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Swiss News

SBB and BLS.

There will be no change for at least two years in the respective Inter-City passenger operations of SBB and BLS. The renewal of the Concession for intercity service, which is the long-term legal authority, with obligations to provide services, is due for renewal by the Federal Transport Office (BAV). SBB had submitted its plan for the future based upon its national network and its current proposals for improvement, including its investment pipeline. BLS submitted a plan to take over remunerative services Basel – Bern – Interlaken and Brig, as well as Bern – Burgdorf - Olten, and a less rewarding group around Neuchâtel and La Chaux-de-Fonds. Since there was no agreement between SBB and BLS in October, a December decision was postponed. Competing operators are welcome, but not two deeply different concepts, in which the SBB can plead that the loss of an integrally coherent operation would cause severe cost increases, while the BLS claims it can provide more targeted and effective operations.

Aargau Railway Companies to Merge.

The government of Canton Aargau originally intended to place the WSB (Wynental - und Suhrentalbahn) and the BDWM (Bremgarten Dietikon Wohlen Meisterschwanden Bahn), together with its subsidiary Limmat Bus AG, under the same management. The government has now decided that more synergies and efficiencies can be achieved by a merger of the two railways from 1st January 2018. A new light railway will also be operated by the new company. The new group will have 550 employees, an annual turnover of CHF106m and serve 30m passengers annually. It will be one of the larger public transport companies in Switzerland. Principal ownership of the new company will be 45% Canton Aargau, 33% Federal government, 5.75% City of Aarau 5.7% and 2.2% Canton Zurich.

Basel-Land-Transport (BLT).

A short 300m tramway link, the Margarethen spur, between BLT Lines 10/17 at Dorenbach and Basel City Transport (BVB) Line 2, would have permitted a new and potentially valuable service for a catchment area of some 60,000 people, some of the commuters often using cars. It would also have reduced congestion in Basel's city centre, given quicker connections to the SBB station, and substantially raised productivity of a part of the BLT tram fleet. Swiss Government and Basel City's Parliament had approved their shares of a modest investment. On 24th September an initiative against the project from right-wing anti-public-transport interests, pleading congestion at a road crossing, was unexpectedly approved by the electorate, so it's 'back to square one'. Something similar happened in Bern a while ago, with the proposed Ostermündigen tram line. Readers, beware of thinking that in Switzerland it always looks so easy; ignorance and prejudice must always be overcome, public votes do not always give the right answer, and in this case 'fake news' was also spread. Overseas lessons in political practice are catching on!

BVB

On 7th December 2017 the new border-crossing 3 km extension of Basel's BVB Tram Line 3 to St Louis Gare in Alsace was opened. It is principally aimed at the daily commuters from France. Visitors to Basel should note that although regional season tickets are valid, the validity for some types of pass is not

yet finalised. You may have to buy an ordinary ticket!

The Basel Station Gate.

In 1844 Basel was still a walled city; the decision to demolish the walls fell in 1865. Three historic gates remain. One, which did not, was of very short life, the station gate of 1844. A new University department is being built at what was the French end of the former station of the Strasbourg-Bâle railway opened to a temporary halt in 1844. Although Basel had wanted the railway, a fierce debate ensued, whether the station should be inside the walls. This once decided, it was found that the available space was insufficient, so a station was built outside the line of the existing wall, which was then diverted to embrace the station, depot and yard, opened in 1846. The crowning glory was a gate in this new wall, across the tracks, and kept closed at night, which nominally preserved the city's security. The new building works have now unearthed the walls and gate at this point. They will not be preserved, being of no great value, but are being carefully recorded before building work goes on. The gate appears in a number of engravings of the time.

Mendrisio – Varese.

This connection opened for service in December 2017. However the Provincial Government of Lombardy (IT) has rejected the intention that S50 trains should run through between Bellinzona and Malpensa, Milan's airport. It had previously done this earlier in the year, and then relented, so the last communication, after a building problem, has prompted Canton Ticino to hold back CHF2m for funding the works. Italian assurances have now been given that the S50 to Malpensa can start in December 2018. Two services in the frontier region are concerned: S50 Bellinzona – Malpensa, and S40, Albate-Camerlata to Varese, reversing at Mendrisio. Watch this space.

Bellinzona Workshops.

