

## Logistics

The Swiss distance/weight-based heavy vehicle fee (HVF) continued to be an explosive issue in 2007 as well. Introduced at the beginning of 2001 as a fee for all vehicles with a total weight of more than 3.5 tonnes, it was first increased in 2005 and the vehicle weight limits adjusted upward in steps. The Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) drew a positive conclusion in its final report on the economic effects of the HVF and higher weight limits. Unsurprisingly, transport companies appear more sceptical. In 2007, the Federal Council decided on a further increase in the HVF (without raising the weight limits), a move which the transport sector opposes. The announced reclassification of EURO 3 vehicles into the second fee category as of January 2009 and the resulting higher fees and depreciation charges for these vehicles have also caused a stir in the transport sector. In addition, high energy prices have exerted further pressure on transport companies.

More dark clouds emerged over the logistics sector last year: The EU will require an advance shipment notice for commerce with third-party countries – hence in principle for commerce with Switzerland too – effective as of July 2009. The relevant information must be provided to European customs officials prior to crossing the border. Switzerland is currently negotiating with European authorities with a view to eliminating this possible obstacle to the country's trade with the EU. The aim is to agree an exception to the rule for commerce with Switzerland under a revised agreement on the movement of goods with the EU. The results of these negotiations were still pending when this publication went to press.

The era of operational NEAT began in 2007, bringing the politically driven shift in the transport of goods from the road to the railway a significant step forward. The Lötschberg base tunnel officially opened in June 2007, and regular traffic has been flowing along this first NEAT axis since December.

### Economy propels the logistics sector

The logistics companies participating in our survey managed to reap significant benefits from the strength of the Swiss economy and can look back on a successful year 2007: These firms recorded revenue growth that surpassed the nationwide average and earnings growth that ranked in the top 25% of all sectors. The logistics sector invested heavily, hired additional employees and enjoyed a positive price trend. Road transport companies posted the strongest growth in revenues, earnings and prices. All these factors indicate that firms succeeded in passing on a significant share of climbing energy prices to their customers.

### Bright outlook despite prophecies of doom

Despite the voices of gloom emanating from the transport industry in the wake of the Federal Council's decision to raise the HVF, companies in all the logistics segments anticipate a slowdown in the trend toward higher prices in the current year. Expectations regarding the business trend point to only a slightly diminished continuation of the positive pattern recorded in 2007: Revenue and earnings growth should remain on a favourable track, recruiting efforts will likely continue at just a marginally reduced pace, and investment activity in the sector will remain robust. Logistics companies should continue to benefit in the future from the trend toward outsourcing of logistics services. They will also boost efficiency and improve the traceability of dispatched goods due to further advances in technology. ■

