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Swiss News

Gotthard Base Tunnel.

This, the world's longest railway tunnel, was officially opened on 1st June. Reports on this landmark event are in this magazine. An interesting development is that SBB/DB/FS announced that from 2017 they are planning to capitalise on the time savings the tunnel will achieve by running a number of daily through trains between Frankfurt and Milan using ETR610 (Class 503) Pendolino units.

Postscript to Jungfrau 'V-Bahn'.

As we reported in an article in the March 2016 *Swiss Express* the Jungfrauahn is hoping to open the 'V-Bahn' and replacement Männlichen Gondelbahn in 2018 or 2019. The time for planning objections has recently expired and objections have been entered by the Foundation for Landscape Conservation and Pro Natura. In addition, an open letter has been written by the alpine protection organisation "Mountain Wilderness" and the Scheidegg Hotels, addressed to those responsible for the Jungfrauahn. The letter is signed by seventeen individuals from the world of politics, economics and culture - the most famous among them being the artist Franz Hohler. They argue that the cableway will destroy the view of the north face of the Eiger, as some of the masts will be over 60 metres high and the concept will promote the wrong kind of tourism. They propose a "Plan-B" which goes back to one of the original ideas where a single gondelbahn is built as far as Arvengarten, and cars are then switched either to Männlichen or to Eigergletcher. They have a website www.eigerexpress-plan-b.ch/ where there are computer generated views of the two alternatives with the Arvengarten route appearing much less obtrusive. A further problem for the Jungfrauahn is that the owner of the land needed for the new terminal at Grindelwald Grund is refusing to sell. So it looks as if the future of the V-Bahn is not as certain and straightforward as the Jungfrauahn had hoped.

BLS veterans.

Rob Boyce's North Korean picture on P25 of the June *Swiss Express* does indeed show an ex. BLS coach, one of twelve built from 1950 as a 1st/2nd Class composite for international traffic. The BLS were pioneer of this series, with some 100, in various configurations including couchettes, built by BLS and SBB to renew their postwar fleets. They were admirable side-corridor compartment coaches built to UIC international standards. The last were withdrawn by 2003 however, the BLS sold (for a nominal amount) sixteen of them to North Korea in 1997. Rob has obviously found two of these. The number he quoted is a UIC number last carried on the BLS, identifying that car as of the 1955 build. *Eisenbahn Amateur* had an article on these in their May 2016 edition.

SBB Passengers.

In 2015 SBB carried 1.21m passengers daily with 460 000 GA (whole system season tickets) in use, and 2.3 m Halb Tarriff (half-fare) Cards in circulation.

Update!

Swiss Express is good at being the first, but this time we were the last. The reference on P7 of the June magazine, at the end of the Bern/Ostermündigen article, to a SCB Section House of 1857 at Wylerfeld is no longer valid, as the building was demolished (it didn't need much) during April, as part of the widening works now in progress. A picture of the house just beforehand is attached. There are others; look out on the east side of the line north of Sissach to see one from 1855 in good condition.



Wylerfeld SCB Haus, Bern, 27.12.2015.

Closures, bus substitutions etc.

Members planning their travel arrangements occasionally ask if we know of interruptions for maintenance work. Sometimes we do, but often the warning given is too short for publication deadlines. We find also that most short-term closures (weekend, nights) are only publicised locally, so the best answer may be to test your route by requesting on-line timetable data. Usually there is a serious attempt to keep things moving, but single-line routes are obviously vulnerable. Reasons at present are the serious efforts to catch up on the maintenance arrears that have crept in, but equally level crossing safety work, and station rebuilding to raise platforms to the new 55 cm. statutory heights, can all cause disruption. The website www.166.ch gives some up-to-date information on work in hand.

Gotthard disruption.

The opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel will not solve some ongoing problems. First however, one which will not happen this year: the planned diversion of Zürich – Gotthard traffic via Rotkreuz, which will last 18 months while a new double track section is built. This forms part of the Gotthard approach lines. A private objector opposing the building licence has obtained a provisional injunction, so the decision was taken, to protect the 2017 timetable (from 12/2016) by postponement. Although this means faster transits, these will not be passed on to passengers because the Gotthard route, even after opening the new base tunnel, will suffer disturbances over at least 3 years before Monte Ceneri can be opened.