The Officine, the 128-year-old workshop in Ticino's Cantonal capital that was originally opened by the Gotthardbahn to maintain its steam engines, was scheduled for closure in 2008. A 33-day strike, supported by all, from local politicians to the churches, persuaded SBB/FFS to retain it and concentrate maintenance work on various ageing locomotive series (Re 6/6, Re4/4 II, and other smaller classes) there. Now time is running out on this work, but good news follows. SBB/FFS will close the Officine but construct a new workshop nearby for the maintenance of the rolling stock used on the Gotthard Base Tunnel route to including the 'Giruno' EMUs presently on order from Stadler. The new workshop will open by 2026, and over half the existing personnel will be retrained for the new roles it will bring.

RBS/SZB - Aare Bridge in Worblaufen.

The gorge of the Aare surrounding Bern has always made railway building difficult. The SZB built the Worblaufen viaduct 50 years ago, and today with 550 trains and 60,000 passengers daily, it is one of Switzerland's busiest structures and renewal is now urgent. Its appearance will not change, as the bridge is a listed structure, but work up to August 2018 will cost CHF4m, although train services should not be affected.

Koblenz-Waldshut Rhine Bridge Under Threat.

The historic railway bridge between Koblenz and Waldshut (D) is once again under threat. Deutsche Bahn has decided that the present bridge is becoming unfit for purpose and is planning to demolish it and replace it with a modern bridge.

When exactly has not been disclosed. The bridge was built in 1859 to the design of the engineer Robert Gerwig. At its opening it was the first railway bridge over the Rhine below the Lake of Constance. Early international trains from Zürich to Germany used this bridge until the railway bridge in Basel was constructed. The bridge is jointly owned by Deutsche Bahn and SBB and the structure has been listed by both the Swiss and German authorities. The Rhein bridge in Basel between the DB's Badischerbahnhof and the SBB was only constructed in 1873.

TpF - Châtel-St-Denis Station.

This is to be completely rebuilt. The work involves a new station with abolition of the existing reversal for Bulle-Palézieux trains. The section Châtel-Saint-Denis – Palézieux will be closed, with a replacement bus, from spring to autumn 2019. The reversing station here is a relic of the junction with the former line that ran south from Châtel-Saint-Denis to Vevey, closed in 1969.

Delle – Belfort opening delayed.

An opening ceremony for this reconstructed route in France, that is to be operated partly by CFF/SBB, had been planned for mid-December 2017, but this was, for reasons not yet given, postponed until December 2018. (See P6.)

SBB Cargo International.

New Vectron Locos Nos.193 461 and 193 462, first of a series of eighteen, were handed over by Siemens to SBB on 6th December. SBB has leased them through a subsidiary company, LokRoll Holding in Luzern.

DFB.

Restoration of the steam rotary snowplough XRotd R12, with the aim of its being introduced for active DFB service, may seem to some of its supporters to be marking time as the tender brake awaits attention, and the boiler is still cold. However in a recent Newsletter to supporters Martin Horath of DFB, the R12 Project Manager at Goldau, reports that behind the scenes much has been achieved as the whole electrical system is now restored and working and the boiler inspection, under operating conditions, will take place in spring 2018. Good news from the DFB is also the start of work in 2018 to build the carriage shed in Realp, with its four 60m tracks. Long planned, this will also allow the steam rotary plough to be kept there under cover. To support this members of the Aargau Group of the Furka-Bergstrecke Association (who are leading the restoration of R12) recently made a donation of CHF10,000 to this project.

False alarm!

On the 30th October it was reported that in Lausanne the Fire Brigade and Police had received notice of a fire causing black smoke at the CFF/SBB station. When the emergency services arrived they found a steam loco on a private charter train!

SBB and others - Re 4/4 II 50th Anniversary.

In 1967 the first series Re4/4 II were delivered. Six prototypes, Nos.11201-11206 (later Nos.11101-11106) had run since 1963-64. Between 1967 and 1985 six successive orders would create a fleet of 296 4-axle BoBo locomotives. These became for at least 40 years the everyday face of SBB. They replaced several classes of early electric locomotives that were still in service, but also handled the dramatic traffic increases of the 1970s and later. Mostly delivered in green, with a speed of 140 kph, some carried liveries from the 'Swiss Express'

