

Gateway Basel Nord and the third port basin

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The project Gateway Basel Nord envisages a trimodal container terminal on the former freight station area of the Deutsche Bahn in the north of Basel, connected to a new third port basin (*Hafenbecken 3*) at Kleinhüningen. The terminal would combine the handling of containers between ships, trains and trucks on a single site and replace dispersed facilities in the existing ports. The project company Gateway Basel Nord AG was formed by Swiss and international logistics operators, among them SBB Cargo and partners from the container and combined transport business.¹

The project encountered resistance from several sides. Competing terminal operators argued that a terminal supported with public funds would distort competition. The Swiss Competition Commission examined the joint venture under merger control rules, approving it subject to conditions intended to ensure non-discriminatory access.² The federal funding of the terminal under the legislation on freight transport became the subject of appeals before the Federal Administrative Court. Environmental organisations raised concerns about the impact on protected areas on the former railway land, whose fallow sites had become habitats for rare species.

In Basel-Stadt, the cantonal credit for the construction of the third port basin was submitted to a popular vote in November 2020 after a referendum had been launched against it, which the voters approved.³ The approval did not end the legal and political disputes. Delays in the federal approval procedure, questions about the financing and changes among the partners have repeatedly shifted the timetable. As of autumn 2026, the realisation of the project remains uncertain in several respects. Status to be verified.⁴

The dispute illustrates a recurring pattern of infrastructure law in Switzerland. Large projects require planning approvals at several levels,

subsidies under federal law, competition clearance and in many cases popular votes, each of which offers opportunities for objections by competitors, residents and organisations with a right of appeal. The resulting delays can be long, while the legal questions they raise, from the right of appeal of competitors to the conditions attached to state aid, are of interest well beyond Basel.

1 Notes

1. On the project Gateway Basel Nord, the shareholders of Gateway Basel Nord AG (originally SBB Cargo, Hupac and Contargo) and the planned third port basin, see the publications of the project company, the Swiss Rhine Ports and the canton of Basel-Stadt. Shareholders and status to be verified. ↩
2. On the examination of the Gateway Basel Nord joint venture by COMCO and the conditions imposed (around 2018/2019), and on subsequent appeals before the Federal Administrative Court, see the decisions published by COMCO and the court. Status to be verified. ↩
3. On the popular vote of 29 November 2020 in Basel-Stadt on the credit for the third port basin (Hafenbecken 3), which was approved, see the official results published by the canton. Date, credit amount and result to be verified. ↩
4. On the state of the Gateway Basel Nord and Hafenbecken 3 projects in 2024–2026, including federal funding decisions and court proceedings, see the publications of the Federal Office of Transport, the Swiss Rhine Ports and the canton of Basel-Stadt. Status to be verified. ↩

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