

The first railway on Swiss soil

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The railway age reached Switzerland through Basel. In the early 1840s, a French company built a railway from Strasbourg along the left bank of the Rhine to Saint-Louis, on the border near Basel. After negotiations with the Basel authorities, the line was extended across the border into the city, where the first railway station on Swiss territory was opened in the mid-1840s, inside the city walls, with a gate that could be closed at night.¹ A city that had for centuries guarded its walls against armies now opened them to locomotives, although it insisted on being able to shut them again.

The connection with Strasbourg linked Basel with the French railway network and, through it, with Paris. In the 1850s, the Grand Duchy of Baden extended its railway along the right bank of the Rhine to Basel, where the Baden station, the *Badischer Bahnhof*, was built in Kleinbasel. Under a treaty between Baden and the Confederation, the Baden railway ran on Swiss territory to its station in Basel and onward to Waldshut and Lake Constance.² The *Badischer Bahnhof* remains a peculiarity of Basel: a station on Swiss soil operated by the German railways, in which German and Swiss customs and passport controls take place. Basel was thus connected to two foreign railway networks before the Swiss network itself had taken shape.

1 Notes

1. On the Strasbourg–Basel railway and the first railway station on Swiss territory in Basel (St. Johann, opened 1844/1845, with a special gate in the city wall), see HLS, articles "Eisenbahnen" and "Basel (Gemeinde)". Dates to be verified. ↩

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2. On the treaty of 27 July 1852 between the Swiss Confederation and the Grand Duchy of Baden on the continuation of the Baden railways through Swiss territory, and the Badischer Bahnhof in Basel, see SR 0.742.140.313.61 and HLS, article "Badischer Bahnhof". To be verified.
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