shuttles of the '70s with their automatic couplings, several were in TEE cream and red, and in 1983 No.11178 appeared in red, which later, somewhat brighter, became a standard. Three are at the time of writing still green: 420 161, 309 and 330. They painted them well in those days. One standard livery in 50 years compares well with what seems to go on in Britain these days! The total fleet involved several important variations. Visual differences include the reinforced modified buffer beam for locomotives for the UIC automatic coupling for freight. The 'Swiss Express' EW III cars had this, but it stopped there. The 'Swiss Express' engines received standard couplings 10 years later. Some of the class have been withdrawn, mostly after accident damage. A number are stored, some as sources of spares. The fleet is now declining. The first prototype No.11101 was used between 2006 and 2014 for passenger shunting at Basel SBB before it finally expired. Twelve, including several prototypes, were sold in 2004 to the BLS. Now mostly out of service, two went on: they are with Travys and BBC. The new large fleet of Class 460 locos took over the Re4/4 II First Division work, but the 2000 restructuring of SBB into separate businesses still found 142 Re4/4 II's allotted to SBB Passenger, and 152 to SBB Cargo. Of these last, 21 were Series III engines, now classed as Class 430, built with a lower speed, 120 kph, but higher tractive effort. Most of these still run in Re 10/10 combinations, that is, Re6/6 (Class 620) and the Re4/4 III (Class 430) in multiple. The picture is rather confused by separate purchases from SOB, EBT, Travys and others, and transfers; and there are many variants. The foregoing summary is not complete, but change will now again be rapid. Class Re4/4 II is ageing, and the service pattern is shifting to multiple-unit trains, both in local and intercity traffic. SBB Cargo is also rationalising its fleet as freight traffic patterns change. This magazine will try to follow as, inevitably, the Re4/4 II's disappear.

RhB Veterans.

The last Ge4/4s of 1947 are now 70 years old. Nos.602/603 of the 1947 batch are in service, as are Nos.605/610 of the 1953 batch. Six have gone. The others might have too, but works trains connected with the new Albula tunnel gave them a new lease of life due to a motive power shortage at the RhB. No.602 was already withdrawn and on display at the Luzern Transport Museum (VHS), but was brought home to Landquart to work again. They sometimes escape, and work freight, locals or even an occasional 'Glacier Express'. No.603 has run over 6m km. Barring trouble, they should survive a couple of years. Watch out for them; one may well work the Bergün-Preda sledging shuttle.

RhB problems.

The motive power shortage is not only a result of the Albula tunnelling, which in any case stops in the winter season. The new shuttle trains on the Albula route cannot come into full operation in the December 2017 timetable, as the RhB has not accepted all of them. Three were in service in Autumn, with one as reserve. Modifications on newly delivered vehicles are in hand. No more crew training is at present in progress, and full implantation has been postponed. However, in Autumn 2017 several Ge4/4 III (Series 641) were also not available with some Albula trains being worked by the older Ge 4/4 II locos. This cascade means that also the Ge6/6 II Series 701, which we were told were for withdrawal, are active on all trains, especially Albula line freights. Your correspondent saw Nos.701/4/6 all out on one day in October 2017.

RhB Scuol-Sagliains - Closure for 18 months.

We are advised that the eastern end of the attractive RhB line to Scuol will be closed for all traffic from March 2018 to September 2019. The Garsun and Magnacun Tunnels will both be reconstructed, and the stations Sagliains and Lavin rebuilt. Trains from Landquart will run to Susch and then to Pontresina. PostAuto Buses will run between Susch and Scuol. Members are warned to be prepared as this can be a busy section, especially in high summer and in the ski season, and with many international visitors with baggage.

Sugar Beet.

The 2017-2018 sugar beet campaign was rather different. It was the last time that beet was loaded direct from trackside to standard gauge wagons on a metre-gauge Morges-Bière-Cossonay (MBC) train, while the passenger timetable was suspended for the day. It was also the last time that the MBC (formerly the Bière-Apples-Morges), the last narrow gauge line so involved, with its reliance on transporter trucks for standard gauge wagons, would be used. Several loading points were closed as concentration points were set up. However the most dramatic change is from loading open wagons, type Eoas, which SBB had mostly to hire from other railways, to the use of open standard 20' containers, carried three-at-a-time on container flat wagons. After earlier trials 450 of these containers were built in Slovakia, and were used in this year's programme for the sugar factory at Frauenfeld (TG). In the 2018-19 season the deliveries to Aarberg (AG) will also be containerised. Some sugar beet is imported from Germany and Austria. Overall about 1m tonnes should go by rail, but delivery of the Bavarian sugar beet was in 2017 affected by the DB's line closure in Rastatt and reached Frauenfeld by road. Apart from Switzerland, how many countries still have rail-based sugar beet transport today? Your correspondent remembers the 1950s in England's Trent valley, where beet was delivered in 13t and 16t. coal wagons, behind 'Austerities', to the evil-smelling beet factory at Colwick. However Aarberg and Frauenfeld are mercifully very different, and have a significant role in Swiss agricultural policy.

