

GIJS MOM, GORDON PIRIE, LAURENT TISSOT (eds.)

# MOBILITY IN HISTORY

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THE HISTORY OF TRANSPORT,  
TRAFFIC AND MOBILITY



T<sup>2</sup>M



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# SWISS TRAFFIC HISTORY: A RESEARCH REPORT

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The history of traffic is presently quite flourishing. At the annual meeting of the Swiss Society of Social and Economic History in 2007, some 36 lectures on traffic history were presented; two-thirds presented new or recent research results.<sup>1</sup> This boom was to be expected. A cluster of historical traffic studies resulted from the social and economic historical research of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>2</sup> as well as the fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation between geography and history in this country.<sup>3</sup> Between 1980 and 2003, the 'Inventory of Historical Traffic Routes in Switzerland' (IVS) emerged,<sup>4</sup> thereby providing a basis for the preservation of the cultural space of historical traffic routes yet extant as well as for continuing research in traffic history. Important protagonists in the past have recently assumed emeritus status and retired: Jean François Bergier (Middle

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<sup>1</sup> The papers will appear in 2010 as volume 25 of the yearbook *Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte – Société Suisse d'histoire économique et sociale*.

<sup>2</sup> This context is best accessible in the focus on traffic history in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 29 (1979).

<sup>3</sup> Important articles: C. M. Merki, 'Die verschlungenen Wege der modernen Verkehrsgeschichte', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 45 (1995), 444–57; C. M. Merki, 'Unterwegs in unwegsamem Gelände. Historische Strassenverkehrsforschung in der Schweiz', *traverse – Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 2 (1999), 37–54; H.-U. Schiedt, 'Trampelpfade und Chausseen – Literaturbericht einer strassenbezogenen Verkehrsgeschichte', *traverse – Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 2 (1999), 17–35.

<sup>4</sup> ViaStoria. IVS Documentations, Bern 2003, <http://www.viastoria.ch>; about IVS comp. <http://ivs-gis.admin.ch/>

Ages and Early Modern period), Klaus Aerni (IVS and historical geography), Heinz E. Herzog (IVS and antiquity), Fritz Glauser (Middle Ages) and Rainer Schwinges (Middle Ages).

### INSTITUTIONAL BASIS

Research beyond the Early Modern period is being conducted at the Department of the History of the Middle Ages at the University of Bern, where Rainer Schwinges was recently given emeritus status, and by Anne Kolb of the History Seminar at the University of Zurich<sup>5</sup> and ViaStoria – Center of Transport History. For the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, traffic history research and instruction reap numerous institutional benefits, especially at the Institute of History at the University of Neuchâtel, chaired by Laurent Tissot; the Department of Social, Economic and Environmental History at the University of Bern, with Christian Pfister, Christoph Maria Merki and Ueli Haefeli, and its close associate, ViaStoria – Center of Transport History, under the direction of Hans-Ulrich Schiedt.<sup>6</sup> Other important institutions include the Research Center for Social and Economic History at the University of Zurich, with Jakob Tanner and Gisela Hürlimann; the Institute of Technology History at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich with David Gugerli; the University of St.Gallen with Rolf Peter Sieferle; the Institute of History at the University of Lausanne with Cédric Humair and Malik Mazbouri; the Department of Economic History at the University of Geneva with Gilles Forster and Gérard Duc; the ‘Geography of Settlements and Regional History’ group at the University of Bern under the guidance of Hans-Rudolf Egli; and the Institute for Transport Planning and Systems (IVT), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, with Kay W. Axhausen and Ulrich Weidmann. IVT is of particular importance to Swiss traffic history because it is the source of increasing questioning of scientific studies of traffic in traffic history.<sup>7</sup> IVT also promotes important initiatives in the historiography of scientific traffic studies.<sup>8</sup>

An expanded institutional basis of historical traffic research is afforded by the museums and special archives of the Museum of Transport in Lucerne, by the Museum of Communication in Bern, and by the PTT Archives and the Heritage Foundation SBB.

<sup>5</sup> The Zurich professor’s main work concerning traffic history is A. Kolb, *Transport und Nachrichtentransfer im Römischen Reich*, Berlin 2000.

<sup>6</sup> About ViaStoria comp. <http://www.viastoria.ch>.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. Tschopp, *Verkehrsinfrastruktur und räumliche Entwicklung in der Schweiz: 1950–2000*, thesis, University of Zurich, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. Sandmeier, *Vom Eisenbahnbau zur Verkehrsplanung. Die Institutionalisierungsgeschichte des Verkehrswesens an der ETH Zürich*, *125 Jahre Verkehrswesen an der ETH Zürich*, Zurich, 2008; S. Sandmeier, *Die Etablierung der Verkehrsplanung an der ETH. Zur Vorgeschichte des IVT*. IVT Arbeitsberichte Verkehrs- und Raumplanung 545; Zurich 2009.

