

## 2.b.10 The railway as important influencing factor for the development of tourism

There was some tourist activity in the valleys along the main routes, particularly in the Upper Engadin, before the Albula and Bernina Railway (1903/04 and 1908/10) opened them up to tourism. The new rail connections improved the accessibility of the region enormously, which was reflected in a great increase in the number of guests. As elsewhere, the demand for tourism in Graubünden was subject to considerable fluctuations over the past 100 years. It has become apparent that the Upper Engadin railway brought and brings the greatest economic benefits to the area. Various major events, particularly in sports (e.g. the Winter Olympic Games, the Engadin Skimarathon, World and European Championships in various disciplines) would be unthinkable without the Rhaetian Railway to provide the transport.

### Railway – an impetus to tourism in Graubünden

Until the mid-19th century, tourism in Graubünden – then usually referred to as ‘visitor traffic’ – had little significance as an economic factor. It focussed, on the one hand on transit traffic across the passes of Graubünden, on the other on spa cures where the various spa bathing and therapy institutions provided the infrastructure. Alvaneu, St. Moritz and Le Prese were renowned spas in the Albula/Bernina catchment area. New medical findings on the curative effects of the mountain climate represented one factor contributing to the rapid development of tourism after the middle of the century, while the boom in winter sports was another. Previously relatively modest farming villages like Davos, Arosa, St. Moritz and Pontresina developed into smart destinations where the jet set from all over Europe would congregate.

Rail development in Graubünden largely took place against this background: easy access to the resorts, nature and landscape was to be assured for the tourists. The Graubünden narrow gauge rail network would never have been built so quickly – if at all – without impulses (and the prospect of

profit!) from tourism. However, the railway-tourism relationship works both ways. It is uncontested that tourism has only been able to develop so well in Graubünden because a rail link ensured rapid, safe and reasonably priced access to the tourist destinations. Rail access meant that the major population centres in Switzerland and other countries, and thus potential holiday guests, ‘moved closer’ to Graubünden. Chur could already be reached by rail by 1858. With the “Engadin Express” Pullman train which started operation in 1895 (eight years before the Albula railway!) the cantonal capital of Chur could be reached from London in just 24 hours, and from Calais on the French side of the Channel in less than 20 hours. However, the rest of the journey from Chur to St. Moritz took at least 13 ½ hours. The railway cut the time for the trip from Chur into the Engadin dramatically.

Unfortunately there are few interesting tourism statistics for the Albula/Bernina catchment area in the period around the turn of the century, and these are not based on uniform sources. However, in the case of St. Moritz, we do know that the hotels there already had 4,000 beds in 1900; when all were occupied the number of guests was already two and a

half times the number of inhabitants – which was then 1,600. The rail link gave tourism a new, powerful boost. Ten years after the Albula Railway came into operation, St. Moritz already had 6,000 beds for guests.

### Tourism-induced population growth

A glance at the population growth in the region accessed by the Albula Railway (1903/04) and the Bernina Railway (1908/10) shows the following pattern:

Area	1888	1910	Index (1888 = 100)
Railway communities, Albula Valley (Thusis, Sils i.D., Tiefencastel, Surava, Alvaneu, Filisur, Bergün/Bravuogn)	3,065	3,705	121
Railway communities, Upper Engadin (Bever, Samedan, Celerina, St. Moritz, Pontresina)	2,510	6,390	255
Railway communities, Poschiavo Valley (Poschiavo, Brusio)	4,107	4,996	122
Rest of Canton Graubünden	85,128	101,978	120

Compared to developments in other parts of the canton, the Albula and Poschiavo regions in the period under consideration showed only slightly above-average population growth; in contrast, the population in the Engadin villages, now accessible both from the north and from the south, doubled in the same period.

Naturally it is questionable whether the population growth in the various areas can be attributed directly and exclusively to the rail access. Could there be other reasons for the over-proportional growth rate of the Engadin communities accessed by the railway? Even if this cannot be ruled out with absolute certainty, there are unmistakable indicators that the presence or absence of rail access to a community did play a significant role with respect to prosperity: thus, for example, the two villages of Sils in Engadin and Silvaplana, immediately adjacent to St. Moritz but without direct rail access, also showed

population growth between 1888 and 1910, but with an index of 122 this was only half as high as in the Upper Engadin communities served by rail.

### Rising rail frequency parallels the growth in tourism

For the time immediately after the opening of the Albula Railway (1903/04) there was a sharp increase in the traffic figures for the Rhaetian Railway:

Key figure	1902	1907	Index (1902=100)
Passengers transported	576,000	1,149,000	199
Kilometres per passenger	10,460,000	27,302,000	261
Goods transported (tonnes)	126,600	220,000	174
Freight-kilometres	3,931,000	9,084,000	231

In view of the relatively low population figure in the valleys served by the Rhaetian Railway at that time (1910: approx. 62,000 persons) the effect of the opening of the Albula stretch on tourism is patent both for the newly accessed regions as well as for the Rhaetian Railway itself.