2018 Timetable.

The focus of the timetable change on 10th December 2017 is on French-speaking Switzerland. The InterRegio service on the Genève Airport-Bern-Lucerne line will now stop in Nyon, Morges, Palézieux and Romont. As a result, Nyon and Morges will have a direct connection to Bern. Palézieux and Romont are now being connected to Genève and Genève Airport. InterRegio trains on the Genève Airport-Lausanne-Brig line will now operate an hourly service without stopping between Genève and Lausanne. As a result, the travel time between Valais and Genève will be reduced by 11 minutes. In the 2018 timetable, construction and maintenance work will increasingly be carried out over longer intervals. This will enable SBB to boost efficiency and reduce costs.

SOB and the Gotthard Route

On 21st December 2017 the SOB ordered 11 new train sets from Stadler Rail at a cost of CHF170m. These are for delivery in time for SOB's new service over the 'old' Gotthard mountain route that starts in December 2020.

Change at SBB

Jeannine Pilloud, SBB's head of Passenger Business, its biggest business sector with 14,000 employees, is leaving to take on a new role where she will be responsible for the future

strategy of public transport, an area for which urgent need is apparent. Her successor is Toni Häne, currently SBB's Traffic Manager with 46 years of railway service.

Givisiez.

Do readers know this curious, once quiet location, 4km from Fribourg on the way to Payerne and Murten? It is really a junction, with an adjacent halt only used by TpF trains on request, on the single track shared by both SBB and TpF. When they stop, they block the through SBB line. Now a completely new station, some 800m west, is to be built where the two lines actually diverge enabling both TpF and SBB trains to stop at a new island platform, with new signalling, proper public access by subway, all a bargain at CHF55m. Givisiez is now a fast growing suburb of Fribourg (an over 300% population increase since 2000) and more growth is planned. The TpF workshops and management are also being concentrated here. The former low, short platform with its hut, and the 1877 crossing keeper's house (now privately owned) will disappear. Watch out for a closure of several weeks in summer 2018, when buses will run.

Bözberg Tunnel breakthrough

On 29th November 2017, after a works period of 8 months, the tunnel boring machine broke through at the North (Effingen) portal of the tunnel. On safety grounds, (instable rocks and risk of injury from rock flying off the bore shield) no guests were invited. If all goes to plan, the new tunnel will come into operation late 2020. The old tunnel will then be converted into a service and rescue tunnel by 2022.

MOB.

The ABDe 8/8 units Nos.4001-4004, so long a familiar backbone of the MOB service, were marked for 2017 disposal. There was a farewell festival at the end of the summer season. Now it appears that patience is needed. Two (Nos. 4002/3) are in storage at Lenk and Fontanivent, whilst Nos.4001 and 4004 are being retained for the great Vineyards Festival ('Fête des Vignerons') to be held in Vevey in 2019. In the meantime they are used for local services from the Montreux end. In November 2017 the MOB took out of service two most interesting railcars. Be4/4 No.1002 built in 1951 for the Biasca-Acquarossa, was purchased in 1975 and modified. For many years it was used, despite being underpowered, for the Gstaad school children's trains. Be4/4 No.1003 was used from 1984 for similar duties from Château d'Oex. It was originally built in 1958 for the Ferrovia Lugano-Ponte Tresa, and was valued for its excellent ride. Both, in recent years little used, were to be scrapped at Ecublens. Also on the MOB, at Montbovon services will be interrupted from mid-March to 2nd June 2018, as the station layout and platforms are being substantially rebuilt.

Appenzeller Bahnen.

Readers are warned that due to the progress of work between St Gallen and Teufen, and urgent renewals between Appenzell and Gontenbad, there will be a closure of at least seven weeks between August and October 2019. During this time the only rail link to Appenzell will be from Gais. Other services will be maintained by bus.

A 'Real Swiss' in Enschede (NL).

On the museum railway MBS (Museum Buurtspoorweg) near Kaaksbergen, Enschede, is an SBB 'Tigerli', E3/3 0-6-0T, still hard at work. It was formerly No.4 'Navizence' of the Alusuisse at Chippis (VS). After WWII, SBB sold to the Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS), a number of redundant steam

locomotives to help in the then motive power crisis. They were not popular and did not last long, but among them were some E3/3s. To remember this the MBS example has been given the fictional but plausible NS No.7853.

