

The Vinschger Bahn - a driving force for the regional development

This report examines the socio-economic effects of the passenger railway through the Vinschgau valley (Vinschger Bahn). For this purpose, a survey was conducted among 27 decision-makers and experts in the catchment area of the railway. Does the railway influence the quality of life of the population? What significance does the railway have for the business location? How important is it for the Vinschgau valley as a holiday destination? Which future infrastructure projects are necessary? These and similar questions will be answered in the report.

The Vinschgau valley has always been one of the structurally weakest areas of South Tyrol. The low attractiveness of the Vinschgau as a business location in the second half of the last century contributed to the fact that the valley remained a migration area for a long time. Lately, however, the Vinschgau has managed to stop this trend and to orient itself largely to the South Tyrolean economic dynamics. Both the tourism industry and socio-economic indicators, such as the unemployment rate and the number of employees, are developing surprisingly positively in the Vinschgau region. Also for the Burggrafenamt, the Vinschger Bahn is an important driving force for the economy and society.

According to experts, the Vinschger Bahn has stimulated the tourism industry in the Vinschgau region, because it has contributed to a better mobility for vacationers, who are increasingly making their stay completely "car-free". The possibility of connecting different destinations (bus-rail connections to destinations in the side valleys of the Vinschgau

and the Burggrafenamt), the attractively priced offer of travelling by train and the planning security during the holiday (no time lost searching for a parking space or due to congestion on the road) are the most frequently mentioned reasons why the train is so well accepted by tourists. In addition, the valley community was able to record a significant increase in day tourism due to the reactivation of the railway. Finally, cycling tourism, a branch that has grown hand in hand with the railways in the Vinschgau region, was strongly expanded. A considerable number of vacationers come year after year to the Vinschgau to explore the valley by bike. Companies outside the tourism industry, on the other hand, see fewer tangible benefits from rail.

In addition to the tourism industry, also the population benefits greatly from the railway. It is an important alternative to the road which is advantageous from a temporal, financial and ecological perspective. According to the respondents, the railway is the only congestion-independent connection to Meran or the provincial capital of Bozen. It is therefore essential for commuters, schoolchildren, students and senior citizens. The reliability, safety and comfort of the means of transport are the main reasons for the popularity of the railway among the population. Without the reactivation of the railway, the traffic situation on the main street through the Vinschgau would be even more problematic, with both locals and tourists having to accept significantly greater time losses due to congestion.

In summary, the survey results point to the added value of the railway in tourism and for the population. To use and expand

these impulses by the Vinschger Bahn in the best possible way in the future, it is necessary to:

- **Continuously improve mobility services for the population:** It is important that the mobility offer of the Vinschger Bahn will be further expanded. With the upcoming electrification of the railway, an important step in this direction will be taken: Direct connections from Mals to Bozen will make the travel offer more attractive. The transport capacities of the railways will increase by means of additional trainsets and denser timetables. This avoids capacity bottlenecks at peak times and increases comfort and flexibility in rail usage. Furthermore, the switch to electric hoists ensures environmentally friendly mobility.
- **Realize railway connection to neighbouring areas:** The connection of Vinschgau to its neighbouring regions is necessary to reduce its image as a "side valley" or "dead end street". The future development of the Swiss rail network would be a particularly great qualitative leap, as the tourism industry in the Vinschgau region would benefit greatly from it. The Swiss market is interesting because the typical Swiss is still a very affluent guest, which already makes greater use of public transport to travel on holiday. A railway connection to Scuol (CH) would therefore highly increase the value of the Vinschgau valley from a tourist point of view. In a second step, the development of the Swiss rail network could also create a connection to Landeck, which would bring the Vinschgau closer to Austria and southern Germany.