

Swiss news

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal**

Band (Jahr): - **(2019)**

Heft 138

PDF erstellt am: **06.08.2024**

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

Swiss News

SBB – Continuing problems with Class 502

As anticipated Class 502 FV-Dosto (long distance double deck) trains entered service on IC1 St Gallen – Genève on 9th January – only to be promptly withdrawn following repeated failures. During January some of the shorter IR variants entered service on IR13 Chur – Zürich and IR36/37 Basel – Zürich. Again breakdowns occurred. Engineers from manufacturers Bombardier have been travelling with certain trains, and on others trains drivers were given a hotline number for technical assistance.

A detailed commentary in Schweizer Eisenbahn-Revue suggests that the worst problems still giving trouble are: doors and footsteps 35%, control software 20%, on-board signalling system 9%, and traction 8%. (A group ‘Other’ causes 20% of incidents.) With 12 sets in service, failures were at 0.56 per day, and with a failure every 1756 km (mid February).

The continuing problems with what has become known as the ‘Pannenzug’ – failure train – are becoming a political embarrassment for SBB who have gone public with their dissatisfaction with Bombardier. The manufacturers hit back saying the problems were exaggerated and “*annoying but not a safety risk*”.

Representatives from both SBB and Bombardier appeared before a Federal Government Transport Committee on the 11th February. They expressed their regrets for the situation and assured the committee that they were working relentlessly together to find solutions to the technical problems. As of that date they were unable to confirm when the trains would enter service on IC1 and testing was continuing in late February. SBB now hope to reach tolerable levels by early summer, so perhaps the planned service on IC1 can start then.

The Class 502 fleet will comprise three variants (23 IC200 and 30 IR200, both eight carriages, and 9 four car IR100).

SBB ordered 59 trains in 2010 in a CHF1.9bn order, the largest rolling stock order in SBB history. Planned introduction was 2013. Delivery delays and the continuing dispute over disabled access have delayed the process. As compensation for the late delivery Bombardier delivered an additional three units free of charge. (Additional Notes: Bryan Stone)



FV Dosto IC200 set 502 009 at Liestal on 25th February operating a Basel to Zürich IR37 service. Photo: Johanna Stone

Giruno gains authorization for 200km/h

Meanwhile, in better news for SBB long distance, the new high speed Stadler SMILE trains, known by SBB as Giruno (Buzzard) and designated as class RABe 501, have gained authorization from the Bundesamt für Verkehr (BAV) to

operate throughout Switzerland at 200km/h. The new units should start appearing in service in the early summer.

The 11-car units are designed to operate with a top speed of 250 km/h. Stadler won the tender to deliver 29 units by 2019 for CHF980m with an option for up to 92 more. The trains are intended to replace the ETR610 units on the Gotthard base tunnel route between Milano and Basel/Zürich.



Giruno Class 501

Photo: SBB-CFF-FFS

SBB 2018 Results Headlines

Headline bullet points from SBB's 2018 results report:

- SBB transported 1.25m passengers per day (up 0.8%).
- Punctuality fell slightly to 90.1% (-0.1%). The result in certain regions and also in the 4th quarter is considered unsatisfactory.
- 2018 was an operationally demanding year with a record amount of maintenance carried out. Delayed introduction of Class 502 did not help (*see above*).
- Profit after tax up 42.3% to CHF 568m. The better result is attributed to efficiency savings and will be ploughed back into the system.
- The good result enabled SBB to offer more reduced price tickets and to invest further in customer service and quality.
- SBB Cargo is back in the black but its situation remains precarious with full liberalisation and removal of subsidy due to happen in 2019.
- The Federal and Cantonal contribution for infrastructure and regional traffic was CHF 66m (+ 2.8%).
- Improved productivity meant a reduced cost, break-even level for the Federal and Cantonal regional subsidy.
- Debt break-even level reduced to 5.62%, (Federal law mandates a maximum figure of 6.5%).

SBB – IC2000 carriages to receive a face-lift

The 341 IC2000 double-deck carriages that form the mainstay of SBB's Inter City services are now 20 years old. They carry 180,000 passengers per day and those who have travelled on them recently will have noticed that the interiors are now rather jaded.

