

SBB Cargo International presents itself as the "Alpazähler" (Alp-tamer)

New-look locos for the Gotthard Base Tunnel

In just over a year, on 11 December 2016, the big day will be upon us: the world's longest tunnel – the Gotthard Base Tunnel – will be taken into service. To mark this occasion SBB Cargo International, the leading railfreight company on the main north-south corridor, is exhibiting a new design for its locomotives at the Eifeltor freight terminal in Cologne on 14 August 2015.

At Cologne Eifeltor, the Swiss railfreight company SBB Cargo International is exhibiting the first of nine locomotives being given the "Alpazähler" look. This is a brand name coined by the Swiss company SBB Cargo International from the dialect words for "Alps" and "tamer". It conveys the fact that the 57-kilometre Gotthard Base Tunnel will have overcome the barrier that the Alps have presented to freight traffic up to now. SBB Cargo International is the leading Swiss railfreight company on the North-South corridor.

In his presentation, Michail Stahlhut, CEO of SBB Cargo International, will explain the benefits that "taming the Alps" will generate for freight traffic: On this route deep under the Alps, SBB Cargo International will benefit from the highest possible clearance profiles. At its deepest point, the track is 2300 metres below the mountain summits overhead. Completion of this "4-metre corridor" will substantially improve the competitiveness of rail freight. Some 20 other tunnels along the North-South route are being enlarged to accommodate rail-borne semi-trailers requiring 4 metres of headroom. 400,000 trailers per year are set to switch to rail, and the railway companies are expecting their market share to grow by 50%. "It'll be easier for us to haul heavier trains. With train loads averaging 1,600 tonnes, we are looking forward to a 29% increase in capacity", says Michail Stahlhut. By 2020, trains of up to 2,000 tonnes – i.e. as heavy as those travelling in lowland areas – will be able to pass through the tunnel. The Gotthard Base Tunnel will allow the premier railfreight company to haul trains that are up to 175 metres longer than those currently travelling the route, which will be shorted by 31 km. "With the inauguration of the Gotthard Base Tunnel, SBB Cargo International will be travelling deeper down with higher profiles, and will haul heavier and longer trains in shorter journey times". That's how Michail Stahlhut summed up the benefits accruing to freight traffic from this engineering feat of the century. He also stressed, however, that high expectations are justifiably being placed in the infrastructure: these must provide the stability that is essential to ensuring efficient operation. "Rail is the future".

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