

# SBB's Broye Valley Expansion

*Text and pictures by Bernhard Studer*



On 13 June 2024, a Domino train, consisting of a driving trailer, an INOVA low-floor intermediate coach and an RBDDe 560 railcar, travelling in the Broye Valley between Bressonnaz and Ecublens. The castle and some other buildings of the historic town of Rue can be seen above the driving trailer.

**THE SWISS ARE WORLD CHAMPIONS** when it comes to travelling by train. No other country in the world today covers a greater distance by train per inhabitant per year. Politicians are encouraging this trend. To keep it that way, the country is

investing and modernising heavily. In western Switzerland, for example, on SBB's Broye lines, the two routes from Lausanne via Palézieux to Murten and from Fribourg to Yverdon that cross in Payerne.



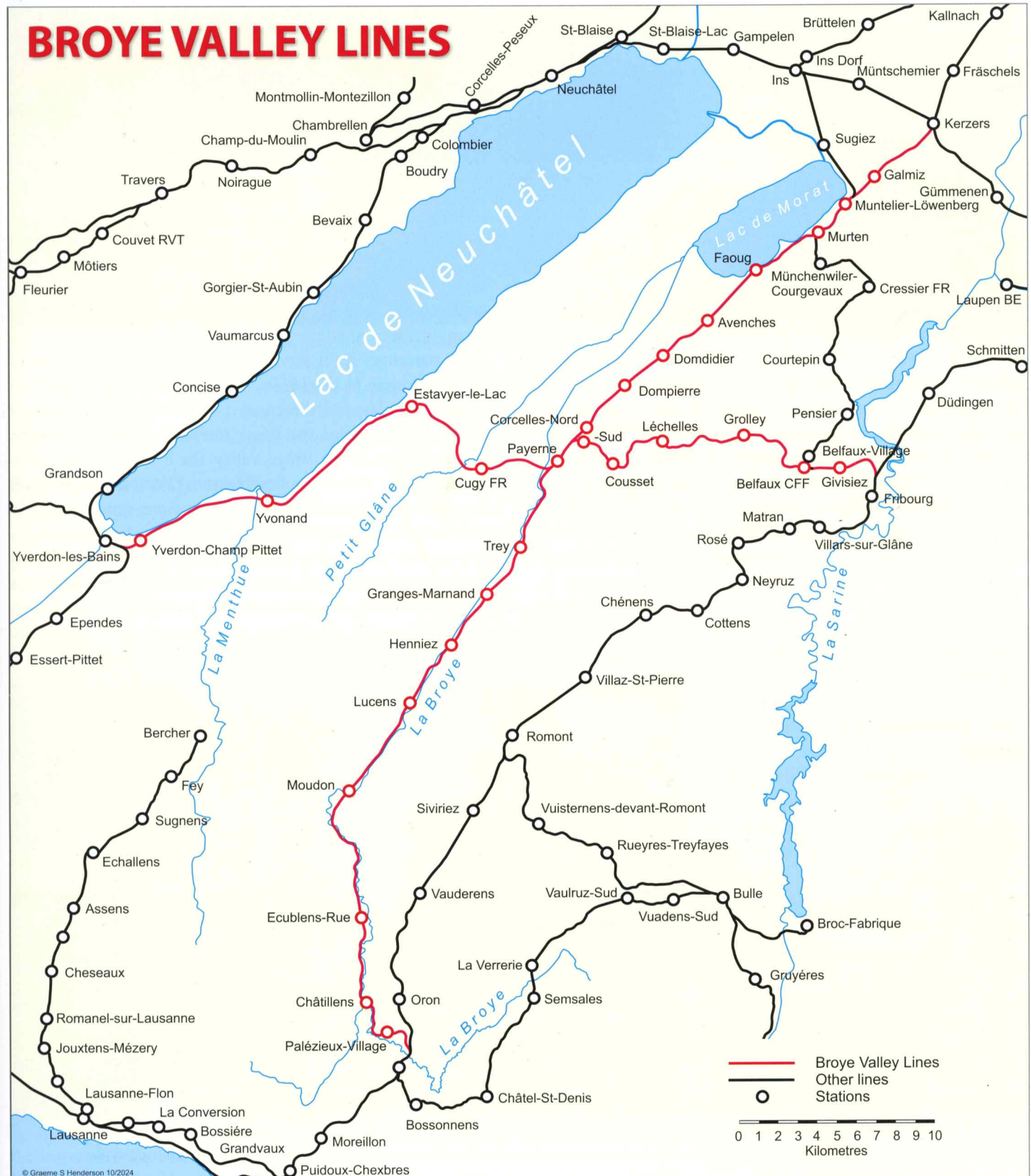
Four Domino trains stand next to each other for a short time at Payerne station on 12 March 2024, providing optimum connections in all directions, including to and from the Postbuses waiting outside the station. This spectacle currently takes place at least every hour. Once the current expansion work has been completed, this will occur every half hour.