Unfortunately, the figures in the Bernina Railway annual reports were not as detailed. However, it is clear that in the first full year of operation after the opening of the direct St. Moritz–Tirano line in 1910, some 333,000 passengers and 18,600 tonnes of freight were transported. In view of the low population of the Poschiavo valley (some 5000 inhabitants in 1910) these figures are very impressive; they show clearly the relationship between railway and tourism. The reciprocal dependence can also be demonstrated “negatively” with a glance at economically difficult times. In the pre-war years 1912 and 1913 transport volumes were on a par with 1911, but in 1915 they slumped to barely 75,000 passengers and 12,800 tonnes of freight.

The enormous dependence of tourism on economic and political circumstances is reflected in the growth pattern for overnight stays in St. Moritz:

1900:	125,000
1910:	372,000
1915:	119,000
1920:	211,000

### Development of tourism in the Albula Valley, Upper Engadin and Poschiavo regions

Neither the Albula nor the Bernina Railway were entering territory unknown to tourism when they were opened. In 1905, the hotels, spas and boarding houses in the valleys served by the railway could offer:

	Hotels	Number of beds
Albula Valley (Thusis, Sils i. D., Tiefencastel, Alvaneu, Filisur, Bergün/Bravuogn)	22	880
Upper Engadin (Bever, Samedan, Celerina, St. Moritz, Pontresina)	76	6799
Poschiavo Valley (Poschiavo, Brusio)	14	318



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The railway is the effective “lifeline of tourism” for the Albula Valley. More nostalgia trips with steam driven trains are planned for the future.  
P. Donatsch



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The stretch of road between Preda and Bergün/Bravuogn is closed in winter; it is then converted into a sledge run. The Rhaetian Railway trains bring enthusiasts to the start of the run.  
A. Badrutt

Early tourism in the *Albula Valley* is connected principally with the Bad Alvaneu spa, which enjoyed its peak period in the mid-19th century.

The spa had to close down in 1962 as it was no longer profitable, but was recently revived with the building of a thermal and indoor swimming pool (with adjacent golf course). To date, however, all the hotel beds in the community are in Alvaneu Village.

The construction of the Albula line was at once a threat and an opportunity for trade and tourism in the community of Bergün/Bravuogn. The flourishing traffic with the horse-drawn post coaches – they transported no less than 22,000 passengers in 1900 – was lost and with it the overnight stays of the guests who stopped over to “acclimatise” before moving on into the 400 m higher Engadin or simply because they needed a rest after the rigours of their journey. Consequently many well-established jobs were lost. However, the improved access assured by the railway did eventually boost tourism in Bergün/Bravuogn – even if it developed gradually and was not spared some very hard blows, as shown by the recent temporary closing down of three major hotels. Today tourism in Bergün/Bravuogn is oriented principally to the family holiday segment: the proportion of overnight stays in self-catering accommodation (80 %) is also correspondingly high compared to the cantonal average of 51 %.

In winter, the road over the Albula pass is closed from Preda onwards in view of the very high snow clearance costs and the potential danger to road traffic from avalanches. The commissioning of the Albula railway opened up new ways of utilising the terrain. From 1904 the stretch of road from Bergün/Bravuogn to Preda was used as a bob run during the winter half-year; after World War II it became a sledge run for the general pub-

lic. Since 1973 the Sportbahnen Bergün sports facilities have been offering a wide range of other activities for winter sports fans.

The Rhaetian Railway mountain transport was and is essential to bring people to the 6 km sledge run between Preda and Bergün/Bravuogn. All in all, the railway is now recognised as the “lifeline of tourism” not only in Bergün/Bravuogn but for the whole region. Consequently, since 1999 the marketing concept for the entire Albula valley focuses on activities and attractions particularly close to the railway (cf. 5.h). These include the railway adventure trail along the Preda–Bergün/Bravuogn-Filisur route, the planned railway museum in Bergün/Bravuogn, the impressive model railway in Bergün’s local museum and the planned nostalgia trips on the Davos line with trains pulled by steam locomotives.

The *Engadin* is one of the best-known holiday destinations worldwide, principally due to St. Moritz and Pontresina. Many pioneering steps in tourism were initiated in this region. A “Fremdenverkehrs- und Sommer-Verschönerungsverein” (“Visitor Traffic and Summer Enhancement Association”) was founded very early in St. Moritz, namely in 1864. The first electric lighting in a hotel was installed on the initiative of the famous hotelier Johannes Badrutt in 1879. And the first electric tram in Switzerland did not run in urban surroundings, but linked St. Moritz Spa and St. Moritz Village from 1892. The variety of leisure activities offered in the Engadin was already striking in the 19th century (cf. 2.b.9); they were renewed continually and adapted to the needs of hordes of international guests: in particular, the potential of the winter sports that started to develop in the second half of the 19th century was recognised early. The cableway on Muottas Muragl was built in 1907 and the one from St. Moritz to Chantarella in 1913





St. Moritz > Major sports events like the World Alpine Skiing Championships in 2003 have been and are highlights on the Engadin tourism calendar.  
P. Blarer



Silvaplana > Over 70% of the some 12,000–13,000 participants of the annual Engadin Skimarathon use public transport.  
A. Mettler



Bergün/Bravuogn > The Glacier Express links St. Moritz with Zermatt (Canton Valais) and carries 250,000 passengers every year.  
A. Badrutt

(continued up to Corviglia in 1927). They were followed by Pontresina – Alp Languard (1945), Corviglia – Piz Nair (1955), Bernina – Diavolezza (1956) and Celerina – Saluver (1958). Numerous ski lifts were erected around the mountain railway stations; many of these have recently been replaced by comfortable cable cars that are independent of the terrain and offer protection from the elements.

