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SWISS NEWS

A bad morning

At around 05.00 on January 14th a 'Personenunfall' (an accident involving a person) was reported at Schönenwerd on a 5 km section of double-track, the only place between Zürich and Olten/Bern where there are no relief lines. The consequence was that the whole east-west trunk and commuter traffic was stopped across the morning peak for over two hours with normal service not being restored until 09.20. SBB reported 35 trains cancelled; 17 diverted, and 360 trains delayed - by a total of 1900 minutes. Buses were organized to cover the S-Bahn between Däniken and Aarau, but for the large numbers of peak-hour Inter-City passengers this was not possible. Some long-distance trains were diverted via Zofingen and the old, slow, single-track, partly-roadside ex-Nationalbahn line through Suhr. Basel - Zürich trains were diverted via Frick. The SBB has developed a series of contingency plans so as to move fast in all kinds of scenarios and this involved one of them. An SBB spokesman could only say 'There is no worse place for an incident to occur'. On this day it did.

RhB Rockfall

At 22.00 on Good Friday evening a rock fall blocked the Arosa line 1/2km above Lüen. The fall originated 500m above the railway line and it is estimated that upwards of 20,000 square metres of rock was deposited on the line. The major problem for the RhB's engineers was not just clearing up the line, and repairing catenary, signals, drains etc., but knowing what is still up there as the Tschanfigg valley is renowned for its geological instability. Services over the busy Easter period were seriously disrupted, but after this peak period the Arosa valley is 'dead' until summer, so replacement bus services were able to cope during the clearance and reconstruction period. The line re-opened on the 24th April.



Chur - Arosa line blockage.

Photo: RhB

All-change for Trans-Alpine Freight

SBB Cargo announced on April 2 that from the end of 2013 it will take over the operation of most of DB Schenker's transalpine intermodal traffic between Germany and Italy. This is an unexpected development, as this traffic has been

handled by BLS Cargo in which DB Schenker has 45% share, and has resulted in the two companies reconsidering their partnership. The new operation should reach several thousand trainloads per year on the Basel/Singen - Gallarate/Chiasso (via the Gotthard), and Basle - Domodossola (via the Lötschberg and Simplon) routes. This move is a blow to BLS Cargo, which had been struggling to break even in the face of the strong Swiss franc. In a statement the company announced that it has decided to cut back its network, abandoning loss-making services and introducing staff cuts as it focuses on a return to profit.

Higher fares as a Planning tool?

Although SBB implemented a 5% rise in ticket prices in December experts at the Swiss 'think-tank' Avenir Suisse think that fares should be raised further to stop urban spread. Their view is that as long as ticket prices are kept artificially low through subsidies (fares currently only cover around 40% of the rail operating costs in Switzerland), there will be a surplus demand that requires constant expansion of both railway and urban infrastructure. Avenir Suisse recommends that politicians should increase the proportion of costs covered by ticket prices to at least 50% to 60%. At the same time they suggest that other taxes should be lowered, as the government will spend less on subsidies. This philosophy does not apply to goods transport where subsidy rates should be increased to encourage transport firms to use rail instead of roads.

A proposed new line is lost...

The history of railways to La Chaux-de-Fonds is, even for Switzerland, curious. A company called the Jura-Industrielle opened the first line serving the town in 1857, not down to Neuchâtel (the Cantonal capital) but in the opposite direction to Le Locle and onwards for 75km across the French frontier and over the Jura to Besançon. 150 years ago that was where the markets were and the line, still a lonely single track, even today enjoys a thoroughly respectable SNCF passenger service. It was not until 1860 that the line south-east to Neuchâtel via Convers was opened, with its 3.1% (1 in 30) gradients, a 3259m long summit tunnel at 1048m, and a reversing station at Chambrélieu that is still in operation. And this was not even in the Alps! Railways across the Jura were a very difficult challenge, and this line remains effectively a single-track by-way, with all-stations trains taking 50-min. (semi-fasts about 40-min.) for some 29 km. In a straight line it is much shorter, and a CHF919m new line mostly in tunnel was proposed with the potential to halve journey times. However, on the 23rd September 2012 a Cantonal referendum on the project was defeated by under 400 votes (33,724 to 33,332). Although the vote in La Chaux-de-Fonds was 70% in favour of the scheme in the rural areas the vote was some 80% against it, probably due to the Canton's current financial problems. That is Swiss democracy in action, as politicians cannot over-ride the loss of a cherished project. Now the SBB has proposed a CHF240m scheme to improve the old line resulting in the rare, and time consuming, reversing station staying safe for a while. The Confederation's planned contribution of some CHF100m will now be redistributed to other projects. The motorway,

by the way, has a direct tunnel through the Jura.

