AUDIT

Audit of the railway infrastructure fund's financial planning

Federal Office of Transport

KEY FACTS

In Switzerland, the infrastructure managers (e.g. SBB, BLS, etc.) are responsible for operating their railway infrastructure, as well as maintaining its quality and expanding it, under the supervision of the Federal Office of Transport (FOT). For its part, the FOT is responsible for managing the railway infrastructure fund (RIF) and thus for the financing of operating costs, quality maintenance and network expansion.

Around CHF 6 billion is deposited in the RIF every year, coming from federal funds (taxes and levies) and cantonal contributions. These deposits finance both the operation of the infrastructure and the maintenance of its quality (some 4 bn in 2025), as well as its expansion (about 1 bn in 2025). The latest RIF plan approved by the Federal Council in September 2025 envisages long-term negative equity from the end of 2028 onwards, which would be contrary to the law. This is one of the reasons why the Federal Council is redefining the next steps in the expansion of the railway infrastructure as part of the "Transport '45" project.

Against this backdrop, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the processes associated with the RIF's long-term financial planning. The audit revealed that the FOT has taken significant measures to better identify the challenges and find solutions for the RIF's financial situation. Nevertheless, in view of the amounts involved, the financial planning processes and the reporting instruments are not yet sufficiently developed. The SFAO also found inaccuracies in the figures used for long-term planning.

The financial planning process is still weak, and reporting does not shed enough light on significant uncertainties

Long-term financial planning involves collecting and processing data, and preparing the elements needed to produce reports to support decision-making by the Federal Administration and Parliament.

However, the SFAO believes that the FOT's processes, responsibilities and controls are insufficiently defined. These shortcomings are to the detriment of the clarity required by the Federal Administration and Parliament, which do not have sufficiently transparent information to make informed decisions. In particular, the SFAO recommends that the degree of uncertainty in the RIF forecasts be presented transparently by adding ranges based on scenarios.

While the quality of projections is insufficient, it is improving

Between 2025 and 2045, the FOT plans to spend CHF 88 billion on maintaining infrastructure quality. In the absence of a robust methodology for determining this amount, the SFAO notes the high degree of uncertainty in this forecast, as already identified in an earlier audit in 2022. In view of the legal priority given to maintaining quality over expansion, an increase in requirements for maintaining infrastructure quality would reduce the funds available for expansion by the same amount.

A number of expansion projects already under way will continue to be carried out. They involve expenditure of some CHF 13 billion between 2025 and 2045. In addition, around CHF 40 billion is needed for projects currently being analysed, whereas the FOT has only CHF 14 billion, or CHF 24 billion if the Constitution is amended. This situation means that the FOT is obliged to prioritise its expansion projects, or even to abandon some of them. The SFAO noted inaccuracies in the consideration of inflation and economic growth, as well as in data transfer.

The data provided by the FOT, which was used by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich[4] for prioritisation in the context of "Transport '45", does not include inflation-related costs for all projects. These costs – in the region of several billion Swiss francs – could substantially reduce the financing capacity for expansion projects, thereby requiring even stricter prioritisation within the framework of the "Transport '45" project.

[4] ETHZ expert report "DETEC: Transport '45" of 15 September 2025. Prof. Ulrich A. Weidmann, Dr Michael Nold