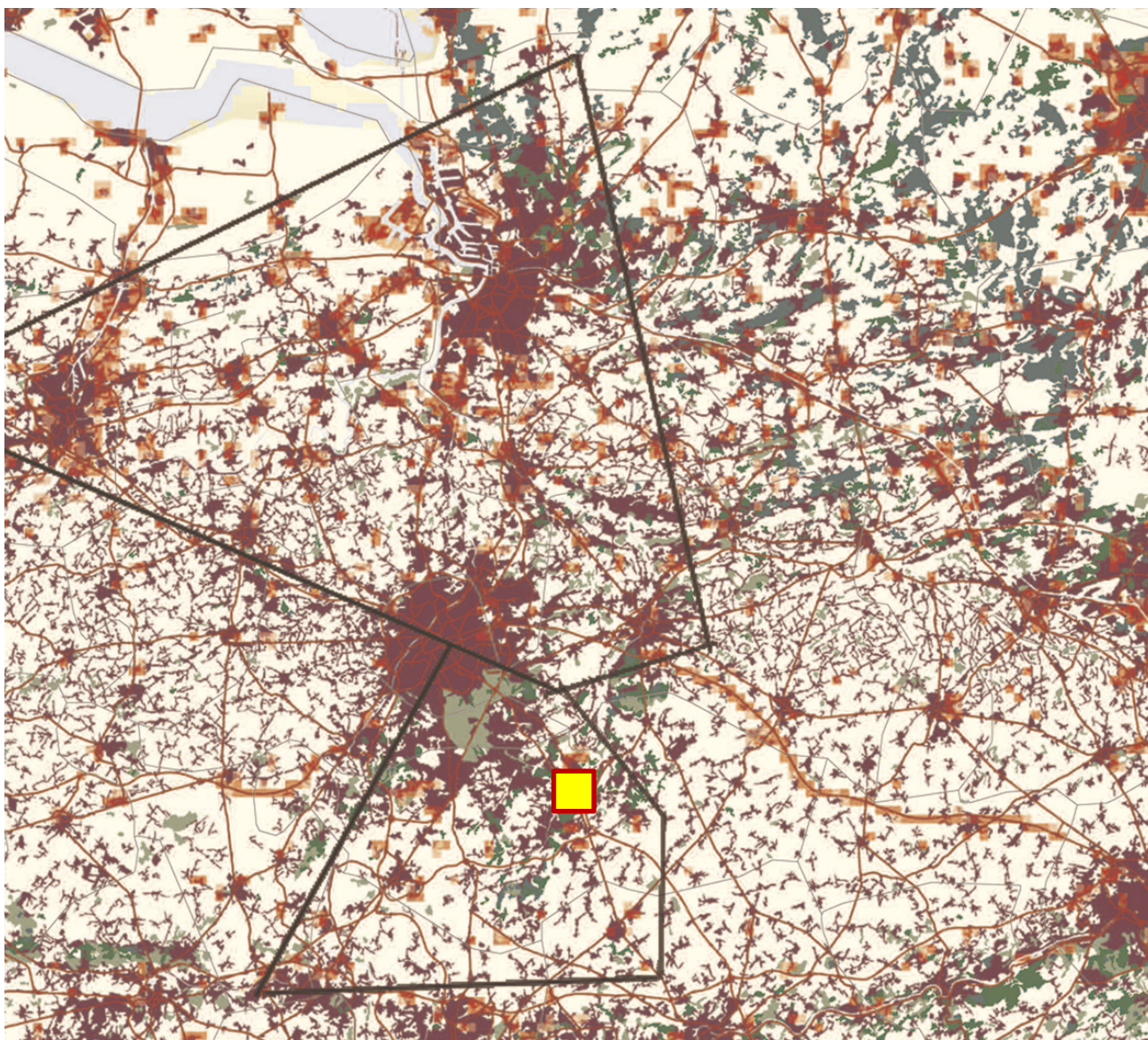


Urban Land Institute
Workshop: What function will a railway station have
in the city of tomorrow ?
Brussels, De Warande, 1 June 2016