...but another is to be built

We have previously reported proposals to build a Chestenberg tunnel to relieve the capacity problems between Aarau and Zürich. This scheme has now been put off in favour of a project first mooted 50 years ago. This is to build, for completion in 2020, a connecting link-line in the heart of that complex area of junctions around Birrfeld. The CHF100m new line will connect Birrfeld and Mägenwil relieving the section between Rupperswil and Othmarsingen almost completely of freight traffic, and will allow 30-minute interval S-Bahn-services between Aarau and Zürich. It is worth studying the map of this area as it shows the complexity that resulted from 19th C competition, and then the construction of the high-speed Heitersberg Tunnel line to Zürich. Today's layout also includes reminders of the Nationalbahn, which meandered bankrupt through the valleys over a century ago, but today is a strategic asset in the area.

TPF - A change at Broc

For some years the standard gauge freight wagons (running on metre-gauge transfer trucks) for the chocolate factory traffic of Cailler at Broc Fabrique, have been hauled in and out of Bulle on scheduled passenger trains. The timetable service is now Broc – Montbovon, with no time for shunting at Bulle, so additional trip workings are now being made with BDe 4/4 Nos.141 and 142.

ZB-Historic, a 125th anniversary, and current improvements

We have reported on the founding of ZB-Historic, the foundation created to care for the museum material of the former Brünig line and the LSE, now the Zentralbahn. Some of this material is in the hands of SBB Historic, but has been placed on indefinite loan to ZB Historic. So it was that, a first historic train with Deh 4/6 No.914 and three middle-entrance Brünig cars, one of these the restored Restaurant car WR 426, could run on December 8th 2012 from Meiringen to Stansstad. No.914, repainted in its original dark green livery in 2009, was often to be seen in the yard at Meiringen and was the last remaining unmodified member of the original class of 16 locos. These engines were built in 1941, in the darkest war years, to realize the electrification of the Brünig line, and incorporated much improvisation and second-class material. Originally with a Bo-2-Bo wheel arrangement (the middle bogie was for use on the rack) they have on the whole lasted remarkably well, as the last ones, rebuilt between 1986-1994 into De 4/4 Class 110, are only just being withdrawn. The Zentralbahn (ZB) will celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Brienz – Meiringen – Luzern (over the actual Brünig Pass) section of their route on June 8th and 9th 2014. The extension from Brienz to Interlaken Ost, once planned to be Bern's main line to Italy via the Grimsel Pass, was not opened until 1916, twenty eight years later. On today's ZB, Giswil station is being rebuilt with five platforms. There will be two island platforms together with one alongside the station building. In January what appeared

to be a short turntable was in the process of being installed in the yard. The line is being doubled from just north of Giswil station to form a long passing loop and although the points had been installed in January the earthworks were still far from complete. This work should be finished by the summer.

An Ae6/6 sold, and others stored

We had reported that buyers were queuing for an Ae6/6 and one with a good claim to be the first sold for preservation was No.11404 'Luzern', bought by Elektra Birseck a generating company in northwest Switzerland. No.11404, now handed over, will have a home in their Münchenstein electrical museum, where the Ae6/6 locos were fitted out with electrical components at Brown Boveri when they were new. In early March SBB noted that the following locos had been provisionally stored for the autumn sugar beet season; Nos.11419, 11424, 11427, 11430, 11465, 11470, 11488, 11513, 11517, 610 420 and 610 496. Other withdrawn engines had already been broken up. The stored engines were in the open at Däniken yard, except 11430 that was still in Erstfeld. Most of their last regular jobs are now with Re6/6s (See article on P14). News reached us in April however that 11419, and perhaps others, were being warmed up again to handle a rush of heavy block trains, especially Rhein valley gravel; this engine was in action in the Limmat yard on Friday April 5.