Punctuality.

In this context, new measures are proposed to improve, yet again, the reliability of the newest Class 503 'Pendolini'. SBB has set-aside CHF12.9m in 2017 to correct faults in

traction and tilt operation. SBB have admitted that the punctuality of services operated by these units is around 80%, against a system average of 89%. More immediate is the unreliability of the present services. There are many on-going infrastructure improvement sites both north and south of the tunnel. Problems with the new Class 503s were unexpected; after good performances on the BLS/Simplon/Genève services, their use on the Gotthard has generated a crop of technical problems: tilt mechanism; traction; parking brakes; train protection signalling; battery charging and others. A further problem is that in Italy a 15 minute delay is recorded as on time! but this is totally incompatible with the timetabling needs on SBB. Connections at Arth-Goldau are being broken, and Class 503/610 sets are sometimes unable to achieve planned turnarounds in Zürich. In a most unusual step, to acknowledge publicly that adequate reliability cannot be assured, SBB have made a public announcement as follows, which readers should note: *“As a result of numerous building works, operations on the Gotthard route are only partially assured. Delays will occur, and connections may be missed. Please use direct trains whenever possible, or allow more time for changing trains. We regret the inconvenience and thank you for your understanding”*.

Sabotage in Oerlikon?

SBB had quite different problems on June 8 2016. At 03.00 a fire was reported in a cable shaft near Oerlikon station. The effect was to cut the SBB in two, with Zürich cut off from its airport and no trains for many commuters. There is an alternative route via Winterthur, but much longer; many would-be flight passengers and thousands of commuters were frustrated. Even during the day, police reports confirmed arson. They reported that the location, which is not normally accessible to the public was, it appears, carefully chosen. The fire damaged communications between the railway and its new operations centre for the north-east, which is located at Zürich Airport. A point had been chosen which could not fail to have a drastic effect. Inevitably, the less serious press, and a few uninformed politicians, raised their voices, but the reality is that someone who ‘knows how’ can, in many parts of our digital world, soon wreak havoc.

Stadler gains orders.

Despite the company posting a gloomy economic prospect earlier this year, due to the strength of the Swiss franc, it would appear that they are still gaining some substantial orders for new rolling stock. Canadian Raitour operator ‘Rocky Mountaineer’ has contracted with Stadler to build ten of their luxury double-deck ‘GoldLeaf’ cars at the Swiss company’s Pankow plant in the Berlin suburbs. The bogies will be manufactured at the Winterthur factory and further engineering items will be sourced from other Stadler facilities in Switzerland and Germany. ‘Rocky Mountaineer’ already has 16 of these bi-level cars, which feature a Vista Dome upper deck plus kitchen and dining areas on the lower deck. These were built in the US from 1995 to 2008 by the Colorado Railcar Company, who subsequently went bankrupt. Other operators of similar cars in the US will be watching the outcome of this contract closely as there is an unfulfilled

demand for such vehicles following the demise of the original manufacturer. Back in Switzerland the SOB has placed a CHF170m order for an EMU fleet to replace the ageing vehicles that currently operate their ‘Voralpen Express’ services. This order comprises 11 new trains based on their highly successful FLIRT platform. SOB will receive six 8-car and five 4-car units with the first arriving by 2018 and the last in 2020. In the largest single rolling stock order that they have ever placed the RhB has let a CHF285m contract with Stadler for twenty-seven 4-car ‘Flügel’ EMUs, with the option to purchase another twenty. Units from the first order are due to start arriving from 2019. These trains are to be built at Stadler’s Altenrhein plant and this order follows-on from the RhB’s current orders for ‘Allegra’ EMUs, and new ‘Alvra’ unit trains for the company’s main-line services. Additionally it has been announced that the RBS has placed an order for 14 EMUs to replace their remaining Be4/12 units numbered between 41 and 61.

Other new trains ...

SBB - New Class 502 ‘Swiss Express’ passenger trains from Bombardier are now being delivered. Nos.502 001 to 003 were out in April, shortly followed by No.502 401. All may be found undertaking test running around the system.

BLS - Two new Siemens Vectron locomotives, Re476 401 and 402, have been delivered to Spiez. They were being tested for first use in July. They bear the slogan ‘BLS - The Alpinists’.