SBB has announced a CHF 300m re-vamp of the fleet, which will involve 40 km of new carpet, 120 tonnes of fresh paint and enough upholstery to re-cover 32,000 seats. The first prototypes were revealed to journalists on 31st January. They feature much brighter LED lighting, new windows destined to help boost mobile phone reception (*some may doubt this is an improvement – Ed*), built in power points and wireless phone charging in the business zones.

Toilets in the “Ticki Park” family compartments will be provided with changing tables and the space available for

bicycles will allow 360 rather than 200 to be carried. The restaurants will also be overhauled.

The first refurbished carriages should be in service this autumn.

SBB to offer full refunds for delayed services?

SBB CEO Andreas Meyer has raised the possibility that customers could receive a full refund in future in the event of a train being “seriously late”.

Readers may be surprised that SBB’s current policy on refunds is decidedly ungenerous. At present a maximum of CHF10 (CHF15 in first class) is refunded if an IC or ICN train is over an hour late. No refunds are given for trains of a lesser category or delayed for less than an hour. Some passengers complain that they often receive just a coffee voucher. Herr Meyer has suggested that 50% refunds might be offered “after a certain lateness” or even full refunds in “serious cases”.

In 2018 86% of SBB services arrived within 3 minutes of their scheduled time as compared to 87.4% in 2017.

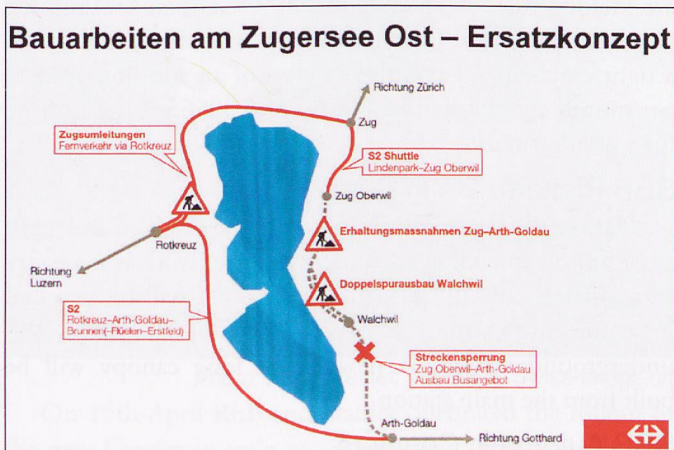
SBB – East Zugersee line upgrade – latest news

Commencement of the improvement works to increase capacity on the line between Zug and Arth-Goldau, which was under threat of delay following a contract dispute, will now go ahead as planned.

The firm Strabag Schweiz was initially awarded the contract following a public tender. As a result of judicial procedures contract signing was delayed for some 30 months. Before the contract was signed Strabag made additional demands that SBB considered unacceptable. The contract has now been awarded to the consortium that came second in the original tender.

Preparatory work will start in 2019 as planned. The main work will be carried out during an 18-month total blockade of the line between Zug Oberwil and Arth-Goldau commencing June 2019. During that time trains will either be diverted or replaced by buses. Full details of the timetable amendments were due to appear in April. SBB says a total blockade will allow a swifter completion and less disturbance to residents near the line.

The main work involves double-tracking a 1.7km stretch north of Walchwil. This will increase capacity and allow trains on S2 to serve Walchwil half-hourly. Work to enlarge the 90m long Büel tunnel will allow double-deck stock to operate over the line. Sagenbach viaduct will be doubled with a second bridge.



Zugersee Map courtesy of SBB

Stadler Rail plans stock market flotation and wins largest ever order

On 19th March Stadler Rail AG announced it was planning a stock market flotation on the SIX Swiss Exchange at some stage during the next few months, subject to market conditions.

In other news, Stadler has been awarded a contract by the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) for the delivery of 127 METRO trains, with two options for each 25 additional trains. For Stadler, this is the first major metro order in the US and the largest order of vehicle units in the history of the company. The order value amounts to over 600 million US dollars. The new trains are destined for use at the world’s largest airport, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

Update: Stadler announced an offer price of CHF 38 per share in mid April.