Rigi Historic launched

The Rigibahnen (RB), Europe's oldest rack railway, has a remarkable range of rolling stock. In order to protect and preserve this heritage of old vehicles and buildings, last October the RB launched a foundation "Rigi Historic" (RH) with an initial funding of CHF100,000. The foundation will help finance the on-going costs of maintaining the vehicles and facilities including; the 1912 boat station at Vitznau; some original bridges; steam locos, including vertical-boiler No.7 built in 1873 (owned by the Verkehrshaus transport museum in Luzern) and Nos. 16 and 17 dating from 1923 and 1925; Arth Rigi Bahn electric railcar No.6 of 1911; Railcar No.7, and snow blower No.8. In total seventeen vehicles will come under the care of the foundation. The RH has a broad remit, which it will develop and progress, hopefully allowing it to access funding that would not be available to the Railway Company. It may also organise special events, trips and parades of the historic vehicles. This move to preserve their patrimony in a fully maintained and operating condition will allow the RB to concentrate on modernisation plans to cope with increasing traffic levels.

Cross-border politics

Why would an agreement on flight plans affect railway electrification? It does when it's the controversial bi-lateral agreement on noise disturbance around Zürich airport. A Swiss-German agreement had been reached, but Germany is, following many complaints, refusing at present to ratify it. Go now to the DB line on the north bank of the Rhein, from Schaffhausen through Waldshut to Basel Bad Bahnhof. This line is diesel-operated, and Basel and the DB have agreed

to electrify it, but the Swiss share of the costs for the 75km of electrification has been rejected by Canton Aargau and by the Federal Council in Bern. The reason is purely political. As long as Germany does not honour the airport noise agreement, there will, it is said, be no further money. Now this action is causing further repercussions, because for the Rheinfelden/Laufenburg/Frick region this line is of considerable importance. Also, between Basel, Schaffhausen and eastern Switzerland it is part of a strategic network alongside the internal Swiss lines. Moreover SBB, with DB's agreement, would be ready to bid to operate it with new equipment, but only if it is electrified. Watch this space!

Double-deck to Vevey

One of the sections on the SBB network where regular overcrowding required double-deck trains was between Lausanne and Vevey. However clearance issues at three bridges had meant that this equipment could not use the route in normal service. These bridges have now been rebuilt, and other line side alterations made, so the Regional Express trains can now be operated with Class 511 units.

Jura happenings

The article about working La Traction steam trains on the CJ, which appeared in the March 2013 edition of *Swiss Express*, was written before last year's partial closure and rebuilding of the station at Glovelier. This was completed in Autumn 2012 and the operations of both the regular services and the steam trains in Glovelier are now focused on the new 35cm high platforms opened at the west end. The celebration of '100 years of electric traction Tavannes – Saignelégier' will also bring out the 100 year old Ge 2/2 No.2 (now CJ No.504) which is to be freshened up for the event. She is regrettably in poor condition, but funds for the work are being sought.

For quiet contemplation?

Over 700 toilets in the IC-2000 fleet and the Class 500 ICNs are being re-furbished. As well as improvements to the equipment, and the introduction of blue tiles, wall panelling illustrating a forest glade, a mountain panorama, sky and high clouds is being installed. There will also be automatic fresh-air deodorizing. It has been suggested that as the differential between 1st and 2nd class fares is being increased, and some trains get very full, this might be a good alternative accommodation tip for regular customers!

