



Level crossings are among the obstacles ©Lucien Fortunati

## New Geneva-Paris TGV link falls short of promise

by Malcolm Curtis  
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**A much-heralded new route is supposed to cut half an hour from the journey for high-speed trains linking Geneva and Paris, but schedules show that when it is implemented in December the savings in some cases will be as little as 12 minutes. The Swiss, who are paying for one-third of the 330-million-euro project - already behind schedule - are unhappy and seeking ways to shave minutes through improvements elsewhere.**

A new rail line cutting the distance for the TGV between Geneva and Paris was announced with much fanfare, but now it turns out it is not delivering the expected savings in time for the journey.

Eager to improve links with the French capital, the Swiss federal government agreed to pay 110 million euros - a third of the cost - for the new shorter route through the mountains between Geneva and Bourg-en-Bresse.

It was supposed to cut half an hour from the trip, promising a three-hour connection for the high-speed trains between Geneva and the *gare de Lyon* in the centre of Paris.

But when the new route is inaugurated in December some TGVs will still be taking three hours and 17 minutes to complete the journey, even though the new route is 47 kilometres shorter than the one used now.

"The Ferrari promises to turn itself into almost a Deux Chevaux," pronounced the *Tribune de Genève*.

Some trains will in fact make the trip in three hours and five minutes, but the Swiss are not happy.

Michael Ducret, a Radical party member of the Geneva parliament, this week called on the federal government to seek action for improvements.

"The gain in time is half an hour less than the initial project," said Ducret, who is president of CITRAP, an association promoting improved public transport.

"However, we learn that the journey during the busiest periods will only gain an extra 10 or 15 minutes for passengers," he said.

"Genevans have been cheated."

The difficulty appears to lie with the landscape.

The new route is actually upgrading an existing line known as the Haut-Bugey section.

It is more direct than the existing route than meanders through narrow valleys heading in a southwesterly direction before finally hooking around to Bourg-en-Bresse, a stop on the trip to Paris.

The long curves mean that the TGVs (*trains à grande vitesse*) are limited to almost a third of their top cruising speed of 340 kilometres an hour.

And the new route won't be much different.

TGVs will only be able to travel at a speed of between 80 and 110 kilometres an hour on the Haut-Bugey section, according to Jean-Bernard Lemoine, president of the Genevois Chablais Faucigny passenger association.

"It's the record for France for the slowest TGV," Lemoine told the *Tribune de Genève*.

Engineers have been confronted with a couple of obstacles on the project, which is already a year behind schedule.

Among them is a curve that cannot be changed because of environmental reasons.

There is also more traffic on the route than when the study was first launched into the faster link a decade ago.

Around 12 million additional euros have been invested in a bid to shave time from the trip.

At the request of the Swiss, a study is under way to list potential improvements along the entirety of the Geneva-Paris route, the federal transport department in Bern confirmed.

The construction of new tunnels and the elimination of level crossings are among the measures under consideration.

However, that will take additional financing for which approval will also need to be sought.

With up to seven return trips daily, the Geneva-Paris TGVs are operated by Lyria a company jointly operation by SNCF, the French national railway, and Swiss Federal Railways.

Lyria also operates TGVs linking Paris with Lausanne, Zurich-Basel and Bern-Neuchâtel.