BLS Cargo acquires Crossrail

On 5th March 2019, BLS Cargo signed an agreement, giving the company a 100% shareholding in Belgian rail freight operator Crossrail. The acquisition strengthens BLS Cargo’s position on the North-South freight corridor and access to the Belgian ports.

BLS Cargo improves market share

In 2018, BLS Cargo AG generated sales of CHF 235 million (+ 15.8%, 2017: CHF 203 million) and increased its profit for the year by CHF 1.9 million to CHF 5.4 million. With 17,051 trains, the volume of traffic was slightly below the previous year’s level (2017: 17,529 trains). The reasons for the lower volume of traffic were the many route closures and restrictions. Despite the lower volume of traffic, the transport performance, measured in terms of net tonne-kilometers, increased significantly year-on-year by 9.9%, as more heavy trains operated in transit. Accordingly, Switzerland’s market share in transalpine rail freight transport increased by three percentage points to 30%, measured in terms of gross tonnage.

DB ICE derailment in Basel

On Feb 17 2019 , ICE 373 from Berlin to Interlaken, with 240 persons, was derailed just before arrival in Basel SBB. The train had left Basel Badischer Bhf for the 7-minute journey to Basel SBB, when it derailed after crossing the Rhein bridge, and came to rest in a short tunnel 800m further on. The situation was a critical one, on the west double track curve of the triangular layout south of the bridge, blocking the lines Basel Bad. – Basel SBB and stopping through passenger trains for some three days between Switzerland and Germany. The usually heavy freight traffic was however not impeded, as this takes the eastern curve of the triangle, to reach Muttenz yards and the transit routes to the south. Passengers were assisted with a railcar shuttle between SBB and Badischer stations, which reversed in Muttenz yard to use the freight curve. A curious legal issue, dating from the days of the Basel Verbindungsbahn (connecting railway, predating SBB), is that although the accident occurred in Switzerland, it was on track which contractually is maintained and signalled by DB.

The first vehicle, the power car, remained on the correct track; the second veered to the left at a crossover, and was held up by the tunnel wall, and the rest of the train took the

crossover to continue on the second parallel track, mercifully free. The second vehicle came to rest 30 m short of a heavy concrete pillar between the tracks. This undoubtedly avoided potential injury to passengers. Clearing up was difficult because of limited clearances.

This was a curious accident. Only four days later, the Swiss investigating team informed that the crossover, normally set for straight ahead, and protected by signals, track circuit and electronic and mechanical interlocking, had obviously moved during the passage of the leading vehicles. That seemed apparent, but those with signalling experience will know that such movement, during the passage of a train, is normally impossible. The inspector said so too; so here is a case where knowing what happened, does not help to understand why it happened.

Only 3 weeks earlier, all traffic between Switzerland and Germany was held up for 4 hours as a tank container of lighter fuel was found at Weil am Rhein, 4 km further north, to be leaking. And in November 2017, an ICE was derailed just outside Basel SBB on double switch points, since replaced. In general, reliability and punctuality, for both freight and passenger trains, on the heavily used north-south DB route have a poor reputation. *(Bryan Stone)*

Through ICE services resumed on the morning of 20th February when Gordon Bannister was able to take this photograph of the re-railed power car and trailer still separated from the remainder of the train.

Readers will recall that this is the second recent ICE Class 401 derailment in Basel (see *Swiss Express* 133 page 31).



Photo: Gordon Bannister

Basel and Zürich Tunnels included in infrastructure improvement plan

Although the Bundesrat (Lower House) has already allocated CHF 12bn in funding for Ausbauschnitt 2035 (the rail infrastructure five year project plan for 2030-2035), this programme did not include the projects for a through underground station in Luzern or the construction of the Basel Herzstück lines. On 7th March, however, the Swiss Upper Chamber (Ständerat) unanimously voted an additional CHF 919m to include project costs for these two tunnels which are considered critical in meeting anticipated future demand.

