

Progress in building the Mendrisio – Varese link

The ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of the new Mendrisio – Varese (FMV) railway line took place in the village of Stabio in the southern Swiss canton of Ticino more than two years ago, in December 2008. The building work on the Italian side of the border has made good progress, but on the Swiss section of the line it has actually only just begun.

The total FMV route from Mendrisio to Varese is 17.7 km long, of which 6.6 km are in Switzerland. The really new section of the line from Stabio to Arcisate is 5.7 km long; 2 km of this is on Swiss territory, where a 1.1-km stretch is being built as single track, while the new line on the Italian side has double track throughout. The longitudinal gradient is no more than 22‰. The permissible speed along the route is about 105

km/h. The line is being electrified at 15 kV AC on the Swiss, and at 3 kV DC on the Italian part. Latest estimates put the cost of the building work at EUR 223 million for the Italian, and at CHF 134 million for the Swiss section.

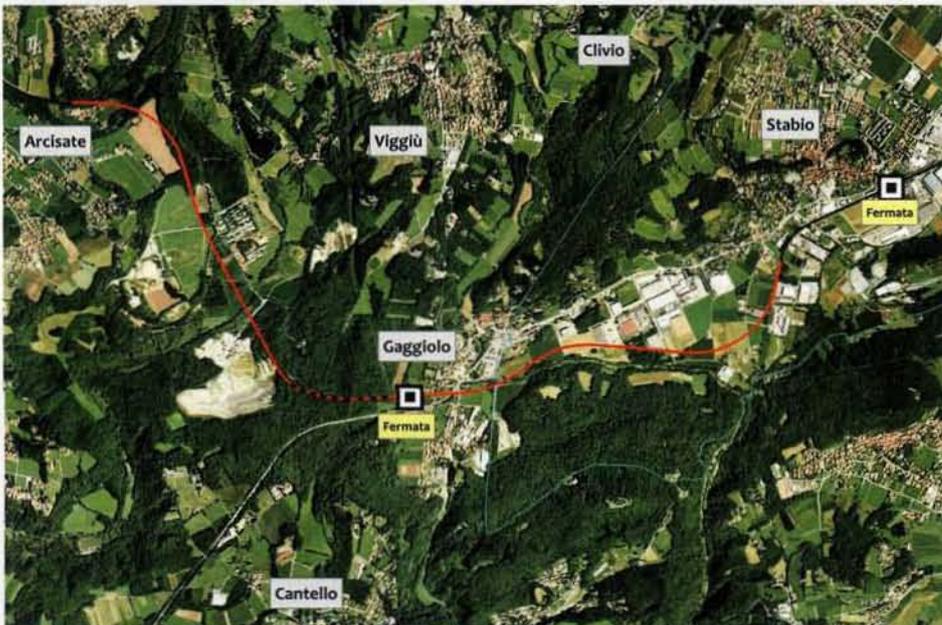
The new line is due to be opened in December 2013 and will improve the rail links in a catchment area of 600 000 residents. The authorities are expecting 7000 passengers to use the line every day, 1200 of whom will be using Ticino – Western Switzerland long-distance services, changing trains at Gallarate. The new line will be served by TILO trains operating every half hour, as on the other regional lines in Ticino. A train will be running directly from Castione-Arbedo via Bellinzona – Mendrisio – Varese – Gallarate to Malpensa airport in Milano every

hour. These regional trains will be stopping at every station, taking 22 minutes to complete the journey from Mendrisio to Varese; with four stops, this represents an average journey speed of 48 km/h. The journey from Lugano to Varese by regional train will take 50 minutes. There are plans for three express trains between Lugano and Malpensa in addition to the regional services and the journey time will be just 70 minutes. These trains will cover the Mendrisio – Varese section in 14 minutes (at an average journey speed of 76 km/h).

Faster services from Bellinzona and Locarno will only be possible after the opening of the Ceneri Base Tunnel – probably from 2019. The planned journey time from Bellinzona to Malpensa is 85, from Locarno to the airport 95 minutes.

In 2004 SBB and FS Trenitalia set up a joint venture, TILO (standing for Ticino – Lombardia), in order to operate the regional services in the canton of Ticino and across the border to Lombardy. Since that time, the company has been able to increase passenger kilometres by 76 % to 133 million (2010 figure). But this success is mainly due to Swiss railway customers; the commitment shown by the Italian partner, Trenitalia, is no more than moderate. The regional services provided by Trenitalia and Lenord have just merged to form a new company, Trenord, due to considerable pressure exerted by the Lombardy region. Trenitalia's 50 % holding in TILO is also set to be incorporated in this new company.

The new rail link from Mendrisio to Varese had been planned right from the start as a purely passenger route. But it could provide an ideal additional freight link via the Gotthard route to the Hupac terminal in Busto/ Gallarate and other terminals west of Milano. (Iüt)



Top: The route of the new line from Stabio to Arcisate. A tunnel, almost one kilometre long (dotted line) is being built just west of the frontier between Stabio and Gaggiolo (drawing: SBB).

Bottom left: A view from the western tunnel portal towards Arcisate. An 800-metre-long viaduct will link this area with the line continuation visible in the background (photo: J. Lüthard, 22 March 2011).

Bottom right: The new link branches off from the Gotthard line in Mendrisio. As far as Stabio there is already a railway line, used to serve various sidings. The really new section starts beyond Stabio. In Arcisate it joins the existing line to Varese (drawing: RU).