Various major sports events have marked and still mark the tourist calendar in the Engadin; notable among them were the Olympic Winter Games in 1928 and 1948, the Skimarathon that has been held annually since 1969, the regular European and World Bobsleigh Championships, several World Championships in Alpine and Nordic skiing, World Cup races etc. An increasing number of major cultural events have also become established here.

These events always involve the transport of participants and spectators on a scale that could hardly be managed without the railway. The capacity of the current road network is restricted and expansion faces not only financial problems but clashes increasingly with ecological and even tourism interests. The most recent studies show that 70% of the approximately 12,000 – 13,000 participants of the Engadin Skimarathon use public transport.

The railway is far more than a means of transport appropriate for conveying large numbers of passengers. It offers excursion visitors and holiday guests a more attractive means of planning their trips there and back. The proportion of rail to overall traffic entering the Upper Engadin is very high with 30%. Besides, other resorts and regions can also be visited from the Engadin by rail. The Rhaetian Railway's "Glacier Express" plays a special role here. The train that has been plying regularly between St. Moritz and Zer-

mat in the Canton Valais since 1930 carries over 250,000 passengers a year.

As in the Albula Valley and in the Engadin, the beginnings of tourism in the *Poschiavo Valley* go back to the mid-19th century and the appeal of spas. In 1857 a hotel with therapeutic sulphurous baths was built in Le Prese (today the Hotel Le Prese). However, the Ospizio Bernina hotel on the summit of the Bernina Pass was opened under other auspices; the valley of Poschiavo – often referred to as the Lost Valley – was gradually "discovered" by guests staying in the Engadin. The "Pro Poschiavo" association was already founded in 1903 (followed in 1958 by "Pro Brusio"), with the objective of promoting the hotel trade and marketing the scenic attractions of the valley; the organisation is still active today under the name of "Ente turistico Valposchiavo".

It was the commissioning of the Bernina Railway, realised in various phases between 1908 and 1910, which significantly boosted the attraction of Poschiavo for tourism. The alignment of the track was planned to take the tourist aspects into account i.e. to highlight the spectacular natural drama of the landscape.

Tourism in Poschiavo grew gradually, in step with the highs and lows of national and international economic development, though it was primarily oriented to the summer visitors. The number of hotel overnight stays has more than quintupled since 1947, amounting to some 57,000 today. Guests can enjoy a southern atmosphere in one of the most varied landscapes in Switzerland as well as a number of historic cultural attractions.

The Rhaetian Railway's "Bernina Express" is essential to tourism in the Poschiavo valley. The direct link between Chur, the capital town of Graubünden and the Italian border town of Tirano, commissioned in 1973, now carries 200,000 passengers a year.



The Rhaetian Railway's "Bernina Express" is essential to tourism in the Poschiavo Valley.  
P. Donatsch/Rhaetian Railway



Tirano > The Italian border town of Tirano marks the end of the trip for the "Bernina Express".  
P. Donatsch/Rhaetian Railway



## **Influence of the railway on tourism in**

### **Tirano**

The railway line from Sondrio to Tirano was opened in 1902. Six years later the first Bernina Railway train from Graubünden in Switzerland arrived in Tirano. The construction of the railway gave an impetus to the economy and to the fledgling tourist industry. Tirano developed into an important hub for tourism towards the mountain passes of Stelvio and Bernina. A heavy transport association and two tourist bus companies were founded in the town. There had been a bus link on the road between Tirano and Bormio since 1905.

The railway also provided the impetus for the construction of two important hotels in Tirano: the Hotel Merizzi and the Grand Hotel Tirano (that remained open until the 1980s), both near the railway station. The Grand Hotel was open all the year round. The bus station for post buses to Bormio, S. Caterina, Livigno, Stelvio, Trafoi Merano and Aprica-Ponte di Legno-Tonale is also located here. Both hotels enjoyed the ambience and elegance of early elite tourism, a lifestyle that was in vogue in the Lombardy Alps at the turn of the century. The roads and railway linked these hotels to the spas and clinics of Switzerland and Italy. This network included the hotels at Bellagio, Cadenabbia and Tramezzo on the lake of Como and the high-altitude resorts of Bormio and S. Caterina but connections extended as far as St. Moritz and other resorts further afield like Merano and Nice. In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, Tirano gave its tourists the opportunity of changing direct from the train coming from Nice to that going to St. Moritz on the same platform.