



**Lessons Learned from the
Project Meeting in Ghent & Liège (Belgium)**
on September 28/29, 2015

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*Building Block

Ghent

BB1. BIKE PARKING

• Impressive renovations of the train station are currently underway, with plans for **11,000 bike parking spaces**. The temporary situation (picture 1) may seem a little confusing, however once complete, the new bike parking facilities under the new station will impress users with its level of safety, easy to use racks, and clear overview with open sight-lines.

• The racks in the new **covered bike parking** facility are very well used (picture 2). Given the high demand, especially in this temporary situation, it is remarkable that the space between racks is so wide, especially when compared to Dutch bike parking facilities. Two-tier bike racks may be an appropriate solution, however it is important to keep in mind that this solution would block sight-lines, therefore decreasing the feeling of user-safety.

• The northern access point to the new covered bike parking facility nicely accommodates users with **a ramp for easy entry and exit**. However, the southern access point currently lacks a ramp, though plans are being considered to introduce one. This shows that ease access of the station for people traveling by bike is consistently made a priority. What's more, the location of the bike parking facility, directly underneath the railway tracks, provides easy access and for busy commuters.

• In the temporary bike parking solution, there is a significant shortage of parking spaces (note the square in front with many bikes). While construction continues at the station, **temporary bike parking spaces** have been introduced on public roads. A better accessible and more attractive bike parking behind the station would be of added help



BB2. PUBLIC BIKE

• Located at a central train station, it is only natural that there is a high demand for bike rentals at this site (picture 3). Short term rental bikes are available through automatic **Blue-bike rental locations** and by personnel at the 'Fietspunt' (run by social enterprise Max Mobiel). The cooperation between Blue-Bike and 'Fietspunt' is useful as it offers the chance to rent a bike at a staffed location.

• Signage of the Blue-bike locations and 'the Fiet-

spunt' could be better as it should be easier to find these valuable services after exiting the platforms.

• **'Fietspunt'** provides facilities and tools for self-service bike repairs as well as checking-on and cleaning the bike parking. 'Fietspunt' is therefore a valuable asset for commuters travelling to and from the station by bicycle. There are many other types of rental bikes available from this location as well including short-term rental but also bikes for students or employees through special schemes.

BB3. UNITY OF BIKE-TRAIN ORGANISATIONS

• National Railway Company of Belgium (NMBS) operates at quite a distance, they focus on their core business instead (mainly for reasons of difficult maintenance). NMBS does financially contribute to the 'Fietspunt' but a closer integration of bike policy within the railway company policy could be a good option.

BB4. INTEGRATED PAYMENT SYSTEM

• Introduction of **MOBIB card** (offering transport with operators De Lijn/NMBS, mainly buses and trams) with Blue-bike integration will be a major improvement.

• In Ghent the bike share system is very well used, with the cost of a 24-hour bike rental at €3. Elsewhere in Belgium, where local governments have taken the initiative to cover part of the rental fees, 24-hour fees are reduced.



BB5. COMMUNICATION, MARKETING AND PROMOTION

• While the following points are not necessarily specific to the Ghent location, they did contribute to its success:

- The personal approach of Blue-bike – especially

in the early phases of the project – worked out very well.

- Blue Mobility and the easily recognizable Blue-bikes have developed a strong visual identity, making use of **photographs of real users in ad campaigns** (picture 4).

- Blue-bike uses several **social media** accounts **to communicate with users** as well as make the Blue-bike brand a part of their life. The main message is always consistent; getting on the bike after the train is easy, useful, efficient and pleasant.



BB6. UNDERSTANDING OF INFRASTRUCTURE SITUATION

• Ghent is a true **cycling city with many cyclists**. Especially in comparison to Liège, the city of Ghent has a lot of separated cycle lanes (picture 7), some bike streets (picture 6) and a large network of cycling infrastructure (pictures 5, 8 & 9). However, the cycling infrastructure provided is not always appropriate given the high demand and potential for further growth.

• Limiting the available space to make a pass, the often narrow cycle lanes prove to be inconvenient for cyclists travelling at all speeds. Although in Ghent space for road traffic has sometimes been limited in favour of cycle roads, this is not done on the same scale as in Dutch cities. Moreover, at crucial intersections cycle infrastructure is sometimes lacking, combining all the traffic and creating unsafe situations. And on many larger roads there is no

real segregation of bicycle infrastructure from automobile infrastructure.

• Sometimes there is very little space between parked cars and the cycle lane, creating dangerous situations when drivers get out of their car, swinging their door into the cycle lane. On routes where demand for car parking is low (e.g. Sint-Denijslaan) parking spaces on one side could be removed in favour of extra (possibly separated) cycle lanes. Even where demand for car parking is high, there is often enough room for car parking spaces to be moved (e.g. to an area between the trees as on Sint-Denijslaan) in favour of cycle infrastructure.

• Cycle routes have no direct link with the station (picture 10: ramp of a bike parking) and are more focused on the neighbourhoods. Wayfinding and signage for cyclist is not always available, which could make navigating difficult.