To ensure that trains and buses are well filled, several conditions must be met, both now and in the future:

- Public transport runs according to a regular timetable throughout the country. This means that everyone can easily memorise the departure times;
- All connections at transfer stations are guaranteed as optimally as possible;
- Trains and buses are accessible to as many people as possible, including people with reduced mobility and people travelling with pushchairs or suitcases;

- Tickets are easily available for every customer, the ticket system is simple and clear;
- Care is taken to ensure that all permanently inhabited areas in Switzerland are served by public transport (“a stop within walking distance of every front door”).

For many years, taxpayers’ money has been used for specific purposes in Switzerland to continuously improve and expand the railway infrastructure and extend the range of services. Referendums are held regularly. So far, voters have always spoken out in favour of public transport.



As a result, services have been constantly expanded and extended for many years seeing public transport in Switzerland growing considerably in recent decades – and will continue to grow in the coming years if the framework conditions continue to improve.

### In the Broye Valley

The Broye Valley, located in the cantons of Vaud and Fribourg in western Switzerland, forms part of the Swiss Plateau. The scenically beautiful, tranquil valley has a long history. However, it is located away from the major traffic flows that bypass the Broye valley to the east and west. La Broye is also – wrongly! – little known to tourists. Only Murten, Avenches and Estavayer are visited by large numbers of Swiss tourists; very few foreign visitors come to the Broye Valley.

The Broye River's source is at an altitude of 1245 metres above sea level on the western slope of Les Alpettes in the Fribourg Pre-Alps. The river initially flows southwest before heading north through the Swiss Mittelland. At Moudon it changes direction again to the north-east through a valley carved by the Ice Age Rhone glacier through a valley towards Payerne. At this stage the valley widens to an up to five kilometre wide valley used for agriculture and the growing of grain and beets in particular. Shortly before it enters the Lac de Morat/Murtensee its longest tributary, the Petit Glâne joins it. It exits the lake in the north-western corner and then flows westwards, via the Broye Canal into Lac de Neuchâtel. The river below Moudon is formed and straightened.

The valley is also a very popular residential area, especially the southern part close to the city of Lausanne. As a result, the population in the valley is growing rapidly, while the need for mobility is also increasing.

### The railway in the Broye valley

The valley has been served by the railway since the mid-1870s. At that time, the railway company Suisse Occidentale (SO) opened a single-track branch line from Palézieux to Murten and from Fribourg to Yverdon. In 1889, SO merged with other railways to form Jura-Simplon (JS), which was nationalised in 1902. Since then, the two railway lines in the Broye Valley have been operated by the SBB.

For a long time, the two lines remained largely in their original state. It was not until the end of the 1940s that SBB electrified the two lines, making them among the last SBB lines to be covered by overhead wires. But



On 13 June 2024, a Domino train arrives at Avenches station, the loop of which has not yet been extended. As soon as the train stops, the crossing train enters the loop. Boarding and alighting is not entirely safe for passengers, especially for disabled people, as the platforms are not yet raised. In Roman times, the most important city on Swiss soil was located here, in what was then Aventicum! With its Roman ruins, the Musée Romain, which is well worth a visit, and the historic old town, Avenches has a number of sights to offer.

even after this important modernisation, hardly any major investments were made.

The passenger train service in the Broye Valley remained relatively modest. In the 1960s, there was an average of around 10 trains per day and direction, two of which were express trains that only served the larger towns and villages. On the north-south axis in the Broye Valley, the line from Murten to Palézieux, most trains travelled beyond Palézieux to and from Lausanne, the cantonal capital. Trains were very irregularly distributed throughout the day.

