

Audit of the supervision of cableways with a focus on the financing of dismantling installations

Federal Office of Transport

Key facts

At the end of 2021, around 2,450 cableway installations were in operation in Switzerland. Of these, around 660 have a federal licence and are under the supervision of the Federal Office of Transport (FOT). As part of regional passenger transport (RPT), 34 cableways are jointly ordered and paid for by the federal government and the cantons. The cantons are responsible for the licensing and supervision of the remaining cableways.

If cableway installations are permanently decommissioned, they must be removed at the owner's expense in accordance with Article 19 of the Federal Act on Cableways for Passenger Transport. The ongoing climate change means that it is increasingly likely that cableway installations at low and medium altitudes will have to be decommissioned due to a lack of snow.

Against this backdrop, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined whether the supervision of cableways, with a focus on dismantling installations, is risk-oriented and comprehensive. The SFAO conducted a parallel audit together with the cantonal audit offices of Lucerne, St Gallen, Valais and Vaud. The SFAO audited the FOT and the cantonal audit offices examined the supervisory authorities of the cableways with cantonal licences.

Supervision is organised similarly at both federal levels. The competent supervisory authorities have cableway databases. In accordance with the provisions of subsidy legislation, financial supervision only applies to cableway companies that receive public funds. However, the risk that the state will have to contribute to the dismantling costs of permanently decommissioned cableways is low.

The FOT's supervision of cableways is working – potential co-financing for the dismantling of installations needs to be clarified

The FOT keeps records of the supervised cableway companies and their installations in different databases due to different information requirements. A comparison of the database information shows marginal deviations (e.g. different status), which can, nevertheless, be explained. There are no indications that the cableway directories are incomplete.

In the case of cableways with access functions (RPT), the financial supervision of cableway companies is established via concepts and risk analyses. Cableways without an access function are not explicitly subject to financial supervision, as they do not receive any public financial support, in principle. The safety-related monitoring of cableway installations with a federal licence is ensured during the operating phase on a risk-oriented basis.

To date, all permanently decommissioned cableway installations were dismantled by the cableway owners without a federal contribution. In the case of cableways without an access function, an internal FOT legal opinion confirmed that a federal contribution to dismantling costs is excluded. For regional passenger transport cableways, cost sharing must be examined on a case-by-case basis and cannot be completely ruled out. The SFAO made a recommendation to clarify this issue.

The cantonal authorities supervise the cableway companies – low risk of cantons participating in dismantling costs

In general, the results of the survey of the cantonal supervisory authorities are consistent with the SFAO's audit findings.

The cantonal supervisory authorities maintain cableway directories. There is still room for improvement in terms of data quality.

There is no legal basis for the implementation of general financial supervision of cableway companies. Subsidised cableway companies are subject to supervision under subsidy law. The safety supervision of cableway installations during the operating phase is delegated to the Intercantonal Concordat for Cableways and Ski Lifts. Implementation is risk-orientated.

If a cableway owner is unable to finance the dismantling, the principle of accession comes into play: the landowner must bear the costs. If the landowner is also unable to pay, the cantons do not rule out the possibility that they or the communes will have to pay for the dismantling. However, the risk of having to contribute to any dismantling costs is considered to be low.

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