

trasse.ch – the Independent Swiss Train Path Allocation Body

1. Who is trasse.ch?

Swiss Train Paths Ltd, referred to below as trasse.ch, is the train path allocation body for the railway networks of the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB), the BLS and the Südostbahn (SOB) [Swiss South-Eastern Railway].

In spinning off the allocation of train paths to a body that is independent in its legal form, organisation and in its decision making, the three largest standard gauge Swiss railways together with the Verband öffentlicher Verkehr (VöV) [Swiss Transport Operators' Association] are reinforcing their commitment to support fair competition on rail.

2. What is a train path and why is it necessary to allocate them?

A train path is comparable to a slot for air transport.

What is a train path?

A train path is the right to use,

- a particular section of the rail infrastructure,
- at a defined time,
- for a specific train (length, weight, loading gauge, speed).

Switzerland introduced open access to its rail network in the first railway reform process in 1999. Since then, freight railway undertakings and, to a limited extent, passenger railway undertakings have had a right to run their trains over other railways' lines provided they held the requisite certificates and licences issued by the Bundesamt für Verkehr (BAV) [Federal Office of Transport]. Previously, track access was only available by means of a mutual agreement. Open access to infrastructure should promote competition, particularly for freight traffic, and hence make the rail mode more attractive.

Today, some 25 different railway undertakings run over the infrastructure of the SBB, BLS and SOB. At least a further 15 undertakings run special trains with historic rolling stock or non-scheduled traffic. All of them use the same rail network. To make it all work properly, one body must coordinate all their individual aspirations. Therefore, all the undertakings signal their requests for the various individual trains for each year to the allocation body. The allocation body coordinates these train path requests. It resolves conflicts when two or more path requests are mutually exclusive and allocates the train paths. The sum of the train paths allocated forms the timetable for the next year.

3. Why was trasse.ch founded?

Before trasse.ch was founded, the railways allocated train paths on their rail networks themselves. In doing so, they could theoretically give their own freight and passenger activities priority over those of other undertakings. Whilst there is no evidence of this ever happening in Switzerland, the train path allocation process of that time was incompatible with the movement towards further liberalisation of transport by rail. The advantages of competition can only be realised if all undertakings have equal access to the rail network. Hence, in its proposal of 23 February 2005 on Railway Reform 2, the Federal Council suggested setting up an independent train path allocation body as a federal institution subject to public law.

Parliament's rejection of the proposal (for reasons which had nothing to do with the suggestion to set up a train path allocation body) could have led to a delay of several years. To avoid delay, SBB, BLS and the SOB decided to spin off their train path allocation activities to a common independent allocation body. In conjunction with the Verband öffentlicher Verkehr [Swiss Transport Operators Association], they founded trasse.ch at the beginning of 2006.

The Federal Council welcomed this initiative as an important step towards strengthening fair competition for rail transport. It also would provide the council with significant experience to help it revise its communication on Railway Reform 2. Even at that time however, the Federal Council declared that further discussions with the European Community would be necessary to establish if trasse.ch was sufficiently independent organisationally and had a sufficient spread of responsibilities to allow the First EU Railway Package to be adopted.

4. What does trasse.ch do?

trasse.ch's three main tasks are:

1. Train path allocation

trasse.ch coordinates train path requests for the networks of the SBB (including the Turbo network, the Sentalbahn and the Port railways of Switzerland Ltd. – all operated by SBB), the BLS and SOB and then allocates the train paths. Accordingly, 95% of the Swiss standard gauge network is covered. The remaining standard gauge railways will allocate train paths on their own networks until this becomes subject to statutory regulation.

Fig. 1: Lines with train path allocation by trasse.ch



2. *Non-discriminatory annual timetable*

The timetable is the best possible translation of applicants train path requests. trasse.ch ensures that timetables are compiled without discrimination. It instructs the infrastructure managers’ specialists to run train path applications through their planning tools and oversees the preparation of the draft timetable. In that way it guarantees freedom from discrimination and by allocating the train paths definitively it approves the draft timetable.

3. *Capacity analysis on congested sections*

If trasse.ch cannot satisfy all path requests even after the coordination process, it declares the section of line in question to be congested. Subsequently, trasse.ch carries out a capacity analysis in which it identifies the reasons for the congestion and points out potential short and medium term ways of relieving the congestion.

5. How does trasse.ch ensure that the creation of the timetable and the allocation of the train paths are free of discrimination?

