

Construction audit of Bern railway station

Regional Transport Bern-Solothurn

Key facts

Bern railway station is reaching its limit as regards operating capacity and space. The company Regional Transport Bern-Solothurn (RBS) is currently building a new RBS station in Bern. At the same time, Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) is building a new underground passage, the "Mitte" underpass. The project for the new RBS station in Bern involves the construction of a new subterranean station 17 metres below the existing platforms 2 to 7 of SBB. Trains will access it through a new tunnel around 1km in length.

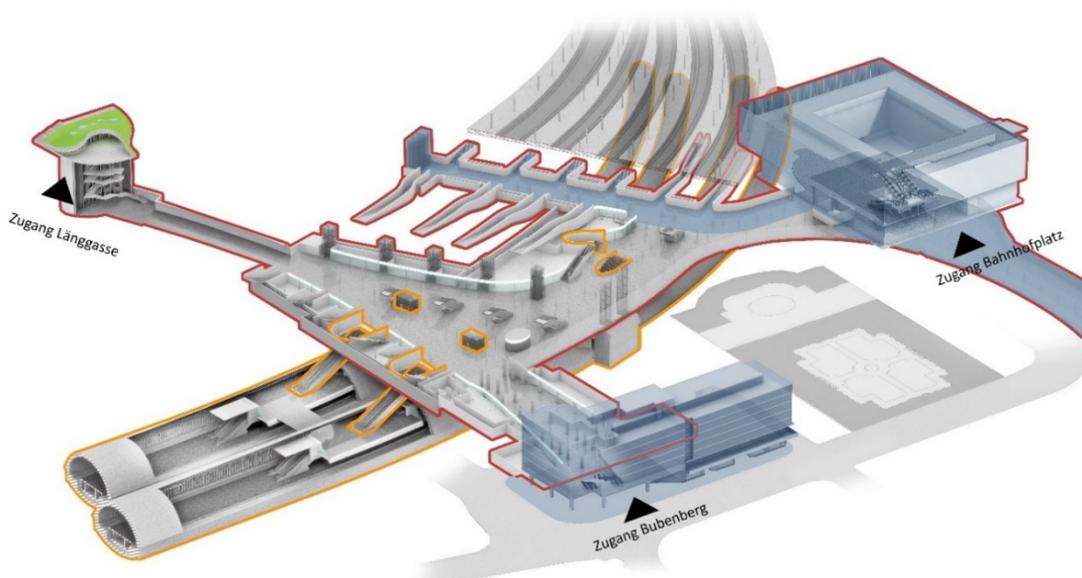


Figure 1: Cutaway diagram showing the future Bern station, with the SBB underpasses (red) and the future RBS subterranean station (orange); source: RBS/Zukunft Bahnhof Bern

The audit by the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) focused on RBS's project management and steering. The audit found that there was room for improvement as regards steering, management tools and cost transparency.

Total costs are around 25% higher and the start of operations will be just under four years later than originally agreed

The financing arrangement stipulates that RBS's Bern station extension should cost CHF 600 million and go into operation in the fourth quarter of 2025. At the time of the audit, the planned total costs were around CHF 750 million, and the start of operations had been pushed back to mid-2029. In February 2022, after the audit had been performed, RBS reported total costs of CHF 731 million.

The statements on costs and schedules in the financing arrangement were not reliable. In addition, the complexity of the project was hugely underestimated. This meant that, while the project was ongoing, remedial work took place, changes were made and the project owner at RBS redid its project organisation.

In future, cost transparency must be improved. There must be active reporting of final costs and the date for the start of operations. Changing risks and project modifications must be integrated into the final costs on an ongoing and transparent basis.

The project owner's project organisation works well, but there is still room for improvement in steering

The project owner has had a stable and smoothly functioning project organisation since 2018. The heavily centralised focus on the overall project manager should be split up for the next phase, in order to ensure greater division of tasks and functions, and to reduce the dependence on a single person. Individual roles must be more precisely defined and be actively integrated into the project.

Moreover, project steering in the next phase should be reinforced with an expanded project manual that is binding for all external project participants.

Risk and quality management and project change management could be improved and made more systematic

The project owner's risk management is not applied strictly and consistently. This situation needs to be clarified. Currently, quality management is implemented only during the execution phase. There is no project-specific quality management as yet.

Project changes are monitored at RBS. However, the company does not use project change management as a management tool.

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