

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Band: - (2019)
Heft: 139

Artikel: Swiss Rail Centres; Olten. Part 2
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853824>

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SWISS RAIL CENTRES; OLTEN

- Part Two

By Steve Tinsley

The first part of this article appeared in Swiss Express 138.

The Zürich to Bern Inter-Regio service is seen here arriving at Olten in the hands of immaculate 6 car FLIRT unit 511055 on 06/09/2017.



Although Olten has a population of 18,000, the station is used by some 80,000 people daily, utilising the 540 plus weekday departures. In the 2018 timetable, the first train of the day is advertised as the 04:48, the last departure of the day being the 01:37. I can only assume that the timetable is published this way (and not midnight to midnight) in order to remove the 3 hour and 11 minutes

LEFT: Although this photograph of the S23 service to Baden in the hands of an NPZ unit was taken at Olten on 16/06/2012, these units still work this service today.

BELOW LEFT: ICN class 500, 500003 "Germaine de Staël" is seen here at Olten with an afternoon train from Zürich on 06/09/17.

BELOW: 460005 "Val d' Anniviers" is seen here in advertising livery on 23/06/2018, departing Olten with a train of double deck stock for Zürich.



gap in services! Between 06:00 and 23:00 there are on average 30 departures per hour. During the daytime clock face timetable, Olten sees various S-Bahn services, usually in the hands of FLIRT units, with the exception of the S9 service to Läufelfingen and Sissach, usually worked by a class 526 2-car GTW set, and the S23 service which is usually worked by a class 560 NPZ unit. A majority of the S-Bahn services are extended at peak times. Hourly Inter Regio (IR) and Inter City (IC) services serve destinations including Zurich and Genève (and their respective airports) and also Lausanne, Bern, Basel, Interlaken and Romanshorn. Genève services are usually worked by class 500 ICN units in either single or double formations, whilst a majority of the other services are worked by class 460s with single deck or double deck coaching stock, usually in push-pull formation with a driving van trailer (DVT) at the non-locomotive end in order to remove the requirement for additional locomotives or run rounds at terminal stations. It is not uncommon to see a locomotive mid-train, with DVTs at both ends of the train – anything goes!

For the international traveller, there are 4 workings each way to Milano and 5 services each way to stations in Germany. The Milano services are usually worked by class 503 and class 610 sets, whilst most of the German trains are in the hands of ICE 1 sets. The 2018 timetable saw the introduction of a through Frankfurt to Milano train. The train travels south via Luzern and the Gotthard, whilst the northbound service is routed via the Simplon, the Lötschberg and Bern. This is the first through service between Germany and Italy via Switzerland for several years and is worked by a class 503 unit. The other notable working in the timetable is



Following a fall-out between the Swiss and Italian rail authorities, the 14 strong fleet of class 610s were divided between the two companies. Trenitalia owned ETR. 610008 is seen departing Olten, on a Milano to Basel service on 23/06/18.

the daily service from Paris Gare de Lyon to Bern and is worked by a TGV Lyria set. The return working from Bern to Paris does not stop at Olten. The only other services that are booked to run through Olten non-stop are the hourly Brig to Romanshorn and St. Gallen to Genève Airport services in each direction. Both are usually worked by class 460s on double deck IC2000 stock. Occasionally a standard IC2000



TGV set 4412 is seen here on 23/06/2018 taking the Basel line as it passes through Olten non-stop with the daily Bern to Paris Gare De Lyon service.

rake is strengthened with additional carriages. In that case two class 460s are required, top and tail, to overcome the adverse gradients in the Zürich station area whilst maintaining the schedule.

In addition to the high volume of passenger traffic, Olten sees many freight workings. The primary flow is that of container traffic for the Lötschberg, with its origins being the seaports of Rotterdam and Antwerpen, before journeying up the Rhine, entering Switzerland at Basel. Basel is for the purposes of heavy freight, the end of the navigable Rhine and so trans-shipment between barge and train is required for onward progression of goods. This traffic flow then continues south, approaching Olten from the Hauenstein Tunnel direction, crossing the Aare before passing beneath the Zürich lines, entering the station. It then continues to Rothrist and beyond. Other than sea containers, this route sees up to 20 rolling road "Piggyback" trains between Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany) and Novara (Italy). Steel trains from Germany, en-route to Italy are regular visitors, along with cement trains and a number of tank trains. Some of the tank trains travel from the oil terminals at Wörth near Karlsruhe on the Rhine, although a majority of the oil is loaded onto trains at the tank farms at Basel (Birsfelden), having come up the Rhine by


BLS Cargo locomotive 485013 is seen entering Olten on 06/09/2017 with an Ambrogio company "block" train.





barge. Postal trains are also evident at Olten as they move to and from the parcel processing facility at Härkingen. Coop trains can be seen daily, usually in the hands of the dedicated fleet of Railcare Vectron class 476 locomotives. The Solothurn line also sees a regular flow of tank trains usually carrying heating oil or diesel travelling from the oil terminal at Cornaux on Lake Neuchâtel. Cornaux sits at the end of the pipeline originating in the Mediterranean seaport of Genoa.

Olten station, whilst busy, is not particularly good for photography – the north end of the station is wide and spans ten lines and there are numerous electrification masts and items of signage that hamper the photographer. Though I move around the station in order to get a variety of shots, I have found that the optimum position is mid-way across the station at the north end of platform 7. Unfortunately from this position, photography of the lower numbered platforms is hampered by poor light. The south end of the station, also suffers from unfavourable light, with the sun being “direct” for a couple of hours around midday, before it drops behind tall buildings, plunging the area into relative darkness!

At the end of a day’s train watching, especially in the heat of high summer, I suggest a visit to Platform 13 is in order – or more precisely, “Gleis 13”. This is not a Harry Potter(esque) “Platform 9¾” but more like a golfer’s 19th hole! “Gleis 13” is a pub, just off the station (beside platform 12) and here you are made welcome and you can have a cold beer with the locals and a chat about beer, football, England and no doubt as I write this article – BREXIT! 

1. BLS Cargo locomotive 485017 is seen here at Olten in charge of a “Rolling Road” service to Freiburg im Breisgau on 23/06/18.
2. Passing through Olten, DB class 185s 185113 and 185086 are seen here at the head of a tank train on 06/09/17. The train will most likely be empty and heading for the Rhine.
3. Railcare Vectron 476452 “TESSIN” is seen here passing through Olten on the evening of 19/06/18 with a train of Coop containers, the driver acknowledging the cameraman – of course!
4. As the shadows lengthen, Re 4/4II 421378 rumbles through Olten with a mixed goods train on 19/06/18.

