

BUNDESAMT FÜR VERKEHR
OFFICE FÉDÉRAL DES TRANSPORTS
UFFICIO FEDERALE DEI TRASPORTI
FEDERAL OFFICE OF TRANSPORT

The Swiss-EC Land Transport Agreement as a base for an Alpine Transport Policy

Since trans-alpine traffic in the narrow valleys of the Alps is a major political issue in Switzerland and sources of this traffic are found mostly abroad, the Swiss government has sought to come to an transport agreement with the neighbouring countries resp. with the EC.

The agreement

The Land Transport Agreement constitutes a part of seven bilateral agreements between the Swiss Confederation and the European Community. It envisages a coordinated land transport policy.

The objective of the agreement is to stimulate sustainable mobility and environmental protection. In addition it shall support an efficient traffic flow by ensuring the free choice of transport means. The continuation of the ban on night driving of heavy vehicles is assured as well as the ban on driving on Sundays.

The main point of the agreement is the raise of the Swiss weight limit for heavy vehicles from 28 tonnes to 34 tonnes in 2001 and to 40 tonnes in 2005. At the same time road duties are raised.

The agreement will work together with different measures of the Swiss transport policy. These measures comprise e.g. the milage related heavy vehicles tax, the two new rail links through the Alps and the railways reform. This policy will lead to a successive medium term transfer of freight traffic from road to rail. The requirement for a modal shift is stipulated in the Swiss Consitutional Article on the Protection of the Alps.

The decision process

Until recently transport relationships between the European Community and Switzerland were based upon the Agreement about Freight Transport on Road and Rail, the so called Transit Agreement. This agreement concerned the cooperation in rail traffic and certain easements for road transport.

The access to the road transport market is regulated in bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU member states.

In December 1992 the Swiss rejected the European Economic Area treaty. So the government approached the EC with the proposal to begin bilateral negotiations on the basis of the mentioned Transit Agreement.

In its negotiating mandate of March 1995 the EC raised the question of the access of 40-tonnes vehicles to Switzerland. Until recently maximum weight of trucks was 28 tonnes. Consequently the scope of the future agreement was extended to the domain of a coordinated alpine transport policy.

Finally the contracting parties included additionally the question of free access to railway and road markets into the discussions.

In April 1996 the Swiss Federal Council decided upon a paradigm shift. The 28-tonnes limit for heavy vehicles in Switzerland was suspended. This was an indispensable prerequisite for the continuation and conclusion of the negotiations with the EC. In return Switzerland achieved the simultaneous increase in weight limits and in road duties.

In fall of 1996 the objective was to elaborate an agreement which contained the principles of a coordinated transport policy which delayed the fixing of precise numerical values to a later date. However, this idea was rejected by the European Transport Council. The Commission submitted different other proposals which included the fixing of a ceiling for charges for transit traffic through Switzerland and the access to the Swiss central region for 40-tonnes vehicles.

The politically most important question of the land transport dossier rose in spring 1997: the fixing of the amount of duties. This charge should contain different tariffs. For a transit ride of a 40-tonnes vehicle from Basle to Chiasso the tariff should be based on the weighted average of the truck fleet circulating in Switzerland and on the EURO motor emission category.

In fall of 1997 Switzerland specified its offer to negotiate with proposals for road duties, contingents for 40-tonnes vehicles and the safeguard clauses. After intense negotiations Switzerland and the European Commission, with support of the British presidency, were able to make the compromise of Kloten.

Main element of the compromise was the fixing of the tariff for a trans-alpine ride. This ride of 300 kilometers for a 40-tonnes vehicle would cost CHF 325 as soon as the first base tunnel is operational but at the latest on January 1, 2008. During the meeting of the Transport Council in March 1998 this compromise could not be accepted because of the salvo of certain member states.

Prerequisites for the following political decision to finalise the negotiations were

- the acceptance of the law regarding the mileage-related heavy vehicle tax by the Swiss people in September,
- the acceptance of the law about financing mechanisms of infrastructure for public transport in November

- and the results of the Councils of Transport and Foreign Ministers.

On the occasion of the Transport Council meeting in Bruxelles negotiations were finalized and materialised into the Land Transport Agreement during the night of November 30, 1998.

In the period between February 1999 and February 2002 initialisation and signing of the agreement took place and the approval by the Swiss and European Parliaments as well as by the Council of the European Union was achieved.

In the referendum concerning the seven agreements between Switzerland and the EC a share of 67.2% of the voting Swiss accepted the agreement in May 2000. Although the bilateral agreements will enter into force on June 1, 2002 only, Switzerland has implemented the content of the Land Transport Agreement as of January 1, 2001.

Since then Swiss transport policy has received a new impulse by introducing of the mileage related heavy vehicle tax, by the general increase of the weight limit für heavy vehicles to 34 tonnes as well as by provision of contingents for 40-tonnes vehicle trips.

In addition there are several new or changed laws, e.g. the Traffic Transfer Regulations, the regulations concerning Transport Contingents and changes of the Road Traffic Law. The mentioned Swiss Traffic Transfer Regulation aims at a modal shift in trans-alpine freight transport towards the use of rail. Objective of this regulation is to reduce the number of heavy vehicle road trips from 1.4 million in the year 2000 to 650,000 trips in 2009.

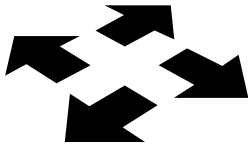
First results and outlook

What happened in the first year of the application of the new bundle of measures? Growth of trans-alpine road traffic could be slowed down in 2001 as a result of these measures. A theoretical three percent growth was calculated for the last year without regarding the blockage of the Gotthard road tunnel from October to December. Compared to the long standing average growth of 7 to 8% p. a. this result is encouraging. Thus the aspired disruption of the trend could be achieved, although the weakening economic situation contributed to this development. In reality the traffic of heavy road vehicles decreased by 2.4% as a result of the serious road accident in October 2001.

Other favorable results are a good take-off of the Rolling Road with a utilisation of about 70%, and the growing international acceptance of the Swiss transport modell.

During the next years the transfer process which is based on the Land Transport Agreement will reach an awkward transition phase. The road tax will reach its final level as soon as the first base tunnel will be operational, but at the latest on January 1, 2008. At this time the competetiveness of the railroad will receive an additional increase. However, this must be supported by combined efforts of the transportation companies and the governments concerned to rise quality and effectiveness in rail transport.

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Biographical Note

Hauke Fehlberg

born January 24, 1959 in Hamburg, Germany

married, two daughters, lives in Basle, Switzerland

Studies: 1978 – 1986 Agriculture and International Agricultural Development at Göttingen University and at the Technical University of Berlin; Master of Sciences in Agriculture; postgraduate studies at the Center for Advanced Training in Rural Development, Berlin

Employment:

- 1986/88 Associate Professional Officer at the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN in Rome, Italy
- 1988/90: several assignments to technical cooperation projects in Africa and the Near East
- 1990 – 1998: head of the environment department of a civil engineering company in Switzerland; responsible for environmental and territorial planning issues of the Lötschberg Base Railway Tunnel
- 1998 – 2001: member of the executive board of a Swiss civil engineering company, head of environmental, security, geology and immission control department; responsible for environmental issues of the Gotthard Base Railway Tunnel
- since 2001: staff member at The Director's Office of the Swiss Federal Office of Transport, dealing with strategy development, national and international freight transport, national rail research coordination