

Sidetracks... a miscellany of items

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● SBB's "Climate Express"

Last December the UN held the 15th Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. Federal Councillor Herr Leuenberger, head of the Swiss Department of the Environment, together with a number of other Swiss representatives, travelled there by a special "Climate Express" train organised by SBB together with CityNightLine (now owned by DB). In taking this environmentally friendly method of transport they indicated how Switzerland is taking the need to cut carbon emissions seriously. Guess the method of transport the UK delegation used?

● Railjet comes to Zürich

From the timetable change on 13th December 2009, ÖBB's "Railjet" sets have been operating two trains per day on the Zürich - Innsbruck - Salzburg - Wien axis. The new trains provide an enhanced level of on-board service, compared to the previous locomotive and coach formations.

● Finance approved

As noted in the article on the CJ in the December Swiss Express it was planned that the rail link in France from Delle to Belfort was to be reopened to include an interchange with the LGV Rhin-Rhone at Meroux. Escalating finance had been a problem that had put this project in the balance as the original budget had risen by 50% to €100m. The French Government now substantially increased its funding for this scheme, that will allow a new Biel/Bienne to Belfort direct service, and it is to go ahead with a late 2012 completion date.

● HUPAC on the up

In December Hupac reported that traffic on their Shuttle Net is again steadily rising from its low point in the spring of 2009 when loadings had dropped by 25%. Demand for space on some of their trans-alpine trains was often exceeding capacity as the year drew to a close and some services that had been suspended as the recession took hold at the end of 2008 have now been reinstated. Having started-out as an operator of North-South trains Hupac now notes that its main growth area is in traffic flows to Spain in the west and Russia (and ultimately

China) in the east. Hupac see the main constraint on boosting its trade across the Alps is the inability to carry the 4m high (European standard) height truck/trailer on the Gotthard route where the maximum height permitted, even with their special rail wagons, is 3.86m. Although the Gotthard Base Tunnel will allow the euro-standard truck/trailer to be carried the lack of investment at bottlenecks on the access routes through Switzerland will still constrain their operation. Although these 4m height vehicles can run on the Lötschberg route only 48 paths are available due to the volume of traffic already using that new base tunnel. Hupac are campaigning for more investment in rail infrastructure across Switzerland to assist in removing ever increasing numbers of polluting HGVs from the alpine pass routes.

● Investment called for

Private rail cargo companies in Switzerland (see the Hupac story) have said that rather than their current subsidies they prefer system investments. They have jointly called on the Federal Government to spend CHF200m, a sum that was earmarked for boosting domestic transport, on innovation. The rail operators hold that investment is needed for them to be able to compete with road transport firms.

● Allegra arrives

The first of fifteen new dual-current Allegra EMUs ordered by the Rhätische Bahn (RhB) from Stadler started arriving in the Graubünden in October. The ABe 8/12 three-car units are designed to operate on the 1000V dc Bernina line, but are also able to run at 11,000V dc on the rest of the RhB system. An SRS member reports that one unit was observed on a test run, or on driver training duties, at Filisur some weeks later. We hope to have more on these new units in a future edition.

● Fly Rail Baggage

From the 1st December 2009 SBB has further extended its Fly Rail baggage service to cover Air Berlin, Belair and Fly Niki airlines. At over 50 large SBB stations you can check in your luggage the day before your flight, and receive your boarding card as

well, and the luggage goes directly to your destination airport. This costs CHF20 per item, or just CHF10 if you just want to check in and receive your boarding card. The system also works in the other direction. Luggage arriving at Zürich or Genève airports will be taken directly to your destination station for collection there, again for CHF20 item. In 2008 SBB transported 120,000 items of luggage under this scheme. More information is available at www.sbb.ch/check-in

● Changing times

When the SBB has to put the clocks back, with its intensive timetable it gives rise to some interesting complications. Overnight trains transiting Switzerland simply stop somewhere for an hour, giving passengers an extra hour in bed. The actual time change is at 03.00 in the morning when all station clocks (electronically regulated from SBB HQ at Bern) stop for one hour. Trains that started before that time, but finished afterwards, continue to use the summer time until they reach their destination. This also applies to "Nightbird" buses. In the Zürich region ten RER trains run after 03.00. These are duplicated, to run at both the summer time, and an hour later at the winter time.

● KLB – The End

As we were putting this edition together it was announced that from 1st January 2010 the dual (standard and metre) gauge track of the Kriens-Luzern-Bahn (KLB) from Luzern-Eichwald to Horw will pass into the authority of the Zentralbahn. The BAV (Federal Transport Department) has also directed that the concession of the KLB for this section be transferred to the ZB, and the KLB branch Eichwald – Kupferhammer will be closed with the access clamped out of use. With these measures the KLB is no longer operational and the organization will be wound-up. More details on this in the next edition.