## RESEARCH SURVEY

Current studies emerge mainly from institutions that emphasize historical research in technology, sociology, economics and the environment. Subdisciplines of traffic history remain to be developed. Rudimentary beginnings of such an institutionalization are evident in the cooperation between the Department of Economic, Social and Environmental History (Pfister) and ViaStoria – Center of Transport History at the University of Bern.

The current methods are pluralistic. In the process, however, there is a number of networking initiatives, including conferences,<sup>9</sup> interdisciplinary cooperation, work on a common quantitative database and a virtual research project concerning Swiss traffic history.<sup>10</sup>

## PUBLICATIONS

The diversity and the connections between subdisciplines are well represented in a number of recent works. In his work concerning the onset of the Swiss tourism industry, Laurent Tissot connects traffic history and the history of tourism through social-historical as well as cultural-historical questioning.<sup>11</sup> His circle has also published a series on traffic history.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Régis Huguenin has published a volume on urban traffic in Neuchâtel, whilst Christophe Simeon has published on the emergence of the Swiss aviation industry.<sup>13</sup> Both topics have hitherto been the subject of very little research.

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<sup>9</sup> Conferences and symposiums on transportation history topics (see also annotation 1):

- ‘Simplon 1806–2006. A European axis’, organized 2006 by the Société romande d’histoire in Lausanne.

- ‘Mit Tempo in die Zukunft? Die Geschwindigkeit der Eisenbahn’; conference of 2007, organized by the Research Center for Social and Economic History of the University of Zurich (FSW), the Institute for Transport Planning and Systems (IVT), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, and the professorship of the history of technology of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich; in 2009, the follow-on conference dealt with the topic ‘Die Revolution der Automatisierung’.

- ‘The Gotthard: from Favre’s tunnel to AlpTransit’, an international study conference to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the Gotthard line and to discuss the future of transalpine routes, 2007.

- In 2009, the annual conference of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T<sup>2</sup>M) will be held in Lucerne.

<sup>10</sup> H.-U. Schiedt, C. Pfister, *Research Project Swiss Traffic History. A View of all Traffic*, Bern 2003–, <http://www.viastoria.ch/D/Forschung/Verkehrsgeschichte.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> L. Tissot, *Naissance d’une industrie touristique. Les Anglais et la Suisse au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Lausanne, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Title of the publication series: *Histoire des transports, du tourisme et du voyage* (Éditions Alphil, Neuchâtel, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> R. Huguenin, *L’émergence des transports publics en ville de Neuchâtel. Urbanisation et mobilité (1890–1922)* (Neuchâtel, 2007). C. Simeon, *L’envol manqué de l’aviation suisse à la fin de la Belle Époque (1910–1914)* (Neuchâtel, 2007).

Christoph Maria Merki concerned himself in his postdoctoral lecture qualification thesis with the motorization of road traffic. Combining cultural-historical, economic and social-historical questioning, he analyzed the innovation of the complex, never individual and only rarely inevitable proliferation of automobiles. This work is a study of an emerging market, which exists not only on the basis of supply and demand but also in conjunction with a multitude of intermediary institutions.<sup>14</sup>

In Switzerland, though, it is still the railway that draws most attention. The Geneva thesis by Gérard Duc discusses the historical economic development of railway fare structures and the state's influence on them.<sup>15</sup> A study published by the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War (ICE), and four very recent dissertations are concerned with twentieth-century railroad history. Gilles Forster addresses passenger service and the transportation of raw materials between Germany and Italy via the Swiss railway network during World War II, when Switzerland was accused of being too willing to assist Germany.<sup>16</sup> Jonas Steinmann and André Kirchhofer examine financing and governmental railway policies, and in her important survey, Gisela Hürlimann takes a close look at automation, express traffic and the modernization of the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB).<sup>17</sup> An informative outside view of Swiss transportation policy is provided in a dissertation by Markus Höschen, in which the latest history of the Swiss Alpine Transit (involving the major Swiss railway projects Rail 2000 and NEAT) is discussed.<sup>18</sup> In his study of freight transport, the economist Philipp Thalmann developed a statistical analysis in comparison with Great Britain.<sup>19</sup> The historical context in this study, however, is not completely satisfactory.

