

Swiss news

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Swiss News

Another ending

This is the last Swiss News in its current form. Along with the retirement of the *Swiss Express* Editor, our *Swiss News* Editor Bryan Stone has decided that at 80 he believes that it is time for him to relinquish his role of collating news from the numerous participants in the Swiss Transport System. Bryan has been in this post for some 10 years and we thank him for the unstinting involvement that he has happily shown over this period. It is his intention to continue to submit articles and items of interest to the magazine.

No smoking!

From 1st June 2019 smoking will be prohibited in all Swiss stations. Recent trials in six stations showed an over 75% preference among users (and staff) to such a ban so the decision came quickly. However, implementation in detail requires thought to defining limits, as Swiss stations are generally 'open', with direct access from roadside, pedestrian and quayside areas. As in Germany, a marked area on platforms is to be expected, where smoking is allowed.

Good news for Swiss Pass users

After serious reflection, the Association for Public Transport (VöV) has decided to continue validity of Swiss All-Network tickets on the lines serving: Les Pleiades; Sonloup; Schilthorn; Stanserhorn; Ristis; Rigi; and Felsenegg.

SBB suffers timekeeping issues

The last quarter of 2018 followed on a difficult summer. It was expected, insofar as extensive re-laying and improvements were planned. Unforeseen was a series of random actions, weather-connected (flash floods and slides after the hottest summer ever), a spate of signalling and communications failures and, more than ever, lower tolerances in the face of fast increasing traffic. Arrears of maintenance are still around and good news would be when another mild winter allows work to continue, but even then train running suffers. But rest assured, although commuters are getting rebellious, unless you take a peak-time train on a route like Bern-Zürich (overcrowded and only 83% punctual) or worst of all, Brig-Sion (just 37% on time), or take a train where a bus bridges the gap (e.g. Brünig line of the Zentralbahn), you will not notice too much, and with two fast trains hourly on most main lines, you will still enjoy your day. SBB works to a tolerance of 3 minutes. FS Italia sets a 15-minute limit; Airlines have a calendar. Your correspondent takes a through train if possible: Basel - Interlaken, or -St Gallen, avoiding the risks of missed or crowded connections and noisy stations.

SBB/SNCF: Delémont - Belfort

This has been a riddle. Almost up to the last, no real timetable information of the scheduled re-opening on 9th December was available. Then, following the official inauguration of the re-opening on the 6th December, the SNCF timetable was made public - just 3 days prior to the start of the service. The French seem to delight in this type of official behaviour! SBB advises that 10 trains daily run Biel to Delle. They are not all extended every day to Meroux (TGV). Footnotes remind me of the long-lamented Indicateur Chaix in France, which showed many branch lines where an apparent five trains only gave one or two different ones each day. Connections at Meroux for Strasbourg and

Luxembourg are not planned. Please check carefully. At Meroux there is connection with an SNCF regional train to Belfort. Additional SNCF trains will run Belfort - Delle and return. In Meroux there is a connection by a long footway, or by lift, to the TGV platform, with connections (20-25 minutes) in and out of TGV trains to Paris and Lyon. SBB Table 240 (Delémont - Delle/Belfort) applies, but shows no train times beyond Meroux. We must repeat that a check of the SNCF website is a necessity if planning to use the route.

