

Stabio and Mendrisio

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

The logistics sites of the fashion groups lay mostly in the municipalities around Chiasso, in Stabio, Coldrerio, Mendrisio, Novazzano and Balerna. Land was available there along the motorway and the main roads to the Italian border crossings of Gaggiolo and Novazzano. Stabio has developed into an industrial and logistics municipality with a large commuter workforce. VF's campus and other company sites lie close to the Gaggiolo crossing towards Varese. The railway line from Mendrisio to Stabio and Varese, which entered cross-border passenger service on 7 January 2018, connects the area with Varese and Malpensa airport.¹ Mendrisio, with the Fox Town outlet centre and the industrial zones of San Martino and Rancate, combined retail, logistics and production.

The concentration of logistics in so small an area has costs that the cantonal and municipal authorities have to manage: traffic on roads that pass through villages, land consumption, noise and the pressure of commuting. The planning instruments of the canton, in particular the cantonal structure plan (*piano direttore*), designate industrial zones of cantonal importance and restrict the further spread of logistics halls in residential areas. For investors, new logistics sites of significant size can therefore be built only in designated zones. The vacant halls left by the departing fashion groups are an important part of the available supply.²

1 The Gotthard freight corridor

North of the Mendrisiotto the distribution economy depends on the Gotthard corridor, the shortest route between the ports of the North Sea and northern Italy. The Gotthard Base Tunnel opened to commercial traffic on 11 December 2016 and the Ceneri Base Tunnel with the timetable change of 13 December 2020, completing the flat rail line of the New Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA, in Italian AlpTransit). The four-metre corridor for semi-trailers on rail was completed at about the same time.³

The Swiss policy of shifting transalpine freight from road to rail is laid down in the Constitution and in the Goods Traffic Shift Act. The Act sets a target of no more than 650,000 heavy goods vehicle crossings of the Alps a year, which was to be reached two years after the opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel.⁴

The figures for 2024 show how far the policy remains from that target. According to the Federal Office of Transport, transalpine freight through Switzerland amounted to 36.6 million net tonnes in 2024, of which 25.7 million tonnes went by rail and 10.9 million tonnes by road. The rail share fell to 70.3 per cent, mainly because of construction works on the northern and southern access lines. Heavy goods vehicle crossings rose by 4.8 per cent to 960,000, of which 707,000 used the Gotthard. Unaccompanied combined transport accounted for 17.8 million tonnes, or 72.2 per cent of rail freight, while the rolling motorway carried 1.2 million tonnes.⁵ In November 2025 the Federal Council announced measures to improve the access lines to the NRLA in Germany and France. It also intends to shift traffic from the rolling motorway to unaccompanied combined transport and to continue financial support for combined transport beyond 2030.⁶

In figures. About 500,000 trucks cross the Chiasso-Brogeda customs office each year.⁷ In 2024, 36.6 million tonnes of freight crossed the Swiss Alps, 70.3 per cent of it by rail, and 960,000 heavy goods vehicles made the crossing, 707,000 of them through the Gotthard.⁸ Switzerland abolished its import duties on industrial goods on 1 January 2024, with an estimated welfare gain of about CHF 860 million a year.⁹

2 What the corridor means for Lugano's distribution economy

For the distribution economy of Ticino the corridor has two faces. It makes the canton a natural transit space for goods moving between northern Italy and the rest of Europe. Combined transport terminals in Lombardy and in the Ticino plain can serve shippers on both sides of the border. It also means that most of the goods that pass through the canton never stop there. A container that travels by rail from Rotterdam to a terminal near Milan crosses Ticino in less than two hours and generates little local value added. The added value arises where goods are stored, handled, finished, invoiced and insured, and that is precisely the function that the Fashion Valley performed and that the Kering case called into question. The future of the logistics belt therefore depends on whether companies continue to find reasons to locate the functions of ownership, inventory and distribution in

Ticino after the end of the special tax regimes. The volume of transit alone will not decide it.¹⁰

3 Notes

1. Varesenews, "Compie tre anni la ferrovia Lugano–Varese" (January 2021), <https://www.varesenews.it/2021/01/compie-3-anni-la-ferrovia-lugano-varese/1293076/?output=pdf> ("il 7 gennaio 2018 la ferrovia è entrata in servizio"). See Chapter H.I. ↩
2. Canton of Ticino, Piano direttore cantonale, sheets on industrial zones of cantonal interest. ↩
3. TunnelTalk, "Grand opening of world record Gotthard Baseline" (1 June 2016), <https://tunneltalk.com/Gotthard-Baseline-1June2016-Opening-celebrations.php> (official opening for service on 11 December 2016); Federal Office of Transport, SBB and AlpTransit Gotthard AG, "Cerimonia di inaugurazione del Ceneri nel 2020" (29 August 2019), <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/58206.pdf> (inauguration on 4 September 2020, entry into service with the timetable change of 12/13 December 2020); Federal Office of Transport, Neue Wege durch Europa. Die Neue Eisenbahn-Alpentransversale (NEAT) (2019), https://www.bav.admin.ch/dam/bav/de/dokumente/themen/neat/die_neue_eisenbahn-alpentransversaleneat.pdf.download.pdf/die_neue_eisenbahn-alpentransversaleneat.pdf (4-metre corridor). See Chapter C.III. ↩
4. Federal Constitution, SR 101, Art. 84(2), <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/de-en/1/10/101-84-99.html>; Federal Act of 19 December 2008 on the Shift of Transalpine Heavy Goods Traffic from Road to Rail (Goods Traffic Shift Act), SR 740.1, Art. 3 ("höchstens 650 000 Fahrten pro Jahr", to be reached at the latest two years after the opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel), <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/de-fr/7/74/740.1-3-6.html>. ↩
5. Federal Office of Transport, Alpenquerender Güterverkehr durch die Schweiz – Kennzahlen 2024 und Interpretation der Entwicklung (Bern, March 2025), https://infras.ch/media/filer_public/5f/9b/5f9b3581-1d8d-4cd0-8fb4-bdd5a88eedc4/1809v_bav_guterverkehr_2_semesterbericht_2024-d.pdf. ↩
6. Federal Council, press release "Bundesrat setzt sich für leistungsfähige NEAT-Zulaufstrecken ein" (19 November 2025),

<https://www.admin.ch/de/newsb/BeYR4WQfaWWdnbkUH7i9t>.
↩

7. RSI (21 October 2022, above). ↩
8. Federal Office of Transport (March 2025, above). ↩
9. SECO, "Aufhebung der Industriezölle" (above). ↩
10. The distinction between transit volume and local value added is the author's analysis. ↩

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