The Herzstück (Heartline) would branch off from the SNCF line west of Basel SBB and then tunnel under the city centre and river to approach Basel Bad from the north with intermediate stations at Basel Mitte and Klybeck. A further branch would be constructed from Mitte to the existing SNCF line at St Johann. Such lines would allow all S-Bahn trains to proceed through both Basel SBB and Bad stations without

reversal. A loop from the SNCF line to EuroAirport is also envisaged. If built the line would open in the late 2030s. It needs to be stressed that it is only project costs that are being funded. The actual building costs (assuming work is approved) will be colossal. *(Bryan Stone)*

100,000th train traverses Gotthard Base Tunnel

On 5th March an SBB Cargo International Vectron hauled the 100,000th train to pass through the Gotthard Base Tunnel (GBT).

Freight traffic accounted for 58% of all movements through the tunnel in 2018, up to 120 trains a day at peak times. Demand for paths is growing rapidly following the recovery from the Rastatt closure and the Luino line rebuilding.



Photo: SBB-CFF-FFS

SBB dispatch procedure

The traditional orange boxes on platforms containing conductors' 'right-away' switches have been taped over at many locations and a notice is applied saying that the signal must be given by SMS. They are still in use at stations in some parts of Switzerland.

SBB Capacity improvement in Canton St. Gallen

The short stretch of single track between Goldach-Ost and Rorschach-Stadt on the SBB main line from St. Gallen to St. Margrethen is to be doubled at a cost of CHF 23.3m.

SBB fourth platform for Zürich Stadelhofen

A project competition has been launched to design a fourth platform at this busy but cramped suburban station. SBB is looking for the best operational and architectural solution.

SBB short of drivers

Not for the first time SBB finds itself short of drivers. They are looking for 200 trainees in 2019. German speakers are sought in the "Great Canton" to the north where there is also a tight employment situation. Offers of an additional €500 per month above a standard salary of €3056 are being made for a 39 hour week.

SBB Platform 9¾ in Bern?

Platform 9/10 at Bern station is to be doubled in length to 385m by extending it to the west. The work is necessary to maintain capacity, as platform closures will be required in connection with the construction of the new RBS underground station. A new 170m long canopy will be built from the main station.

SBB Automatic Couplers

In the last *Swiss News* we reported that Re4/4 Class 420s

are starting to appear with automatic couplers. Here is a photograph of one by Johanna Stone Rheinfelden on 22nd February last.



Photo: Johanna Stone

Third Class to return on SBB?

According to a report that appeared in NZZ am Sonntag newspaper in March, the Federal Office of Transport has commissioned a report recommending “third class aircraft style seating for maximum capacity at favourable prices”. The proposed seating would be five across. As might be expected the report has met with little approval from SBB or unions.

SBB Historic Vehicles damaged in shunting accident

On 2nd April at Buchs depot Re 420 118 failed to stop whilst shunting and broke through the depot door. Inside the depot on the same track stood C4 9002 and C2 6138. The impact damaged the former severely and propelled the latter through the depot wall and into the open air to a distance almost equal to its full length.

Old loco replaces new

Private undertaking Swiss Rail Traffic (SRT) has sold its TRAXX loco 487 001 to an Austrian operator. In its place it has hired 1945 vintage Re4/4 I 410 016 (originally SBB 10016) from Verein Classic Rail. It is used on a wagon load working from Rekingen (AG) to Limmattal yard.

RhB: Rollout of first Capricorn



Photo: Andy Mettler. Credit @Swiss-image.ch

On 15th April RhB and Stadler celebrated the rollout of the new Capricorn train at an event for approximately 120 invited guests from business and politics at the Stadler's

Altenrhein facility.

The Capricorn order is the largest procurement of new rolling stock in RhB history. 36 four-car trains were ordered in June 2016 from Stadler for CHF361m. The first trains are expected in service in the late autumn. They are designed to operate in multiple and two units will provide a half-hourly service from Landquart to Klosters, where the train will divide with individual units heading to Davos or through the Vereina tunnel.

An interesting feature of the passenger information system will be the transmission of the view from the front camera in the driver's cab. Another feature which members will appreciate will be the provision of slide-down opening windows throughout the train.

