



Zurich to Paris in 4 Hours

Now a quick trip to the Wicked City is more attractive than ever.



The new Euroduplex TGV

Full commercial service on the TGV to Paris on the new route will start on 11 December, and it's been possible to book in advance for some time. But a daily train has been making trial runs on this route since it was opened on 11 October, and your faithful reporter was able to make the trip between Mulhouse and Dijon with other journalists to see what it was like.

With a maximum speed of 320 km/h it was quite an experience. The brand-new Euroduplex double-decker trains with their distinguished livery of purple and blue offer a very smooth, comfortable ride. There's a display screen at both ends of the carriage showing you where you are and expected time of arrival at the next stations, and also the speed you're travelling at – leaving you thinking, it doesn't feel that fast!

The new high-speed section of line, 140 km of it, doesn't actually connect the main stations Mulhouse and Dijon yet; the 35 km section from Mulhouse and the 15 km one from Dijon are being constructed in a second phase and should be complete in about 2015. Two huge, beautifully designed TGV stations have been built in the middle of the countryside, at Belfort-Montbéliard and Besançon, with large carparks (as at an airport), shops, restaurants and so on.

The biggest advantage is that the train no longer has to take the dogleg route via Strasbourg, so it saves a lot of time. The Paris train now goes through to Gare de Lyon in Paris (not Gare de l'Est). Swiss customers travelling first class on the Lyria, the joint Swiss-French marketing company for high-speed rail travel to France, have an excellent meal included in the price of their ticket. There are six return trips a day; journey time from Zurich to Paris is just 4 hrs 3 mins, and from Basel 3 hrs 3 mins.

The new link also cuts travelling time to Lyon and the south of France: the trip from Mulhouse to Lyon takes only 2 hrs 50 mins, with six trains a day, of which three go on to Marseilles and two

to Montpellier. And there are plans to launch a direct train from Basel to the south of France in 2012.

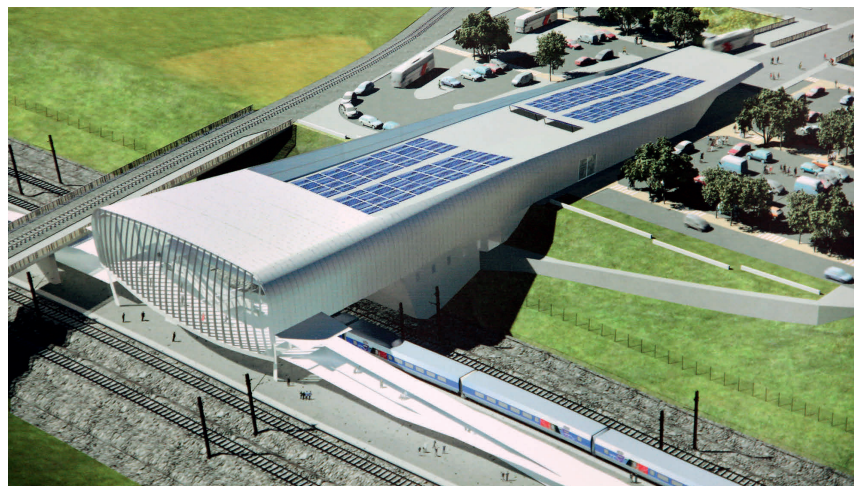
The Mulhouse-Dijon stretch is the eastern branch of the Rhine-Rhone high-speed line, which will have two more branches out of Dijon: the southern branch to Lyon, effectively linking northern Europe with the Mediterranean arc, and the western branch as a link to the existing high-speed line between Lyon and Paris.

Restoration of cross-border Jura link

There's been a plan afoot for years to restore the cross-border railway line between Biel and Belfort, where the fast regional train on the Swiss side only goes as far as Delle on the border; the line on the French side was closed in 1992. Supporters of the scheme point out that the catchment area of Biel and surrounding towns – one of the centres of the Swiss watch industry – is just as large as that of Belfort/Montbéliard, and people can conveniently change to the new high-speed train at the new station.

At the moment the project seems to be bogged down with administrative hurdles, and priorities lie elsewhere. But the locals are more than hopeful that it will come – it's only around 20 km after all – then they, too, can enjoy a quick trip to Paris with minimum fuss.

www.tgv-lyria.com



Mock-up of the new station at Belfort-Montbéliard, seen from the air