Open Access, with ICE, TGV, RailJet - and even with TrenItalia (!) - is also today standard practice. The draft proposals go now into the pre-parliamentary consultation process. SE will keep in touch.

Passenger Compensation Law to be Amended

The Swiss Government is planning to amend the regulations on compensation for railway and long-distance bus passengers. The new law is expected to introduce revised operational targets for users of these services, with rail passengers able to make claims if trains have delays of more than 60 min. This measure would bring Switzerland in line with EU standards. Passengers may get their tickets refunded by 50% if transport services have delays of more than two hours. It is not expected that the new regulations will apply to regional and local transport companies when they are first introduced.

Government and SBB agree Financial Framework

The Swiss Federal Office for Transport and SBB have agreed on the financial framework for the performance agreement for infrastructure between 2017 and 2020. As a result of the agreement, the SBB are to receive CHF 7.63bn during the three year period, a 15% increase on the current 2013/16 period. The increase in funding recognises the increasing costs of maintenance and in specific cases SBB will be able to apply for additional funding.

Cargo Connections

SBB Cargo and DB Schenker of Germany are to provide new connections between Germany and Switzerland that will allow palletised consumer goods to be transported from Hamburg, Germany to every region in Switzerland within 48 hours. The new connections will operate under the names of DB Schenker 'Swiss-Shuttle' and SBB Cargo 'Rail Plus Deutschland'.

Gotthard Base Tunnel Project

The 15.4km Ceneri base tunnel that is part of the Gotthard NEAT Project, that suffered a delayed start because of legal disputes over the contract partners, cannot now open in 2019 as planned and will be delayed for a further year. Although a substantial share of the freight traffic with Italy, especially the Intermodal trains, takes the Luino line avoiding Lugano and Chiasso, this will still be a further delay to the planned exploitation of the potential transit market once the key Gotthard Base Tunnel opens.

Rationalisation on the Gotthard route

It was noticeable to visitors to the Gotthard route during the summer that some rationalisation of the route infrastructure is taking place. At Goschenen the whole of Platform 1 has been relaid. This is a platform that sees no regular use at present. After the opening of the base tunnel it could be that it is planned that local trains will use this line. The relaying, and rationalization of the layout also included the sidings and shed at the south end leaving the water crane (near the MGB line) isolated. At Wassen the point accessing the line nearest to the station building off the northbound line, has been removed and replaced with plain track. The line is still connected at the other end although the remaining points are clipped and locked out of use.

On-going Gotthard Service troubles

With the delivery in June of two further Class 503 (ETR 610) Pendolino sets Nos.017/018, operating conditions on the Milano services from Basel, Genève and Zürich should have considerably improved. However, on the Gotthard three things went wrong. First, FS-Trenitalia for its part of the joint service, contrary to expectations, brought back its own Class ETR 470 units, which have again proved unreliable. This unreliability was the main reason why SBB had withdrawn their 20-year-old Italian ETR 470s from the Zürich-Milano service. Trenitalia's CEO has now confirmed, in a joint statement with SBB's Meyer at the Milano Expo, that from December it will use its new ETR 610s on the Gotthard service. We wait to be surprised as various 'solemn declarations' by Trenitalia in the past have been shown in practice to be only good intentions. The second problem was more immediate. The introduction of the new (Italian built) SBB Class 503 units succumbed to an unprecedented heat wave, lasting throughout the summer, and various defects arose with door mechanisms, tilting control, air conditioning and electronics. Finally, the Gotthard route is beset by speed restrictions, and will be for some years to come. For example, the whole section Erstfeld – Brunnen is limited to 80 km/h. Lost time can rarely be recovered. SBB sees this in timetable

and diagram breakdowns, when turnarounds in Zürich cannot be maintained. Substitute sets of hauled stock involve passengers changing to local trains in Chiasso for Milano and, in Milano Centrale missed connections. These are the more irksome because in Italy fast train tickets, as elsewhere, come with validity and reservations for specified trains. All this leads to more complaints and further traffic loss.

