

The Nyon St Cergue Morez

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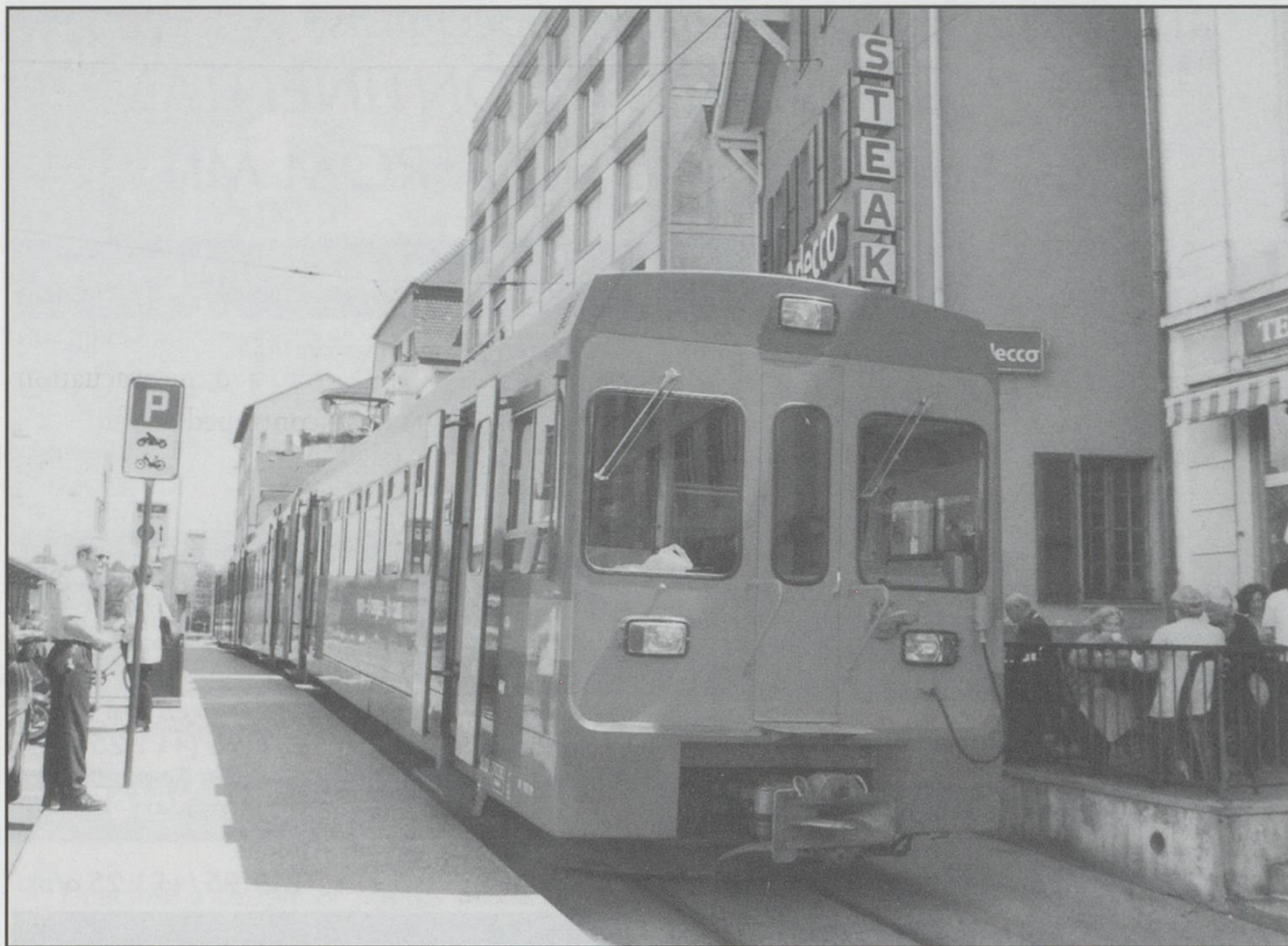
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The Nyon St Cergue Morez railway (NStCM) is a remarkable success story. The line was menaced with the usual closure and replacement by a bus service, but it has survived and prospered and today is a model of public transport. Services are frequent, punctual, clean, economical, secure, and this has led to a big increase in usage. Too many secondary lines have been closed due to short term economy measures, lines that would be valuable today. The NStCM has an efficient and modern infrastructure and is looking forward confidently to a bright future.

In railway terms it is quite a modern line. When the railway from Geneva to Lausanne opened, the towns along the foot of the Jura mountains that form the border with France, were concerned that they would be left to slowly lose importance as economic activity would be attracted to the corridor along the lake. A flurry of activity saw several small lines built,

NStCM nos 202 & 305 wait outside the café at Nyon. 24/05/01.

