

# Convention in Switzerland

## September 2010

In its centenary year, the RSA convention was held in Switzerland from Sunday 5th to Friday 10th September 2010. The convention was based in Bern, but featured extensive travel throughout the country during the five days.

Andi Willich, SBB's Product Management Director, was the Association's principal host and guide.

Picking up on many of the themes of the past year's meetings, the convention had a particular focus on:

- Integration between undertakings: (rail/rail; rail and other operators; and operators and infrastructure providers).
- The challenges of operating high-density services, with a mix of long-distance passenger and commuter services and intensive freight operations, within the constraints of the existing infrastructure.
- Projects to increase line capacity, by track upgrades and other major works, including a visit to the construction of Gotthard Base Tunnel, where break-trough is expected in October of this year.
- Station facilities and management, including integration with the wider local community.
- Geographic and climatic challenges.
- The opportunity to meet with senior managers from SBB and many other Swiss rail companies.

### Summary Programme

#### *Sunday 5th September*

Informal evening reception in Bern.

#### *Monday 6th September*

The themes of the first day were:

- Swiss railway hubs
- Coping with mixed traffic
- Works to increase line capacity
- High Speed Lines

The itinerary took us first from Bern to Interlaken. There is an intensive commuter traffic into and out of Bern on this north-south route, with the associated heavily peaked flows. It is also a popular route for leisure travel (generally in the counter-peak direction) and is a key freight corridor. Operation of the line requires close co-operation between SBB and BLS over train services and infrastructure (BLS).

The Group visited the control centre at Spiez.



We continued to Interlaken and changed onto the metre gauge Zentralbahn for the journey over the Brunig Pass (including a rack and pinion section) to Lucerne, with lunch served on route (cooked on the station platform at Meiringen!). This line has recently been integrated by amalgamation between the SBB and LSE. The new company is jointly owned by SBB(90%) and the Cantons (10%). The line is a popular tourist route and carries commuter traffic at both ends.

Lucerne is a bottle-neck, requiring through trains to reverse in and out of the terminal station. A project to build a through line underground has been approved in a referendum; planning work is proceeding, but construction funding is awaited.

We continued from Lucerne to Zurich, by special train: the 1939 “Churchill Red Arrow” two-car EMU, so named because it was used by (Sir) Winston on a post-war visit to Switzerland in 1946. This was the first time this unit had operated over the Sudostbahn line via Arth- Goldau, reflecting close co-operation between the SBB and SOB.



Zurich is SBB’s busiest hub, serving 100,000 passengers each day. S-bahn trains can already by-pass the terminal platforms on a through underground line. It is proposed to build a second through line for regional trains by 2015. We visited the station, including the linked ZurichCity development, the second largest shopping mall in Switzerland; the station commercial facilities; and the underground construction works for the new through line.

Finally, we returned to Bern over the High Speed Line.

*Tuesday 7th September*

This day’s programme took the RSA Group to the French-speaking part of Switzerland, including Lausanne.

The Bern – Lausanne line is the east-west backbone of the network. It is an old line with curves. Some infrastructure works have been undertaken to improve line speeds; but a further saving in time has come through the introduction of tilt-compensating trains (on which we travelled).

In Lausanne, visited the SBB control centre for all of Western Switzerland and also the control centre for the Lausanne Metro. Then we continued by paddle steamer and train to Yverdon to visit the maintenance depot for the tilting trains. We then travelled on via Biel to Solothurn, which is a medium-sized hub served by four train operators. We received a presentation by the RBS company and then travelled by train to Bern, where we inspected the RBS underground station where impressively fast turn-rounds are achieved in the peak hours.



*Wednesday 8th September*

A day in the mountains. We looked at the issues of maintaining infrastructure and operations in extreme weather conditions and at integration between different railway gauges and operators in the mountains south of Interlaken. We visited the highest train maintenance facility in the country (at Eigergletscher); and heard how commercially the most successful railway in Switzerland (the JungfrauBahn) markets its operation world-wide; determines its pricing; and handles the tourist travel peaks.

The convention dinner was held on the Paddle Steamer Blumisalp on Lake Thun. At the dinner we were joined by senior representatives from many of the Swiss rail companies.

*Thursday 9th September*

Focus of this day was on the largest boat operator in Switzerland, the SGV, operating regular-interval services on Lake Lucerne integrated with the national railway timetable; on the new Gotthard Base Tunnel; on freight operations; on the unfortunately-abbreviated FART international metre gauge international railway, crossing the border to Domodossola in Italy; and on the ETR 610 High Speed Train.



We travelled from Bern to Lucerne by train, then transferred to the Paddle Steamer Uri for Fluelen. This is the oldest working paddle-steamer in Europe, dating from 1901. On the journey we had a presentation by the steamer company, the fourth largest in the country's revenue-sharing agreement, operating 25 boats.

We transferred to the train on the Gotthard line, continuing by bus from Erstfeld to visit the construction works for the Gotthard Base Tunnel. The current Gotthard route is the backbone of the north-south international corridor, with a two-minute frequency of passenger and freight trains. It is famous for its spiral staircases - a masterpiece of 19th century engineering. The visit to the new Base

Tunnel showed how this is being upgraded by an extensive (and expensive) 21st century engineering project.

En route to Locarno, in the "Salon de Luxe" (used the previous day by the German President on a state visit to Switzerland) the RSA group was given a presentation on SBB freight operations.



On arrival at Locarno, we visited the FART depot and control room. We

then travelled on this line, with its spectacular scenery of one hundred valleys, hence its nickname "Centrovalli") to Domodossola. We returned to Bern on the first of Sbb's new high speed international trains, taking dinner on board. The train had been first presented to the press that very morning.



*Friday 10th September*

On this, the final, day, we travelled by train from Bern to Zweisimmen. There we joined the metre gauge MOB (the "Golden Pass" scenic line), on which most trains are formed of luxury panoramic, or heritage, coaches. A plan to convert the connecting BLS line from Zweisimmen to Interlaken to mixed gauge, to enable through trains to operate from Montreux to Lucerne, has been dropped and the plan now is to fit stock with gauge-changing bogies. On arrival in Montreux, we received a presentation on the MOB company and then were privileged to be the first group to see a demonstration of the new gauge-changing equipment.