Funicular modernisation

The oldest funicular in Switzerland is the Giessbachbahn, whilst the oldest electric funicular (the early ones worked by water acting as ballast) is the Bürgenstockbahn, visible from the Lake Luzern steamers at Kehrsiten-Bürgenstock landing stage. We recently commented in *Swiss Express* about the role of concessions in authorizing the building and operating of Swiss railways, and for many tourist lines of the Belle Epoque this is a critical issue, for often the original concession is reaching its expiry date. However, renewing their operating authorisation means meeting contemporary standards of safety and comfort, often requiring substantial reconstruction

of both vehicles and infrastructure. The Bürgenstockbahn concession expires in 2016. The line is now closed for extensive rebuilding, and the upper station will become part of the new hotel and luxury resort complex being built on the mountain. The historic cars are to be rebuilt and, with windows and heating (whatever next?), will also in future operate in winter. Re-opening is planned for 2015. Another funicular has just gone through this process. The Les Avants – Sonloup line was closed in May 2012, and in remarkably quick time the two historic cars were rebuilt in the Chernetz workshops of the MOB in time for approval and re-opening at Christmas 2012. From mid-2013 this line is intended to be entirely automatic in operation, overseen by the MOB control centres in Montreux or Zweisimmen.

Stadler wins joint tender

On P31 of the March Swiss Express we noted that four metre-gauge railways operating in Cantons Vaud, Fribourg, and Berne had gone out with a joint tender for new rolling stock. It was announced in the spring that a CHF150m contract had been awarded to Stadler at Bussnang to supply 17 similar EMUs for delivery between January 2015 and July 2016. Montreux Oberland Bernois (MOB) will take delivery of four 900V dc units, to replace their four ABDe 8/8 two-car sets built in 1968. TRAVYS has ordered three 15kV ac units, two to replace life-expired rolling stock while the third will allow the introduction of a half-hourly service on the line from Yverdon-les-Bains to Sainte Croix. TPF will receive six EMUs to replace older trains on its network, while MBC will take four units to replace 1981-built stock and to support the launch of half-hourly services on the line between Morges and Bière. The decision to issue a joint tender for the new units generated significant economies of scale for the four operators, reducing the overall purchase price by CHF28m, while also offering potential synergies in maintenance provision. The contract with Stadler includes options for additional stock, which if exercised could be worth up to CHF80m.

Fifty Shades of.... green

Well four shades of green actually. The issue is that BVB's current fleet of Combino trams are in a light green livery that has been criticized by some Basel citizens. Historically BVB has during well over 110 years used four varieties of green. In early years it used a two-tone green of light with dark paneling, and the dark green of the 60s and 70s was always popular. Now Combino No. 301 is indeed painted in sections from nose to tail in four shades of green, and passengers are asked to vote on the colour that they prefer. The outcome of this democratic process will be that the new fleet of Flexity trams currently under construction will have the chosen colour and within a year or so the Combinos, as they fall due for heavy overhaul, will be painted to match. Behind all this is a declared wish to capitalise on and strengthen the strong proprietorial sense of popular involvement in the tram in Basel. Readers will recall that last year BVB asked their users to choose the type of seating that the Flexity trams will have, and they chose the ergonomic wooden option.

Italian Traffic

While present services to Italy via the Gotthard show no great sign of improvement, fortunately the Class 610 units on the BLS route are now achieving some regularity. This may have significance, as offers have now been received by SBB in response to its invitation to tender for the 29 new high-speed, but non-tilting, Gotthard trains. These are from Alstom, based on a non-tilting Class 610; from Siemens, offering a variant of the ICX being built in Germany; from Talgo, who would probably work with Bombardier, and from Stadler, who have their most successful 'Norwegian Flirt' series (NSB have now ordered more) as an example.

No more freight

The RBS is today a highly effective metre-gauge commuter network serving Solothurn, Bern, that also incorporates the VBW line to Worb. At its opening it was also a vital link for industry in the valleys around Bern. It carried standard gauge wagons on transporter-trucks, using an assortment of electric tractors and baggage cars to handle trains of freight wagons to various interchange points. In 1924 a third standard gauge rail was added with a new alignment from Zollikofen to Worblaufen, greatly facilitating service to a cement works in Worblaufen and a paper factory in Deisswil. Freight traffic declined heavily in the 1970s and later the transporter-truck operation ceased whilst SBB Cargo took over the standard gauge haulage. In 2010, in a local scandal, the Deisswil works closed abruptly. Last December 12th SBB Cargo ran its last daily trip over the line, although it is suggested that the three-rail track will remain in place between Worblaufen and Zollikofen for the time being.

