



A CONSTRUCTION PROJECT SERVING EUROPE

THE OPENING OF THE GOTTHARD BASE TUNNEL

Introduction

The world's longest railway tunnel will be officially opened on 1 June 2016 – the Gotthard Base Tunnel. Covering 57.1km, it is the cornerstone of the European Rhine-Alpine Corridor for freight transport and is part of Switzerland's «New Rail Link through the Alps» (NRLA). This once-in-a-century construction project represents a substantial contribution by Switzerland to the European transport infrastructure and symbolises Swiss values, such as innovation, precision and reliability. Its commercial commissioning by the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) is scheduled for 11 December 2016.

The Rhine-Alpine Corridor

The Rotterdam/Antwerp-Genoa railway corridor is Europe's most important freight transport axis in terms of volume. It runs along the Rhine through Europe's industrial heartland, linking dynamically growing economic hubs, such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Cologne, Frankfurt am Main, Basel, Zurich, Milan and Genoa. Forecasts indicate that the volume of freight on this railway line is set to increase further. The EU classifies the Rhine-Alpine Corridor as a priority and will invest around EUR 25 billion in its expansion over the coming years. The corridor is an integral part of the European policy on the development of trans-European transport networks (TEN-T) in which it plays a pioneering role. The goal of the five adjacent states of the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy is to create a cost-effective, reliable and competitive rail freight transport axis between north and south. These corridor states have consequently signed various agreements on a coordinated action programme.

The Swiss people approve sustainable transport policy

Switzerland has been pursuing a sustainable transport policy since the 1980s which has focused on shifting transalpine traffic from the road to rail. The Swiss people have endorsed this policy in several referenda. The NRLA concept was approved by the Swiss electorate on 27 September 1992 and the corresponding financing model on 29 November 1998 by clear majorities (both 64%). This large-scale project has therefore been legitimised by means of direct democracy.

The fund for large-scale railway projects (FinöV fund) was created to secure the financing of this major scheme. This was fed from three sources – the heavy goods vehicle charge HGVC (60%), VAT (30%) and the mineral oil tax (10%). In January 2016, the FinöV fund was replaced by the Rail Infrastructure Fund (RIF) which now provides funding for the entire railway infrastructure.

NRLA – a once-in-a-century construction project

The NRLA is the largest construction project that Switzerland has ever undertaken in its history. It consists of three new base tunnels (Lötschberg 34.6km, Gotthard 57.1km and Ceneri 15.4km) and the expansion of the approach routes. The Lötschberg Base Tunnel has been in operation since 2007 and the Ceneri Base Tunnel is set to open in 2020. Switzerland is investing around CHF 23.5 billion (around EUR 21.5 billion) in the construction of the NRLA, which equates to approximately 3.5% of Swiss gross domestic product (GDP).

After completion of the work at Ceneri and on the approach routes, trains will be able to cross the Alps without any significant gradients. The journey time for passenger transport between Zurich and Lugano will be reduced by around 45 minutes, more freight trains will be able to travel through the Alps more quickly and fewer locomotives will be required. The efficiency and reliability of railway transport is improving which makes the railways more competitive and strengthens the EU single market. Economic benefits and the protection of the alpine environment have therefore been reconciled.

The Gotthard Base Tunnel – a record-breaking project

The first plans for a base tunnel between Amsteg and Bodio were drawn up in 1947. Just short of 70 years later and after a 17-year construction period, the Gotthard Base Tunnel, which is 57.1km in length, replaces the Seikan Tunnel (53.9km) in Japan as the world's longest railway tunnel. The breakthrough was made in October 2010. The Gotthard Base Tunnel cost around CHF 12.5 billion (around EUR 11.5 billion) and connects Bodio in the canton of Ticino with Erstfeld in the canton of Uri.

The Gotthard Base Tunnel is a masterpiece of modern-day engineering. With a rock overburden of up to 2,300 metres, the Gotthard Base Tunnel is the world's deepest underground railway tunnel. Up to 2,400 people worked simultaneously on this construction project and bored through a wide range of rock strata from granite to heavily fragmented sediment. Numerous test runs will be carried out up to commissioning.

The section of line through the Gotthard Base Tunnel is around 30 kilometres shorter than the current route running over the mountain. Capacity will be increased thanks to the new tunnel. Up to 250 freight trains and 65 passenger trains can be used per day in future. Capacity was restricted to a maximum of 180 freight trains on the existing Gotthard mountain line. Passenger trains will travel through the tunnel at up to 200km/h and speeds of up to 250km/h will be feasible in future.

Switzerland invests for Europe

Shorter journey times makes Switzerland's regions as well as Germany and Italy more accessible. Over 20 million people in the area lying between southern Germany and northern Italy alone will benefit from the Gotthard Base Tunnel. The Gotthard Base Tunnel represents a significant Swiss contribution to European transport policy and brings Europe closer together.

The Gotthard Base Tunnel is both «an idea born in Switzerland» – which Switzerland has financed itself – and the result of close international cooperation. Companies and workers from around 15 countries were involved in the construction project. Tunnel boring machines came from Germany, for example, shaft construction specialists from South Africa and many engineers and tunnelling specialists from Italy, Austria and the Balkan states.

Switzerland is planning to complete a further project aimed at delivering efficient rail services by 2020 – a continuous, four-metre railway corridor from Basel through the Gotthard and Ceneri Base Tunnel to northern Italy. This is

important because intermodal transport is a strong-growth segment. Switzerland is also investing CHF 990 million (EUR 900 million) in upgrading the existing railway infrastructure on the approach routes to the Gotthard. Switzerland and Italy signed an agreement in 2014 to secure the required expansion work on the Italian side. The Swiss Parliament provided credit of CHF 280 million (EUR 255 million) for investment in Italy, such as on the Luino line.

The opening celebrations in June 2016

The opening of the world's longest railway tunnel will take place on 1 June 2016 with around 1,200 guests near to the two portals in Erstfeld, canton of Uri, and Bodio/Pollegio, canton of Ticino. The celebrations will be staged in parallel at the north and south portals and are certain to complement one another. All members of the Swiss government, the heads of state and government from the neighbouring countries, transport ministers and high-ranking representatives from the European Union will take part in the celebrations. As part of a draw, 1,000 people from Switzerland will also have the opportunity to be the first to travel through the Gotthard Base Tunnel. A public event will also be held on the weekend of 4 and 5 June 2016. The public will be able to travel through the tunnel and visit the attractive festival grounds near the tunnel portals. The aim is to thank the Swiss people for approving through the various referenda the NRLA and an environmentally friendly transport policy.

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