

Audit of the GITA project

Alliance SwissPass, Federal Office of Transport and Swiss Federal Railways

Key facts

The tariff system for public transport in Switzerland, with its 250 different transport companies and 18 regional transport networks, is complex. The fact that there are two different tariff systems complicates matters further. While the so-called "national direct transport" is charged according to the distance travelled, the transport networks use the zones travelled through. By law, the providers are obliged to offer a single through ticket for a journey. This results in time-consuming and costly calculations and system maintenance. The public transport sector has sovereignty over the tariff system and it has the power to simplify it. The GITA (*Grobkonzept eines integrierten Tarifsystems*, "Initial concept for an integrated tariff system") project, launched by the industry organisation Alliance SwissPass (ASP), is an important first step towards the harmonisation of the tariff system requested by the Federal Office of Transport (FOT).

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) found that the GITA project is well on the way to creating a sustainable conceptual basis. However, the industry is still far from implementing an integrated tariff system. In the SFAO's view, the complicated structures, the ASP's lack of the right to issue instructions to the transport networks and the absence of a financial incentive for transport companies entitled to payment represent major hurdles.

In addition to the expected revenue and customer impact, a concrete savings target is needed

The SFAO examined whether the GITA project had included the relevant stakeholder groups. The ASP and the project management team engage in active stakeholder management. The project pays particular attention to the inclusion of service purchasers (especially the Confederation and the cantons). Thanks to the dedicated "purchaser" support group, this interest group can assert its justified influence as the main body responsible for public transport. The developed concept, with its focus on an eTariff, is broadly supported and is intended to meet the challenges presented by digitalisation.

As the GITA project had not yet been completed at the time of the audit, the SFAO could not comment on the initial concept document. However, it takes a critical view of the implementation phase. The impact on revenue allocation will not become apparent until the implementation phase, and the lack of resistance observed so far may not last. In addition, there is little incentive for eligible transport companies entitled to payment to accept changes, as the costs are covered by the Confederation and the cantons. The SFAO recommends that the ASP define a concrete savings target for the GITA project's execution phase in order to increase the impetus for the introduction of an integrated tariff system and to strengthen its binding nature.

The governance problem runs all the way through to the operational level

The strategy council, as the governing body of the ASP and the decision-making body for the GITA project, does not have the authority to issue instructions to the regional transport networks. The SFAO sees this as a significant obstacle to the introduction of a new tariff model.

In response to the Reynard postulate¹, the FOT initiated the process of adapting the legislation and governance as a whole. The SFAO therefore did not make a recommendation in this regard.

The clarification concerning the rights of the ASP and SBB, its agent, to access the distribution channels of the IT distribution platform NOVA cannot be delayed. The ASP and its mandated operator, SBB, are thus exposed to increased security risks. The SFAO recommends that the ASP establish cross-platform governance to ensure the indispensable right to issue instructions.

Follow-up audit on recommendations: a comprehensive authorisation concept is still missing

The SFAO also audited the implementation of four recommendations made to SBB in 2019². The SFAO found that the recommendation for a comprehensive authorisation concept had not yet been satisfactorily implemented. SBB has set up an internal control system (ICS) for the NOVA platform and has thus implemented the recommendation in its narrower sense. However, as the platform owner, the ASP must better integrate the ICS into the business processes.

Following the SFAO audit of NOVA, third parties conducted additional audits of the platform. The SFAO observed that the shortcomings identified in these audits with regard to business continuity management and cyber-risks indicate a need for further action on the part of the ASP, as the owner of NOVA.

Original text in German

¹ 19.4199 – For affordable and well-coordinated public transport, submitted on 26 September 2019

² "Audit of the IT platform NOVA for public transport" (audit mandate 19231), available on the SFAO website (www.sfao.admin.ch).