• The immediate **area around the station does not provide a good starting/ending point for cyclists** either. This is partly due to construction works, but is an important aspect often overlooked, even in countries, such as Holland, known for their cycling infrastructure.

• The historic centre is mostly car free but there are **no real cycle routes and often pedestrians and cyclists share road space**. There are some specific cy-

cle streets though where cars have to make space for cyclists. The layout has a relation with the historic character of the city centre but comparable Dutch cities make choices more in favour of the cyclist.

• Quality of the surface of the (cycle) roads is often insufficient. The cycle lanes and crossings are not always marked by red asphalt which would be more noticeable for car drivers. Asphalt is also a preferable material compared to tiles or cobble stones.



Liège

BB1. BIKE PARKING

• The impressive main train station of Liège is designed by world renowned architect Santiago Calatrava and features **two bike parking facilities** (picture 12), one inside (picture 11) the station while the other outside (picture 13). The indoor parking facilities are especially difficult to find as **signage is lacking**. This has to do with the general design principles of the station as even the basic services such as departures and platforms details are difficult to find.

• The main parking is indoor and of good quality with a capacity of around 180 bikes. It has one entrance

but consists of **two separate sections** inside, one free of charge and a second for **members-only** (35 bikes, monthly and yearly subscriptions). Both sections are checked twice a day and two video cameras film the place constantly.

• One positive aspect is that the **'Maison des Cyclistes'** (bike shop and cyclists' organisation) is located next to the parking so people are always nearby (for safety reasons and providing information and help if needed). The 'self-service repair tools' and 'lock parking' in the main parking provide small but very practical tools that improve service for daily commuters.



• The other much smaller indoor parking is located at the rear side of the station but is almost impossible to locate and not very well used. However, it has fairly good access to the platforms.

• There is very limited **outdoor cycle parking** space with one location with covered cycle racks in front of the station.



• Cycling is not as popular as in Ghent and the capacity seems to be just sufficient for the current demand. In order to accommodate growth in commuters coming to the station by bike, an expansion of cycle parkings in a balanced way is recommended. The local government could play a bigger role in co-financing new bike parking facilities (as is done in Holland where often around one third of the costs are paid for by the municipality).



BB2. PUBLIC BIKE

• The Blue-bikes (picture 14) are available through an **automatic Blue-bike rental location** and **by personnel** at the 'Maison des Cyclistes' (run by cycle promotion organisation ProVelo). It could be interesting to develop more Blue-bike locations in Wallonia to improve the regional network. As in Ghent, the cooperation between Blue-bike and the 'Maison des Cyclistes' is useful for the clients as they have a choice here between an automatic and a staffed rental location.

• The '**Maison des Cyclistes**' also rents out other rental bikes through a municipal scheme, provides advice, self service maintenance facilities and a mobile bike repair service (picture 15), and checks and cleans the bike parkings at the station. These activities show the added value of their presence at the station for people cycling to and from the station.

• The 'Maison des Cyclistes' and Blue-bikes might be **difficult to find**, signage should be improved.



BB3. UNITY OF BIKE-TRAIN ORGANISATIONS

• NMBS operates at quite a distance, they focus on their core business instead (mainly for reasons of difficult maintenance). NMBS does financially contribute to the 'Maison des Cyclistes' but a closer integration of bike policy within the railway company policy could be a good option.

BB5. COMMUNICATION, MARKETING AND PROMOTION

• The activities of the 'Maison des Cyclistes' promote an important community feeling around the bike shop. Examples are 'cargo bike repair on location' and several community classes (mechanic course or promote cycling to school).

BB4. INTEGRATED PAYMENT SYSTEM

• Introduction of **MOBIB card** (offering transport with operators TEC/NMBS, mainly buses and trams) with Blue-bike integration will be a major improvement.



BB6. UNDERSTANDING OF INFRASTRUCTURE SITUATION

• It seems that cyclists **are not treated well** immediately around the station. **Cycle routes are not continuous**, forcing people traveling by bike to behave like a pedestrian (on the sidewalk) or like a car (on the main road). In this situation, a cycle route could provide additional security. A cycle route that passes the station could make the 'Maison des Cyclistes' and cycle parking facilities easier and safer for people traveling by bike approaching from Rue Paradis and Place des Guillemins (in front of the station, picture 16). The local government could play a bigger role in providing safer routes towards the station.

• The position of the station west of the river Meuse presents a barrier, making the eastern side of the city less accessible by bike (at least until the possible bike bridge

across the river will be built). In general, cycle routes from the station towards the neighbourhoods are not attractive because they are interrupted too many times by main roads without any protection for cyclists (picture 17, back of the station). The sign 'cycle path' is not consequently used across town.

• The quality of the surface of the roads and bicycle routes is often insufficient. There is a high contrast in maintenance for public space and (cycle) roads.

• **Signage for cyclists is lacking**, at least the route from the station to the centre should be signposted. Expansion to a general wayfinding system for the whole city and region is preferable.