Louvain-la-Neuve, a new university town conceived, built and expanded around a Railway Station

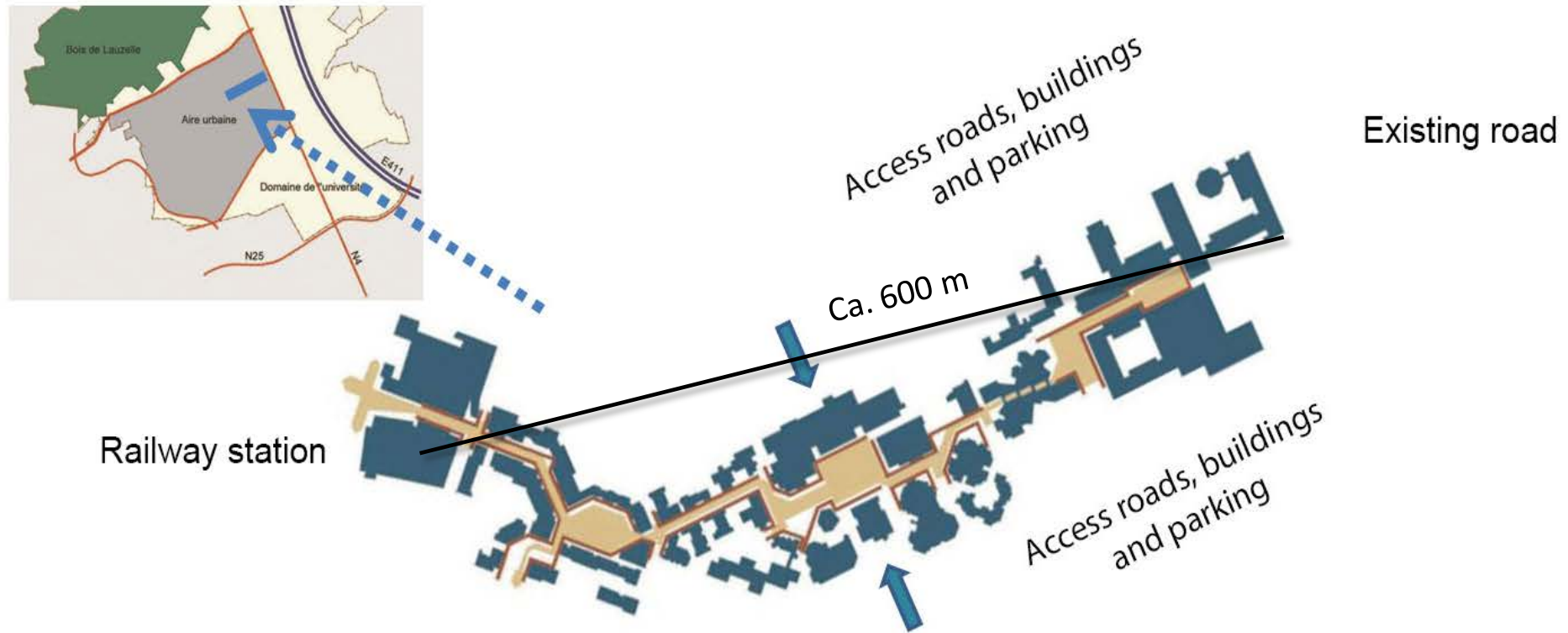
By Pierre LACONTE, Co-designer of Louvain-la-Neuve



The regional setting – Belgium is a highly urbanised country, Brussels being the centre of a metropolitan pattern. The cities of Antwerp, Ghent and Louvain, North of Brussels, loosely suggest a diamond (losange). The smaller cities of Nivelles and Wavre, South of Brussels loosely suggest a triangle. All of them are commuting distance from Brussels (maximum 60 km).

It reaches the lower part of the site through a tunnel. Rail became the main access to the new town, while walking and cycling became the main mode of transport inside the city.