RhB to procure four new fire and rescue locomotives

The current rescue trains used in the Vereina tunnel are approaching life expiry. RhB has therefore ordered four new self-propelled and multiple operation capable fire and rescue locomotives which will be designated Vereina (LöReF Xm 2/4 27401-27404).

Engadin line blockade

A total blockade of the line from Susch to Scuol-Tarasp is in force from 11th March to 7th September. Bus replacement is in force. A direct bus service from Susch to Scuol operates along the main road, to allow existing rail timings to be met so that no alteration is necessary to connecting postbus services from Scuol. The intermediate stations are served by separate postbuses either Susch or Scuol (apart from Ftan Baraigla which is not served). Services from Landquart to St Moritz operate normally. Disentis / Mustér - Chur - Scuol/Tarasp will be diverted via Susch to Samedan. Scuol/Tarasp - Pontresina will be reduced to a shuttle Samedan - Pontresina (these trains are not push-pull and there is no run-round facility in the Samedan bay platform at Pontresina). *(Michael Donovan)*

RhB helps out the World Economic Forum

The 2018 World Economic Forum (WEF) was noted for the massive traffic jams it created in and around Davos. As a result Davos Gemeinde, Canton Graubünden, the WEF and the RhB worked together for a solution for 2019.

For the period 21st to 25th January 2019 free shuttle trains ran between Davos Dorf and Davos Platz stopping also at a temporary station created at “Kongresszentrum/Hertistrasse”. This halt comprised a surfaced platform complete with ramps, handrails and lighting. Four trains an hour ran in each direction from 0700 to 2200. Motive power was provided by Allegras 3510 and 3512 both of which carried overall advertisements for ABB.

RhB records high customer satisfaction scores

Every two years RhB engages an independent market research organisation to carry out a customer satisfaction survey. Almost 2000 responses were received to the latest exercise the results of which were announced in February. The average score was 84 marks out of 100, the same as for the previous survey. The highest scores were recorded for staff friendliness and willingness to help (particularly on the Bernina Express). Areas for improvement were luggage space and

overall value for money. Not surprisingly the lowest score (78 marks out of 100) was given by commuters.

RhB Allegra runs on MGB tracks west of Disentis

Details of an interesting working that took place on Thursday 21st February have been received.

Rhb 8/12 Allegra 3515, with two motor bogies switched off was coupled to second class driving trailer Bt 52801. The resultant 4/16 then travelled west of Disentis onto the MGB system as far as Dieni.

The purpose of the test was to establish whether the new Capricorn trains on order from Stadler (36 ABe 4/16 units to be numbered 3111 – 3146) could operate west of Disentis. These new trains will be used on the Chur – Disentis services and, as both Sedrun and Dieni are in Canton Graubünden, the question has been raised as to whether through services might be possible.

Whilst knowledgeable readers will recall that the rack commences immediately west of Disentis station, the maximum gradient as far as Dieni is only 70%, the same as the maximum gradient on the rest of the RhB system, and therefore within the capabilities of an Allegra fitted with magnetic track brakes.

Why were two motor bogies switched out? RhB had to create a train that would most resemble the new Capricorns. They would not have been able to use one of the four car Allegras (ABe 4/16 nos 3101-3105) which are to be found on the Chur S-Bahn services, as these units lack magnetic track brakes and are therefore restricted to gradients less than 60%.

Albula Tunnel work re-commences after winter break

Construction work re-commenced on 1st March. This year's program involves lining and fitting out the new tunnel. This summer the station building at Spinas will be moved to its new position in line with the exit from the new tunnel. Work to bring both Preda and Spinas stations up to standard for disabled access will take place in 2020.

Jungfrau Railway Group posts record profit

Jungfraubahn Holding AG recorded a profit of CHF 47.8m in 2018, the best result in its history. Operating income was CHF 212.8m, an increase of 9.8% on the previous year. Over half this amount was accounted for by the Jungfrauoch segment alone (income CHF 111.8m). The summit station recorded 1,067,000 visitors in 2018, the third time the one million mark has been exceeded.

CHF 63.6m was invested in the last financial year, the bulk of this amount was devoted to the V-Bahn project.