From 1982, when a nationwide synchronised timetable was introduced in Switzerland, a new timetable also came into force in the Broye Valley. Regional trains now ran every two hours, with express trains also being offered in some intermediate hours. Almost all trains travelled to and from Lausanne.



Palézieux-Village station, shortly after completion of the conversion work: On the left, the new platform raised to 55 cm above the top of the rails; on the right, the temporary platform used during the remodelling work, which was about to be dismantled. 13 June 2024.



The completely remodelled Châtillens station has a raised platform and a newly built crossing track, which is only used by passing goods trains. 13 June 2024.

This timetable was further condensed in the 1990s. There were no longer any express trains, but there was now a regional train in each direction every hour throughout the day.

### Steady growth in traffic

Since trains have been running every hour, demand has grown considerably. In 2005, SBB counted an average of 1,500 passengers per day on the Palézieux–Moudon section, rising to 2,300 in 2014, but the trains were now running close to capacity.

The political decision-makers and SBB have therefore decided to further increase the frequency of services in the Broye Valley. This is also because the canton of Vaud has forecast that 5,900 passengers will want to be transported between Palézieux and Moudon every day in 2035, an increase of almost 150 percent compared to 2014! In future, a train will therefore run every half hour, twice as many as before. In addition, longer and more modern trains are to be used and all stations are to be redesigned to make them accessible to the disabled.



Crossing of two trains in the completely remodelled Lucens station. Both platforms are elevated, the subway between the platforms is accessible via stairs and ramps. 13 June 2024.

# The Broye Valley Lines in Times Past



Above: On 15 November 1978 an express train hauled by Re 4/4 10048 passes through the now closed Bressonnaz station, located between Moudon and Ecublens-Rue.

Below: For many years, BDe 4/4 railcars were used on trains in the Broye Valley as seen at Murten on 14 August 1993.



## Biggest modernisation since the Broyetal railways were established


This is why both Broye Valley lines have been undergoing massive expansion since 2017. The investment volume amounts to around 250 million Swiss francs. 90 km of track, 63 level crossings (rail/road) and several bridges are being renovated, several stations that were previously unsuitable for train crossings are being converted into crossing stations, and the usable track lengths at the crossing stations already in use are being extended from the current maximum of 99 metres to 165 metres. As the line is to be remotely controlled from the Renens control centre (near Lausanne) in future, all interlocking systems will be replaced. This will improve the stability of the timetable and the punctuality of the trains.

Another key part of the project is the upgrade of 12 railway stations to make them accessible to disabled travellers. Customers with a disability should be able to travel independently. The platforms in the stations will be adapted to allow step-free access to the trains by raising the platforms to 55 cm above the top of the rails. Wheelchair users and people with pushchairs will be able to reach the platforms via ramps where there are currently steps.

The rolling stock is also to be replaced. The Domino trains currently running in the Broye Valley, consisting of RBDe 560 series railcars, INOVA low-floor intermediate cars and NPZ control cars, are to be replaced by more modern FLIRT railcar trains.

Now that new crossing stations have been built in Ecublens-Rue and Lucens, trains between Palézieux and Payerne already run every half hour. However, due to a lack of capacity on the route from Lausanne to Palézieux, which is also heavily travelled by intercity trains, only every second train can run to and from Lausanne. However, trains starting and ending in Palézieux always have a connection to and from Lausanne. In the longer term, the population and local politicians would like to see direct half-hourly S-Bahn trains from Allaman via Lausanne–Palézieux–Moudon–Payerne–Murten to Kerzers. However, this requires further extensions and capacity increases in the Lausanne railway station area and between Lausanne and Palézieux. A decision on this will be made at a later date.

### Satisfied customers

Generous expansions, as shown here using the example of the two SBB lines in the Broye Valley, are also being carried out in many other regions in Switzerland, both by SBB and by other railway companies. Rail customers are very grateful: They use the trains. The Swiss are proud of their railways. 

On 25 October 2017, a Domino train enroute from Lausanne via Palézieux and Payerne to Murten, is seen high above Lake Geneva between Bossière and Grandvaux. There are capacity bottlenecks on the section between Lausanne and Palézieux, which is also used by many Intercity trains, so that not all trains to and from the Broye Valley can run between Lausanne and Palézieux.