The pedestrian place-making through a string of public spaces. This approach was implemented in the main pedestrian street in the first phase, starting from the existing N4 road east of the site, in 1972 (lower part of the picture), and later extended to the railway station opened in 1975 (upper part), the centre of the city, and the extension towards the western part of the site. Car access to buildings and parking is placed outside the spine, with some underpasses.



A string a public spaces for movement of leisure. The centre of the first phase was the Science Library, a huge concrete building seen as the cathedral of a university town with its plaza (parvis), above an automobile underpass. It is a social gathering place with university buildings, shops and restaurants (arch. A. Jacqmain).



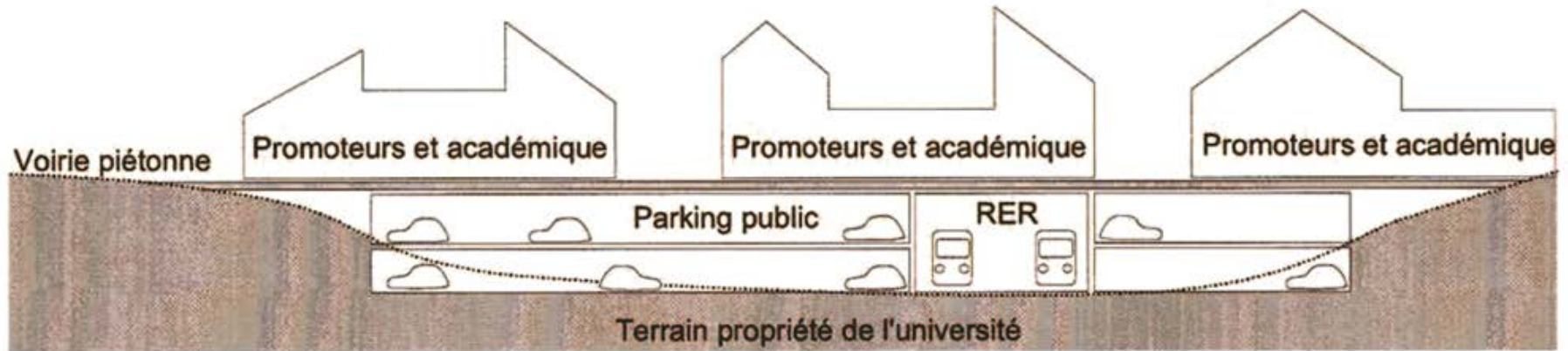
Transit oriented development. The new station built by the State railway company in 1975 was entirely underground, in view of being covered at a later stage. The full development of the East-West spine includes a slab on the lower part of the site, hosting the services, the parking and their underground access, in addition to the rail tracks.



The Station. The arcaded entrance of the station (arch. Y. Lepere) on the pedestrian spine is the place where the platform starts.



The platform is built up by offices and apartments, with shops on the ground floor, surrounding a market place next to the station (“architectura minor”, by contrast to the iconic library, “architectura major”).



The functioning of the platform. The diagram shows how the underground remains property of the university while the infrastructure and buildings are leased (leases of up to 99 years) to public and private investors. The subterranean station opened the opportunity to also create subterranean road access and parking.



The platform hosts numerous small and larger public spaces planted with trees and sidewalk cafés.

