

GRONINGEN (NL)

The compact city

Groningen is the metropolis of the northern Netherlands and with its 175.500 inhabitants; it is the seventh city of the country. Because of the presence of institutions such as a university and an academic hospital, Groningen plays a 'centre' role for over 500.000 people.

Groningen has an integrated urban planning, transport and environment policy. This is put into practice through a number of tools:

- ◆ Spatial plans favouring the compactness of the city;
- ◆ Access restrictions for the city centre and parking management;
- ◆ Management of the car flow to give priority to public transport;
- ◆ Cycling network;
- ◆ Public participation and consultation of stakeholders.

The Compact City – Linking transport and land use planning

Groningen pays a lot of attention to the link between land use planning and transport planning. This is reflected in the concept of the 'compact city'. The compact city approach aims to keep distances as short as possible to as many destinations as possible, in order to limit the number of necessary traffic movements and to allow many distances to be covered by bike. Points of attraction (such as commerce, cultural centres, employment centres) are located where they are accessible by public transport and bicycle. New residential zones are located at 3-4 km from the city, close to public transport networks and cycling routes. Large businesses and public buildings are implemented in the neighbourhood of transport stops or railway stations, or in the city centre. Only enterprises really needing access by car are implemented in the periphery. Car traffic in and around is concentrated to some roads in order to limit nuisance and focuses on transport that is economically required. At those roads noise measures are implemented.

Cycling Policy

The bicycle is very competitive to the car as a transport mode in the city of Groningen. For 25 years Groningen has had a consistent transport policy aiming at encouraging the use of the bicycle and discouraging the use of the car for short distances. Groningen's cycling policy was initiated in 1977 with the introduction of a traffic circulation plan. As from that moment, the inner city shifted its focus more towards the bicycle and away from the car. A lot of time, money and energy were invested in qualitative cycling infrastructure. These investments have made the bicycle competitive to the car. The bicycle is on average 30 % faster than the car in Groningen and around 50 % of the number of travels over short distances are made by bike.

Public Transport: the KOLIBRI plan

The northern Netherlands want to avoid the congestion problems, lack of public transport connections, etc. that the Randstad (Amsterdam region) is currently facing. Aiming for a clean environment, quality of life and maximum accessibility, a public transport plan has been developed for the region. Travelling within the urban region becomes more and more important: many people do not live where they work and a lot of traffic from the region also enters the city for shopping and leisure purposes. Therefore the region of Groningen – Assen has developed the Kolibri Public Transport Network. The ambition of Kolibri is to develop a modern, fast and comfortable public transport network that competes with the car and increases the accessibility of the cities of Groningen and Assen. By means of light trains, trams, speed bus connections and transferia, a network should be created which caters for fast connections between living, working and services.

Parking Management

The parking policy of Groningen supports the strategic choice to limit car access to the inner city:

- ◆ Parking spaces in and close to the city only for business travel and targeted (short) shopping
- ◆ Parking for fun shopping and commuter parking discouraged in centre, directed to P+R
- ◆ On-street parking in inner city most expensive
- ◆ Parking garages: the closer to the centre, the more expensive
- ◆ Special agreements with companies

Mobility Management

Influencing the demand for mobility and the travel behaviour of citizens in favour of sustainable transport modes is a main priority for Groningen. The city is experienced in setting up campaigns for different target groups and on different topics. In 2002 for example, a target group oriented public campaign was set up to inform citizens of the city's parking policy.

Partnerships and cooperation with companies and business located in the area are essential to tackle transport problems related to commuting. As main traffic generators, employers are asked to take their responsibility. Through the traffic coordination centre Groningen-based employers are encouraged to develop a company transport plan. In return the company can receive a number of privileges, e.g. in terms of parking for business purposes, carpool benefits, etc.

Freight Transport

Groningen has a historic city centre with small and narrow streets that cannot provide daily access to big trucks and vans. In addition, the city's policy is to minimise motorised traffic in the centre. Despite these restrictions, shops need to receive deliveries, if not daily then at least weekly. The city of Groningen has found smart solutions to facilitate deliveries while preserving the quality of life in the city centre. In 2002 Groningen received the 'Sustainable Distribution' label of the Platform for Urban Distribution, for its initiatives in favour of sustainable freight transport in the inner city.

Since 1995 Groningen has a special arrangement with freight transporters: they can also have deliveries outside the fixed delivery hours, provided they cluster goods to a minimum of 100 deliveries to at least 20 addresses in the inner city per day. In addition they should make use of small environmentally friendly vehicles. Distributors that are part of this arrangement carry the 'Sustainable Distribution' logo.

Two bus lanes have also been opened to freight transport. During the delivery hours, freight transport over 3.5 tonnes can use these lanes.

A Committee for Advice on supply issues was established in 1995. They make sure that retailers from the city, transporters and loaders are involved in the optimisation of the urban distribution policy.