Factsheet, 13.06.2025

Land transport

Overview

Switzerland has invested heavily in an efficient transport infrastructure and is a key transport hub on the European north-south axis. Through its policy of shifting traffic from road to rail it is pursuing a key strategic goal. In addition, participation in the EU's road and rail transport market is important for the Swiss economy and the country's supply. It is therefore important that factors specific to Switzerland are taken into account and that its achievements and participation in the EU transport market are safeguarded in the long term.

These aspects are regulated by the Land Transport Agreement with the EU. The Land Transport Agreement relates exclusively to cross-border passenger and freight transport, both by road and rail. Purely national transport (long-distance, regional and local transport) is not covered. The Land Transport Agreement makes it possible to coordinate transport policy with the EU and defines, for example, common technical standards, type approval and social regulations.

The Land Transport Agreement also secures important exemptions for Switzerland, such as the ban on lorries driving on Sundays and at night and the performance-related heavy goods vehicle charge (HGVC). This plays a part in shifting traffic from road to rail, which is enshrined in the Federal Constitution, and is important for financing rail infrastructure.

Key elements

State aid rules

As a public service, domestic public transport is exempt from the state aid rules. This means that the tried-and-tested financing of domestic public transport remains unchanged (see also factsheet on *state aid*).

The outcome of the negotiations also provides for important exceptions to the dynamic adoption of EU law within the scope of the Land Transport Agreement in the following areas.

Opening up international rail passenger transport

In future, EU railway undertakings will be able to independently offer cross-border rail connections to Switzerland. Likewise, Swiss undertakings will be able to offer their own cross-border connections abroad. However, the opening will be conducted in a controlled manner so that key success factors of the Swiss public transport system continue to be protected:

- EU railway undertakings must comply with Swiss wage and working conditions for their activities on sections of track in Switzerland.
- The priority of the Swiss regular-interval timetable was secured: EU railway undertakings can only offer international connections to Switzerland if capacity (train paths) is available for the Swiss section of the route. National regular-interval passenger train services (regular-interval timetable) and national freight services have priority, and their train paths are secured. In return, the EU member states can also give their undertakings priority on their networks if Swiss companies want to operate independent services in the EU.

- In the annual timetable process, international passenger transport is prioritised when allocating remaining train path capacity in Switzerland.
- The allocation of train paths remains in Swiss hands and cooperation in cross-border rail passenger transport (e.g. SBB with DB, SNCF or Trenitalia) is still possible without restriction.
- EU railway undertakings that also carry out transport operations on Swiss sections of the network as an ancillary service to an international service (cabotage) may be required to integrate into the Swiss fares system. They must therefore recognise the GA and Half Fare travelcards, for example.

Further exceptions in public transport

- In rail transport, the Swiss instruments for train path planning and safeguarding (network usage concept/network usage plans) were legally secured vis-à-vis the EU. These are planning instruments that can be used to reserve train paths for national needs in the long term. This ensures that freight transport will continue to have sufficient secured train paths.
- Furthermore, Switzerland will still be able to award cross-border rail tenders directly and therefore, in contrast to the rules in the EU, is not required to issue public tenders.

Cross-border road transport

The outcome of the negotiations also protects a number of elements in road transport, which are excluded from the dynamic alignment of legislation:

- A maximum of 40-tonne HGVs will continue to be permitted in Switzerland. This would remain the case even if Longer Heavier Vehicles or LHVs (up to 60 tonnes) were approved in the EU.
- In commercial road transport, vehicles registered abroad may only continue to offer cross-border transport of passengers and goods and not those with origin and destination in Switzerland (cabotage ban).
- The ban on HGVs driving at night and on Sundays remains in place.
- The implementation of the constitutional provision on the Alpine Initiative remains unaffected (no expansion of road capacity through the Alps).
- The EU accepts the HGVC with defined maximum possible rates. In addition, Switzerland can further develop the HGVC without having to amend the Land Transport Agreement. This will strengthen the policy of shifting traffic from road to rail.

The amendments to the Land Transport Agreement allow for a secure long-term and more in-depth cooperation between Switzerland and the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA). Switzerland can therefore play an active role in shaping the European railway landscape.

Implementation in Switzerland

The federal government is drawing up a directive to ensure that international rail passenger transport service providers comply with Swiss wage and working conditions for their activities on sections of track in Switzerland. The trade unions and employee associations in the public transport sector are closely involved in this process.

The directive is intended to serve as a benchmark for the Federal Office of Transport (FOT) when reviewing licence and permit applications to ensure that wage and working conditions are in line with industry practice. The requirements include compliance with the Working Hours Act and industry-standard wages as well as social and insurance benefits.

Certain amendments to the Railways Act and the Passenger Transport Act are necessary to implement the amendments to the Land Transport Agreement. For example, the Swiss regulatory authority for rail transport (RailCom) will be authorised to check, upon request, whether the main purpose of a cross-border rail service offered by an EU railway undertaking is actually international passenger transport and not national transport.

Importance for Switzerland

The Agreement secures Swiss undertakings important integration into and participation in the EU road and rail transport market. Cross-border transport works according to standardised rules and runs smoothly.

The planned opening of international rail passenger transport, as envisaged under the outcome of the negotiations, will take place under defined framework conditions so that the high quality of the Swiss public transport system is not impaired. At the same time, the opening will create the conditions for customers to benefit from additional cross-border transport services.

The relationship between Switzerland and the EU in Land transport can be continuously developed and made fit for the future. At the same time, important Swiss achievements in public transport and the constitutionally enshrined policy of shifting traffic from road to rail will be safeguarded in the long term.

Specifically

- **Additional rail connections:** Two students from Bern have been planning a city trip to Munich for some time. Flying is out of the question for them. They buy a ticket from Cheaptrain, a railway undertaking based in Germany that recently started offering services on the Bern – Munich route. The train service operates late in the evening, as the Swiss rail network is already at full capacity during the day. They may not arrive in Munich until after midnight, but the journey is good value and the half-fare travelcard is valid on the Swiss section of the route.