Refurbished units enter service on Biel/Bienne – Ins line

Aare Seeland mobil (ASm) is currently modernising its fleet at a cost of CHF 20m. During March refurbished Stadler GTW Be2/6 no 509 was placed in service sporting a new red livery.

SBB Cargo news

SBB Cargo has extended its Alpentransit contract with DB for a further three years. This was confirmed at a meeting in Frankfurt on the 25th January. The agreement came into effect

at the last timetable change and it encompasses all border-crossing traffic from Mannheim, Singen or Basel to Chiasso through to the end of 2022. From February SBB Cargo will be handling 130 freight trains a week.

Since the start of its cooperation with DB, SBB Cargo says the volume of traffic handled has developed positively. It envisages further quality improvements once the Ceneri base tunnel is available and the NEAT programme is concluded at the end of 2020.

Also in January SBB Cargo signed a contract extension with Swiss Post for a further four years to the end of 2022. Currently around 60 post trains are run each day in Switzerland.

Not so good news for SBB Cargo is the loss of their long standing contract with Nespresso to BLS Cargo. There are suggestions Nespresso were unhappy with SBB Cargo's service quality.

Swiss rail access charges to be cut?

The Bundesamt für Verkehr (BAV) – the Federal Office of Transport – has proposed reducing track access charges by up to CHF 90m from 2021.

Swiss law requires every train to cover the track costs it incurs but a recent review has suggested that the latest efficiency gains and increased automation have not been taken fully into account.

As part of the proposed review the BAV has also proposed retaining a noise bonus for freight trains for four more years. New EU wide noise limits will come into force sometime in the early 2020s, but Switzerland which follows EU rail directives intends to introduce them at the beginning of 2020. The BAV wants the bonus to apply to trains where all wagons are fitted or retro-fitted with 'quiet' brakes.

Smartrail 4.0 gets the go-ahead

Smartrail 4.0 is the name that the Swiss railway industry has given to a new traffic management system it has developed. The goal of the system, developed by SBB, BLS, SOB, RhB and the public transport support organisation Verband Öffentlicher Verkehrer (VöV), is to increase capacity on the existing infrastructure by 30%.

Work on development of the programme which employs 100 people started in 2017. A successful test of the system at the end of 2018 means it will now go into production with a gradual roll-out over the next ten years to 2028. The goal of the first stage is short term timetable planning which will come in by the end of 2022. Job descriptions of existing staff will change and consultations are under way.

More information at www.smartrail40.ch.

Hupac reports good results

In 2018 the Swiss intermodal transport operator Hupac achieved a traffic growth of 21.4%. In total, the Group carried 926,414 road consignments or 1,720,000 TEUs, corresponding to 163,000 road consignments more than in the previous year. The good result is partly attributed to one-off effects such as the recovery of traffic losses due to the Rhine disruption in 2017 and the acquisition of ERS Railways in June 2018. Transalpine traffic through Switzerland also developed positively. Compared to the previous year, Hupac Intermodal was able to shift 67,000 additional road consignments which

corresponds to an increase of 14.4%.

Basel tramway improvements

Work was due to begin in March on the renewal of rails and platforms of the BVB and BLT at Basel SBB station. This major interchange sees five tram routes and several bus services converging at a location famous among visitors for its apparent complexity. Modifications are now necessary, not least for improved access for the mobility impaired. Once started work will last several months, so visits to Basel should include checking the BVB website. *(Bryan Stone)*

Basel chooses Dutch electric buses

In 2015 the city of Basel announced plans to replace its entire diesel bus fleet with electric vehicles by 2027. Following the successful trial of a demonstrator, it was announced on the 7th February that the city's choice was the CITEA SLFA-181 from Dutch manufacturers VDL.

In 2018 Genève introduced 20 TOSA electric buses manufactured by ABB.

BLS: An operationally successful year but results affected by write-downs

BLS had a successful year in 2018 from an operational point of view, but exceptional items had a dampening effect on the overall result, producing an overall loss of CHF12.6m.

Passenger numbers increased to 66.3m (BLS anticipates this figure will reach 90m in the year 2040). As a result combined turnover for rail, bus, ship and car shuttles increased by 7.2%.