● Genève voters approve CEVA

In a local referendum held on the 29th November 2009 voters in Canton Genève approved the plan to build a new rail link between the CFF/SBB Cornavin station and

the SNCF station at Eaux Vives, and on into Annemasse in France. The project, which was described in the December 2008 *Swiss Express*, is currently scheduled to cost CHF1.6 billion with 57% coming from the Federal Government. When completed in 2016 the line will be a vital link in serving the combined 900,000 population of the Canton and its French hinterland. The new rolling stock required for this project will enable the CFF/SBB to standardise on one class in this area and allow replacement of the Class 550 and 524 units.

● RhB works for the RHB

In August the Rorschach-Heiden-Bahn (RHB), that is now part of the Appenzeller Bahnen organisation, has sent the bodies of its 1998 Stadler-built ABDeh 3/6 twin railcar to the Rhätische Bahn (RhB) workshop at Landquart for overhaul and the refurbishment of their interiors. The RHB's own workshop will overhaul the unit's three bogies. The 5.7km standard-gauge rack railway is maintaining its hourly service with its two reserve BDeh 2/4 units (and 1875-vintage open coaches) until the railcar returns to service in the spring.

● Fire at Biel/Bienne

At 22.15 on the night of the 16th December a fire broke out in two coaches of a four-car BLS EMU that was stabled at a platform in Biel/Bienne station. It was discovered by station staff and although both a local fire crew and a fire fighting wagon manned by SBB/CFF personnel were soon on the scene several million CHF of damage took place before the blaze was extinguished. At the time of writing the Kantonal Police do not suspect foul play and the long term fate of the unidentified unit had yet to be decided. (*See Gallery*)

● New coaches for MOB

In June 2007 the Montreux-Oberland-Bernois ordered eight new panoramic coaches from Railyty in Biel/Bienne with the intention that they should go into service at the end of 2008. Nearly one year late the first of the coaches, that have a single low-floor disabled-accessible entrance in their centre, have been delivered to Chernex workshops

where they will be finished-off and painted in the appropriate MOB livery prior to working on the Golden Pass services. (See Gallery)

● SBB has long-term maintenance concerns

In late October 2009 SBB announced that it would need to spend CHF1billion on network upgrades due to projects that have been postponed. The company also calls for between CHF100m and CHF250m annually so that in the future it can carry out maintenance works in time. At the moment postponed maintenance has led to trains not being able to operate at full speed on certain routes making it difficult to keep to advertised schedules. The problem is exacerbated by the growing number, and the increasing weight, of trains.

● Log on to LogIn

Now that Bemo have announced two metre-gauge model locos with the LogIn livery, members may be wondering precisely what they are publicising. SBB already had a loco in the bright yellow colour, now followed by the RhB and MOB. On the latter line the vinyls are applied to one of the 6xxx series locos acquired from GFM/TPF. LogIn's website www.login.ch – in French and German – explains that the organisation is responsible for training railway staff in all aspects of operation both for the state railways and most of the (nominally) independent companies involved with transport of all types. The organisation was set up in 2002 by SBB and BLS with the aim of providing high quality training at the most economical cost. It soon included independent operators with training geared to their individual needs. Operational staff can be trained on simulators and e-training is available for distance learning.

● Jungfrau Region News

Three new chairlifts went into service in the Jungfrau Region last December in time for the start of the Christmas ski season. They were: a 6-seater Eigernordwand chairlift from Arvengarten to Eigergletscher; a 2-seater Allmibodenchairlift; and a 4-seater Winteregg chairlift. Heavy snow at the end of November allowed the ski-ing facilities to

open early on the 5th December.

Skiers who retain their Winter 2009/10 Jungfrau Region Sportpass will be entitled to travel at half the normal fare on all Jungfrau Region mountain rail and cableways (from Lauterbrunnen, Stechelberg and Grindelwald) during the 2010 summer season. No further reductions will be granted, e.g. for a Half-fare Card or local residents passes. By the end of 2009 some 651,000 trips had been made on the Jungfrau Bahn up to the summit station, an increase of 3.7% over the previous year. One of the special events organised last summer to encourage Asian visitors to return to the area (their numbers have been falling in the last couple of years) was a limited overs cricket match between former India and England Test players held on the glacier. Guess what? England lost by 4 runs!

● Waldenburgerbahn to stay narrow

The 750mm Waldenburgerbahn should not be converted to metre gauge a study by Canton Baselland has concluded. There had been suggestions that the line should be rebuilt to the "standard" narrow gauge, extended from its Leistal terminus, and linked into the Basel's outer suburban tram network.

● Why are PostAutos yellow?

One of our members would be interested to hear any opinions on this question. It has been suggested that it is because the horse drawn coaches that the motor buses replaced were yellow. Suggestions why the diligences were yellow vary. It could have been simply because yellow is a bright colour that is easily seen, so waiting passengers could prepare themselves or that they could be easily identified if one became stuck en route for any reason. Another idea is that yellow paint did not show the dirt so much. Another is that yellow is the colour of Mercury, the god of commerce and travel. Does anybody have any other ideas?

Information supplied by: Ron Smith; SBB; Stadler; AB; RhB; Bryan Stone; Michael Donovan; Michael Farr; Geoff Turner; JB; Glyn Jones.