December timetable changes

The privately published VCS timetable (that replaces the 'official' Kursbuch) arrived just before the new schedules started on 9th December. General Swiss changes are small, like the Lötschberg south ramp; Kandersteg - Brig, where local trains and station stops are cut back (and will be up to 2022), as the Lötschberg summit tunnel is operated single track while completely reconditioned. There are significant improvements hidden away, mostly with additional trains and improved Takt (regular interval) services; absorbing these without creating more bottlenecks is of course today's challenge. A major project with wide consequences is double tracking of the Zugersee line on the route between Zürich and Arth-Goldau, with trains diverted via Rotkreuz. The problem is so far-reaching that a complete timetable of the 600-series tables is bound separately and is distributed with, but not in, the main VCS Kursbuch. Members visiting Switzerland should not assume it all works as before as many connections, such as with Luzern - Gotthard services, are shifted to Rotkreuz. An accidental by-product is that with direct services diverted via Lenzburg/Rotkreuz, some journeys into the Ticino - even from Basel - are quicker. The publicity has not talked of this! Zürich - München is still severely affected by electrification in Germany; one day it will surely be good, but it's a long hard road to get there. And on the Rhätische Bahn (RhB), the long-announced closure between Saglains and Scuol for tunnel renewal in the section Guarda - Ardez will be from 11th March to 7th September. As this is Switzerland the publicity for the changes was good. In affected regions publicity drew attention in good time to the forthcoming timetable changes. There were even slots on TV. Incidentally, during this period your Swiss News Editor was amused to be told (perhaps only in fun - of course!) that in parts of Britain the timetables are changed, nobody knows, and finally no one can tell the difference!

'Leman Express' route numbering

With the December 2018 timetable change the Regio (R) services to Coppet and La Plaine around Genève have been re-classified as they have been re-branded under the *Leman Express* brand. They are now numbered with an S for urban trains, but with also an L for '*Leman Express*'. In Genève things are often done differently, and taking just what is used in the German-speaking world would not sound right. But calling them RER as was done in some earlier drafts, might have been too French. In the neighbouring Vaud, the service is called RER Vaud but the numbering is S1... The new route numbers SL4, SL5 and SL6 are now in use with the other ones (shown in brackets) reserved for the full launch of '*Leman Express*' from December 2019: (SL1 Coppet - Evian-les-Bains) : (SL2 Coppet - Annecy) : (SL3 Coppet - St. Gervais-les-Bains - Le-Fayet) : SL4 Coppet - Lancy-Pont-Rouge (- Annemasse) : SL5 Genève - La Plaine : SL6 Genève - Bellegarde (IH)

SBB rolling stock news

Class 502s. The 9th of December was to be the inauguration of the new Bombardier double-deck RABDe Class 502 EMUs on the main line St Gallen – Zürich – Bern – Genève. Latest information is that this is not happening as planned, as the electronics of multiple EMU working are still not in order. It was planned that the new units would be introduced first on the Zürich – St. Gallen – Rorschach - Chur line, using the single EMUs of sub-series Class 502-5. However, their unreliability is such that SBB made a public statement in early January expressing their annoyance with Bombardier. The constructor is still wrestling with the software, and introduction to Bern and Genève is to be *'when we can offer a reliable service'*. Readers will recall that these units are already nearly four years late. The planned introduction of these units had resulted from an out-of-court settlement between the SBB and the 'Inclusion Handicap' lobby group, who were contesting the suitability of various aspects of the equipment for persons with reduced mobility – PRM. The lobby group is still contesting a further 11 issues in a Federal Court. (BS/MD)

New locomotives. A better story is the delivery of 12 hybrid heavy shunting locomotives, at present called only Prima H3, from Alstom; they have diesel and battery power, and are leased for 10 years. Three are already on hire from Alstom, as H3 1002 022, 023 and 025. One is said to be at Basel Kleinhüningen harbour, so we will go to look out for it.

Automatic couplings. SBB Cargo is testing these, starting end-2018, on 12 Re 420 and 10 Am 843 locomotives, as they rationalise their wagonload traffic services.