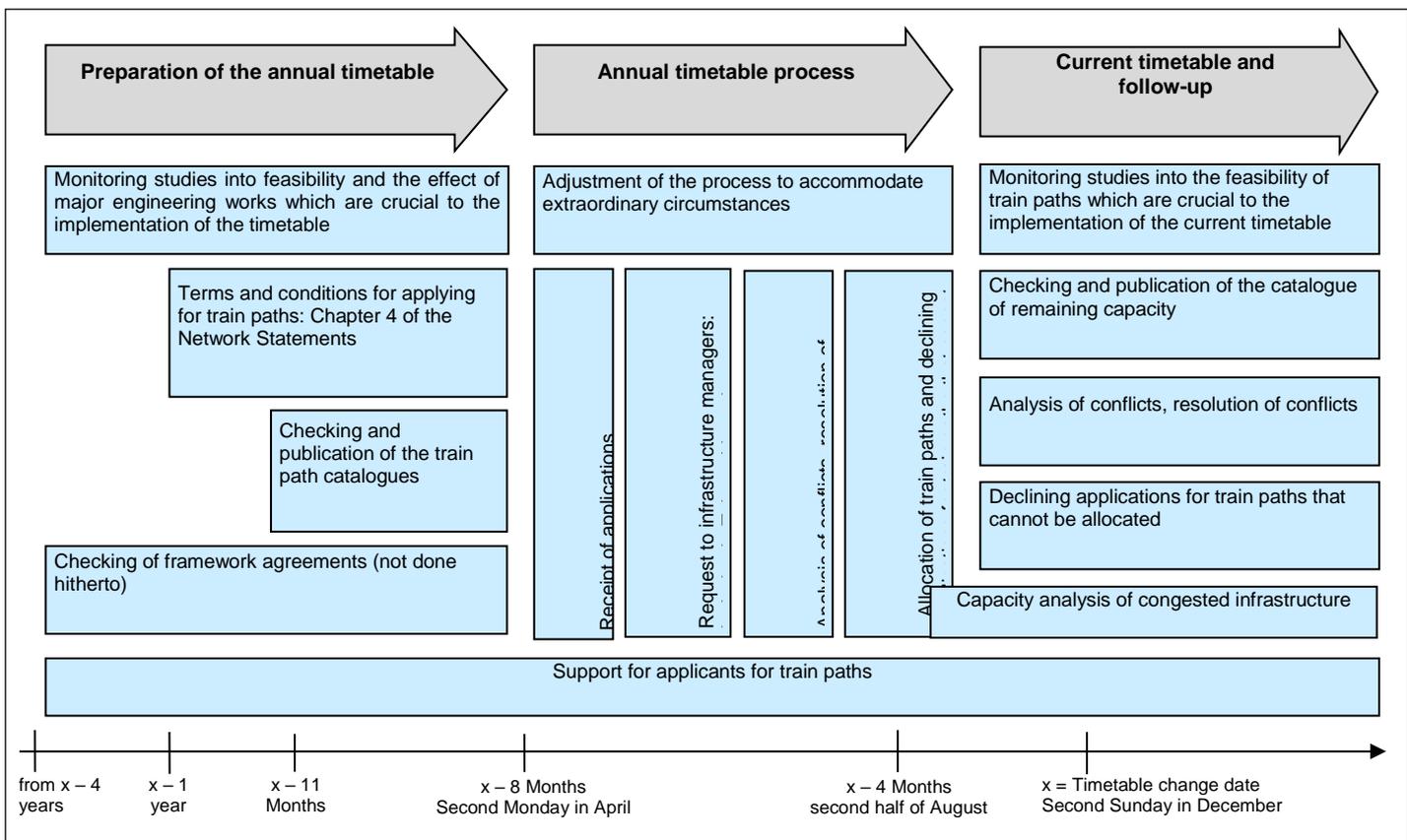
Incumbent railways have no grandfather rights to train paths. Old and new undertakings must reapply for train paths every year and each year a new coordination process takes place.

The process of compiling a timetable may be divided into three phases:

- 1) Getting ready for the annual timetable before applications for train paths are made
- 2) The train path allocation process from application through to the final train path allocation
- 3) Allocation of ad hoc train paths up to the end of the timetable year

Figure 2 illustrates these three phases.

Fig. 2: The three phases of timetable compilation



trasse.ch ensures that the processes in all three phases are free of discrimination:

1. *Preliminary work for the annual timetable: monitoring of train path studies and larger construction projects and drawing up and auditing of the ground rules for applications.*

Before undertakings apply for train paths, they frequently ask the infrastructure manager's timetable specialists to check the technical feasibility of the train paths they intend to apply for. If their plans are impractical or can only be achieved by making significant changes, the infrastructure manager brings in trasse.ch. Undertakings may ask explicitly for studies to be monitored by trasse.ch. trasse.ch checks if the infrastructure managers' comments are justified, if the infrastructure managers have pointed out the most attractive alternatives to the undertakings and if the statutory requirements have been respected. This also applies to maintenance and engineering work that results in reductions in capacity. Attractive and acceptable alternatives must be worked out for the affected path users in good time, if possible before the path order process begins. The alternative offers and timetables must be non-discriminatory. No undertaking should receive a negative decision without trasse.ch becoming involved beforehand. In addition, trasse.ch checks that all the ground rules for path applications are free of discrimination (train path catalogues, possible framework agreements) and draws up updated conditions for applying for train paths annually (Chapter 4 of the Network Statements of SBB, BLS and SOB).

