

# Worldwide

## Austria

### St. Gotthard railway seeking to become a World Heritage Site

#### Kilian T. Elsasser, Head of the industrial heritage committee, ICOMOS Suisse

Since the St. Gotthard base tunnel is due to be opened for railway service in 2016, several organizations and communities along the railway line have come together to talk about the future of the St. Gotthard transportation landscape. The base tunnel will connect the regions north and south of the Alps without the need climbing up the mountain on either side. More goods and passengers can be transported through the Alps in a much shorter time than with the existing railway. The new base tunnel that connects Erstfeld directly with Biasca (Ticino) will measure 57 km, not only exceeding the old St. Gotthard tunnel by more than 40 km but also becoming the longest railway tunnel of the world. The historical St. Gotthard tunnel was finished in the 1880s. It is a highly valued pioneer work and forms the centrepiece of the historical railway through the Alps. Due to the opening of the new base tunnel, new transportation capacities will emerge for the old railway line. With this change of significance comes the chance to open up this region for tourism. The historical railway line will be in function continuously.

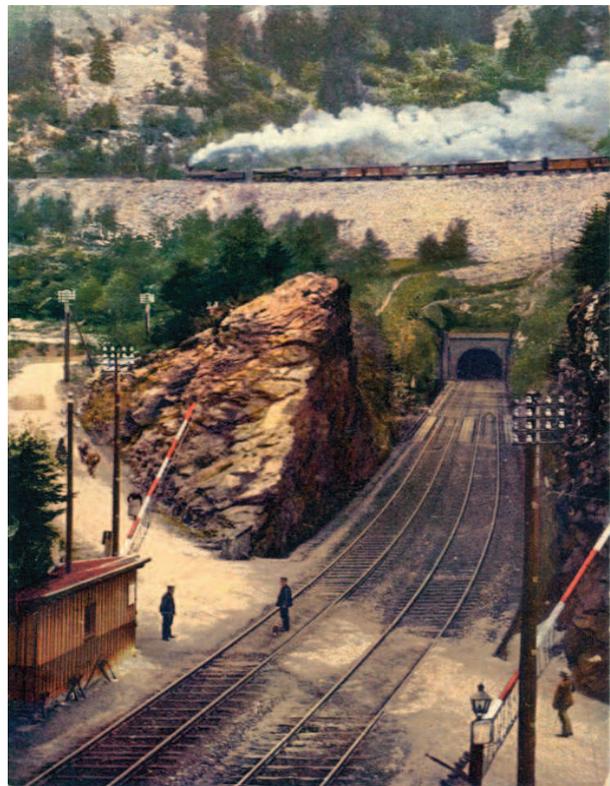
At the conference on the future of the St. Gotthard Transportation landscape the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) presented their timetable concept for the future of the historical railway. After the opening of the new base tunnel it will unfortunately be mandatory to change trains in Erstfeld, if you are heading to a destination situated between Erstfeld and Biasca such as Andermatt.

In September 2013, ICOMOS Suisse invited more than one hundred experts to discuss and think through possible futures for this special railway line. The president of the Council of States, Filippo Lombardi, stressed the importance of the historical railway line for the touristic opening of the region between Biasca and Erstfeld.

To achieve such a development it is indispensable to get labelled by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The Federal Cultural Office basically supports a candidature. The advice of the Office is to focus the candidature on the railway line, which is the most important monument. The St. Gotthard railway line could be put on the tentative list not earlier than 2016 but there are still

many open questions concerning the authenticity of material aspects of the line. Those doubts concern primarily the encased concrete bridges and noise abatement walls.

According to Hans Amacker, director of the Rhaetian Railway, a candidature would intensify the awareness of the residents to live in a unique region. Hans Amacker knows what he is talking about, since the Albula-Bernina Railway line was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2008. He admits that due to this honor the processes of renewing the infrastructure get more complex. But nevertheless the marketing quality overweighs these expenditures. Retrospectively the Rhaetian Railway would not hesitate to present its World Heritage Site candidature again.



Picture postcard from around 1900. The Freggio helical tunnel is one of four such tunnels on the southern slope of the Gottard railway line. In the postcard the tunnel entrance is in the middle of the picture and the train which has just emerged has gained about 80 m in height around the helix.

Postcard from Roland Arnet.

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