Photo. Ron Smith

but Nyon to St Cergue never succeeded in getting onto the statute book. It was not until 30.9.1898 that a project for a line from Nyon to Gimel with an extension to St Cergue and on to the French border was proposed. This received widespread support, but as Gimel was already well served by tramways, it did not succeed. Finally, on 11.11.1912 a concession was successfully obtained to build the line that exists today. Construction began at once, but was severely delayed due to the impact of the First World War. To go beyond the frontier demanded a law being passed by the French government, and this was achieved on 6.4.1913 for a line from the standard gauge at Morez to La Cure.

On 12.7.1916 the line from Nyon to St.Cergue was opened. The extension to La Cure opened just over a year later on

18.8.1917. Obviously the situation in France at that time was difficult, and so it was not until 7.3.1921 that traffic was inaugurated right through to Morez.

The metre gauge line used electric traction from the start, with 1500 volt dc powering tram type cars. From 1921 to 1958 the line carried out its function faithfully serving the people of the area. The line was operated by two different companies: NStCM in Switzerland, and Chemins De Fer Electriques du Jura on the French side. During World War Two, Swiss and French crews changed over at La Cure. However, they calculated that to balance the timetable one trip per day had to change over at St Cergue, and it is said that, by coincidence, both Swiss and French crews needed to go to the toilet at the same time, where contraband of chocolate, eggs or meat changed hands. Little damage was done to the line in the war. In 1943 a rail was unbolted causing the derailment of a tram car at La Cassine. More seriously, on 15.8.1944, the resistance attacked a train. Despite the war

many people from Morez had gone to a fair at Les Rousses. The late afternoon return service consisted of two power cars, three trailers and a covered van. All were packed with people, mainly women and children. At a place called Souches Barres the resistance opened fire with automatic weapons from across the valley and stopped the train. The Chef De Service at great risk and under fire went to the resistance to explain that there were only five Germans on the train. The resistance ordered the evacuation of the train, and then continued to fire with the Germans replying until they were killed. The vehicles of the train were severely damaged and all were taken to Nyon for repair. On the 18th August all services on the French part were suspended.

In 1958 the French part of the line closed, and the service replaced by buses which do not operate today. This is a great pity and reflects the short term vision of the period.

NStCM nos 202 / 301 & 305 await departure at La Cure. 1330 24/05/01. Photo: Ron Smith



The Swiss part carried on, but was beginning to show its age. There had not been a lot of investment. In 1963 the NStCM asked the Swiss parliament for financial assistance to renew its track, rolling stock, and modernise the stations. The Federal Council were not sure about this and decided to appoint a commission to decide whether the line should be modernised or closed and replaced with buses. Incredibly, no fewer than eight commissions of enquiry looked into the matter over twenty

Today the 27.024 km long line is in excellent condition with modern control systems. In total there are 17 stations, 2 tunnels and 75 level crossings. The lowest point is at Morache (399 metres above sea level) where the line dips under the SBB line, and the highest point is at Col De La Givrine at 1233 metres above sea level, with a maximum gradient of 60‰ so that no rack is needed. The only unmodernised

NStCM units 304 & 205 at La Cure. 0820, 29/05/01. Photo: Ron Smith



years. Eventually, on 7.7.1982 it was finally decided to invest in the railway.

By now the NStCM was almost moribund. The rolling stock, 65 years old, was completely worn out. The decades of indecision had had the effect of stopping all but essential maintenance and the track and installations were worn out beyond repair.

Between 1982 and 1988 the reconstruction work was profound, and amounted to a complete rebuild of the line to the most modern standards.

structure is the depot at Plantaz at Nyon, which is still the original from 1916, however there are plans to rectify this. Currently there is no actual station at Nyon. The NStCM has a couple of sidings on the South of the SBB line. Trains start in the street across the road from the SBB station, with most passengers waiting on the terrace of a convenient café, the train stopping right in front of the café steps. Trains depart down the street, dip under the SBB line, stopping traffic at five junctions, and then climb away to Plantaz. This always causes



A NStCM bus sits outside Nyon station. 0945, 29/05/01. Photo: Ron Smith

chaos to road traffic, and happens twice an hour. Plans are being finalised for a new approach on the North of the SBB station, with an underground terminus. Although this will probably be more efficient, it will lack the charm of the present arrangement.

In 1985 / 1986 new railcars and trailers were delivered and these operate all services. There is no freight service, and indeed with the growth in passenger traffic there would be little capacity left for freight!

The NStCM, after revitalisation with the reconstruction, has continued to develop and expand.

In 1983 the growth of the Nyon district brought about a reorganisation of schools. The NStCM undertook to transport school children and purchased mini buses. Today it still carries school children both by train and bus.

In 1996 the NStCM branched out and bought the share capital of the company "Transports Publics de la Région Yvernoise" (TPN). The TPN operated 11 buses from Nyon to Gingins for La Poste, urban services around Nyon, and an international route Nyon

- Crassier - Divonne. These services continue today with the hub of the bus services being outside the SBB station at Nyon.