2. *Annual timetable process: Non-discriminatory timetable compilation and path allocation*

For the annual timetable the applicants request approximately 15 000 train paths. With so many applications, train path conflicts are unavoidable. When we speak of a train path conflict, we mean when two or more aspirations to use the network are mutually exclusive and cannot be implemented as desired.

In the event of train path conflicts, first of all, and together with the undertakings and infrastructure managers involved, trasse.ch looks for alternatives which will allow all the trains to be run. Alternatives include changing the times of the train paths, using alternative routes or developing minor adjustments to service plans jointly with the undertakings. trasse.ch chairs these negotiations as the neutral body. Experience shows that undertakings are quite prepared to be flexible when there are conflicts and sometimes suggest alternatives themselves.

If a train path conflict cannot be resolved by agreement, trasse.ch uses the principles laid down by statute (i.e. the priority rules) to decide who will be awarded the train path.

Priority rules

The priority rules are laid down in Article 9a of the Swiss Railways Act. They lay down that regular interval passenger services have priority access to the network. Connections within a coordinated public transport chain may not be broken.

The priority rules also say, however, that passenger trains outside the regular interval service and extra trains have the same priority for access to the network as freight trains.

The priority rules are a necessary precondition for the passenger traffic service pattern. The hourly and half-hourly regular interval trains arrive at the same time in connecting stations and allow sharp connections to be made.

3. Current timetable: allocating ad hoc train paths without discrimination

Applications for train paths in the current timetable may also be made. This can particularly be the case for new freight services or extra passenger trains. These “ad hoc” train path requests may only be satisfied from the infrastructure capacity remaining and the capacity is allocated on the “first come, first served” principle. trasse.ch only needs to be involved in this process if an application for a train path cannot be implemented as desired. In such cases trasse.ch checks if it is actually impossible to timetable the train, if the most attractive alternatives have been pointed out and if the statutory requirements have been respected. Only trasse.ch may give formal notice that a train path has to be refused.

In the case of requests for train paths at very short notice (trains which run on the same day or the day after the application for the train path), trasse.ch checks retrospectively if decisions to refuse a path were justified.

6. How does trasse.ch promote the rail mode?

trasse.ch does not only consider itself to be a guarantor of fair competition and discrimination-free use of the rail network; trasse.ch also uses its best endeavours to support each individual undertaking from the planning stage right through to allocation of the train paths in accordance with its needs.

trasse.ch delivers efficient processes, a high quality of service and acceptable alternatives in the case of conflict; trasse.ch thus contributes towards making movement by rail attractive. It optimises the procedures continuously, basing its action on discussions held annually with undertakings and analyses of processes with the infrastructure managers.

As a member of RailNetEurope (the Association of European Rail Infrastructure Managers and Allocation Bodies), trasse.ch is actively committed to the international coordination of procedures. This mutual reconciliation is very important because of the increasing internationalisation of traffic by rail. For example, over 60% of Swiss freight traffic by rail crosses the Swiss frontier at least once (share of the

import, export and transit traffic tonnage as a percentage of the entire traffic volume of rail freight traffic in Switzerland).

Furthermore, trasse.ch supports the authorities in the creation of an attractive environment for traffic by rail. In addition to position papers and participation in national working groups, it also works actively in international groups within the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER).

7. How is trasse.ch organised and how does it guarantee its independence?

trasse.ch is a not-for-profit limited company. All four shareholders – SBB, BLS, SOB and VöV – have the same minority shareholding and the same voting rights.

The board has five members. It is composed of the Chairman, Urs Hany and one representative from each of the four shareholders. To guarantee independence, board members nominated by the railways may neither come from the traffic departments nor the senior management of railways which submit train path applications to trasse.ch.

trasse.ch employs ten staff, these staff members learned the skills necessary for their work through earlier employment with various railway companies.

trasse.ch provides its services free of charge. It covers its costs by charging SBB, BLS and SOB fees for allocating train paths on their networks. The fees cover the anticipated costs.

8. How will trasse.ch progress?

In 2009, the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC) issued a consultative document for the second stage of Railway Reform 2. As in its communication of 2005, it proposed to convert the train path allocation body into a federal body subject to public law to strengthen independence, transparency and protection against discrimination. In addition, it specified the responsibilities of the train path allocation body in detail and for train path planning and timetable compilation in particular.

The proposal was received positively by a large majority in the consultative process. However whilst some saw this simply as an interim stage on the way to complete separation of infrastructure and traffic, others wanted a independent train path allocation body precisely to avoid this separation. As the EU was revising the relevant directives at the time, the then Head of the Swiss Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy (DETEC) appointed an expert group in June 2010 to look into the possibility of an EU-compatible model tailored to Swiss needs that would not only be viable from a commercial and transport point of view but would also ensure discrimination-free access to the network.

The expert group under the leadership of Paul Blumenthal published its final report on 2 May 2013. On the basis of the expert group's recommendations, the DETEC is currently drawing up a consultation procedure for the "organisation of the rail infrastructure". The consultation procedure is planned to start in August 2015.

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