Finally, in his postdoctoral lecture qualification thesis, Ueli Haefeli presents a synthesis which examines the 'complex interdependency of supply and demand'

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<sup>14</sup> C. M. Merki, *Der holprige Siegeszug des Automobils 1895–1930. Zur Motorisierung des Strassenverkehrs in Frankreich, Deutschland und der Schweiz*, (Wien, Köln, Weimar 2002); Christoph Maria Merki, *Verkehrsgeschichte und Mobilität* (Stuttgart 2008).

<sup>15</sup> G. Duc, *Les tarifs marchandises des chemins de fer suisses (1850–1913). Stratégies des compagnies ferroviaires, nécessités de l'économie nationale et évolution du rôle régulateur de l'Etat*, Thèse de doctorat, (University of Geneva, 2007), a presently still unpublished dissertation, to be published 2009.

<sup>16</sup> G. Forster, *Transit ferroviaire à travers la Suisse (1939–1945)*, publié par la Commission Indépendent d'Experts Suisse–Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Publications de la Commission Indépendent d'Experts Suisse–Seconde Guerre Mondiale, vol. 4, (Lausanne, Zurich, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> G. Hürlimann, *Die Eisenbahn der Zukunft. Automatisierung, Schnellverkehr und Modernisierung bei den SBB 1955 bis 2005*, (Zürich, 2007); A. Kirchhofer, *Stets zu Diensten – gezwungenermassen! Die Schweizer Bahnen und ihre «Gemeinwirtschaftlichkeit» für Staat, Wirtschaft und Bevölkerung*, a presently still unpublished dissertation, (University of Bern, 2007); Jonas Steinmann, *Weichenstellungen. Die Eisenbahnpolitik in der Schweiz (1944–1982)*, also a currently unpublished dissertation, (University of Bern, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Markus Höschen, *Nationaler Starrsinn oder ökologisches Umdenken? Politische Konflikte um den Schweizer Alpen transit im ausgehenden 20. Jahrhundert* (München, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> P. Thalmann, *The Dynamics of Freight Transport Development. A UK and Swiss Comparison* (Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, Hampshire 2004).

in common transport policies and urban mobility.<sup>20</sup> By comparing all modes of transport in several Swiss and German cities during the second half of the twentieth century, Haefeli widens the perspective of traffic history towards a comprehensive history of mobility.

Recently, several journals and yearbooks have published important articles on the history of transportation. An issue of the *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* (Swiss Historical Journal) provides a general overview of the history of transportation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>21</sup> An issue of *traverse: Zeitschrift für Geschichte* focuses on the question of traffic and economic development.<sup>22</sup> A volume of the *Revue historique vadoise* emphasizing the history of tourism includes three articles on the synergies between the evolution of the transport system and the development of the tourism industry.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the 2007 yearbook of the *Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte* (Swiss Association for Economic and Social History) contains a number of articles on transport as an indispensable service.<sup>24</sup>

### CURRENT TOPICS, MAIN AREAS OF RESEARCH AND PROJECTS

Although individual modes of transport, especially railroads, still dominate, they are increasingly being interpreted as parts of the entire traffic system. Researchers are also examining the connections between spatial efficiency, logistics and mobility.

Some have seen a ‘spatial turn’ in traffic history. Appropriate analytical instruments for the examination of space are still missing in most of the current research, however. A first step towards supplying this desideratum is the recent development of a geographic information system in historical space and traffic research.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ueli Haefeli, *Verkehrspolitik und urbane Mobilität. Deutsche und Schweizer Städte im Vergleich 1950–1990*, Beiträge zur Stadtgeschichte und Urbanisierungsforschung, 8 (2008).

<sup>21</sup> *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, 56:1 (2006), C. Pfister, H.-U. Schiedt, C. M. Merki (eds.), with articles by: P. Schneeberger, H.-U. Schiedt, S. Paquier, L. Tissot, T. Frey, C. M. Merki, A. Kirchhofer, J. Steinmann, G. Hürlimann, U. Haefeli, A. Betschart.

<sup>22</sup> *traverse – Zeitschrift für Geschichte / Revue d'histoire*, 1 (2008), Verkehr und Wirtschaftsentwicklung / Transport et développement économique; articles by C. Humair, T. Frey, G. Duc, A. Kirchhofer, C. Bertho Lavenir, A. Eisinger, H. Siegenthaler.

<sup>23</sup> *Revue historique vadoise*, 114 (2006); L. Tissot about the mountain railways, C. Humair about the funicular and M. Gigase about the steamboat.