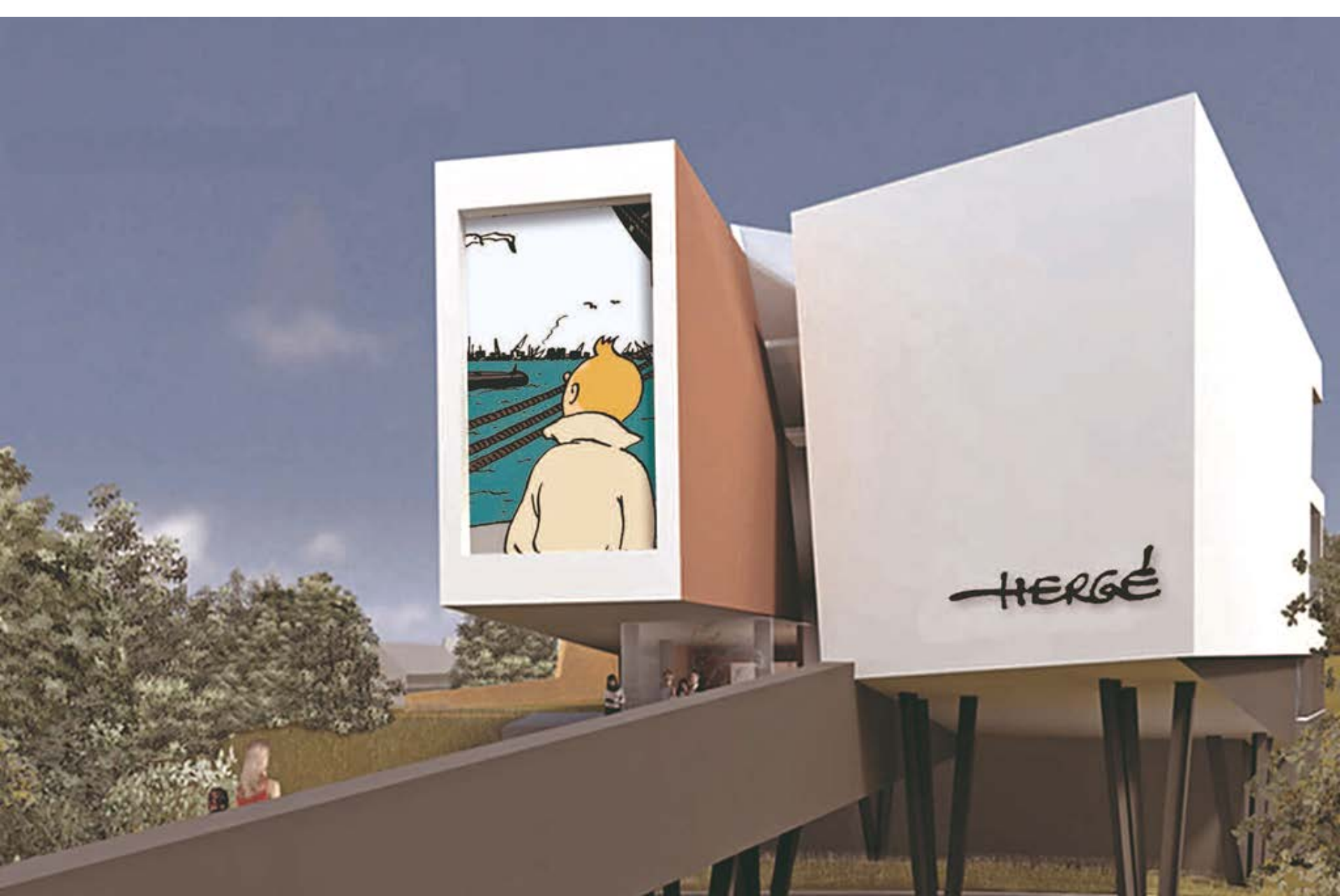


Cafés and restaurants are occupying pedestrian spaces while automobile access uses the underground parking.

**A shopping mall
served by rail:
“L’Esplanade”.**

In 2005 a large shopping centre was opened, next to the station, together with a new residential street, on the platform. The same developer took over the underground parking space. Its success (8 million visitors per year in 2014) led the developer to nearly double its surface by using space above the rail tracks.

