

**PRO GOTTARDO–Ferrovia d'Europa / USI / SUPSI
workshop**
ALPTRANSIT: COMPLETION AND THE FINANCIAL ISSUE
Lugano, Campus USI/SUPSI, 10 October 2025

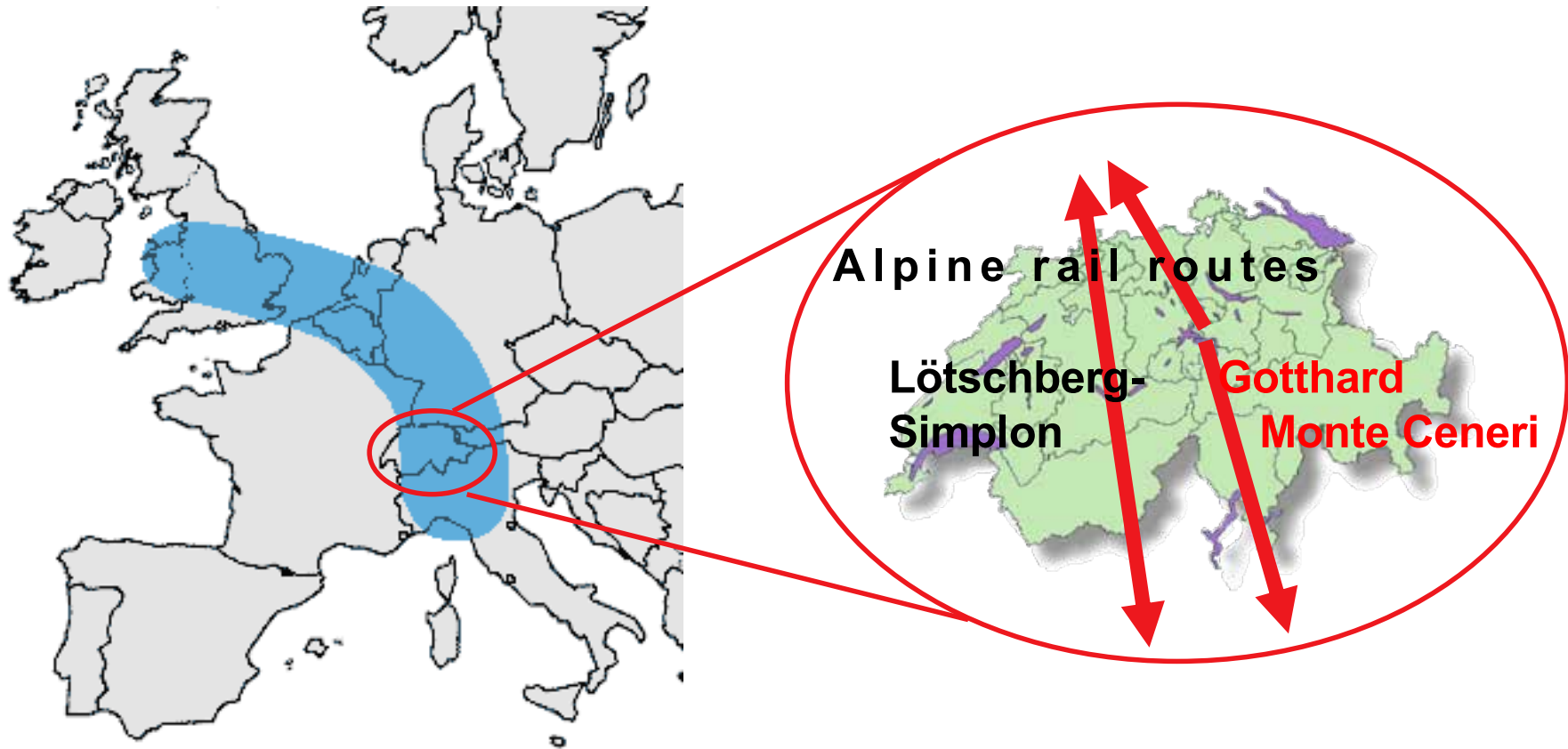
REMIGIO RATTI
**THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE SAN GOTTARDO
RAILWAY AXIS**

Summary notes

between
Economy,
MARKET and
Geopolitics



Switzerland, at the centre of a field of forces and governance of transport and territorial developments



Blue Banana – 150 million
inhabitants

The life cycle of the Gotthard railway axis -
Historical and institutional notes on economics, the market and geopolitics