New FLIRTS. Just before Christmas SBB placed a CHF65m order with Stadler for seven 4-car FLIRT 3 EMUs for service on Inter-Regional Line 66 between Berne – Neuchâtel – La-Chaux-de-Fonds. This was a 10-year concession awarded to SBB by the Federal Transport Office (BAV) in June 2018 that replaced, in part, a BLS operation. Each 4-car unit will seat 154 in 2nd Class and some 27 in 1st Class, and will be equipped with the latest information systems and at-seat power-points. There is an option for the supply of another seven similar units. (MD)

Cooler trains. Following a positive response by travellers to a pilot project, SBB announced in October that it was reducing the on-train winter temperatures on Zürich S-Bahn services from 22C to 20C. The changes will begin to come into place from the end of summer 2019 as rolling stock is modified and could save up to 3.7GWh of energy consumption when fully implemented. (MD)

Class 503 in the Emmental. In November 2018 a Class 503 011 'Eurocity' was hard at work between Huttwil and Sumiswald. Tilting 'Eurocities' are not to be expected in this rural outpost. Rather it was that trial running during the night allowed acoustic measurements in a district where, after dark, little else is to be heard. Perhaps that was why the line was closed to passengers some years ago! Today the only regular users are the steam trains from Huttwil on summer weekends.

620 063. This Re6/6 was the last survivor in the original green livery, once so familiar. On 22nd November 2018 it was turned out from Bellinzona in standard red, after an R3 general overhaul. If you caught it beforehand, treasure your pictures.

BLT and AVA

New 'Tramlink' - similar to 'Tango' - trams are to be acquired by these operators after a joint order procedure has been agreed with Stadler Rail for 18 new units. These Be6/8s, of which 10 will go to the BLT's Waldenburgerbahn, that is being re-gauged to metre-gauge and will be fully converted by 2022, and 8 will go to the AVA's new Limmattalbahn, scheduled for opening in 2023. The units will be built in Valencia, Spain. Readers are reminded to enjoy the 750mm trains of the Waldenburger now.

BLS news

Locos going. The much-loved 'Brunelis' get steadily less. No.164, one of the oldest, was sent for scrap in October 2018.

Infrastructure upgrades. Modernisation of platforms, signalling and layout in Wiler and Gerlafingen is now starting. It was a surprise to learn that Gerlafingen still has hand points. The old Emmental lines had many such stations not too long ago.

New depot policy agreed. The Federal Government has now approved the BLS depot policy which will focus on Spiez (rebuilding already in hand), Bönigen, near Interlaken, and Chliforst Nord, on the Neuchâtel line near Bern. Spiez will service multiple units, Bönigen heavy repairs and locomotives, and Chliforst the Bern S-Bahn units. This has taken some years to decide as early plans met protests. The works in Bönigen are at the extremity of the line built by the Bödelibahn, the first railway of the Berner Oberland, and will ensure that this section, from Interlaken Ost, which serves no other purpose, will remain in place. If we think of Crewe or Doncaster, Bönigen, a lakeside village in the heart of a mountain valley, seems an unlikely place for a locomotive works. Few know it's there, alongside Interlaken where tourism reigns, but the decision to concentrate heavy work there will protect many engineering jobs.

Service withdrawals. From December 2020 the stations at Faulensee, Leissigen and Därligen will no longer be served by BLS regional trains. An hourly all-day bus service between Spiez and Interlaken West will operate, with strengthening in rush hours. Tendering for the service is currently being invited. Although dropping services to these small stations does not surprise, we will see whether the highway conditions allow punctuality to be assured, as traffic congestion along the lakeshore road is often acute.

BLS ships. A record year saw 391,000 passengers being carried on the Brienzsee, an 18% rise on 2017, while on the Thunersee some 703,000 passengers represented a 9% rise. The region saw a record summer for weather too; the warmest summer, and the lowest rainfall, ever recorded.

Automatic train protection. Stadler and BLS have announced that the 52 FLIRT EMUs ordered in January 2018 for delivery between 2021 and 2025 will be equipped with Stadler's 'Guardia' ETCS Level 2 system, that it has developed jointly with Italian automatic train protection system manufacturer Mermec. 'Guardia' consists of both hardware and software installed in the train, and allows the driver to visualise the train's position, speed and additional data, which is also transmitted to the control centre. Data such as track warrants can be collected at the same time. (MD)

Historic 'Wallis Express'

