



New routes through Europe

Swiss transport policy

One of the central principles of Swiss transport policy is that as much transalpine freight traffic as possible must be moved from road to rail. A package of measures has been implemented to achieve this objective. The most important of these measures is the construction of the New Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA).



In several popular votes, the Swiss people have called for the majority of transalpine goods traffic to travel by rail.

Switzerland lies at the heart of Europe. For many years, the Gotthard and Lötschberg-Simplon corridors have been important transit routes for north-south traffic. Passengers and goods moving between northern Europe and Italy come together in the narrow mountain passes. Every year more than one million trucks cross the Swiss Alps.

The Swiss people want to protect the sensitive Alpine region from excessive traffic. Since the 1980s, Switzerland has had a sustainable transport policy based on shifting as much transalpine traffic as possible from road to rail. The Swiss population has confirmed this policy in a number of popular votes. In 1994, the Swiss adopted the so-called Alpine initiative which aimed to move heavy goods transport onto the railways. In practical terms this means that the number of trucks crossing the Alps each year should be reduced to a maximum of 650,000 by 2018.

A total of 42 billion euros for rail expansion

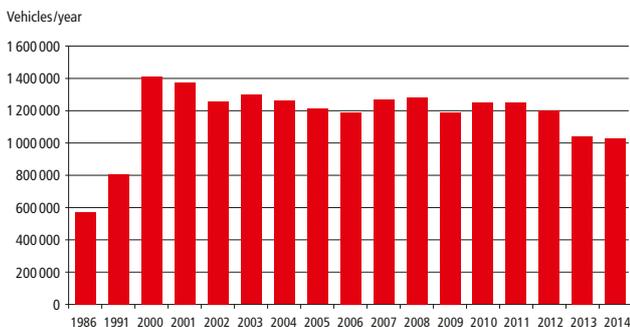
It will not be possible to achieve this ambitious goal, but Switzerland has taken a number of different measures in order to ensure that it comes as close as possible to the target figure. These include the Heavy Goods Vehicle Charge (HGVC), the Swiss equivalent of a truck toll, and financial support for rail freight transport. In order to increase the capacity of the rail system, Switzerland is building the New Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA), which includes the Lötschberg, Gotthard and Ceneri base tunnels. The NRLA provides a fast and efficient route through Switzerland for freight traffic. For passenger trains, it significantly shortens the journey times between cities in the north and the south of Europe. On the Gotthard axis, Switzerland is also expanding the approach routes so that semi-trailers with a four-metre corner height can be transported by rail along the entire length of the line through to the large terminals in northern Italy.



Federal Office of Transport

Switzerland is investing around 23.5 billion Swiss francs (around 22.4 billion euros; current prices, including interest and VAT) in building the NRLA. In addition, the expansion work involved in the Rail 2000 project, the Future Development of Rail Infrastructure (FDRIA), connecting Switzerland to the European high-speed rail network (HSR connection), railway noise reduction measures and the 2025 expansion phase will cost a further 44.4 billion Swiss francs (around 42.3 billion euros). These major projects are being financed by the FinPTO fund and its successor, the Rail Infrastructure Fund (RIF). The funds derive their revenue in part from the Heavy Goods Vehicle Charge.

These measures and the step-by-step opening of the base tunnels are having a demonstrable effect. There has been a clear change in trend away from transporting freight by road. Between 2000 and 2014 the number of trucks on the transit routes fell by almost 30 percent. It is estimated that without the accompanying measures to shift freight from road to rail, around 700,000 more trucks would be travelling on Swiss roads each year. Passenger transport is benefiting from shorter journey times and many trains are now full.



Since 2000, the number of trucks crossing the Alps has fallen by around 30 percent.

Instruments for managing heavy goods traffic

In future, Switzerland aims to manage heavy goods traffic on the roads more effectively. However, it is not currently possible to conclude international agreements to introduce an Alpine Crossing Exchange (which would allow a certain number of transit rights to be established and auctioned) or other restrictive measures for heavy goods traffic. Switzerland's neighbours would not accept measures of this kind and there is currently no basis for them in European Union law.

Cooperation with the European Union

As a small country at the heart of Europe, Switzerland relies on close international cooperation in order to implement its modal shift policy. To prevent heavy goods traffic from moving to other Alpine transit routes as a result of Swiss transport policy, coordination is needed between the Alpine states. The Land Transport Agreement signed in 1999 by Switzerland and the European Union guarantees the necessary coordination. Both parties to the agreement have undertaken to open their road and rail traffic markets for the transport of passengers and goods. In addition, the EU specifically recognises the objectives and instruments of Swiss transport policy. As a result, the agreement has laid the legal foundations for the nationwide introduction and gradual increase in the Heavy Goods Vehicle Charge (HGVC) and for retaining the general ban on trucks travelling at night and on Sundays. In return, Switzerland has accepted the incremental increase in the weight limit for trucks from 28 to 40 tonnes.

Further information

- On Swiss transport policy:
<http://www.bav.admin.ch>

Media contact

Federal Office of Transport
Media Office
+41 (0)58 462 36 43
presse@bav.admin.ch
Postal address: Federal Office of Transport, 3003 Bern