SBB. Zofingen – Suhr

This section was closed from July to December 2015 for complete modernisation. This was the last section of the former Schweizerische Nationalbahn, the ill-fated Swiss National Railway, which only operated for 15-months in 1878 before that company's abrupt bankruptcy. (*Swiss Express* had a detailed article in 2013). It is (or was) a rustic ride along the roadside in places, but was in recent years busy with hazardous freight, following clearance in Kölliken of a heavily contaminated refuse depot. The last loads left in July 2015. Very active is the large automobile distribution centre of Emil Frey AG, served by international block trains.

SBB. Linthal line

This line has been substantially simplified in recent years, although the new AXPO hydro-electric storage reservoirs and plant high in the mountains above Linthal produced heavy freight traffic in building materials and equipment. This work is finished and since mid-2015 the line is again officially closed to freight traffic. After several years the sight of hard-stretched Re6/6 on the long 1 in 45 grade above Schwanden is now past. Now further simplification, and new remote signalling, are reducing layouts in several stations, including the Cantonal capital Glarus, where in future the regional trains will cross.

SBB. Widening and Rebuilding

The North-Western Cantons (Jura, Solothurn and both Basels) are funding a study on doubling the Basel-Delémont line for about 3 km, between Grellingen and Duggingen to increase capacity so two fast connections per hour could run from Basel to Biel. The cantons are pushing the service to start by 2021, but the Federal Office of Transport does not see this possible before capacity at the Basel SBB station is increased by 2025. The construction works of rebuilding the Belfort-Delle rail line officially started on the 10th September 2015 in France. Once this 22 km line is opened in December 2017, the cross-border connection from Biel via Delémont and Belfort Montbeliard TGV to Belfort Ville is restored again. The last passenger train ran on the French section of this once important international line linking France to Switzerland (and further south) in 1992. However, on the Swiss side, the trains have been running without interruption and the service was extended across the border to Delle in 2006. The cost of the project is budgeted to be €110m, out of which €28m will come from Switzerland.

New funicular

At Le Locle the station is on a steep hillside above the town and they have been linked with flights of steps. Generations have put up with this inconvenience, but in

2010 a project for a public lift was unveiled. Nothing happened. However in 2013 work started to build a 62m long inclined plane that utilised a single cabin. This project was opened on 13th June. It is automatic and use is free.

New Albula Tunnel

On August 31 2015, after 14 months of preparations, the real tunnelling started in Preda following an inaugural ceremony; technical visits, and also a dedication to St Barbara, patron saint of tunnellers.

CJ and SBB

Between Delémont and Delle for two weeks in July 2015 bus substitution allowed re-laying and station modifications to be carried out between Delémont and St Ursanne. South of Glovelier this included new sleepers, installed over several kilometres, drilled and fitted for later installation of a third, meter gauge rail. The explanation is that in the transport plan of Canton Jura direct narrow gauge trains of the CJ should operate a regular interval service between La Chaux de Fonds, Saignelégier and Delémont via Glovelier.

Genève Cornavin Enlargement

Cornavin station in Genève is severely constrained as its narrow site is located on a viaduct, in a densely built up inner-city district. The present rapid growth of demand, and forecasts of more growth up to 2030, have led to the project Léman 2030 that includes substantial new works between Lausanne and Genève. The FABI rail infrastructure programme contains CHF795m for the widening of Cornavin at its present level. This proposal has been widely criticised and now an underground project, to be realised between 2024 and 2031 and with a cost of around CHF1.65 billion, has been put forward. This will not be an easy one, but an underground solution, which would also involve major works on the approaches from east and west, seems in the end to be inevitable. *Swiss Express* readers will know that in Genève after the 1960s, transport planning proposals that favoured the automobile solutions were popular and public transport investment fell behind. The world moved on and today investment in a new modern tramway network, and the new CEVA urban rail connection, is in full swing. However, the old double track main line from Lausanne, which goes on to the Airport, remains a worsening bottleneck and the constraints at Cornavin do not help the situation.