The 'Verein Depot und Schienenfahrzeuge Koblenz' (DSF, website www.dsf-koblenz.ch) maintains a selection of

historic rolling stock. On 20th October 2018, they operated a day tour from Koblenz to the Valais using their green Pendelzug composition (RBe 4/4 1405, DZt 911, EW I A and EW I B). The tour repeated an itinerary successfully followed in 2017. After leaving Koblenz in the early hours the tour travelled via Zürich, Olten and Bern, then over the Lötschberg mountain route to Brig where it reversed to continue to Martigny. Shortly afterward the Sion-Sierre stretch was due to be equipped with ETCS Level 2 which will make future operations by heritage stock on the main line through the Wallis/Valais problematic. On arrival at Martigny the tour visited the TMR branches to Orsières and Le Châble before retracing its steps to Thun. From Thun the preserved composition took the Emmental line to Luzern, where our correspondent Mario Gavazzi (who says he always carries his camera with him!) photographed it at approximately 20.00 hours. Mario says the sight made him nostalgic for the time when most of the regional trains in the Luzern area were operated by trains like the DSF heritage stock. After reversals at Luzern and Zürich the train finally returned to Koblenz very late in the evening. (MG)



RBe4/4 No.1405 at Lüzern Hbf.

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

SBB and Zirkus Knie

In a land where circuses have an active tradition, Knie is the Swiss national circus. This family enterprise of four generations, celebrates its centenary. At a ceremony in Rapperswil in November, SBB and Knie unveiled 420 294 and 460 058 in the circus colours, with the well-known clown emblem. Knie has been a faithful rail user since the start, and still generates trainloads of animals, caravans and material as it tours the country.

CJ freight traffic

What was a serious threat to freight operations on the metre-gauge Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ), following freight service cut backs by SBB Cargo in Canton Jura, seems to have found a compromise. Interchange of standard gauge wagons, using metre-gauge transporter trucks of the CJ, will continue for the moment in Glovelier, but no longer in Tavannes. Freight services will also continue in Saignelégier, Les Ferrières and Le Noirmont. The principal wagonload cargo is timber, and the agreement is at least for two years. In Alle, served on standard gauge, a regional freight centre is to be built, to concentrate facilities for the Ajoie region around Porrentruy.

Luzern station...

Although no assurance of finance has yet been made, the

SBB has created a project team to plan the realisation by 2022 of detailed plans for the urgently needed, underground station in Luzern. This will be served by through trains, avoiding reversal, with access through a tunnel under the Vierwaldstättersee's Luzern bay.

... and Luzern again

During a complete closure over the weekend 18th/19th November, SBB has now replaced seven sets of points and crossings in the approach to Luzern from the Gutsch Tunnel. This work, costing some CHF5m, was a consequence of the derailment of a Class 610 unit on March 2017. The formal enquiry report into this accident has not yet been published, but SBB, after its own appraisal of the layout here and also elsewhere, was not prepared to wait longer before instigating changes.

Rigi Bahnen record

Rigi Bahnen have announced that in 2018 they carried approximately 910,000 passengers to the summit of the "Queen of the Mountains", 7.9% more than in 2017 which was itself a record year.

Brienzi-Rothorn-Bahn

While loco. No 2 and its team were in Wales enjoying Snowdon for a month, serious work was being done at home. The entire 7 km line up to the Rothorn Kulm station has now been renewed. The 1892 rails, which had remarkably survived on much of the mountain section, have now disappeared. Points, embankments, retaining walls and galleries are all renewed. It all cost over CHF 7m, raised through private and public support, including the Bern Cantonal Lottery. The last six-months have been a marathon for all; after a disastrous heavy snow cover in early 2018, helicopter access and all-night work saw it through, before winter could close in again. It was a very remarkable achievement undertaken by a small team. As CEO Simon Koller said, 'unfortunately you cannot have a 'completion' party for 50,000' donors. Now reality says that a boiler renewal for No.6 (to be undertaken in Crewe as earlier with No.7), and increasing frailty of the 130-year-old veterans, will still need serious funding. The railway is determined to uphold its on-going history of coal-fired steam engines, and does much of its own work to support this. Now, next year, it's business as usual.

