

GENT (B)

Gent, 55 km to the west of Brussels, covers 156 km² of which 36 km² is seaport area (handling 24 million tons / year). With its 230.000 inhabitants, Gent is the second largest city of the Flanders region in Belgium. As a result of the rapid development of the port, it became specialised in steel production, electromechanical industries and car assembly.

Gent is the third economic centre of Belgium. It is the only of the 5 major Belgian cities with a growing number of jobs, mainly in services (administration, health care and professional services).

Gent has a combined university and college students' population of about 45.000, and is the cultural heart of the Province of East-Flanders.

The city has a well-developed and integrated mobility plan, creating synergies between:

- ◆ Limited accessibility of the city centre by car in combination with a car parking plan
- ◆ Bicycle plan
- ◆ Public transport plan with better services and development of transfer points
- ◆ Traffic liveability plans per city sector with speed reduction and other safety measures

The largest pedestrian zone in Belgium, combined with a smart car parking policy

The City of Gent has the largest pedestrian zone in Belgium. The historical city centre of 30 hectares is only accessible for cars with a specific permit.

Cars are redirected to the "P-route", a clockwise and anti clockwise loop that connects the bigger parking lots close to the city centre. The P-route has a dynamic information and guidance system with indication of the occupancy status of the parking places on its way.

The city has developed a peripheral parking policy with a P+R under construction. There is a differentiated pricing policy. The 17, 000 paying parking spaces within the city's ring road are cheaper than the City centre's parking facilities. Residents receive a free parking card for this area.

Cycling policy

Gent is well known as a cycle city. Almost 15% of the inhabitants cycles daily, which brings the amount of bicycle trips per day to an average of 100, 000. Of the student's population of 45.000 people, two thirds cycles on a daily basis. 25% of the city's civil services come to work by bike. To make things even better, Gent has adopted a Bicycle Plan:

- ◆ 200 km of the 1000 km of roads on the Gent territory are property of the Flemish Region. These regional roads are the biggest concern in providing safety for cyclists. The Gent bicycle plan has set priorities in upgrading bicycle infrastructure at regional roads.
- ◆ All pedestrian zones are open to cyclists. Streets are one way for cars, and two ways for cyclists.
- ◆ A bicycle theft prevention scheme is part of the bicycle plan. It includes campaigning, bicycle registration and anti-theft bicycle racks. Two automatic bicycle pumps are available in the city, whenever bicycles are running out of air.
- ◆ Gent also focuses on the accessibility of the city by bicycles with the development of bicycle lanes next to the waterways that run across the city.
- ◆ A thorough safety campaign for young cyclist, including the distribution of helmets for children of 2.5 years old, bicycle flags for children of 5 years old and safety vests for children of 8 years old.
- ◆ The city organises a second hand market for children's bicycles.

Public Transport

The City of Gent has upgraded its public transport system through the implementation of the public transport plan. Frequency and quality of service have improved. A free late night service has been established on Friday and Saturday. Free public transport is available for large groups of the city's inhabitants: senior citizens and teenagers.

The intermodality and connectivity of the public transport system has grown better with the identification and development of inter-modal transfer points.

The renewal of the bus fleet and of several streetcars makes travelling more comfortable.

Accessibility of public transport for disabled people is also of great concern to the City and the public transport company (e.g. Low floor buses and tramway wagons, accessible infrastructure of bus and tramway stops, information campaign towards people with disabilities).

Mobility Management

Being the educational centre of its region, the city of Gent in a very early stage (beginning of the 90's) started to develop school commuter plans (in the framework of the EU-Life Programme). The experience and expertise gathered in these projects is still taken up in several school mobility plans.

New companies that come to settle in Gent are stimulated to appoint a mobility manager and to develop a company mobility plan.

The city's mobility service works according to an annual mobility communication plan. The City of Gent is an active transport and traffic campaigner. The city has set up campaigns on bicycle theft prevention, bicycle lights, parking management, traffic safety and travel behaviour. Targeted campaigns are run after feedback from police or the city's neighbourhood watch. Citizens can become member of the "smart-on-the-road club" in signing a charter. They promise to be a good example in traffic. The city participates in the "In town without my car" campaign.

Intelligent Transport Systems

The dynamic parking guidance system is a good example of the way Gent makes use of the possibilities of ITS.

Another ITS pilot project is the local demonstration with Intelligent Speed Adaptation (speed limiters). 46 cars (including the mayor's and the university rector's) and 3 regular buses have been equipped with an ISA-system. The purpose is to implement ISA applications for the permit holders that can access the pedestrian zone in the city centre.

Integration of spatial planning and transport planning

The biggest challenges and opportunities for sustainable development are located North of the Gent region. An integrated approach for the economic, spatial and environmental future for the entire the channel zone is being developed in the ROM-project. Regional, provincial and local authorities join forces to solve current and future development and accessibility problems in the channel zone.

Transport is an essential part of this plan. Not only combined freight transport is part of the planning, but also bicycle accessibility of the area.