TPC - Stadler are in the process of supplying a fleet of new units to the TPC operations based in Aigle – reported elsewhere. Normally new metre-gauge units from Stadler’s works at Bussnang, Canton Thurgau, travel by road, but in May Christian Ammann photographed one unit as it passed by rail through Frauenfeld on transporter wagons.



New TPC unit at Frauenfeld, 18.05.2016.

Photo: Christian Ammann

... and old engines.

Ae6/6 Nos.11470 and 11517 long resident on a siding at Studen (BE) have now gone for scrap, as has No.540 017, which had awaited its fate at Zürich, the last active survivor of this series. SBB Historic has adopted Nos.540 069, 020 and 052, but will use them partly for spares. Ee3/3 No.16365 of the third series of standard rod-drive shunting locos built 1938 has been withdrawn. This leaves No.16362, as the oldest SBB motive power still in service.

SBB-Historic.

The steam railcar CZm 1/2 No 31, severely damaged in

the accident in Sihlwald, will be completely restored. It has been transferred to the RhB workshops in Landquart, who will undertake the task.

BLS and CJ.

The Class 566 local train sets have been withdrawn, mostly for scrap but one set has been hired to the CJ for use on the Porrentruy – Bonfol line. A consequence is that the CJ railcar BDe 4/4 101, built 1968, is also no longer required.

DVZO.

Loco Ed 3/4 No.2, an SLM-built 2-6-0T, originally on the CJ's Saignegier – Glovelier line when this was standard gauge, is back at work at Bauma after 8 years' general overhaul.

All Change at the TPC.

The TPC, in the middle of a major renewal programme, bade an official farewell to its old stock at an open day on Sunday 19th June, timed to coincide with the local cycling and cultural event *la Fugue Chablaisienne*. Special free shuttles ran between Aigle and En Châlex Depot and were shared between new Stadler unit No.542 and 1954 Schindler/BBC rack-and-adhesion car BDeh 4/4 No.514 (originally No.14). In addition travel was free between Aigle and Monthey, with all trains serving the staff platform at En Châlex. During the morning, ex-BirsigtalBahn (BTB) car Be4/4 No.102 plus driving trailer was on the 'free-for-the-day' service. In the afternoon it was replaced by 1986-built Vevey set BDeh 4/4 Nos.501/531. The ex BTB cars have what may be the last seating on any stock in Switzerland which retains 1960s style leatherette seating with red covers for smoking and green for non smoking. At Monthey there is an interloper to be seen on occasion. BVB BDeh 4/4 No.82 'Ollon' has been used to test the Abt rack track that is being laid during 2016 on the Monthey - Champéry part of the AOMC line as the Strub track, that is non-standard on the rest of the TPC operations, is replaced.



New TPC (AOMC) rack-fitted Stadler GTW 542.

Photo: Gordon Wiseman

Swiss railcars in Austria – The end of the line.

The Austrian rail operator Stern und Haffel has long worked the narrow gauge lines Gmunden – Vorchdorf and Völkmarkt – Attersee with a wide assortment of elderly rolling stock bought from the Trogener Bahn, BirsigtalBahn /BLT, SernftalBahn, and the Tramways Lausannois. These were kept in beautiful condition and in daily use. We learn

that only the Trogener and Birsigtal cars (former BTB 8 and 9) are now running and that these are also due for early replacement.

The 'Old' Gotthard: what now?

This is not as easy as it sounds. An hourly regional (stopping) train will run, with TILO-Flirt train sets, between Erstfeld and Bellinzona – Lugano. Additional stops will be made in Lavorgo and Ambri-Piotta where the stations are to be reopened. There will be hourly Inter-Regio loco-hauled trains from Basel and Zürich to Erstfeld, of which some will be extended on seasonal weekends (needing timetable consultation) to Göschenen. From Easter to October there will be a 'Gotthard-Panorama-Express' (taking over the former 'Wilhelm-Tell' service) using a paddle steamer from Luzern to Flüelen, and from there using SBB's Panorama coaches to the Ticino (i.e. the existing cars now in use on the IR to Locarno). SBB Historic has also announced its intention to operate some special trains in 2017. However after 2017 there is a snag, as it appears that the SBB does not know under what concessionary regime the line will operate after that date. This might, if it is no longer an InterCity line, have the effect of transferring it to the Regional traffic category, under which the Cantons and Confederation will be liable for guaranteeing future services and subsidies not the SBB. It is not inconceivable that the closed stations on the north side, Amsteg, Gurtellen, Wassen, might reopen, but under the responsibility of Canton Uri. On the south side there are other stations, which Canton Ticino might like to see served, but agreeing the financing for these changes would start from zero. Whether, in this case, the connection in Göschenen with the MGB could meet the future hopes of an ambitious Andermatt, where massive tourist developments are under construction, is still open to question. Finally, Bern, the Cantons and the SBB all seem to agree that the installations can be simplified (track, signalling, etc.) but see equally the need, as happens regularly on the Lötschberg, still to send freight trains over the top when occupation is severe.

