Lugano local

LUGANO LOCAL
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View from the FLP train leaving Lugano station.   ALL PHOTOS: *Jason Sargerson.*

Arriving at the main FFS/SBB station in Lugano you have the choice of two further rail trips. There is the 220m long metre gauge funicular of the Transporti Pubblici Luganesi, the local bus company, that will take you down into the historic heart of the city, or you can take the Ferrovia Lugano Ponte Tresa (FLP) out to the village in its title. To take the train to Ponte Tresa it is necessary to go outside and cross the street. Having taken-in the panoramic view of Lugano you enter the FLP's dedicated terminal to find the friendly orange and cream trains with their smiles painted on their front.

This 12.27km long metre gauge line serves suburban communities west of the city before it rejoins the Lago di Lugano as it approaches Ponte Tresa. Opened in 1912, and electrified at 1200V dc, the line is the sole remnant of three metre gauge lines that served the area, the Lugano-Tesserete closing in 1967 and the Lugano-Cadro-Dino in 1970. The FLP depot is located 7.7km along the route at Agno where its rolling stock is

stabled and maintained. There are five Be 4/12 three-car units in the fleet that were new to the FLP in 1978 as two-car (Be4/8) trains. These units had low-floor centre coaches built by Stadler inserted in 2002, in order to give them more accommodation as well as offering increased accessibility for the mobility impaired, etc. The company also owns two older-style Be 4/8 units that they acquired from fellow Ticinese operator FART/SSIF in 1991and a Tm2/2 diesel tractor that is used for maintenance purposes.

Leaving the Lugano terminus there is a good view of Monte Brè and the lake before the line goes into a tunnel that takes it under the main line before coming out in the western suburbs of Lugano. The line gradually descends, paralleling and then crossing the Autoroute to Italy that avoids the built-up area of the city. The airport and the western arm of Lake Lugano are in view as the train makes a giant 'U' on its way to Agno and then down to lake level. The trains run past the golf course at Magliaso and near

an arm of the lake before joining, and running adjacent to, the main road into Ponte Tresa where the lakeside station is built into the hillside - with a car park on top!

The line is single track with crossing points at Capella-Agnuzzo, Bioggio, Agno and Magliaso stations. The journey to Ponte Tresa takes 25 minutes and with trains running every 15 minutes throughout the day this frequent service carried over 1.5m passengers in 2007. Ponte Tresa is an attractive small village on Lake Lugano with Italian style buildings, churches, etc surrounded by green wooded hills. Its main claim to fame is that at 40 hectares the Commune has the smallest land area of any in Switzerland. In 2008 it only hosted a resident population of 800, being much smaller than its Italian namesake located just across the bridge over the River Tresa that links (and names) the two communities, yet forms an international boundary.

A trip on the FLP offers a pleasant side-trip from Lugano that can be extended by using the boat and AutoPostale services that connect with this small but efficient railway at Ponte Tresa. Be warned though - the train windows only open partially and as the stock does not have air conditioning it can sometimes get quite hot riding the Lugano Local.

TOP: *Two units pause at Magliaso.*

MIDDLE: *FLP Be 4/12 arriving in Ponte Tresa.*

BOTTOM: *Be 4/12 at Lugano FLP station with the Lorenzo Cathedral in the background.*