<sup>24</sup> H.-J. Gilomen, M. Müller, L. Tissot (ed.), *Dienstleistungen. Expansion und Transformation des «dritten Sektors» / Les services. Essor et transformations du secteur tertiaire (15e-20e siècles)* (Zurich, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> H.-R. Egli, P. Flury, T. Frey, H.-U. Schiedt. *GIS-Dufour. Aufbau und Implementierung eines Vektor-25-kompatiblen geographischen Informationssystems für die Verkehrs- und Raumforschung auf historischer Grundlage*, Swiss National Foundation project, CD-Rom, (Geographical Institute of the University of Bern and ViaStoria, Bern, 2007); P. Flury, *Verkehr und Raumentwicklung zwischen Kunststrassen- und Eisenbahnbau. Eine digitale Analyse von Erreichbarkeiten und Raumstrukturen in der Schweiz des 19. Jahrhunderts*, publication series: Geographica Bernensia G 83, Bern 2009.

Five further research projects are currently in progress:

A broadly based ViaStoria project conducted by Hans-Ulrich Schiedt explores the material conditions of pre-modern traffic, specially the development of roads and the transport on them.

A project at the University of Lausanne under the direction of Cédric Humair in collaboration with Marc Gigase deals with the history of tourism in the Lake Geneva region.<sup>26</sup> Project researchers are studying cooperation in the development of the tourism industry and the evolution of technical infrastructure.

A project under the direction of Monika Dommann at the University of Basel investigates the heretofore neglected field of logistics, a complex arrangement of technical, social, economic, legal and political practices.<sup>27</sup> The study deals with changes in transport, storage and conveyance, culminating in the channelized management of the entire flow of goods on a global scale as well as a fundamental complementary coordination between the flow of materials and the flow of information.

Another gap in traffic history is presently being closed at the University of Bern and at ViaStoria – Center of Transport History. Under the direction of Christoph Maria Merki, dissertation writers are investigating Swiss aviation in the second half of the twentieth century, including the influence of technology and politics on the development of Swiss aviation (the long-term development of technology; the political framework, laws, bilateral and multilateral contracts; and the influence of the military on civil aviation), the providers (the history of Swiss manufacturers of aircraft and components as well as the history of airlines which operated in Switzerland or used a Swiss basis for landing) and the airports and the demand for flights (building and development of airports from spatial, environmental and economic perspectives, the expansion of the route network, and the beginnings and growth of demand for both freight and passenger flights).

A project led by Thomas Frey and Hans-Ulrich Schiedt is developing an online database of historical traffic statistics. Following the incorporation of railway data for 1920-1982 through the Department of Economic, Social and Environmental History at the University of Bern,<sup>28</sup> ViaStoria – Center of Transport History is now adding the years 1847-1920. The emerging database includes not less than 110 variables for 150 railway companies. A next step will be to add cog and cable railways and municipal trolley lines.

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<sup>26</sup> Project title: 'Tourist system and technical culture in the 'Arc lemanique': actors, social networks and synergies (1852–1914)'.

<sup>27</sup> Project title: 'The flow of materials: transportation of goods, distribution of merchandise and the rise of logistics 1850–2000'.

<sup>28</sup> Jonas Steinmann et al., 'Trainbase, WSU and ViaStoria', completed 2006, <http://www.trainbase.ch>.

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For decades scholars in diverse fields have examined problems in the history of mobility. Their diversity was their strength but also their limitation, as disciplinary boundaries impeded the exchange of ideas that lets scholarship flourish. Since 2003 the International Association for the History of Traffic, Transport and Mobility (T<sup>2</sup>M) has served as a free-trade zone, fostering a new interdisciplinary vitality in a now-flourishing field.

Now, with the publication of its first yearbook, T<sup>2</sup>M has surveyed these gains in the form of a comprehensive state-of-the-art review of research in the field. Here, twenty-seven scholars in the history of mobility, from sixteen countries and five continents, present synopses of recent research.

Besides reviews of research in thirteen countries, contributions also include thematic reviews relating mobility to the environment, automobile fetishism, race, gender, and other transnational themes. All in all, more than sixty scholars within and beyond T<sup>2</sup>M cooperated in this project, making it a truly collective work.

**Gijs Mom** is Programme Director for Mobility History at Eindhoven University of Technology. In November 2003 he co-founded the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T<sup>2</sup>M), of which he was nominated President (until September 2008). His most recent publications include (with Laurent Tissot) *Road History: Planning, Building and Use* (Neuchâtel, Alphil, 2007).

**Gordon Pirie** teaches and researches transport and travel. He has published widely on aspects of past and present railway and air transport in southern Africa. He has begun researching the history of municipal airports in South Africa. His research into roads and automobility in colonial Africa is ongoing.

**Laurent Tissot** is professor of contemporary history at the University of Neuchâtel. He is currently dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Human Sciences. His main fields of research are: business history, tourism and transport history. His last publications: 'Le tourisme.' Special issue of *Entreprises et histoire* (Paris, 2007).

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