SBB Toilets.

Your correspondent has learned that as of 21st March 2016 there were 2716 toilets installed on SBB coaches. Some 281 of these are still the old 'track discharge' type, with all others having a closed vacuum system. Overall reliability is 97%, reaching 98% on regional trains. There are 135,000 flushes daily, to be compared to a figure quoted elsewhere of 1.21m passengers daily. But of course needs vary by journey. Few commuters use the toilet; most intercity passengers do. There are some 18 defects reported daily. Figures for other railways are not known, but it is surprising that SBB's former 'Swiss Express' EW III cars, now with the BLS and used up to December 2015 on the Luzern – Bern line (and now between Bern and La Chaux de Fonds) still have open toilets. On local lines where modern units are in use toilets, if available at all, are all of the 'closed' type, but these demand proper servicing, which is time consuming and expensive. I still recall those toilets in the middle of a coach that were open to the track below, and where the handwash basin was out in the corridor. Some museum lines still have them.

Newer readers may not know that one short tunnel near Kilchberg on the fast line between Olten and Bern is not there because of a hill. It is a 'hollow shell' structure (like those children once had on model railways) and was built with the new line to avoid dairy products produced at the adjacent Emmi factory, being polluted by 'spray and dust' deposited from 'track discharge' toilets. Now, with modern high-speed stock, no such risk should exist.

NStCM: Part-closure for rebuilding.

The Colline viaduct by Genolier is due for renewal, resulting in this metre-gauge line being closed until mid October between Trelex and Givrine with a substitute bus service in place.



Nyon St Cergue temporary closure, changing from bus to train and laying new track. *Photo: Gordon Wiseman*



BLS loco used for trials.

BLS's Re 4/4 No.165 has been seen in various places hauling two brake test cars, and with one of its bogies wired for stress and load trials, especially when running through tight curves. The explanation is the need for reference data to help

provide a differentiated track access charging structure. This was mentioned in SE 125. Although from the start of the EU-legislated Open Access regime, (that Switzerland chose to adopt), it was clearly desirable to differentiate charging for trains, motive power, and schedules that caused different levels of track damage; for at least ten years this has not been done. Essentially, track access is a flat charge. Now that the degree of wear for fast trains, high axle loads, and various suspension configurations, is better known, and costs of maintenance have rapidly increased, the Federal Transport Office (BAV) has taken things in hand. New charging rules will include incentives to use equipment that is less punitive to the track. It is interesting to note that after 2000, someone at SBB-Cargo noticed that they were not now held to account for 'Schienenfresser', (rail-eaters - locomotives notorious for hammering the track). A result was a proposal to modify surviving Ae6/6s, that had been notorious for their hard-riding, so that they could be used in multiple-units for freight over the Gotthard as track access would cost no more... Fortunately, and your correspondent was in on the story at the time, this cunning wheeze was spotted and vetoed early on.

La Chaux de Fonds – Ponts de Martel: Line closed by the BAV.

At the beginning of May the BAV (Federal Transport Office) took the unusual step of shutting down the operations of the 16km metre-gauge line that runs through a quiet rural area of northern Canton Neuchâtel. Substitute buses had been put in place. The reason for the draconian closure was that its operator, transN, had failed to meet the end-2014 deadline for upgrading the 84 level crossings en-route. In practice on this line, which is effectively a roadside tramway, most of these crossings are just unprotected ballasted field access points. Work had taken place on some 56 of them, mainly by arranging with individual farmers to consolidate numerous accesses to just a few protected crossings on their property. It was anticipated that the section from La Chaux de Fonds to La Sagne would reopen by September and the remainder of the line by the end of the year. However the BAV appeared to have a change of heart, as only a few weeks later services resumed following the installation of simple flashing orange warning beacons at a number of these unprotected crossings. It is understood that a number of operators across the country have failed to meet the BAV's deadline for upgrading crossings, and that the original almost symbolic closure order was imposed as a way of 'encouraging-the-others' to sit up, take notice, and toe the Federal line on crossing safety.