SNCF Plans around Le Léman

The map shows that the shortest way from Genève to the Valais and the Simplon Tunnel is along the south shore of the lake, the majority of which is in France. Indeed in the 1850s a company called the 'Ligne d'Italie' built a line between St Gingolph, St Maurice, Martigny and Sion, relying on a connection through Savoie via Évian-les-Bains. This was before the line from Genève to Lausanne and Montreux was extended eastwards. Even if Napoléon in his vision of Europe had seen the strategic interest of the Simplon, a rail route to Italy was however still 50 years away. The 'Ligne d'Italie' went bankrupt, being unable to develop through traffic, and its line was merged into the 'Jura-Simplon', which ultimately

built along the Rhône valley to Brig. The Simplon Tunnel then followed. The (eventually SNCF) line from Annemasse through Thonon-les-Bains and Évian-les-Bains to St Gingolph survived, with a frontier interchange to the CFF/SBB at St Gingolph. Although it carried some heavy traffic in WWII it gradually fell out of use and in 1998 it was closed to all traffic, although the tracks are still in-situ. St Maurice still however, has two lines from the lake, the present main line from Villeneuve, and the CFF/SBB branch from St Gingolph, which is a last reminder of the 'Ligne d'Italie'. In recent years various efforts have been made to reactivate the 17.6km lakeshore line from Évian-les-Bains. Studies have now finally led to the approval (although not without financial controversy) in the French State and Regional Plans for 2015-2020, of a proposal to reintroduce passenger traffic following a 3-year building period and expenditure of some €124m.

Basel – The New Carlisle?

Your Swiss News Editor sometimes hears it said that Switzerland is no longer interesting - because of all those multiple units, goes the comment. Our friend Mario Steffani had on one day at Basel Badischer Bahnhof last summer just the opposite experience. His account reminded me of those old days when railway enthusiasts visited Carlisle and York to see trains from the various pre-grouping companies that used these stations. Mario's list, not counting passenger trains, included freight locomotives of all shapes and sizes from Railpool, BLS (although no 'Little Brownies'), a Vectron loco on test, Swiss Rail Traction, Alpha-trains, X-Trains, SBB Chemicals, MRCE, Crossrail, Hector (a surprise from Sweden), Railadventure, DB, NS, and HGK. Open Access and the booming, if unpredictable, world of private freight operators provide the key. But even Carlisle at its best prior to 1923 never ran to 14 different companies!

Basel – Tram Operation Update

The new Bombardier 'Flexity' trams for the BVB are now being delivered in series, with No.5005 being new in service in early August. The service on Line 8, extended into Germany to Weil am Rhein, is already overrun with passengers, both commuters and the many Swiss who shop at beneficial Euro prices in Germany. Since the latter group of consumers also generates very heavy car traffic, conditions at the German end of the route became chaotic as trams stuck in Weil, or at the border, were missing on the rest of the Basel urban Line 8 to Neubad. Road traffic discipline, necessary to keep the tramlines clear, broke down. The BVB are now to double the frequency to eight-per-hour in the hope of improving service reliability. Work has also started in France on the Line 3 extension to St Louis, to open in 2017. A two-week holiday season 'blockade' in the Marktplatz, where normally all lines except two use the same two tracks, resulted in some adventurous diversions. The new 'Tango' trams for BLT are being delivered (No.176 was seen in mid-August) and with these the last of the elderly 101-series, still running out their servicing-interval kms., will steadily disappear. At the end of August they were, however, still much in evidence.

Waldenburger-Bahn to be widened

In September the government of Canton Basel-Land, after a long and controversial evaluation, has proposed that the Waldenburger Bahn (WB) should be converted from its present 750mm gauge, of which it is the only representative in Switzerland, to the much more widely used metre-gauge. The reasons have been comprehensively aired locally. A complete renewal of track and signalling has become due; major station rebuilding in Waldenburg and Liestal is necessary, and the ordering of new, and higher capacity, rolling stock is now urgent. The evaluation showed that programming a metre-gauge conversion and all the other associated works would cost some CHF270m, but retaining the 750mm gauge would be even more costly, mainly due to having to specify special rolling stock. Also maintaining the current gauge would effectively have prevented service and timetable improvements, now seen as inevitable. The WB is 13km long, and carried 1.86m passengers in 2014. This summer, partly with a view to the massive investment to come, WB was merged into the Cantonal transport company - Basel-Land-Transport (BLT), which operates tram routes No.10, 11 and 17 in and around Basel, along with many bus routes in the region as one component of the TNW Tariff Union. However, the re-gauging is not quite so simple. Clearances along the line are very tight, and standard 2.65 m wide meter-gauge rolling stock cannot yet be ordered. Currently the Federal Office of Transport allows stock up to 2.20m to be used but have relaxed this to allow new 2.40m rolling stock to be delivered up to the programmed completion of the conversion in 2022. This year is a key date as it is when the SBB is scheduled to rebuild Liestal Station where the WB connects with main line services. The conversion, assuming that the Federal Parliament gives approval, will therefore take time, but in the meantime only minimal work will be done to keep things working correctly. Among many other things the gauge change may mean that the sole steam loco on the property, E3/3 0-6-0T No.5 'Gideon Thommen', will not be able to run again. The loco has already been immobilised this year for safety and maintenance reasons. *Swiss Express* will keep you informed. In the meantime you should have some five years to visit the line before it is closed for a year, for rebuilding. It is also understood that an offer for No 5 has already been received from a British railway operation.