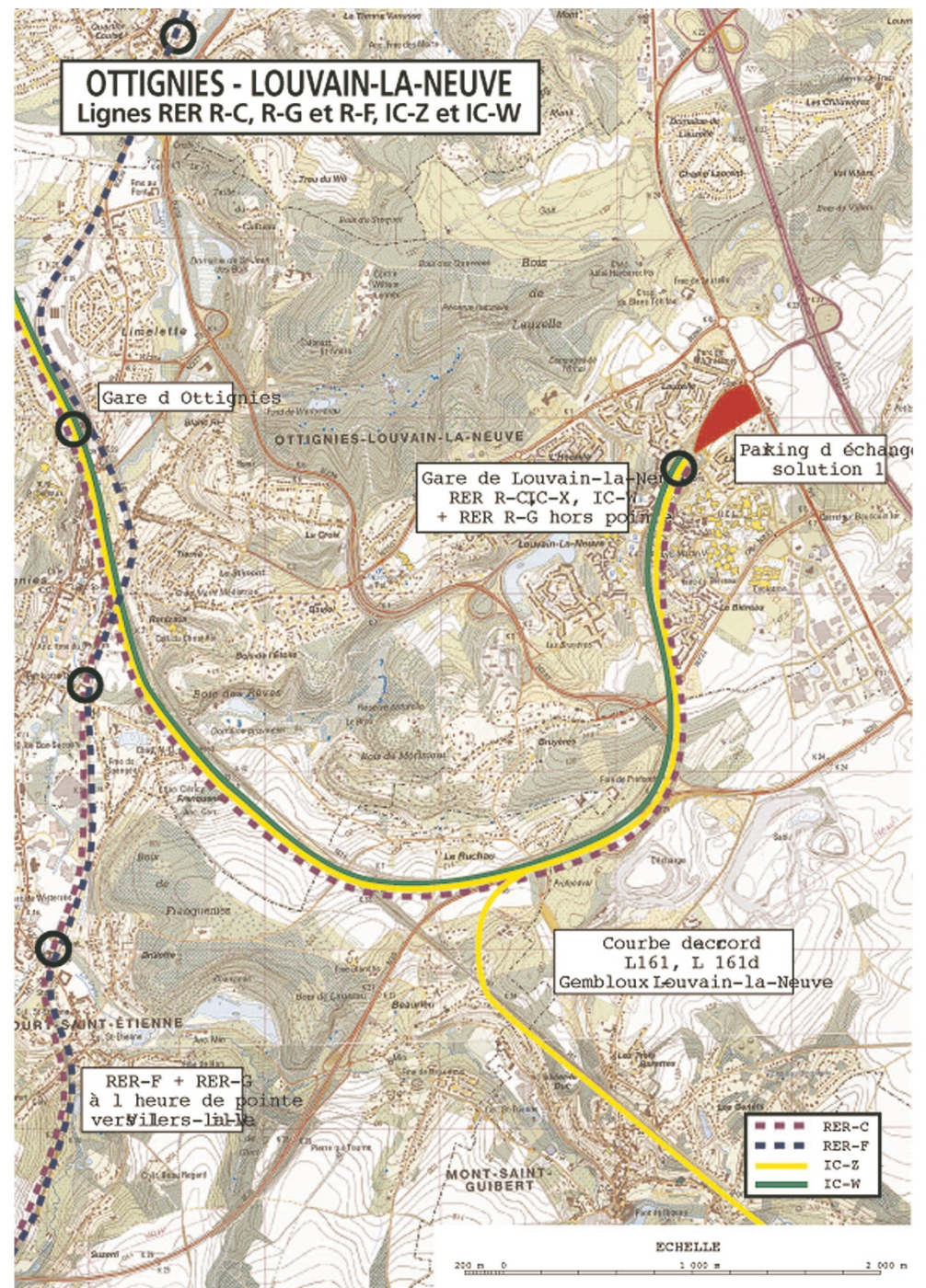


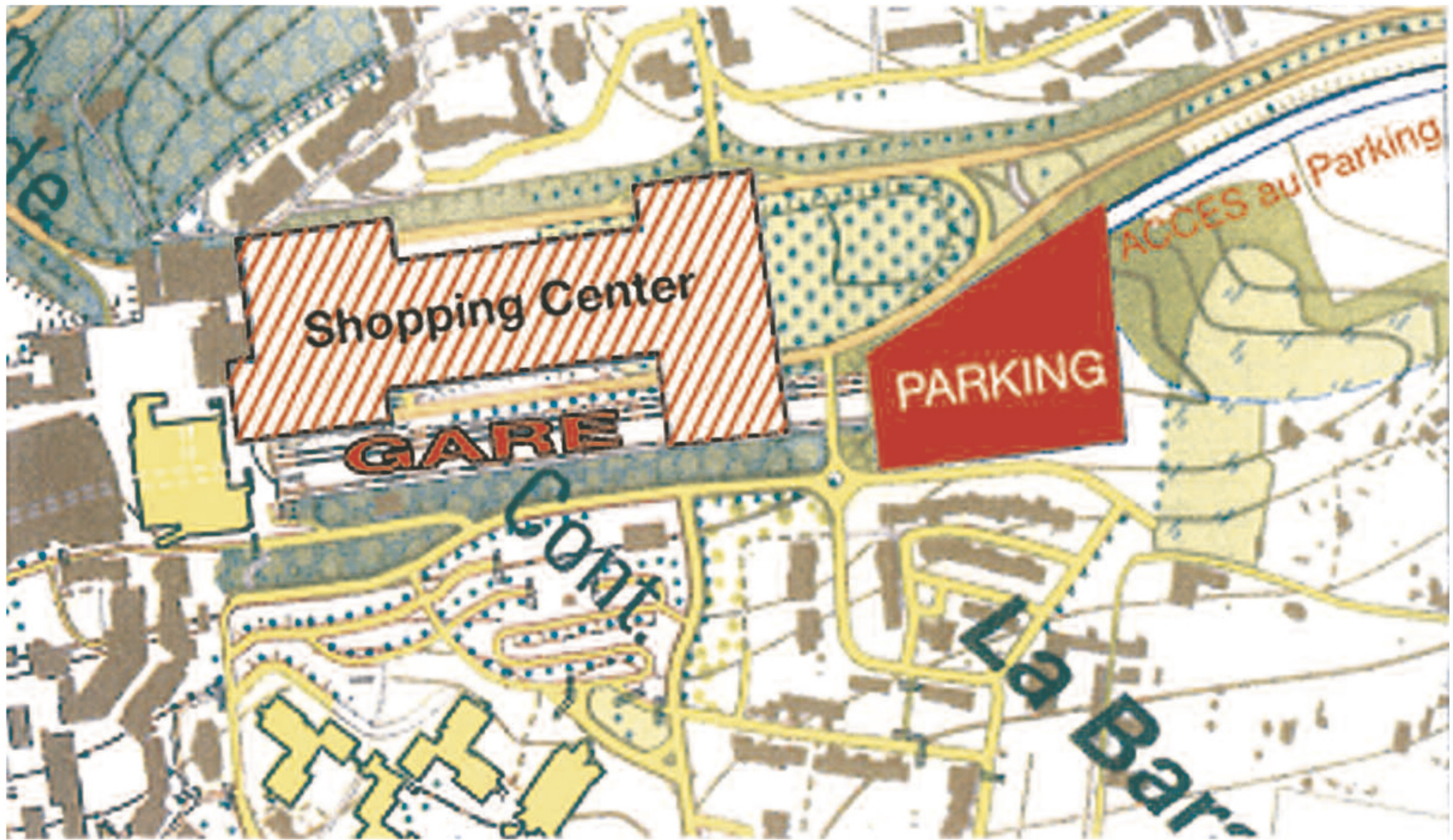


The private Hergé museum was located in direct connection to the station and the main spine (architect de Portzamparc).

Further transit development.

The development of the rail station as head of one of the Brussels S-Bahn lines is generating a challenge: combining transit pedestrian movements, park & ride and local residential development.





Further urban development. View showing the Shopping Centre, its future extensions above the rail tracks and the future parking spaces for commuters, combined with apartments blocks. The challenge of the new RER station will be the arbitration between the expectations of the of commuters and the opportunity offered by the enlargement of the station.