One of the exceptional items was a write-down of CHF 7m in the book value of the shipping fleet, the reason given being a funding shortfall. The BLS can no longer finance its current shipping operations from revenue and intends to develop a new model for shipping services. In future priority will be given to scheduled operations where most income is generated. The fleet size will be reduced and the remaining ships modernized. Regardless, the 2019 shipping season started as planned on the 6th of April.

Staff reductions have already been announced (see item below).

Lötschberg summit tunnel works update

The BLS intends to start the first phase of track replacement and general repairs in the tunnel after the Easter break. Over the next four years one half of each of the two tracks will be closed over the summer period. This year the first 6km of old line will be replaced by concrete slab track. Single track working will be maintained past the work site. Car shuttles continue at a service of at least every half hour. RE services from Bern to Brig are unaffected.

BLS - Renovation of the Weissenstein Tunnel

Total renovation of the 3.7km Weissenstein Tunnel between Oberdorf and Gänsbrunnen on the BLS line from Solothurn to Moutier, was agreed by the Bundesamt für Verkehr (BAV) in February 2017. The tunnel is in a poor state and failure to carry out the work would have resulted in the line's inevitable closure.

The BLS has now decided to use the necessary blockade to modernise the entire line. As a result work has been postponed for a year and will now begin in June 2021.

Along with the renewal of the tunnel the BLS will modernise six stations, renew the entire catenary and relay track at various locations. Repair work will also be carried out on the viaducts at Geissloch and Corcelles. Total cost is estimated at CHF85m for the tunnel work and CHF 60m for the remainder of the work. Buses will replace trains to the north of the tunnel from June to November 2021. A revised train timetable will operate Solothurn to Oberdorf.

BLS staff reductions announced

In November 2018 BLS announced that it needed to effect annual cost reductions of CHF 50m to 60m by 2023. Now it has announced that 170 full time jobs will disappear, 45 through redundancy and mainly in managerial and support functions.

RhB – Innotren, a mobile meeting room

RhB have converted an ex-Glacier Express panoramic carriage into a mobile meeting room. It can be hired by groups of up to 15 people and set up either as a classic conference room or as a more relaxed environment for "creative thinking". Stationery, coffee, water, snacks and internet connectivity are provided.

A number of itineraries are offered. For example, for an introductory offer of CHF 765 you can attach the carriage to the 0947 Landquart to Davos Platz.



The Innotren carriage at Landquart.

Photo: Bill Salter

DFB Steam snow blower Xrotd R12

The DFB have been restoring ex-RhB snow blower in Goldau for many years now. Progress in 2018 was slow as work on other projects took priority. However the aim is now to complete the restoration by winter 2019 when R12 will be transferred to Realp with testing to take place in May 2020. For further information in German see www.dampfschleuder.ch.

Aargau Transport receives first Stadler EMU

AARGAU Transport (AVA) has received the first of five three-section ABe 4/12 Stadler EMUs for the lines from Aarau southwards to Menziken and Schöftand. The initial unit was delivered for testing at the end of January and official presentation is due to take place in Schöftland on the 18th May. All five units should be in service by the end of the year.

TPF Châtel-St-Denis diversion

Work is well underway to install a chord line to eliminate reversal at Châtel-St-Denis, on the metre-gauge line between

Bulle and Palézieux. The existing station is on the formation of the former route to St-Légier (closed 1969). The new line is on a curved double-track concrete viaduct, on which the platforms for the new station will sit. At the Palézieux end the new viaduct is considerably higher than the existing line and major realignment will be necessary. The line to Palézieux will therefore be closed from the 4th of March to the 3rd the November. At the Bulle end of the station the new platforms are level with the existing line so the service from Châtel-St-Denis to Bulle will only be suspended from the 19th of October to the 3rd of November. *(Adrian Friend)*

Appenzeller Bahnen lines under threat?

A potential threat has emerged to the following lines: Gais-Altstätten Stadt (KBS 856), Rohrschach Hafen-Heiden (KBS 857) and Rheineck-Walzenhausen (KBS 858).