Rigi record.

The Rigibahnen organisation has reported that 2017 saw an 8.2% increase in traffic to a new record of 850,000 passengers. Fittingly the peak day of a record year was 31st December, when some 7,200 people travelled.

Museum locomotives.

1. **Ballenberg G3/4 208**, severely damaged in late 2013 in the Interlaken depot fire, has returned to service at last after almost complete rebuilding in the RhB depot at Landquart. She ran some celebratory trains in September 2017 and is now back at Interlaken Ost.

2. **Ce6/8 III No.14305 of SBB Historic** is back home. In September 2015 she was sent to Sweden for a special event. Hot axle boxes on the long journey out and back resulted in her being diverted to the steam locomotive workshop at Meiningen, where she also received a complete overhaul. She came home on Nov 3 2017, two years later. SBB Historic will now reflect on the wisdom of such adventures.

Brien Rothorn Bahn.

In 2017 this operation celebrated its 125th Jubilee Year having opened in 1892. Time to take stock, since the BRB survives due to its steam engines. Thanks to a steady flow of donations, and now with a supporting grant from Canton Bern and its Lottery, track renewal should be on course for completion for the Concession renewal to operate from 2019. The sections with the remaining 1892 rails are still safe, and a curiosity, but no longer tenable. The Planalp station is now complete, with the SRS Memorial Bench to Roy Dungalison installed there (*See SE 131*). Rolling stock is maintained in the Brien depot - with much ingenuity. Loco No.1 (of the 125-year-olds) did not run in 2017, but was exhibited in Bern and Basel. It is serviceable but has a frame distortion, which may one day require its being laid aside. No.2 was at work all summer. No.3, also unserviceable, is on loan to the Verkehrshaus in Luzern; No.4 is stored in Brien, and No.5 is planned for service in 2018. The BRB reports that No.4, 20 years out of service, could perhaps run despite uncertainties with its boiler as it appears that its frame is sound. No.6 (of 1933) had a boiler overhaul in Winter 2017; No.7 (of 1937) re-entered service in September 2017 after an 8-year pause, but now with its new firebox. No.14 is also scheduled for boiler repairs in Winter 2017, after the other 1992-96 engines. At the same time, with big crowds on good days, a variety of passenger cars must be kept in order. The historic coach No.17, newly in light blue Belle-Epoque finish, comes new from overhaul. The BRB is not a museum railway but a business. Keeping it going in steam operation, and covering costs, is an unending tightrope walk, balancing time, space, skills and funds. The SRS, whose members value the BRB, is duly appreciative of the small band under Simon Koller who achieve this.

BLS - Weissenstein Tunnel.

This 3.7km long tunnel line between Solothurn-Moutier, opened in 1908, is in poor condition, and the line has one of the poorest operating ratios on the Swiss network. This means that the operating costs far exceed the revenue generated so closure was feared; however in Spring 2017 the BAV (Federal Transport Office) approved plans for a CHF85m renovation

of the tunnel. This will assure its safe use for 25 years. Work is planned to start in June 2020 for completion in November 2021. Since the tunnel will be completely closed during this time, readers who make long-term plans for their trips should take note. It is a most attractive journey over a steeply graded single line through the Jura. Your correspondent has just seen an Edmonson card ticket, printed by SBB in 1913, for a special train for pilgrims to the Monastery at Einsiedeln. This train ran on 2nd June 1913 from St. Ursanne, via Delémont, Moutier, Günsbrunn, Solothurn, Olten, Luzern, Meggen and Arth-Goldau, returning on 5th June. To our eyes this was a quite remarkable itinerary, all steam hauled. Travelling as they did in Third Class on wooden seats, this must have been a lengthy test of faith. Routing the special train over the Solothurn-Moutier-Bahn with its mountainous grades, and through the Weissenstein tunnel was not apparently an obstacle.

Incident at Basel SBB.