Genève platform display

At Genève Cornavin station, the old mechanical platform displays have been replaced with modern LED displays. (IH)

Rolle works

At Rolle on the Genève – Lausanne line the platforms are being heightened for barrier-free travel for passengers with mobility issues. The work, which should finish by summer 2019, has led to timetable alterations as the tracks have been closed one at a time. For instance on some days the IC1 and IR90 trains did not run between Lausanne and Genève Airport, but instead there was a quarter-hourly RE service shuttling between those stations, doubling the service for some smaller stops on the line. (IH)

New flyover near Lausanne

Work started in November 2018 on the 3-year project to construct a flyover for the new fourth track between Prilly and Renens. This will cost CHF112m and is a part of the master plan to raise capacity on the Lausanne-Geneva section.

Restoration of the “Stadt Luzern” commences

On Sunday 21st October 2018 ps ‘Stadt Luzern’, the flagship of the SGV fleet, was made ready for its final cruise on the Vierwaldstättersee, from Luzern to Flüelen and back, before its general restoration (see ‘Swiss Express’ No.135, P27). SGV expected a large number of passengers and the ds ‘Unterwalden’ was provided as a relief ship. Hundreds of enthusiasts joined the ‘normal’ passengers on board. It was foggy at Luzern, but after Brunnen the sun shone. How beautiful was the Urnersee! There were people on board from regions far away from central Switzerland. I met two influential women with British passports! Magdalen Mary Pemberton has published a book of poetry in German (“Veduten I-V: Lyrische Impressionen der Schweizer Reisen 2011-2015”) and Cathy Lewer is the principal of an English Language school at Sarnen (‘My English, Sarnen’). Cathy and Maggie are regular passengers on our steamers and along with everyone else they were enjoying some nostalgic feelings as it would be more than two years without the Flagship. It was also a special day for the flagship’s crew, particularly its Captain, Kuno Stein. He is due to retire at the end of the 2019 season, so when ps ‘Stadt Luzern’ returns to service in 2021 he will be on board – but only as a passenger! The final day in service of ‘his ship’ was also his last day as Captain on board the 90-year-old ship. All the passengers congratulated him and many gave him presents. The final autumn timetable day was also the last day in service for the original boilers. Bruno Stein and Danial Tresch operated them with feelings of gratitude and nostalgia! The association Dampferfreunde Vierwaldstättersee has organised a CHF4m fundraising effort to support the renovation costs (which will exceed CHF12m). Volunteers on board both steamers sold souvenirs and called on the passengers to contribute toward the flagship’s renovation costs. More details can be found on www.dampfschiff.ch. When at around 17.00 hours the ps ‘Stadt Luzern’ arrived back at Luzern its passengers said goodbye to both the ship and its crew until 2021. (MG)



Sunshine welcomes ‘Stadt Luzern’ on its final visit to Flüelen for more than two years. Photo: Mario Gavazzi

SBB Historic and Vallorbe

For many years historic motive power for the Transport Museum, and from SBB’s collection, has been stored in the former locomotive depot at Vallorbe. Over 50 years ago I recall leaving the overnight ‘Direct-Orient’ from Paris in Vallorbe, at around 06.00, to walk back to the depot and see the collection of treasures. In the 1960s it was always unlocked. Then, after coffee, soft rolls and cherry jam at the station buffet, taking a morning commuter train on to

Lausanne to pursue that day’s plans. Recently SBB Historic had 16 vehicles stored, but for cost and practical reasons has now removed them to Olten and Erstfeld. The depot in Vallorbe goes back to steam days, and it was still important later when Swiss and French locomotives on international express and freight trains were changed. Vallorbe is still a large station, where once customs and police controls were made. Today there is the S2 regional service to Lausanne, plus the local trains Le Brassus, as well as an early morning and evening commuter train from and to Pontarlier. There is also a private night train - ‘Thello’ – between Paris and Venezia, which runs with an SBB 420 class. Otherwise things are very quiet.

