

Press release

RAlpin achieves strong modal shift results

Last year, 2015, was the first time the "Rola" rolling highway carried more than 100,000 trucks across the Swiss Alps via the Lötschberg-Simplon axis. The overall figure is slightly up on 2014. RAlpin's reconstruction of the terminal in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, is aimed at optimising the long-term modal shift from road to rolling highway.

For the first time in its history, the "Rola" rolling highway between Freiburg i. Br., Germany and Novara, Italy, which uses the Lötschberg-Simplon axis, has exceeded the 100,000 mark in a single year. In excess of 110,000 trucks were transferred to the rolling highway in 2015: 100,500 between Freiburg i. Br. and Novara, and 10,000 between Basel and Lugano. This exceeds the previous year's excellent figure by 0.4%. The capacity utilisation of the trains averaged 85%.

Despite strong franc and low diesel prices

RAlpin found itself obliged to raise its prices in response to the removal of the franc-to-euro peg in January 2015. This at a time when its customers were facing their own exchange rate challenges and the price of diesel fuel was very low. Despite these adverse conditions, RAlpin managed to pass its price rise on to the market.

The difficult economic circumstances have found the company further optimising its processes wherever possible. One example of this is the addition of an extra wagon to each train – from 21 to 22. Although technical reasons have prevented this until now, RAlpin has been able to demonstrate the technical feasibility of lengthening the trains and joined forces with Italian infrastructure operator RFI to develop a special solution. The move was initiated at the beginning of 2015 and the change was adopted into RFI's operating regulations at the end of the year: trains will start circulating with 22 wagons (i.e. truck places) per train in January 2016.

Reconstruction of the Freiburg terminal underway

Following a planning phase lasting a number of years, reconstruction of the terminal in Freiburg im Breisgau began in October 2015. Much of the work centres on switching the embarkation direction of the trains. Due to the current layout of the Freiburg terminal, trains are currently able to load only from the south, i.e. contrary to the direction of travel. It means that trains have to perform a loop in the Basel area before continuing their journey southwards (see illustration). This is operationally time consuming and increases traction costs. The German Federal Railway Authority (EBA) approved the plans in September 2015 and bulldozers moved in the following month.

"This project represents a milestone for RAlpin and the rolling highway," says René Dancet, CEO of RAlpin. "The middle of 2016 will find us, as well as our customers, our neighbours and the town of Freiburg i. Br., benefiting from operational, environmental and safety improvements."

The work on the Freiburg terminal is being funded by the Swiss Confederation and RAlpin.

Freiburg terminal: facts and figures:

- The terminal in Freiburg witnesses embarkation and disembarkation manoeuvres involving 60 trains a week
- The terminal sees more than 2000 in/out truck movements every week
- More than 1.7 mio. tonnes of goods pass through the terminal every year
- Seven service providers employing a total of around 50 staff are on site at any one time to ensure the smooth running of the rolling highway. Their duties include handling the check-in, technical check, embarkation and safety processes, cleaning and stocking the passenger coaches, and maintenance.

Long-term vision: increasing capacity

The reconstruction work to alter the embarkation direction is aimed primarily at improving operational efficiency. Any substantial increase in capacity – involving train lengths of 750 metres (up to 34 trucks per train) – would require the establishment of a four-metre corridor along the entire Germany–Italy route via the Gotthard/Ceneri base tunnel axis, plus new terminals at either end. Work on implementing the project has begun, and the envisaged time frame for completion is ten years.

Olten, 6 January 2016

RAIpin AG at a glance

Headquartered in Olten, RAIpin AG operates the rolling highway between Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, and Novara, Italy, and between Basel and Lugano. Every year, the company transfers more than 100,000 heavy goods vehicles from road to rail. Under the rolling highway system, drivers embark their vehicles onto low-floor wagons at the terminals and accompany their loads in a passenger coach. This service finds RAIpin making a significant contribution to the modal shift of traffic from road to rail and safeguarding the sensitive Alpine region.

The shareholders of RAIpin are BLS AG, Hupac SA, SBB Cargo AG and Trenitalia SpA.
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