Waldenburgerbahn at Liestal.

Photo: Malcolm Bulpitt



BLS - Half-year results

Half-year results announced by BLS show some interesting trends. Overall, profit at CHF18.1m was down by 10%, however passenger business improved with 27.5m journeys and 2% better results. It was the freight side that showed the poor results, for although 7% more traffic was moved, freight profitability fell. BLS was certainly affected by the higher value of the Swiss Franc v the Euro in the first half of 2015 as most of its costs are in Switzerland. Passenger business includes widely different traffics, from Bern commuter services to servicing mountain valleys and the rural lines in the Emmental. Most main line traffic, Interlaken/Brig to Bern, is run by SBB over BLS lines. From northern Switzerland all passengers for Italy who can, take the SBB trains using the BLS Lötschberg route to Brig and the Simplon Tunnel, for although the reliability is not perfect it is higher than on the Gotthard route.

BLS – Changes at Zweisimmen

Rebuilding of Zweisimmen station and yard will start shortly. A sum of CHF 58m has been approved for layout simplification, new electronic remote-controlled signalling, raising of platform heights to the obligatory 55 cm, and also installation of two sets of gauge change equipment. The last is for the new through MOB trains from Montreux to Interlaken, four daily in each direction starting in 2018, which will rely on gauge change between MOB (meter-gauge) and BLS (standard gauge). The signalling equipment and track layout, in both gauges, are time-expired and do not meet today's needs.

Motive Power News

1: SBB Cargo

Recently SBB Cargo locomotives have been appearing without polished metal numerals (Re4/4 II, Re6/6 but with the short form of the computerised number in large figures at the ends, so 420-275-0 (formerly 11275). Not beautiful, but great for photographers and train spotters.

2: Lausanne Triage

We learnt informally in August 2015 that the on-off debate about the use of ÖeBB 1063-class heavy shunting engines in place of the ageing Ee6/6 at present in Lausanne-Bussigny, has again been stopped because the rental charge was considered too high. Perhaps not the last word!

3: RhB

The other G3/4, No.11 'Heidi' is now fully restored and was running trials in Filisur and in the Engadin in July.

4: MGB

A regular sight in recent years in Brig was HGe 4/4¹ No.33, one of the original FO rack locomotives from the electrification in 1943. It was used for odd jobs, shuttles to and from the depot, etc. However, it was sent for scrap in June 2015. Nos.32 and 36 are still in limited operation, and may now be seen more often.

5: AB, BDB, RhB

After the Interlaken depot fire three years ago the Ballenberg Dampfbahn had hoped to have one of its locomotives in operation this summer. 'Steaming Brienz' a splendid weekend of steam trains and ships, on June 27/28, was the deadline. Alas, this was not possible, despite serious progress with repairs. However, a steam engine did run, RhB G3/4 No.14, hired from the Appenzellerbahnen and in service the whole summer from Interlaken. Without rack equipment it cannot run north of Meiringen. This was the engine, which once (for some years) belonged to the Model Club of the BOB in Zweilütschinen, until it outran their means.

