



Audit of the financial potential gained through partial or total closures for rail maintenance

Audit at the Federal Office of Transport, BLS Netz AG, Südostbahn and Swiss Federal Railways

Key facts

With the 2017-2020 service level agreements, the Confederation makes about CHF 13.2 billion available to infrastructure operators (IO) for financing operations and maintaining the asset value of rail infrastructure. The IOs are responsible for the efficient operation and maintenance of the infrastructure. Based on the Subsidies Act among other legislation, the Confederation expects the operators to use the resources made available to them economically. Tied in with these expectations, the IOs should lower costs with adjusted investment strategies (such as closure of sections instead of maintenance "during normal operations").

Against this backdrop, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) wanted to establish what the financial potential of a cluster (bundling of projects/measures to exploit synergies) with total closure is. To do this, it analysed one cluster each at BLS Netz AG, Südostbahn AG and Swiss Federal Railways that had been implemented and invoiced. The actual costs of these three clusters amount to some CHF 44 million.

Development of clusters difficult to understand

Two of the three invoiced clusters revealed savings of 10%. The third project produced additional costs of about 15% which can be justified however (e.g. technical aspects, failures with awards, unforeseeable events, planning inaccuracies). The greatest lever for making savings in all clusters proved to be the optimised use of rail construction machines.

In the lead-up to the clusters, all IOs examined different interval variations (such as an 8-hour day interval, an 8-hour night interval, or complete closure). However, the interval chosen was not always the most economical. The decision in favour of a complete closure was based on the one hand on qualitative aspects (e.g. single-track line, quality of construction, safety, and acceptance) and on the other on the IOs' need to gain experience with this instrument.

Impact of clustering with total closure must be raised

The three clusters with total closure analysed show that savings cannot be expected per se. The IOs are constantly working on optimising their interval plans in order to obtain a better impact in rail maintenance. As the SFAO sees it, the Federal Office of Transport, as a supervisory authority, should systematically monitor the clustering. Based on these results, the economical use of this instrument together with trains should be optimised further.

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