Cantons Appenzell Ausserrhoden and St Gallen have launched a consultation over the future of all three lines following years of declining demand and the need for investment in renewal of both infrastructure and rolling stock. The lines are uneconomic. They fail to meet the 30% threshold of covering costs which, according to federal requirements, mandates an investigation as to whether more cost-effective alternatives exist. Options being considered are: improvement of the existing offering, bus replacement or conversion to automatic operation.

The final report following the consultation is expected to appear in June.

St Gallen

The Muhleggbahn funicular has acquired a new car, with level access. It has windows on one side only, with floodlights whose main purpose seems to be to illuminate the tunnel wall which is in close proximity for most of the journey.

(Adrian Friend)

Limmatalbahn (Zürich)

This light rail line will eventually stretch from Altstetten SBB station to Kilwangen-Spreitenbach SBB station. The first stretch to be constructed runs from Farbhof, the no 2 terminus, 2 stops from Altstetten, to Schlieren. Tracklaying is proceeding from Schlieren towards Zürich; tracks are complete in Schlieren. Most track is in the central reservation. At Schlieren Zentrum-Bahnhof, a 'roof' has been erected over the tracks, which is presumably an 'architectural feature' rather than to keep the rain off. The 2019 ZVV network map shows Farbhof to Geissweid as an extension of tram line 2 under construction. At Geissweid there is a turning circle, with points and crossings in place, for the extension westward. No track-work has yet been started at Farbhof. (It is not clear whether the first stage will be served by new Light Rail Vehicles, or just route 2 trams) The second stage to be constructed will be from Altstetten Bahnhof to Farbhof. *(Adrian Friend)*

Project Seetalbahnzug 1950

The Verein Historische Seetalbahn based at Hochdorf has acquired two carriages that were built in 1950 specifically for the Seetal line. If all goes to plan they hope to have them operational on special trains behind their Seetalkrokodil 15301. The carriages require asbestos removal and work on bogies and brakes. The work is estimated to cost CHF 210,000,

of which Canton Aargau will contribute CHF 50,000 in lottery funding.

Meiringen Innertkirchen Bahn (MIB)

The MIB is promoting itself as the way to visit the Aareschlucht, the Aare Gorge near Innertkirchen. The railway has acquired Stadler EMU 7004 from the MVR, and numbered it 13. It has been painted dark blue, and labelled 'Aareschlucht' at one end and 'Grimselwelt' at the other, these are tourist attractions the railway wishes to promote. On the 24th of Dec last it was in Innertkirchen shed for attention to the door mechanism; it was in service on the 29th.

(Adrian Friend)

Säntisbahn cable car out of action

Following a major avalanche on the night of Sunday the 13th of January severe damage was caused to a pylon supporting the cable. The cable car is expected to be out of action for many months. The avalanche followed an earlier one on the 10th of January. Clearance work following the earlier fall had already been suspended for safety reasons. Between the two avalanches an estimated 1.5m of fresh snow fell.

VHE Emmental

Huttwil-based Verein Historische Eisenbahn Emmental commence each year with a traditional steam trip from Huttwil, via Burgdorf and Solothurn to Balsthal on the OeBB. The trip took place on the 19th of January and motive power this year was Eb3/5 No 5810.

After being served an excellent fondue on board, guests could both view the model layout of the Eisenbahn-Klubs-Balsthal and also visit the OeBB depot itself. The latter houses four serviceable steam locomotives. These include Ed 2x2/2 (Mallet) no 196 (originally Schweizerische Centralbahn). Also housed here is RBe 2/4 (Roter Pfeil) no 202 (originally SBB 1007) currently undergoing repair following electric motor damage.

5810 is normally housed at the depot of the Verein Dampfbahn Bern at Konolfingen. Currently however Konolfingen is under repair and 5810 is shedded temporarily at Huttwil.

(H J Schweizer)



The special at Gerolfingen during a water stop. *Photo: H J Schweizer*

Editor's Note

Sometimes these reports contain prior notice of planned work and interruptions of normal services. These are without guarantee. 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 was compiled by the Editor with input from SRS Members Bryan Stone, Michael Donovan, Adrian Friend and Hans Jörg Schweizer. 🇨🇭