**1882-1909: 1/ TAKEOFF PHASE:
THE GOTTHARDBAHN PRIVATE RAILWAY**



- Half-and-half public-private financing
- Italy finances 49%; Germany 26%; Switzerland 25% (of which almost $\frac{1}{4}$ from Ticino) of the public share
- Gotthardbahn distributes dividends of up to 7% (the maximum allowed)

➤ In this phase, Switzerland is participating in a process of railway integration between nation states

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1909 – 1944 2/ CAREFUL REPOSITIONING IN THE MARKET



- The nationalisation of the Gotthard Railway: a political and technical necessity (electrification)
- The political wisdom of the time: Germany and Italy waive the repayment of subsidies paid
- SBB is able to offer better fares in the interests of end customers

➤ The Gotthard axis establishes itself as the main and most efficient transit operator in the Alps (it anticipates investments and has a dynamic and highly competitive fare policy compared to its competitors Brenner and Fréjus)

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1939- 1945 3/ Second World War:
THE PHASE OF GEOPOLITICAL PRIMACY



What are the rules of the game for a neutral Switzerland?

- The combined action of the Hague Convention of 1907
and the Gotthard Convention of 1909

- Genoa, Switzerland's supply port

-Exploitation at the limits of railway capacity

➤ **This period highlights the value and strategic-military role of railway infrastructure.** Switzerland was the only country to maintain relative neutrality and not be invaded

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1946–1972/75

4/ THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE NEAR-MONOPOLY



- Boom in the European integration process
(Swiss rail crossings in the lead: 46% share in 1965 compared to all transalpine routes)
- Transit traffic profits offset losses in all other SBB sectors (1970)
- The 1970 recommendation (not followed by the Federal Council) to urgently build the Gotthard Base Tunnel!

➤ The golden age: Switzerland benefits from its strategic position as the most direct and efficient north-south axis between the Rhine and the Mediterranean

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The life cycle of the Gotthard rail axis -

1973–2020 5/COMPETITIVE PHASE AND NEW PARADIGMS



- Advent of **road competition** (1980: Road tunnel); constant revaluation of the Swiss franc
- European pressure and the 1992 transit agreement. Start of EU policy **on liberalisation of access to infrastructure.**
- Swiss compromises, **the 1998 agreement** and the opening of the base tunnels: **Lötschberg**, 32 km, 2007; **Gotthard**, 57 km; 2016 and **Monte Ceneri**, 15 km, 2020. CHF 23 billion.

➤ **The environmental paradigm** (1994 Alpine Initiative) **and the advance investment in transalpine tunnels are taking place, however, in an uncertain, hybrid and changing international railway context**

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2021-2050

Towards new challenges: Gotthard, railway of Europe?



- The emergence of **new players** in global logistics and **liberalisation** in long-distance passenger transport
- Completion of **the TEN-T networks** and EU targets for **doubling the share of rail transport** at European level and in individual countries
- The opening of the **Brenner** (2032) and **Fréjus** (2035-40) base tunnels and reassessment of their reference axes
- The future role of Swiss transalpine routes depends on the completion of **access to the base tunnels** and how they are integrated into **the TEN-T network**

➤ **Switzerland's position, which in the 1990s had decided to go for it alone, is being overturned.**

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2021-2050

Towards new challenges: San Gottardo, Europe's railway?



➤ **TWO SCENARIOS** for Switzerland and its transalpine axes:

- a) fallback on a national network strategy;
- b) full integration into the European AC/AV network.

- The future depends on **the NEW MARKET STRUCTURES** for transalpine transit and on **A MULTICRITERIA POLITICAL STRATEGY** (economic, environmental and security)
- In any case, **each scenario** requires **NEW FINANCIAL ENGINEERING**

Additional slides in reserve

ALPTRANSIT A LONG-TERM GOVERNANCE PROCESS

A process involving the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects with a century-long timeframe is easily held hostage by medium-term economic, institutional and political circumstances.

Switzerland has put in place a generous and pragmatic planning process, but one that risks not being fully understood and effective and that may get out of hand

WILL THE COMING YEARS LEAD TO A NEW PROCESS OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE?

Everyone – Switzerland, Europe, Ticino and Lombardy in particular – could emerge as winners.

THE ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL ROLE OF THE R. Ratti - PROGOTTARDO 10.10.25



- **Switzerland, a space built between dependencies and entrepreneurship:** The Gotthard railway axis guarantees Swiss identity and acts as a link between the north and south of the Alps
- **Alpine railway crossings as drivers of economic development:** a constant from the 19th century to the present day in the 'blue banana' arc of London, the Rhine and northern Italy
- **Base tunnels erase the Alps and at the same time must be part of the strategy to protect the Alpine Arc.**



R. Ratti - PROGOTTARDO 10.10.25