Genève News

Work is well under way on the re-electrification from the French 1500V dc to 25KV ac between Genève and La Plaine. The new overhead poles are seen here at Bourdigny in November 2012. The SNCF signalling is also being converted to the SBB standard. Freight trains between La Plaine and La Praille freight yard are being diesel hauled.



CEVA works at La Praille Yard. Photo: Gordon Wiseman

Construction work is getting into full swing on the CEVA project with drilling rigs at various work sites around the route of the tunnel loop under the Champel area of the city. Other clear signs of progress are excavations along the west side of La

Praille freight yard, preliminary tunnel mouth excavations and tram route track alterations at Bachet de Pesay, and removal of the late 19th century abutments at Eaux Vives dating from the abortive late 19th century plans for an equivalent of CEVA. Preparations are also under way along the track bed east from Eaux Vives station. From April buses have replaced trains to and from Annemasse.



New masts at Bourdigny Photo: Gordon Wiseman

Linking-up in St Gallen

The projected connection of the Appenzellerbahn and Trogenbahn metre-gauge lines (these have been under the same management for some time), through the City outside the Hauptbahnhof, has been approved by the St Gallen Kantonal Parliament. The Confederation has already approved a CHF41m share of costs so the through route may be getting nearer. Two of three Kantonal governments have now approved the project, while in Appenzell Inner-Rhoden the Landsgemeinde, the annual public meeting of citizens that is held in April, will vote by raised hand. This is democracy in action, although an optional referendum to defeat the proposal could also still be invoked by some critics of the scheme.

Lausanne Metro booming

The long-range forecast of 25 million Metro passengers on the innovative Line M2 has been overtaken in just four years with the ridership in 2012 expected to be 27 million. The question of what to do next is now urgent but in the long term the plan is to double capacity. This hi-tech system is based on the old funicular that ran down to Ouchy from the City Centre. To cope with the rise in traffic on the conventional light-rail Line M1 five new train-sets are being built jointly by the MOB and the Metro's own workshops, but these are also only a stopgap solution.

Pay your parking fine and take the train

Between March 11th & 31st the RhB and the Chur Traffic Authority tried an original promotion. Anyone during that period who picked up a Chur City parking fine (that had to be paid), also received a CHF40 voucher towards a monthly or annual public transport season ticket. Parking fines have been sharply increased, as part of a much wider campaign to both discourage automobile commuting and abuse of the all-too-limited resources in town centres, so this was a serious attempt to encourage change.

Jungfraubahn developments

For some time there has been discussion of plans for cable cars and lifts, a possible 'Y-project', in the Jungfrau region possibly replacing the existing rack rail lines. The reality has now been announced as two new cable cars, but also a considerable upgrading of the existing railway lines. A cable car route with 27-seat cabins will run from Grindelwald Grund to Eigergletscher, the first stop on the JB from Kleine Scheidegg. A second line from Grindelwald Grund to the Männlichen, with 8 seat cabins, will replace the present outdated installation. A new station at Rothenegg on the BOB from Zweilütschinen is proposed, so that passengers can alight and go directly to these cable cars, without the detour by Grindelwald and then on to Grund by WAB. The existing rail lines will all remain in operation. Six new panorama train sets have been ordered from Stadler for the WAB with delivery in 2015. These will replace the 1947-1968 units now showing their age, but still capable of carrying capacity loadings on good skiing days, or for the Lauberhorn race. The Jungfraubahn will also need three new trains, but these are not yet financed and ordered.

Revisions planned for Zürich - Chur services

Information is coming out about proposals to change the service pattern between Zürich and Chur. One objective is to have a twice-hourly semi-fast Regio-Express service between Zürich and Ziegelbrücke and a 30-minute interval stopping service between Sargans and Chur. There will also be changes to the direct Basel - Zürich - Chur trains currently the backbone of the fast service. Some of these will continue as part of a twice hourly InterCity service that aims to integrate the DB ICEs from Basel into the pattern. At present there is a half-hourly fast service Basel - Zürich, with hourly fast and semi-fast through trains to Chur. With Zürich Airport - Basel services, and trains on the Bözberg route, a lot is going on as SBB tries to serve several overlapping, but different, markets all needing differentiated improvements. Few now realise that the original main line to Chur went north from Zürich via Wallisellen, Wetzikon and Rapperswil (now part of the Zürich S-Bahn system) to reach Ziegelbrücke, and then to Chur through Weesen. This line was built by the VSB (Vereinigte Schweizerbahnen) in 1857-59. The present main line, along the south shore of the Zürichsee, was opened in 1875 by the Nordostbahn. Today this route runs close to capacity with the booming passenger traffic, and also a significant freight business between Zürich, Sargans and Buchs for Austria.

