Bienne (CH) - Belfort (F): one line, two worlds

David Asséo, Head of public transport, Canton of Jura (CH)

CROSS-BORDER RAIL CONNECTIONS: fostering cohesion between regions and their citizens 10th & 11th June 2021

11th June Round-table #2: From peripheral regions to 360°
Canton of Jura and Nord-Franche-Comté Metropolitan Area

Total ~400’000 inhab.

A contrasted territory between a french part more densely populated and a less populated swiss side

Strong industrial presence on both sides of the border:
• Automotive and railway industry on the french side
• Micromechanics and watchmaking in Switzerland

A long tradition of cross-border cooperation
The line (Bienne)-Delémont-Delle-Belfort

Swiss side: Delémont to Delle: 40 km;  
A line that has always remained open and modernized

French side: Delle to Belfort: 22 km;  
A line that was closed since 1992

Huge effort over 15 years for a positive reopening decision

97 millions € Opening dec. 2018

BUT…

Difficulties in establishing a coordinated and attractive railway operation and timetable
Two different conceptions for the operations

Swiss part  
- High frequency (each 30’)
- Regularity of schedules (same minutes each hour),
- Nearly no difference between off-peak and peak hours.
- Tight connexions and coordinated with the bus network

Easy-to-read schedule and easy use of public transport

French part  
- Lower frequency (not better than each 60’),
- Irregular schedules, gap in transport supply
- No coordination with the bus lines

Complex and unclear schedule, less attractive
2.5 x more trains on the swiss side

Schedule already low on weekdays in France, and fewer trains on weekends

5’000-7’000 pass./day Delémont-Porrentruy

Supply of public transport creates demand
How can we improve the situation?

F-CH governance has been introduced since 2020

Project “Convergence 2026” is in progress:

• Direct connections, regularity and high frequency for an attractive timetable;

• Technical, political, financial and legal challenges and above all to draw up different political calendars and framework conditions on both sides of the border.
A evident target: two countries one system

Each detail is important:
The transport chain, cross-border or not, is no stronger than its weakest link
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