6: MIB and YStC/Travys

Motor-baggage car De4/4 No. 402 of the CJ was sold to the MIB in 2011, after rebuilding by the CJ Workshops at Tramelan with a diesel-powered generator. Now No.12 of the MIB, its purpose is to move large, often indivisible loads, on the MIB when it is necessary to switch off the catenary. It usually stands in the power station yard at Innertkirchen. A complete surprise therefore was to find it in Yverdon on July 30 2015; Track maintenance specialists SERSA had hired it for two days to haul ballast wagons on the YStC during heavy maintenance work, when the electric power was off.

MIB Gem 4/4 No.12 at Yverdon.

Photo: Bryan Stone

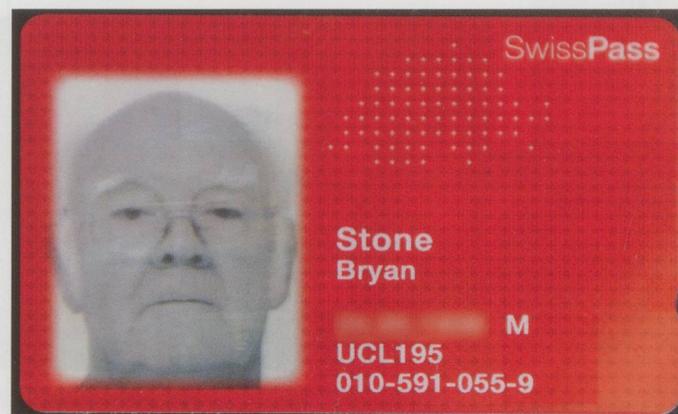


Swiss Pass is now in use

Readers may know that from 1st August 2015 a new general purpose electronic pass has been introduced to replace all the various General Abonnements, Half-Price cards, etc., and indeed also many integrated ski-passes and others. It is not the SBB's creation: it comes from the Public Transport Association – VöV - with support of all the participating operators. This is essential, because Swiss tickets and passes are available interchangeably on services, including Post Autos, ships, etc. of all participating operators. The new card is red, has a picture and includes some basic information. However, most details are only recorded on its chip. It must therefore be presented and read by a fixed or hand-held device, which approves its validity. Not all old cards disappear overnight; some Half-Price cards are valid 3 years, and many regional tariff associations have separate cards which are not yet integrated. Don't be surprised too if there are some rough

corners to be smoothed off; this is a very ambitious programme, and this summer's tests have surely not met all the snags. Tourist Swiss Passes, which members gladly use on their travels, will be incorporated too; don't be surprised if your next one is in the new format.

Bryan Stones's new style 'Swiss Pass'. Photo: Bryan Stone



Finally – SBB Sheep

As we have been informed that Eisenbahn-Amateur, the journal of SEVA our partner Swiss association, will not maintain regular reports on SBB's sheep operations that were described in September's *Swiss Express*, we are therefore dependent on readers' observations, concerning operations, allocations and areas of work. I may start with a recent observation of a large flock of Class Skuddn (individual stock Nos. were not recorded) in active service on the cutting near Nebikon, on the Olten-Luzern main line. For details of SBB's excursion into this specialist area of operation see www.SBB.ch/schafe for more details – but only in German.

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from, Michael Donovan, s'Murmeli, Mario Gravazzi, Jakis Jager, Phil Weaver, and others.

Lötschberg Base Tunnel to be Completed

s'Murmeli reports on a major - and overdue - project

In 2007 the 34.6 km Lötschberg base tunnel between Frutigen and Visp was opened, allowing 200 kph running that brought the Valais and Central Switzerland an hour closer and, after 95 years, bypassing the long 1 in 37 grades of the old route through Kandersteg. Traffic was at once heavy, with the new BLS route popular both for Germany – Italy transit freight traffic, and also for an intensive interval programme of Swiss InterCity trains, and some through services to Milano.