Hidden treasure

For some years before the 1969 closure of the passenger service between Etwilen & Singen (the cross-border line the SBB never electrified), trains were pulled by the diesel baggage railcar Dm2/4 No.1692. This was one of two prototypes built by Sulzer in 1928. After withdrawal No.1692 went to the Emmental-Burgdorf-Thun (now BLS) for use as a service vehicle, while No.1691 joined SBB Historic's collection. It is now surprising to learn that No.1692 has been lying idle in the open at Ramsen on the line it once served, now a

museum railway - the SEHR, for the last 4-years. Like many enthusiast lines they may have taken-on more than they can cope with, with the result that a valuable artefact is rotting away.



No. 1692 between Etzwilen and Singen in the 1960s.

Photo: Bryan Stone

MOB forgoes freight

The progressive elimination of freight traffic on this line will now be completed by the announcement that the block gravel trains that have run for some years between Grandvillard and Saanen will finish. There will now be no more booked commercial freight services although there will still be works and permanent-way material trains, especially since a rebuilding programme is still in progress. New on the MOB at Montreux is Be4/4 No.1007. This is former Be4/4 No.303 of the ASm sold following the arrival of their new trains.

MIB on the BOB

Stadler-built railcar Be 4/4 No 8 is normally the backbone of the MIB's half-hourly shuttle service between Meiringen and Innertkirchen, that ends up in the Power Station yard and on the way serves Switzerland's shortest station at Aareschlucht Ost. Passengers are a mixture of schoolchildren, villagers, tourists and the curious. The 5km metre-gauge line that belongs to the Bernese electricity generating company BKW is surprisingly busy, especially after getting its new interchange platform with the ZB at Meiringen. Dating from 1996 No 8 needed an overhaul and this was done in two stages - at the BLS workshop in Bönigen and at the BOB in Zweilütschinen. On the ZB to Interlaken Ost it was hauled by the MIB's heavy hybrid loco, Gem 4/4 No 12, bought last year from the CJ after rebuild with a diesel auxiliary power unit. For many years this had been CJ De4/4 No 402. From Interlaken to Zweilütschinen, No 8 ran under its own power, but on the standard gauge to Bönigen it had to be carried. The outward sign of all this is a new red-white livery, quite unlike what went before with its numerous advertisements.

RhB News

The line from Klosters to Davos Glaris through Davos Platz and Dorf was to be completely closed from April 2nd (after Easter and the ski season) to June 28th, with a shuttle bus service running through the valley. The principal object is the rebuilding of buildings, trackwork and signalling at

Davos Platz station as announced last year. During the closure the opportunity will be taken to undertake renewal work on the tunnel and catenary at Calvadürli, in the reverse curves above Klosters and renovate a level crossing at Davos Wolfgang. During Autumn 2012 the RhB remodelled the track layout in the congested 'throat' at the west end of Samedan station where the St Moritz and Pontresina lines divide. In the extensive reconstruction twelve sets of points and some 750 m of track were replaced, including considerable realignment and simplification.

In particular the alignment between the station and the new tunnel Sper l'En, in the direction of St Moritz, is now complete. It will not be long before the new main line EMUs are in service on the Albula Line following extensive trials that have been taking place over the last autumn and winter. Advertised service, with a changeover to a half-hourly interval service should start in 2016, though individual units will no doubt appear sooner. At present several diagrams are worked by Allegra 3-unit railcar sets, sometimes pulling considerable trains. These powerful units (more powerful than any RhB loco) are allowed trailing loads of 350t on the Albula route with its 35% (1 in 28) gradients.