DFB - HG4/4 Nos.704 and 708 heading towards completion.

Yes, you read correctly, these are the two 0-8-0T steam rack locomotives, which also came back from the Vietnam jungle with their former Swiss colleagues. They were built new by SLM for use in Vietnam (then French Indo-China) so never ran in Switzerland. This meant that they were also slightly outside the norms accepted for the Furka Oberalp whilst heavy repairs were in any case required. The renovation of these engines has required many new components,

including the main frames that have been sponsored and supplied by Stadler Rail. No.704's boiler had a new copper firebox, and has passed its hydraulic test. The cylinders and motion, including the rack-drive bogie, are almost complete and assembled. There has been a long and complex process to achieve certification to today's standards, including some structural modifications. A small example: the 80m radius curves on the DFB required an increase in lateral play on the outer axles, as in Vietnam the curves were 100m radius. No.704 is expected to receive its licence during the 2017 season, and be in public service for the 2018 season. Work on No.708 is on schedule, but is programmed two years behind. At the end of 2015, these two locomotives had so far incurred costs of CHF2.66m and had been booked with 56,414 hours of work.

Solothurn – Bern.

The 9th April was the centenary of the SZB, the metre-gauge line between Solothurn and Bern. This has its terminus underground at Bern HB, and rapid growth of commuter traffic will soon see again a major rebuild. It was not always so; the first direct trains to Bern terminated on the street, on the old Bahnhofplatz.

BDB: Ballenberg Dampf Bahn.

Locomotive G3/4 No.208 was used to haul the opening train between Brienz and Interlaken Ost in August 1915 and it belongs today to the BDB. However its restoration after the 2013 Interlaken depot fire inow being completed in Landquart after heavy boiler repairs, has proved more difficult than had ever been envisaged, resulting in it not being ready this year. RhB's G3/4 No.14, which also ran in 2015 for the BDB, is scheduled now for the festivities taking place on 23rd August and 3rd/4th September.

RAlpin.

This company announced that in 2015 it increased its throughput to over 100,000 HGVs on its shuttle trains between Freiburg im Breisgau and Novara, which use the BLS route. This helps to better understand that rival Hupac's carryings are stagnating on Alpine routes (see SE 126); they run a good operation, but are not only competing with low fuel costs for lorries, but with various intermodal carriers using open access conditions to run block trains in north/south traffic. Indeed, some so-called partners seem to compete with one another. Not all of these are successful; Crossrail was recently in trouble, but as RAlpin shows, growth is possible. An hour spent at Basel Bad. Bahnhof, or at Spiez, or Arth-Goldau, will show how dynamic and varied is today's intermodal market. That was of course the intention of Open Access policy, even if it seems rather muddled at times' and it was always a major argument for the new Gotthard Base Tunnel.

Lugano Funicular.

Visiting Lugano in mid-May we found the Funicular between station and lake still subject to major reconstruction as reported in an earlier magazine. The publicity speaks of its re-opening in December (with the new timetable) but it seemed improbable – our image shows the view looking down

the line. However the walk up and down through the old town, and past the cathedral, although strenuous, is a delight. A replacement shuttle bus service has been provided using a circuitous route.



A view over Lugano with work in progress on the funicular.

WB.

We have reported frequently on the 750 mm gauge WB that runs between Leistal and Waldenburg in Canton Basel Land, which is now in the early stages of conversion to conventional metre-gauge operation. The last stage in ending the WB's quasi-independent operation took place on 6th June when the BLT's General Assembly approved the takeover of the WB by BLT, the Canton's own transport operator. In parallel the last AGM of the WB approved the sale. As part of the take-over by the BLT it had laid down conditions for the museum steam operation with G3/3 No.5 which, in reality, could not be met, resulting in the association voting to liquidate itself. There is no news about the possible future of No 5 and other preserved rolling stock.

