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Swiss Federal Railways (SBB)

The SBB has recently published for the first time a cost-effectiveness ratio survey per line for both EC, IC and Express train traffic and the Regional traffic. The results are given as the percentage by which the marginal cost is covered by net receipts., this figure being arrived at by dividing the net receipts by the marginal cost and multiplying by 100. I do not want to criticize here the use of some techniques which are contrary to the established practices of the science of business administration, but praiseworthy as this publication is, it includes, in my opinion, some serious uncertainties which can lead to misinterpretations.

- 1) The net receipts have been extrapolated on the basis of surveys made on the trains by the staff. It is obvious that this method involves the possibility of serious errors occurring on the positive or negative side and means that the net receipts shown may deviate considerably from the true figures.
- 2) The marginal cost (in this case this would be better expressed as the proportional cost) is defined as that which the train is causing directly: staff cost (driver, conductors), energy consumption, maintenance of rolling stock and track as well as the direct cost to the train of the use of station staff. An exact cost analysis is not possible, since on almost all lines the station staff also serves the freight business. Without correct and precise time records it is not possible to determine the exact costings.
- 3) The published result is therefore somewhat misleading. In theory, each line shown covering more than 100% of the cost produced has achieved an operational profit which is diminished by the overhead cost allocated to each line. A line with say 120% cost covering may still be one producing a net loss in passenger traffic, due to overhead. However, since the surveys are not precise enough and since, for instance,

it is not known exactly how much of the passenger traffic of the regional lines is feeding the EC, IC and other express trains, I have some difficulty in accepting these results.

The SBB also give in the same study the percentage of use of the available capacity. These are so low (never exceeding 41%) that we have to ask in all seriousness whether the principle of meeting the demand applied by the SBB is the correct one. It is obvious that to supply a capacity which better meet the demand would have a significant rationalising effect by economising on staff and maintenance cost of rolling stock. In this connection it would be interesting to know how much the cost/profit ratio could be improved by using faster but fewer trains (for example, using tilting body technology) and it would be worthwhile to have the corresponding results of the private lines which in general operate with less overhead costs per passenger and tonne kilometer. Another question is whether the administration of the SBB is not too cumbersome when compared to the administration of some successful private lines on the basis of passenger and tonne kilometres produced per staff member.

For the benefit of members I give in Table 1 the three best and three worst lines of both express and regional traffic.

Services on the regional lines Solothurn - Herzogenbuschsee and Beinwil - Beromunster have been replaced by buses, this against the protests of the infuriated local population. In my opinion the bus is no solution, since the journey usually takes far longer than on the railway. It surely would have been better to have looked for a solution using for instance, a diesel railcar to reduce cost, the freight service still being carried out with an electric locomotive. In view of *Alptransit* it is not wise to antagonise the voter by closing down regional lines, this may even be the reason for a political

movement with the slogan: "If 24 billions for *Alptransit*, why not 'NO' for Alptransit and 'YES' for investment in existing lines?" This danger exists and is proven by the fact that the Traffic Minister, Mr. Ogi, maintains in each speech touching this problem that "further reductions in regional lines are the subject of careful examination", whatever this platitude may mean. [Editor's comment. In English *Politspeak*, the meaning is clear, 'These lines are about to be closed'.]

The increasing cost of Bahn 2000, due to environmental protection measures and the thousands of objections that have to be examined has led the SBB to consider the abandonment of the Bahn 2000 Bern - Lausanne project.

Metre gauge

The RhB, FO and BVZ will be introducing a new type of *Glacier Express* with the timetable change in spring 1993. The first step will consist of two new exclusively first class trains complete with dining car, probably on the St.Moritz - Zermatt run. Hot food will be served at all seats, which are to be provided with large

tables. The coaches are now under construction by Breda in Pistola (Italy) and are part of an order for 20 new coaches placed by the FO, BVZ and MOB. If the new *Glacier Express* is a commercial success, the order may be extended.

The MOB announce an increase of one million passengers during 1991 followed by a further increase of 11% in the first six months of 1992. Seat reservation is now obligatory for all *Panoramic* and *Superpanoramic Expresses* and it is expected that with the new stock that will appear in 1993 the demand will increase still further.

In my opinion this company has proved yet again that to innovate and improve can still be rewarded by commercial success. I feel that the SBB could do more in this respect, the more so since they operate a large number of beautiful lines. I think that the provision of luxury trains, perhaps in partnership with the private lines, could offer a variety of exciting itineraries going well beyond what is currently on offer.

General

I have recently been invited to a meeting on the friends of the reopening of the Italian Bolanzo - Mals line, which was replaced by a bus service in 1990. It was interesting to learn that this group also considers that a metre gauge extension from Scuol through Pfunds and Landeck would be a far better investment than the existing bus route, which offers a very poor service. Members spoke in admiration of the Swiss enterprise in constructing the Vereina tunnel to provide a shorter connection to both the higher and lower Engadine. Whether these plans will materialise is another question, the present Italian State is hardly in a position to finance a project of a more or less local importance. Nevertheless it is interesting to discover that even in a country that is in every sense, car mad, there are those who have rediscovered the value of the railway. It is a fine compliment to the RhB that this group would like to see its operating principles applied to the new line.

See "The Tirolean Connection" on p.34 for details of the original proposals for Engadin extensions

Table 1 Swiss line performance

Line	Cost coverage in %
Express routes	
Bern - Thun	410
Bern - Olten - Zurich	392
Zurich - Winterthur	359
Regional routes	
Les Verrieres - Neuchâtel	39
Zeiglebrucke - Linthal	71
Wil - Watwill	73
Regional routes	
Z.Oerlikon - Wollishofen	190
Z.Stadelhofen - Winterthur	161
Schaffhausen - Winterthur	126
Genève - Aéroport	14
Sissach - Laufelfingen	18
Vallorbe - Le Pont	199