MOB

Progress on infrastructure improvements for the project to run through services on from Zweisimmen to Interlaken is well advanced with the gauge-changing installations and station rebuilding taking shape. However the start of the new service is still unclear. It is now apparent that snags have arisen, particularly concerning the weight and power parameters for safe operation on the MOB. It’s well known that the MOB, always laid out as a mountain light railway, has long 1 in 14 gradients and tight curves. Traction and braking are always critical. The intended seven-car through trains will now only have five coaches, whilst the three intended restaurant cars no longer feature. Nineteen passenger coaches are foreseen, this figure including those that will only run on standard gauge. The explanation appears to be that the new rolling stock is turning out to be heavier than planned for MOB running, both for structural reasons and because of the gauge-changing bogies. This has also led to the recent confusing reports on the MOB’s 8000 Class locomotives. Originally these were to be disposed of; three are now to be retained, as their characteristics are better suited to the new operation.

Forchbahn (FB)

This metre-gauge operation that runs between Zürich Stadelhofen and Esslingen (S-Bahn Line 18) has awarded Stadler a contract to modernise its 13 Be4/6 EMUs that were originally built by Stadler in 2008. This work is intended to prolong the life of these intensively used units until 2037. The FB operates the first part of its route out of Zürich on the tracks of ZVV Line 11 to Rehalp at 600Vdc, where it then switches to its own 1200Vdc power supply. Stadler is co-operating for the first time with Voith who will supply two traction converters/unit based on its EmCon I1000-9AR design for each set. The modernisation programme will begin in September 2019 and is due to be completed by mid-2024. (MD)

AB

The line from St Gallen to Taufen was reopened for scheduled service on the 7th October after a six-month closure to allow completion of the new Ruckhalde tunnel. The formal tunnel opening ceremony was on the 5th October and on the following day the AB offered free travel on this section, something some 6,000 people took up. The Be4/8 units Nos.31-35 are now definitely out of service on the Trogen line. The voltage was increased in the night of 6th December, to 1500 v DC, and from the next day the new ABe 8/12 units took over the service, running on the new transverse route S21, Appenzell – Trogen. Note: Voltage in St Gallen city centre remains 600v DC because of proximity of trolley bus and other rail systems.

RBS

On the 21st December RBS introduced the first of its new 'Worbla' four-car articulated EMUs. By the end of 2019 14 of these trains will be in service. They will replace the aging 'Mandarlinli' units currently used on S7 Bern to Worb Dorf services.



'Worbla' 02 is seen on a wet 21 st December, its first day in service at Bolligen. Photo: Bill Salter

MIB

This small operator has a new train. A rare event, and it's second hand, but newer than acquisitions before. Be2/6 No.13, formerly No.7004 of the MVR (Vevey), built in 1997 has been operational since 12th December. Also available at MIB's Innertkirchen Depot are Be4/4 No.8, now due for complete overhaul, and BDe4/4 No.11, formerly No.604 of the CJ, a veteran of 1953. The future of the latest is now being reviewed. Get to Innertkirchen if you can, it's a fascinating ride taking only a few minutes from Meiringen.

OeBB

Two curious veterans in the Balsthal have disappeared. These were Em4/4 Nos.20 and 22 a pair of rod drive diesel heavy shunters, that were originally members of DR's (East German) Class V 60. They worked the OeBB container-terminal at the Klus Waste Products Depot. They have now been sold out of regular service to the railway support company EDG.

MSG

The Mühleggbahn funicular (actually an inclined plane), in St Gallen is back in service after a closure of nearly a year for renewal. It is 125 years old, was once a rack railway and before that a water-powered funicular, and is now a single car funicular carrying, before closure, over 700,000 passengers yearly. The new cabin is standing room only and carries 38 and has much improved access.

