

The longest and deepest rail tunnel in the world opens for business.

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Almost twenty years since the first blast in the main shaft heralded the beginning of



construction, regular rail service commenced through the world's longest and deepest railway tunnel began yesterday. The twin-bore Gotthard Base Tunnel (GBT) is a 57km (35-mile) line under the Swiss Alps between northern and southern Europe, provides a rail link at maximum speeds of up to 250 kilometres per hours, and will

boost both passenger and freight travel in Europe. A truly remarkable project, with speeds made possible by the straight route with no tight curves and no level crossings on the over-ground sections. On Sunday 11th December, a first service ran between from Zurich to Lugano, opening the line for full use, following an inauguration in June and an interceding period of safety and technical testing from Swiss Federal Railways (SBB).

The Swiss news agency ATS reported that the first regular passenger train to use the GBT pulled out of Zurich at 5.09am and arrived in Lugano around three hours later, with the tunnel passage shaving a full 30 minutes off the previous travel time for the same route. This tunnel is a true mega-project, the total cost of which had to be approved by a referendum of the Swiss people in 1992, is 9.8 billion Swiss francs, or 10.3 billion US dollars. Nine people lost their lives while constructing the Gotthard Base Tunnel.

In becoming the world's longest the GBT has surpassed Japan's 53.9km Seikan tunnel to move into first place. The 50.5km Channel Tunnel connecting Britain and France has fallen a place into third.

Freight Trains

The level rail route through the Gotthard brings major benefits for freight traffic. It allows for longer, heavier trains, fewer locomotives and shorter journey times. The efficiency and reliability of rail freight traffic will increase, making it more competitive.



In addition, the transport capacity of the route will increase. As many as 260 freight trains will be able to pass through the Gotthard Base Tunnel every day. On the historic mountain route, the maximum number was 180. In future, freight trains travelling through the Swiss Alps will no longer require an additional bank engine, which eliminates the need for time-consuming

shunting. This means that the tunnel will be able to absorb the expected increase in the volume of goods being transported on the north-south route.

Passenger Trains

More than 20 million people in the catchment area between southern Germany and northern Italy will benefit from the Gotthard Base Tunnel. Thanks to the level route, train connections will be faster, more reliable and more punctual. Passenger trains will travel every half hour on the north-south axis. Passenger trains generally travel through the tunnel at a speed of up to 200 km/h. In future, top speeds of up to 250 km/h are possible. The reduction in journey times will gradually become noticeable from 2016 onwards. Once work on the entire length of the Gotthard axis (incl. Ceneri Base Tunnel) has been completed, the journey between Zurich and Lugano will be around 45 minutes shorter.

VIDEO – [GOTTHARD TUNNEL 360° \(7 MINUTES\)](#)