At 16.55 on 29th November 2017, three cars of an incoming DB Class 401 ICE from Hamburg derailed when entering Platform 5 at Basel SBB, blocking tracks 5 and 6 and felling a signal mast. This shorted out the catenary and so closed the station to all traffic. Some 500 passengers were on the ICE and these were evacuated through the front cars of the train, already at the platform. Fortunately there were no reported injuries. The evening rush hour was just starting, so large numbers of people were affected. For SBB the station is a terminus, so incoming trains were stopped short with intending passengers being immediately sent to the tram network in order to reach suburban stations where their trains waited. DB ICE trains turned round at Badischer Bahnhof, also just a few minutes tram ride from the SBB Bahnhof. Despite initial overcrowding, the emergency plan handled the evening rush. The station was largely reopened after 2 hours, but with some on-going delays over the next 3 days. The local media became suitably agitated over the incident. For comparison on the day before, the two motorways east and southwards from Basel had both been blocked for some hours in the evening peak, one by an overturned delivery van, the other by a driver impaired by alcohol who collided with a roadside column. Despite far more serious disruption media interest was much less - as such events occur daily!

RhB - A braking revolution.

In the 19th C. the RhB, like other minor railways in Switzerland, equipped its trains with Hardy vacuum brake equipment. This allowed safe and economical operation for over 100-years, but getting quite out of date, and an obstacle to improvements. New, and later all, passenger cars were equipped from 1999 with air brakes, under vacuum-operated control. Motive power now required compressor, vacuum pump, air brake and vacuum couplings and controls. Since 2013 all new passenger stock has only had air brakes. Freight cars, often heavy, are vacuum braked; these often run attached to passenger trains, and their different braking behaviour can exercise the driver's ingenuity. For some time all three systems may be in the same train. Class Ge4/4 II and Ge4/4^{III} locos have been refitted with air and vacuum train pipes, with a single driver's control. There is also an emergency braking system to release air and destroy vacuum, for full application of all brakes. It's worth a look at the coupling arrangements where freight cars are attached to fast trains.

SBB driverless train tests.

On 6th December 2017 the Swiss media reported a trial

run of a new Stadler train on the high speed Olten – Bern line. Over the main part of the journey (but not between Wankdorf and Bern) the train was running under driverless moving-block conditions. Such operation is not coming soon; but the attraction of increasing system capacity and obtaining more efficient train running is well known. SOB, who are actively developing the concept of driverless operation, was refused permission to conduct trials, but SBB and Stadler are clearly running a similar programme. Rail Union dinosaurs in the UK who are in conflict with operators over the introduction of one-person-operations should take note!

Vierwaldstättersee.

On 7th December 2017 the SGV's newest ship, the CHF15.5m 'm/s *Diamant*' that only entered service last May, struck a rock near Kehrsiten. The ship was completing a private charter and the 163 passengers on board were all safely evacuated. The hull was holed, and the ship settled in the water with lower deck flooded. Next day it was patched-up by divers, pumped out and brought to dry dock in Luzern. The damage, particularly to equipment and fittings on the lower deck, is severe and is estimated at over CHF1m. The ship will be out of service for several months.

Changes to 'British' transport.

On Saturday 30th September the last double-decker PostAuto service operated by Thepra AG Stans (since 2016 part of Verkehrsbetriebe der Stadt Luzern - VBL) ran between Stans and Beckenried on Line 311, that connects Stans Bahnhof and Seelisberg. For more than 20 years these double-deckers, built by Neoplan in Germany but known by some as 'British' buses, have been in regular service on this route. They are being replaced by conventional, new, single-deck PostAutos to the disappointment of Swiss bus and public transport enthusiasts, many of whom made special trips on the last day they operated. Although Switzerland has many double-deck train compositions, buses of this 'architecture' have not been common in the country. However, whilst 'British' buses were making their last runs in central Switzerland PostAuto were launching into service a new fleet of genuine British-built double-deck buses made by Alexander-Dennis in the North East of the country.

News from Genève

1. CEVA - Léman Express open day

Over the weekend of 23rd/24th September 2017 around 30,000 people visited the sites of the future stations of the CEVA in Genève, and exhibitions in Lausanne and Renens in Vaud. Visitors could study the progress of the works, walk in the railway tunnels and ask questions from the people running the project. This is important in a country where the citizens do not express their dissatisfaction on the streets but by organising referenda. The CFF/SBB area for servicing passenger trains, adjacent to Genève Cornavin, was partially opened to the public. They could visit different workshops, where the maintenance groups from the electricians to the cleaners, demonstrated what they do to keep the trains running as well as visiting locomotives and the CFF/SBB rescue train. In Lausanne there were displays depicting how the station will be enlarged and people could visit the CFF/SBB 'school train', whilst the CFF/SBB Police Force was showing what they do. In Rennes, where extensive works are currently taking place to enlarge the station capacity and from where a fourth track is being built to Lausanne, there were information displays and Q and A sessions, which were very popular as people were

eager to gain information on what is happening.