JB

For the third time in its history the Jungfraubahn has carried over one million visitors. In 2018 some 1,067,000 people used the organisation's services, an increase of some 2.4%. The downside of the operation was a decline of almost 4% in skiers using the Jungfrau ski region. As in previous years the majority of the increase came from visitors from the Far East, the Jungfrau being one of the 'must see' attractions for visitors from that region when visiting Europe.

Railcare and Coop

Without much publicity, Coop in western Switzerland has

achieved a most effective switch from heavy goods road haulage to intermodal rail. A rail-road terminal and distribution depot at Aclens, northwest of Lausanne, receives food and non-food products, mostly by rail, for 45 Coop stores in the region around Genève. Each night the Coop subsidiary Railcare loads three complete trains of 32 swap-bodies (inland containers) from Aclens. Destination is the terminal La Praille in Genève. The first train loads perishable and temperature-controlled goods, for which the swap-bodies have electric refrigeration powered by generators and batteries on the wagons. Transfer rail-road is lateral. Railcare has at present 84 container wagons and seven Class 476 Siemens 'Vectron' locomotives, fitted with a last-mile diesel auxiliary power unit. In 2017 240,000 loads were carried. Railcare is also using and planning other supply points from which Aclens will be supplied. Railcare trains and their white Class 476's may be seen in daylight on the Base-of-the-Jura line through Neuchâtel. An interesting statistic: Coop has reduced its road fleet in Genève from 34 to 14, and reckons on present traffic to save 663t of CO2 annually. The whole system demonstrates that dedicated intermodal rail can be more efficient even on the short 67km haul between Aclens-La Praille. Coop's inventory control also benefits from overcoming the chronic highway congestion on the Genève – Lausanne motorway.

Sugarbeet

This year the conversion to operating container trains was largely in force for the first time although there were some snags. These included an unexpected shortage of container wagons for lease, as the fast expanding Chinese overland 'Silk Route' services were absorbing available rolling stock across Europe. Motive power was no longer from SBB but from several private operators, and these were sometimes tightly stretched. A few failures and trivial mishaps sufficed also to cause trouble, but the concept has worked, with many trains operating, especially on the section Yverdon – Biel. Swiss Sugar factories are at Aarberg (BE) and Frauenfeld (TG). Some bio-beet also came from Poland and Germany using block trains of conventional wagons. A curiosity was when Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ) hired BLS Re4/4 No. 425 191 for its haul between Alle – Delémont, and proudly painted its 'CJ' logo on its front.

Tests of autonomous train operation

Normally when this is mentioned two issues come up; job losses, and trains without drivers. In fact that is not the issue. What is being pursued, is automatic train operation, to achieve standard performances and to optimise running conditions, so as to make better use of line capacity, energy and installed power. Tests are being conducted at night on the line Mogelsberg - Wattwil, in the Toggenburg, where the SOB and Stadler Rail have been authorised to conduct live trials. After a year it is planned to make trials in passenger traffic between Wädenswil and Wattwil. The SBB have already tested a system on the Bern – Olten line, with automatic acceleration and braking. The Federal Office of Transport (BAV) licenses such trials, but is also insistent that 'island' solutions are not sought; these are steps towards inter-operable systems on a European level.

Stations cClosed in 2019 timetable...

Areuse, Ferenbalm, Lalden, Murkart, Gübsensee, Rank. Of these, Lalden, a familiar stop for hikers on the Lötschberg south ramp, will reopen in 2022, when the Lötschberg tunnel

reconstruction is over.

...and re-opening

Also important to many tourists, Lugano-Paradiso has re-opened after 2-years closure for rebuilding.

RhB

The new Rhein Bridge at Reichenau-Tamins was inaugurated on 11th November 2018. The RhB has joined in a fundraising effort to restore to working order the G 4/4 No.1 'Rbätia', the original engine of the Landquart-Davos Railway. Loco No.616 has been painted accordingly in order to advertise the project.

Another loco, Ge6/6 II No.702 has achieved 6m km in 60-years. This remarkable performance is announced to all in large characters on its red livery. This summer she will surely be again in regular service on the Albula line freight trains.

