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From Lester Weeks – By email

I was interested in what John Morgan had to say about travelling with luggage, particularly when changes of train mean carrying luggage to distant platforms. As one gets older this problem increases, especially in my case, as I now make the entire journey to Switzerland by train usually making an overnight stop at Köln outwards and at Basel on the return.

But help is at hand. I have discovered a firm called First Luggage based at Hayes, Middlesex. This firm is, in effect, an agent for Fed-Ex, the air-freight concern. They will arrange pick up of your luggage at your home address and deliver it to your destination hotel. On the return journey the system works in reverse. I have used this service about six times and can thoroughly recommend it. First Luggage can be contacted at 020 8750 0242

Speaking of planning the journey, I obtain the Kursbuch on CD-ROM. This includes buses and the services of most European railways, including Eurostar, can be downloaded for free. Additionally there is a half-yearly update also downloadable. I order this by e-mail from SBB@rms-direct.ch

If the order is placed well ahead of the timetable change date, there is a good chance of receiving it by the effective date. Payment can be made by credit card. By in-putting starting point and destination, a wide choice of routing is usually revealed.

From Paul Russenberger – London, SW14.

While it is questionable whether *Swiss Express* is an ideal publication in which to debate the quality of the British railway industry, Mr Hopkins's assertion in the letters section of the June issue that its shortcomings arise from the employment of graduates in managerial posts cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged.

Firstly appointing graduates to management is not new, as is shown by the likes of Gerard Fiennes and Chris Green – both Oxford graduates who reached the top of the industry through knowing their business and delivering what the railway needed.

The railway I worked on, until privatisation trapped me in its former consultancy arm in 1993, contained a healthy mixture of those who had joined straight from school and those who graduated from either polytechnics or universities. Indeed, when I was part of the management of the Euston Area in the early 1980s, I believe I was the only graduate working at the station. I cannot recall that having a degree in itself ever conferred an automatic advantage in obtaining promotion and all of us had to spend time in a supervisory position very much at the "sharp end".

The suggestion that this has also led to a reduction in safety is not borne out by data on accidents. Writing in 1999 in "Hidden Dangers", Stanley Hall, who is not a graduate and joined the railway as a booking clerk at Keighley to work his way up to becoming Signalling and Safety Officer at the BR Board, wrote that "railway passengers have never been as safe as they are today". The Railway Safety and Standards Board's website contains interesting statistics which support this. For example, the data for "Collisions and all derailments on or affecting passenger lines" shows that in 1975 there was 1 per million train-miles. By 1985 this had dropped to 0.65, by 1995 it was 0.3 and by 2004 it was 0.15. This massive improvement in safety has occurred while the annual number of passenger journeys has risen to an all time high, despite the effects of the pressure of the war years and the size of the pre-Beeching era network.

Editor's Note: Whilst agreeing with Paul's comment about the suitability of this journal for the discussion of the railway industry in this country I have published his letter in the interest of balance. The debate is now closed.