2. Lancy - Pont-Rouge opening

The first major milestone of the CEVA project benefiting the public was reached on 8th December 2017 with the official opening of the new Lancy - Pont-Rouge station. Unlike the CEVA open day, this event was only for selected invited guests and it was not possible to find information about it beforehand. With the timetable change from the 10th December the new station was brought into commercial use. Lancy - Pont-Rouge was originally opened in December 2002 as a simple single platform and it has been served by a half-hourly Regio service from Coppet. As the platform was sited just before the entrance to La Praille freight yard, the passenger trains had to move down to the yard between services, in order to avoid blocking the line for freight trains. The new station is situated about 100m further south and has one large island platform between two dedicated tracks for the Léman Express service. From June 2018 the Coppet service will run every 15 minutes during the rush hours and from December 2018 at this frequency throughout the day. If there are no further delays these trains will continue on from here via Genève - Eaux-Vives into France to serve different parts of the neighbouring Haute-Savoie. Although the station has been opened as Lancy - Pont-Rouge, the Canton wants to rename it as Genève - Pont-Rouge (as reported previously in *Swiss Express*), however the Commune of Lancy is fighting the renaming in the courts. We will have to wait to see which name it will have in the future.

3. Genève - Eaux-Vives Voie Verte

On 22nd December 2017 the Voie Verte (Greenway) cycle path between the CEVA stations of Genève - Eaux-Vives and Genève - Chêne-Bourg opened to the public. The Greenway follows the alignment of the former SNCF single-track line from the old Eaux-Vives station to Annemasse (F) that was opened 1888. This line was closed in 2012 to allow its rebuilding as an underground double-track route as part of the CEVA project. Later the whole line through to Annemasse (F) will be opened as a cycle path. Whilst putting the trains underground removes the level crossings, and reduces the disturbance to those living next to the line, we suspect that future Léman Express passengers would have preferred the views of leafy suburbs to a long tunnel.

4. Viaduc de la Jonction

Also on 22nd December the renovation works of the Viaduc de la Jonction bridge on the line from Genève Cornavin to La Praille freight yard and Genève - Lancy-Pont-Rouge were finished just in time for the Christmas/New Year holidays. During the past two years the double-track bridge, originally opened in 1945, over the confluence of the rivers Rhône and Arve, has been extensively refurbished. As each track was worked on in turn, the rail traffic was kept running, but the pedestrian footpath had to be closed for several months while it was widened. This is a spot well worth visiting while in Genève not only for watching trains, but to observe the different colours of the two rivers (the Rhône is clear, whilst the Arve is cream-coloured from the sediment it carries) and see how they gradually merge into one flow.

Switzerland and South American railways

On 14th December 2017 the Swiss Federal President Leuthard and Bolivian President Morales met to sign a Memorandum of Understanding for Switzerland to support Bolivia in a Trans-Andes rail project, between Ilo in Peru and Santos in Brazil, via La Paz in Bolivia. This line would be 3,750 km long, involving renewal of existing railway lines in Brazil

and a run-down network in Bolivia, whilst the 350km Peruvian section would be newly built. The objective is to provide a Pacific/Atlantic transit route for maritime containers. Ship sizes, even on the currently being widened Panama Canal, are restricted, and the route around Cape Horn too circuitous and time consuming. This Inter-Modal traffic is today the backbone of the Union Pacific and BNSF (and their partners) transcontinental routes in the USA and the CN and CP in Canada. A cost of some \$15 billion (similar to the Gotthard Base Tunnel) has been mentioned. Various Swiss companies were present and expressed interest, including Stadler Rail. However, caution is recommended for this project, for apart from the potential logistic, environmental and political problems the Chinese are currently in the early stages of working with Nicaragua to build a new, and bigger, ship canal across that country to link the two oceans. Keeping containers on ships for as long as possible will always be the most economic movement option.

Environmentally-friendly heating ...