Remembering the CIWL

In 1993, the Wagons-Lits Society was founded in England, and in over 53 issues its magazine 'Repas Bleu' has contributed to the memory of the world of CIWL's famous sleeping, restaurant, and Pullman cars that operated on services through Switzerland. The International Railway Preservation Society (IRPS), part of the Nene Valley Railway in Peterborough that has a CIWL restaurant car (2975) and a sleeping car (3916), has now taken on the role of this journal with a new publication being published quarterly from autumn 2018. For more details of this contact christopher.elliott@club-internet.fr

Andrea Keller

The former Area Manager for Navigation Lake Maggiore at Locarno, Andrea Keller, died aged 66 on 14th November 2018 just one year after he had retired following 34 years service with the company. His main interests were in the history and literature of Canton Ticino, and he was working with a project that is planning the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Centovalli railway. His ideas included documenting what the 'Centovallina' meant for local people, in the past, present, and future. (MG)



Andrea Keller in his office at Locarno, 13 09 2010.

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

Ligerz Tunnel

SBB is starting to plan a new double-track tunnel to bypass Ligerz between Neuchâtel and Biel to remove the last remaining single-track section on the Lausanne-Biel line. At Ligerz the Jura Massif comes very close to Bielersee and the line is squeezed between the lake and the picturesque village. The main road had been cut through the mountain earlier

and now the same is planned for the railway. The works are planned to run from 2020 till 2025, after which the old line will be removed and the villagers will have better access to the lake – and less noise. However, it appears that this scheme will isolate the line from the 'Vinifuni' Funicular to Prêles and the lake ship pier. It is also unclear if the community would retain a station. (IH)

Vevey - and Lyria

One of Switzerland's great occasions is the Winemakers' Festival in Vevey, the 'Fête des Vignerons', held only every 25 years during the summer. 2019 is one of these four-times-a century occasions with the festivities running from 18th July to 11th August. It is a great affair, with music and dancing, much wine (!), and attracts many thousands of visitors. During that time you may find no ready accommodation, so book early, or plan to stay outside the district. The SBB/CFF will run many extra trains, so use the website to see exact dates and services. Lyria TGV set No.4414 has already been adorned with advertising livery for the event.

Solothurner Dampfbootclub

On 22nd December, the Saturday before Christmas, the Solothurner Dampfbootclub operated their small 1889 vintage steam boat, the 'St Urs' on a shuttle service along a section of the River Aare in the city to take shoppers to and from the annual Christmas Market. (MG)

Stadler Rail

After contractual doubts following the uncertainties associated with Trump's presidency, the CALTRAIN authority in California ordered 16 electric train sets, to be built in Stadler's plant in Salt Lake City, for electrification of the San Francisco – San José route. Now, in late 2018, the CALTRAIN board approved purchase of a further 37 new cars, to increase capacity of the new service.

At the end of 2018 Stadler was fitting out the first 12-car Class 745 EMUs for Abellio East Anglia, in its Erlen works in Switzerland. These are for the Norwich-London service.

Federal Transport Office (BAV) and the DB

Your correspondent (just before he retires) was delighted to hear how BAV director Peter Fuglistaller described his experience with the European North-South axis for freight trains, a critical factor in Swiss and European transportation policy. His remarks at a conference in Berlin were directed primarily at DB. These were that there are... "*two important persons on this route, named Somebody and Nobody; their collective efforts ensure that Somebody makes the plan go wrong, and Nobody takes responsibility!*" Even more seriously, he suggested that German procrastination in adopting European ETCS standards had delayed the full development of this critical route by 15 years.

Editor's Note

Sometimes these reports contain prior notice of planned work and interruptions of normal services. These are without guarantee - see the first item! Readers must check locally, or on websites, when 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 Robert Amstutz (RA), Michael Donovan (MD), Mario Gavazzi (MG), Ilkka Huotelin (IH), and others.