Since 1994 the NStCM has managed the landing stage on Lac Léman at Nyon on behalf of the CGN (Compagnie Générale de Navigation sur le lac Léman) which operates the boat services on the lake.

To counteract the effect that nearby Geneva has of drawing away business, the Nyon region has decided to go on the offensive and develop its area. The backbone of the development will be the NStCM, and many projects are under way to develop tourism in the mountains around La Dôle (connected by an NStCM cable car from La Givrine) and industrial zones close to the line. With the integration of the train and bus services in the same company, the NStCM is ideally placed to be the key factor in this development.

The line continues to invest. Some of this is not readily apparent, such as consolidation of rock faces close to the line to prevent rock falls interrupting trains. Other measures though are very obvious, such as the splendid station buildings, particularly at St Cergue. New additional rolling stock will be needed soon to cope

with the increase in traffic. Winter traffic is also doing well, with two axle wagons being propelled by trains to St Cergue to carry skis for this increasingly popular sport. The NStCM employs 48 people on average, with another 19 people working for TPN. The telecabine employs 3 people full time and up to 15 more during the winter season.

The extension of activities to cover complimentary services like the buses, school buses, telecabine and the landing stage shows how enterprising the railway is. With the Nyon authorities determined to develop their region and the popular support for the railway, the future looks very positive.

In conclusion, I give a little anecdote which typifies the attitude of the line. I arrived at La Cure in time for the 08.35 to Nyon. In the small booking office, which is also a bank, *bureau de change*, post office, and parcel office, a border customs officer, with his gun, was banking a pile of banknotes. Once this transaction was completed I asked for two tickets to Geneva airport. The lady was sorry, but the man responsible was on holiday and I would have to buy the tickets on the train. In the window was a faded copy of a book with the history of the line, and I asked if I could buy a copy. She consulted with another lady behind her who was busy sorting mail into pigeon holes ready for delivery. No, there were no copies left, I would have to ask at St Cergue. The

train arrived exactly per timetable at 08.22 and the young driver changed ends ready for the return run. On the platform I asked him if we could buy tickets and he cheerfully provided them, no problem at all. I told him about the book and asked whether I would have time to nip into the booking office at St. Cergue on the journey. He climbed into his cab and picked up his phone. After a short conversation he asked if I wanted the book in English, French or German, and then it was all organised. When the train stopped at St Cergue I was ready to dash out to get the book, but the young driver stopped me; he went himself and presented me with the book. He was a one - man railway! Nearer Nyon the train was full and we had gained a lady ticket controller, all very efficient. At Nyon there was a four minute connection into the Geneva airport train which I missed as I was too busy taking photographs - the timetable does not allow for that!

Rolling Stock(As at 1.1.2001)

Powered Locos and Railcars

Be 4/4	201-205 *	1985/86 ACMV/ABB 800 kW	Length 17,500 mm, 40 seats
BDe 4/4	211 *	1991 ACMV/ABB 800 kW	Length 17,500 mm, 24 seats.
BDe 4/4	221 **	1935/1992 (ex LEB N° 22) 440 CV	Luggage and postal area 8 m ² Length 15,500 mm, 40 seats.
Xtm 2/2	251 **	1984 Beilhack 220 CV	Luggage and postal area 5 m ² Length 9,670 mm, diesel powered.
Tm 2/2	261 *	1958/1996 O & K /NStCM 110CV	S/G tractor adapted for N/G

Trailers

Driving trailers

Bt 4 Nos	301-305 *	1985 / 86 ACMV/ABB	Length 17,500 mm, 52 seats
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Coaches

B4 Nos	341 & 342 *	1987 / 1949 (ex BTI/BD N° 41 et 42)	Length 18,300 mm, 60 seats
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Van

D4	381 *	1919 / 1995 (ex YStC N° 62)	Length 14,500 mm.
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Goods wagons ** Now only used for service trains and railway use as freight is no longer carried

Open wagons

K 3	1916		
E 43	1916		
O 45	1924 (ex MLC) pole carrier		
Ra 25	1978 flat low loader (adapted from coach B4 25)		

Service wagons

G 33 **	1916 breakdown wagon		
X 101 **	1921 snowplough		
X 102 II **	1991 rail transporter (adapted from former railcar N° 2)		
X 103 II *	1998 workshop van (adapted from Z 48 FLP/PTT)		
X 104 II **	1992 ballast wagon (adapted from wagon K 12)		
X 105 II **	1993 ballast wagon (adapted from wagon O 47)		
X 106 II **	1993 ballast wagon (adapted from wagon O 48)		
X 107 **	1974 crane wagon (adapted from wagon L 50)		
Xa 108 **	1976 overhead wagon (adapted from coach B4 26 and a CGTE lorry)		
X 110 **	1988 weedkiller and track cleaner tanker (adapted from wagon K2)		
X 113 **	1993 foliage lopper (adapted from wagon L 40)		

* Equipped with automatic air braking

** Equipped with screw brakes