Hupac.

Major intermodal operator Hupac, who maintains its own fleet of 5,000 wagons, intends that by the end of 2015 all of them will have been equipped with low noise brakes, making Hupac the only company in Europe with a totally low noise fleet. The latest series of 'pocket' wagons introduced in 2015 all have disc brakes, further lowering the noise level. Russian broad gauge wagons are now being introduced into the

Hupac fleet as well, reflecting the growing importance of this market to the company.

Basel: BVB trams.

Swiss Standard trams in the series Nos.457 – 465 are now history, although No.457 remains as a museum piece. The next series Nos.466 – 476 are only in use until October, as trailing power cars in tram-trailer-tram compositions on Line 3 where the short section from Barfüsserplatz to Musikakademie climbs at 1 in 11 from a standing start, require extra power. The last of the 56 Duwag Be4/6 trams have also been withdrawn. On 24th April the last Duwag ran to Riehen and back on its old Line 6, while another ran a last rush-hour operation on Line 21.

Rail and Road Safety.

In 2015 253 deaths on Swiss roads were recorded, with 3,830 serious injuries. On public transport there were two passenger deaths, both in trams. There were 32 deaths and 124 serious injuries on public transport, most of these being persons who were on the tracks without authority, or level crossing users who overlooked trams or trains.

Matthias Tromp 1946 - 2016.

Dr Matthias Tromp joined the BLS in 1987 as Vice-Direktor for Marketing and Ships. In 1999 he became General Manager and retired in 2008. During his period of office many innovations and milestones were addressed. He saw the Bern S-Bahn established, introduced the 'rolling highway' on the BLS, and implemented the Lötschberg Base Tunnel that opened in 2007. He held many offices in Swiss public life. For some years he had been a member (and President) of the Bern City Parliament and up to 2014 he was in the Bern Cantonal Parliament. His death on 17th April removes from the Swiss rail scene a well-loved and sometimes larger than life personality.


Brussels – Basel.

On the 2nd April SNCF loco No.26166 brought the last 'Vauban' into Basel, and took out its counterpart, putting an

end to the through trains via Strasbourg and Luxembourg. Once ECs, and even for a while TEEs, these trains had in the past also served Brig via Kandersteg, and Zürich, and at the northern end, Ostende for the British passengers. Your correspondent often took the sleeper on the night train Basel – Brussels for a day's work there. The TGV Est, completed to Strasbourg, though delayed by the derailment in test running, is one reason for the change, but they had long been a dejected echo of earlier times. Friend of the SRS, Mario Stefani was there, we were not! But the background is that after the TGV accident in trial running north of Strasbourg, the introduction of full TGV service Strasbourg - Paris Est (which also brings faster connections Basel – Strasbourg – Brussels) begins in June, but the overall timetable change in the Region Est was already far advanced. So there was a gap...



SNCF BB 26166 EC 96 IRIS BASEL BRUXELLES Dernier EC Voyageur Basel SNCF 02-04-2016. Photo: Mario Stefani

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from, Michael Donovan, Ron Smith, Glyn Jones Ilkka Houtelin, s'Murmeli, Gordon Wiseman, and others. 

Treib-Seelisberg-Bahn Centenary

Mario Gavazzi

On the 30th May 1916, after several years of construction works, the Treib-Seelisberg funicular was opened, unfortunately during one of the darkest periods of WW1. Although Switzerland was neutral and out of the conflict the tourist traffic, for which building the line was a key element, had withered away. The 1149m long metre-gauge line climbs some 332m from the steamer pier on the Vierwaldstättersee up to the community of Seelisberg, which occupies the top of the promontory between the main body of the lake and the Urner See. Until 1932 the line only operated from Spring to Autumn but since then it has operated on a daily basis, although with a much reduced service (approximately

hourly) in winter. It is an essential link for the community, as it carries a regular flow of residents who commute to work or school in Brunnen and Schwyz, using the ship connections that operate across this narrow (1km) part of the lake.

The two original cars were replaced in 1965 by the two current ones that have a capacity of 90 people. Further renovation work has taken place over the years but much of the original machinery is still in operation and is so reliable that no engineering staff are needed on a daily basis. In 1966 the TSB also became a PostAuto operator and it continues in this role today, operating an hourly service from Seelisberg along the south shore