What many did not, and perhaps still do not, know was that the project was bedevilled, and almost spoiled, by political interference that had little to do with transportation policy. The popular NEAT vote authorised this and the SBB's Gotthard base tunnel, which will open in 2016 - although approach routes are not yet ready. The parallel BLS Lötschberg project would not be cheap, but could be realised much more quickly (as it would be) and the old BLS was already stretched by freight traffic demands. Switzerland would not be able, foreseeably for several years, to meet its constitutional aims of handling transalpine freight intermodally by rail. Parliament



debated sympathetically the Lötschberg proposal, but then the right wing politicians got their claws into it. Ostensibly this was to reduce costs, but in reality to reduce its competitive effectiveness, against both the Gotthard and highway transport, and also because of old rivalries. Unable to stop Parliament's approval, they forced a compromise, which is still in place today. This has not reduced the Lötschberg's attractiveness, but has acutely limited its capacity and efficiency. Indeed, although the dispatchers in Spiez perform daily miracles of ingenuity, pathing is at its limit and conflicts constantly occur. Freights at critical times now again go over the top through Kandersteg, requiring assisting engines and taking one hour longer.

The political compromise was in reality absurd. It required that 21km of the 34.6 km tunnel be built to operate only as single track. For 15 km between Mitholz and Ferden, a second tunnel was built, but track and catenary were never installed (shown solid grey on the diagram). Between Raron and Ferden both tunnels were built and commissioned, whilst between Mitholz and Frutigen, only a single tunnel was built and brought into use (working sections are shown red on the diagram). As the BLS so diplomatically says today, "This long single line section leads to high operating costs, reduces the timetabling possibilities and prevents any increase of passenger and freight services in the already fully employed capacity." In fact it was a scandal, and the BLS was saddled with a world-class high-speed link, which was almost hamstrung by irrelevant political interference. Almost, but not quite; I recall Matthias Tromp, the then General Director of the BLS, saying in effect, "If that's what they want, let's get on with it and build the d..."

thing as single track, and we'll sort them out later." That is what is now happening.

The Federal Parliament has now approved FABI, a programme of rail infrastructure improvements due to be realised by 2025. FABI includes provision to plan the completion of the Mitholz – Ferden section to allow double-track operation along most of the route. This August the BLS called for tenders for this work, whilst the total project includes also evaluation of completion of double-track throughout, including building the missing 6 km of tunnel between Frutigen – Mitholz (shown as a broken grey line on the diagram). The BLS already makes clear that both are necessary if the required two-way 2-trains/hour future passenger train frequency to the Valais is to be achieved, along with predicted increases in Trans-Alpine freight traffic. The overdue completion of the project will also allow serious economies to be made on the old line, which is presently kept at the highest standards because of the 'overflow' traffic obliged to use it.

Inevitably the work will now be more costly than if the job had been done properly to start with, and perhaps twenty years of more efficient operations have been lost - but the politicians concerned knew, and cared little, of this. In the meantime, the BLS continues to perform its daily miracles (even when Italian traffic arrives in disorder from Domodossola!), and enjoys strong demand and a modest profit. And the Gotthard Base Tunnel will, in its time, also quickly find its capacity limits.

In 2005 BLS AlpTransit AG, the consortium for the overall Lötschberg Base Tunnel project, published its detailed book in German: 'From Idea to Breakthrough'. On P42 appears this note – my translation:

"BLS AlpTransit was not allowed, despite several approaches to the Federal Transport Office, to make any preparations for subsequent completion. This means that any further improvements will inevitably interfere with rail operations in the present base tunnel. Especially difficult to understand is that the second bore between Mitholz and Frutigen was not built from the start and used as a relief route. The entire material and infrastructure for construction work.... was available, but now any later enlargement will mean heavy new investments and environmental disturbance. Since tunnelling in this sector had gone quicker than planned, (the contractors) could have dug the missing section then, within the terms and timetable of the global contract. The cost would have been CHF102m, and safety standards would be improved. Today's cost (i.e. 2005) would be CHF95m higher. Although widely recommended, the proposal was rejected by the Federal Transport Department on legal and financial grounds, and for political considerations."

What the BLS thought of this is obvious. Today, ten years later and with the present tunnel working at over its planned capacity of 110 trains/day in each direction, the reader can only imagine the costs and upheaval. To be fair, the issues were far more complex than I have outlined. The Base Tunnel was also planned to provide for an automobile shuttle to and from the Valais, to replace an abandoned Autobahn project under the Rawil Pass. The shuttle will probably never happen, but an 8 km curve to Steg at the south end was indeed bored (but never fitted-out) to facilitate this. Today's reality is however that the politicians at the time were totally out of touch, and that present and future rail traffic urgently needs the capacity. +