When your Swiss News Editor was a young BR employee, loco men and guards had to carry a bag of timetables, appendices, weekly notices, etc. and had a signing-on time allowance for reading daily notices. Over the years, failures to do this properly sometimes had disastrous results. The RhB has beaten this by issuing all staff concerned with train operations with a portable computer, maintained from the central data management point, which contains all current data, including updates for short-notice modifications. The considerable costs of printing and distribution of operating instructions will be saved, and the quality of information improved.

On March 3rd in a referendum the electorate in Graubünden rejected a proposal, supported by the Federal Council, to bid for holding the 2022 Winter Olympics in Davos and St Moritz. The proposal was in any case controversial, because of a feared escalation in costs and also the potential environmental impact. Nothing was mentioned publicly about the RhB, which would have faced a challenge of considerable magnitude in handling the Olympic crowds in midwinter. Even this winter's ski and vacation business stretched the RhB's resources severely. An example of this was the cross-country Engadiner Marathon, now in its 45th year. The route of this hugely popular event is some 42km from St Moritz/Maloja to S-Chanf via Pontresina, and this year attracted over 12,000 participants of all levels of skill. The RhB starts at 04.00 to bring competitors to the start, then to distribute spectators and, throughout the afternoon, provide for an orderly journey home afterwards. All available staff are called out, and everything that runs is set in motion. Some rare train compositions are turned-out, additional to the usual timetable, to maintain a 20 minute interval shuttle between St Moritz, S-chanf and Scuol. Within Graubünden all rail transport is free to participants, payment being included in the registration fee for the event. After the start competitor's clothes left at the check-in are taken by train to the finishing line, and the seriously exhausted skiers can reserve their train

seats to get home once they make the finish.

Digging in Luzern

The long-discussed project to construct a loop line under the lake between Luzern Hauptbahnhof (with new sub-surface platforms) and Ebikon, has reached one of its first mileposts. A shaft 18m deep has been dug and lined in the freight yard giving favourable results which will now be incorporated in the costing and planning of the main project. Work is also going on to clarify conditions for the potential connection at Ebikon.


Cargo Domizil to expand network

In 1996 the SBB decided to give up door-to-door transport of less than wagon-load traffic (Cargo Domizil) as it was losing money running the service. Three enterprising, and normally competing, road haulage companies Camion Transport AG, Planzer Transport AG, and Galliker Transport AG decided to get together and buy the operation. Having reorganised and slimmed it down they still own and run it and are operating profitably. Each day 10,000 consignments are picked up by road and taken to one of ten centres for loading onto the railway. These are then carried across Switzerland during the night in 280 wagons, covering 12.5m km a year with 85% of the consignments being delivered before noon the next day. Now Cargo Domizil, who are one of SBB's major customers, are looking at expanding their network.

New SNCF Swiss service

For the first time in many years the SNCF is operating a stopping service between Frasné and Vallorbe through the 6078m Mont d'Or Tunnel. This is a regional development project to serve commuters from the French border region to the watchmaking industries of the Vallée to Joux. At Vallorbe the trains connect with the isolated 24km TRAVYS standard-gauge line along the Vallée to Joux to Le Brassus, and with 'S-Bahn Léman' Line S2 to Lausanne. Also in the Jura it looks as if the Bern – Neuchâtel – les Verrières - Frasné – Paris TGV may not last much longer as it has been made superfluous by the much faster service through Basel/Belfort, and has been losing loadings recently. Overall, these Jura crossings are only a shadow of their one-time importance, when the Direct Simplon-Orient Express, and others from Calais and Paris, ran their blue CIWLT cars this way en-route to Italy, Venice and beyond. As we have previously reported freight too is very quiet on these routes.

'Elefant' on the line

In April SBB Historic announced that their C5/6 'Elefant' will be working two 2-hour special trains next September 8th from its home in the roundhouse at Delémont along the Tavanne – Sonceboz line celebrating the engine's 100th anniversary. If the Swiss can find something to celebrate, they will, and this time they have given us more than their usual two weeks notice of the event! 

Swiss News is compiled by Bryan Stone and includes items from Ron Smith, Mario Gavazzi, Jakob Jäger, Michael Donovan, s'Murmeli, Adrian Friend and others.