Our Swiss railwayman friend s'Murmeli (the Marmot) informs us that: "Just in time for the first cold spell of the 2017-2018 winter the SBB have announced that they have 7,400 points/switches which are heated with gas or electricity. Carefully pointing out that they are well prepared for the winter, the announcement includes a note that at Eschenbach (LU), a station on the Seetalbahn near Hochdorf, they are testing an installation, which will draw its warmth from underground via a geothermic plant with a borehole and heat exchanger. The test installation cost CHF450,000 and is partly financed by the BAV (Federal Transport Office). Savings of around one-third of today's costs and an avoidance of emissions are expected." Although welcoming this news our correspondent let his imagination run! "Imagine a winter morning. Snow is falling steadily. A passenger asks 'Conductor, why have we stopped here?' 'It's the snow, madam, it blocks the points'. 'Oh, but I thought they were heated?' 'Yes, madam, they are, but we are using a new form of heating from deep underground. I suppose it takes a little while to come to the surface'. 'Thank you, Conductor, will we soon be moving again?' But he had already gone on to announce a delay for "Technical reasons" and to thank us for our understanding – as they always do". Our friendly Marmot's Alpine cousins also go underground to keep warm in the winter!

... and Environmentally-friendly train power.

An experiment with six SBB FLIRT EMUs has shown that using new dry transformers not only saves the equivalent of 600-700l of oil fuel/unit but also reduces energy consumption by up to 8%. Maintenance is also simpler. Full implementation in the fleet is estimated to save around 10GWh per year (SBB used 1933GWh in 2016). SBB estimates that the more than CHF5m investment will be paid back quickly. Use of the technology in other train types is being considered.

Not seeing the train for the trees.

A report from 'Global Forest Watch' noted that contrary to what is happening in the rest of the world, forest cover in Switzerland has increased by 7% between 1995 and 2015. Anyone comparing today's photographs, e.g., on the old Gotthard Line, with those from decades ago will not be surprised!

ASD line extension studied.

TPC, Les Transports publics du Chablais, which operates the Aigle-Sépey-Diablerets (ASD) line, is evaluating an 800m

extension to the line that would run from the current Les Diablerets station to a relocated station to serve the ski lifts to Meilleret. TPC will decide in the first half of 2018 if it is to proceed with this proposal.

Re6/6 Hauled Rail Tours over the Classic Gotthard Route.


"*Verbano Express*' is running Re6/6 hauled special trains from Luino and Bellinzona over the classic route in 2018 as follows:- Sunday 8th July 2018 – Luino and Bellinzona to Schaffhausen; Sunday 16th December 2018 - Luino and Bellinzona to a Christmas Market destination. Previous years these have been Einsiedeln, Basel, and in 2017 St. Gallen. Bookings can be made through home page - www.verbanoexpress.it and details appear on their "prossimi appuntamenti" page. Organiser Marco is usually happy to allow pay-on-the-day bookings. The fare is usually around €50-€70. SRS Member Heléna Moretti will be organising a group booking for those interested. Contact her on helena.moretti@btinternet.com

Death of Peter Willen.

The long lead times of the editing and printing of *Swiss Express* always mean that some events may only get reported after a delay. We learned, with respect and regret, of the death in late summer 2017, of Peter Willen, a well-known Swiss photographer whose work has bridged some 50 years of Swiss railways. He was tireless, and always to be found with his two cameras where news was being made, or an 'oldtimer' steamed-up, or where his nose and his network told him to look around. He will be known to many SRS members through his 'Photobook', which covered the last years of steam in Switzerland and the changes which are so apparent today. He also travelled widely. I recall his running to earth the great Swiss Mallets in Valencia on the RENFE, as well as many other unsuspected treasures. The stories of his interest in young enthusiasts in their railway hobby are many; he was a caring person. A tribute with pictures was in the Autumn edition of '*Semaphor*', whose editor Christian Zellweger had known Peter for many years.

And the Best News at the end...

... as SBB's Bombardier Class 502s enter service at last! In May 2010 SBB ordered 59 double-deck express EMU train sets for Inter-City services, at a contract price of CHF1.9 billion. Various factors led to serious delays; finally a new agreement planned for delivery in 2017, with three additional train sets to be delivered in lieu of financial compensation. On 30th November 2017, after some months of prototype test running, the BAV (Federal Transport Office) issued a first certificate allowing SBB to use the new trains in public service. Since Bombardier had already delivered several sets to SBB, service operations will start progressively during early 2018. Expect to see them at first on routes such as Zürich – Bern (Inter-Regio) or Zürich – Chur. The full fleet should enter service by early 2020.

Note. These reports contain some prior notice of planned work and interruptions of normal services. These are without guarantee. Readers must check on websites if travelling to avoid disappointment, but also because such projects can change even at short notice. 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes input from other SRS Members including Michael Donovan, Mario Gavazzi, Ilkka Huotelin, Trevor Gauntlett, Robert Amstutz, and others.