

Österreichische Bundesbahnen after 1945

On 6 April 1945, when the troops of the Red Army occupied Vienna South Station ("Südbahnhof"), employees of the RBD Wien took refuge in three sleeper trains which carried them to the workshop "Edelweiss" close to Sigmundsherberg. Three days later, while the Vienna West Station station building ("Westbahnhof") was still ablaze and fighting was going on at the Danube canal, railway men set up a committee aiming at restarting rail operations as quickly as possible.

On 19 April 1945, following agreement by the Soviet occupying power, railway employees of the former RBD Vienna who had stayed in Vienna established the new Railway Directorate Vienna which was charged with the management of the railway operations in the regions occupied by the Soviet troops.

Key role in reconstruction

The railways played a key role in the reconstruction of the Second Republic. Railway operations had to be started up as quickly as possible in particular to ensure the supply of the population with the necessary foodstuffs.

The division of the country into four Allied occupation zones made setting up a new Austrian-wide railway organization a difficult task with the allied forces exerting a major influence. On 22 May 1945, the Villach Directorate, which emanated from the former RBD Villach, started its operations in the British zone of occupation. At the same time, the Directorate in Linz was established for the US zone of occupation. In Tyrol, the Directorate of Innsbruck, which had been dissolved by the German Reichsbahn who divided its operational area among the RBDs of Munich and Augsburg, was reactivated.

General Directorate of the Austrian State Railways

Following a ruling of the Allied Council, the Railway Directorate of Vienna was transformed into the General Directorate of the Austrian State Railways (ÖStB) which was integrated into the State authority for Industry, Commerce and Trade as of 1 August 1945. Initially, its sphere of action remained restricted to the Soviet zone of occupation. Furthermore, an own State Railway Directorate Vienna for the Soviet zone was established. The four State Railway Directorates continued to operate side by side and without having a common management or correlation.

Only on 1 Nov. 1945 was the sphere of action of the General Directorate of the Austrian State Railways expanded to the entire territory of the Federal state and the State railways placed under a joint management.

There was a marked difference between the legal basis for the new ÖStB and that of the pre-war BBÖ. Between 1923 and 1938, the latter had been an independent economic entity. As in the years before 1923, it was again placed under direct Federal control, reporting to the State authority for Industry, Commerce and Trade (27 April to 20 December 1945), the Federal Ministry for Transport (20 Dec. 1945 to 8 Nov. 1949) and the Federal Ministry for Transport and Nationalized Enterprises (8 Nov. 1949 to 29 Jan. 1956).

Österreichische Bundesbahnen – ÖBB

On 5 August 1947, Österreichische Staatseisenbahnen (Austrian State Railways) changed its name to "Österreichische Bundesbahnen" (Austrian Federal Railways). Its official abbreviation "ÖBB", however, was adopted only in 1953 when the new numbering scheme for traction units was introduced.

The building of the former General Directorate of BBÖ and its successor, RBD Vienna, which had been located at Schwarzenbergplatz in the 1st district of Vienna, was destroyed by a fire sparked off by employees of RBD Vienna prior to their escape. The newly established General Directorate of ÖStB was headquartered in Vienna's 1st district in Elisabethstrasse 9.

Following removal of the greatest war damages major items on the agenda of the new ÖBB were electrification of the most important railway lines as quickly as possible, change the mode of traction, i.e. to abandon steam traction, and renewal of its rolling stock fleet. Several new station buildings were built in the capitals of the provinces and with the construction of the Vienna S-Bahn rapid transit system and the Jauntalbahn line remarkable rail projects were completed.

Following the National Council election on 6 March 1966, the Austrian People's Party won the absolute majority. The government appointed following these elections included commercialization of the State Railways in its working program. This put an end to the 24-year era in which ÖBB was directly administered by the State.

With the Federal Railway Act put in force on 14 June 1969, the economic entity "Österreichische Bundesbahnen" run by the Austrian Federal Republic as part of its economic activities was established. This ushered in a period of rather short-lived legal structures of ÖBB which was characterized by numerous organizational changes.

Adopted both on the political and legislative level in 1989 the "New Railway" program aimed at enabling ÖBB to operate as a modern transport system.

In 1992, however, yet another major restructuring followed suit with the coming into force of the Federal Railways Act 1992, which provided for the economic entity ÖBB to be transformed into a company endowed with legal personality. This resulted in the appointment of a Board of Management and a Supervisory Board including 18 members. To meet the provisions of the EU-Directive 91/440, the company was again restructured to implement the required separation of the Infrastructure and Transport Operations sectors.

Based on the Federal Railway Structure Act 2003, put in force on 1 January 2004, ÖBB was restructured to receive its present legal structure – the ÖBB Group, operational since 1 January 2005.