

Rethinking Belgium's institutions
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Mobility and urban development: all powers to the regions?

Keynote paper **Mobility, transportation policy and urban development -** **Institutional aspects**

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QUESTIONS RAISED

What are and should be the respective roles of the federal state, the regions and the local authorities in mobility policy?

The paper addresses each of the questions in a time and space framework:

- *The period starting with the post-WW II urban development*
- *A special reference to the Central Belgian conurbation, which summarises a maximum of decision levels (135 municipalities located in the three regions).*

I. The post-World war II conurbation's urban development .

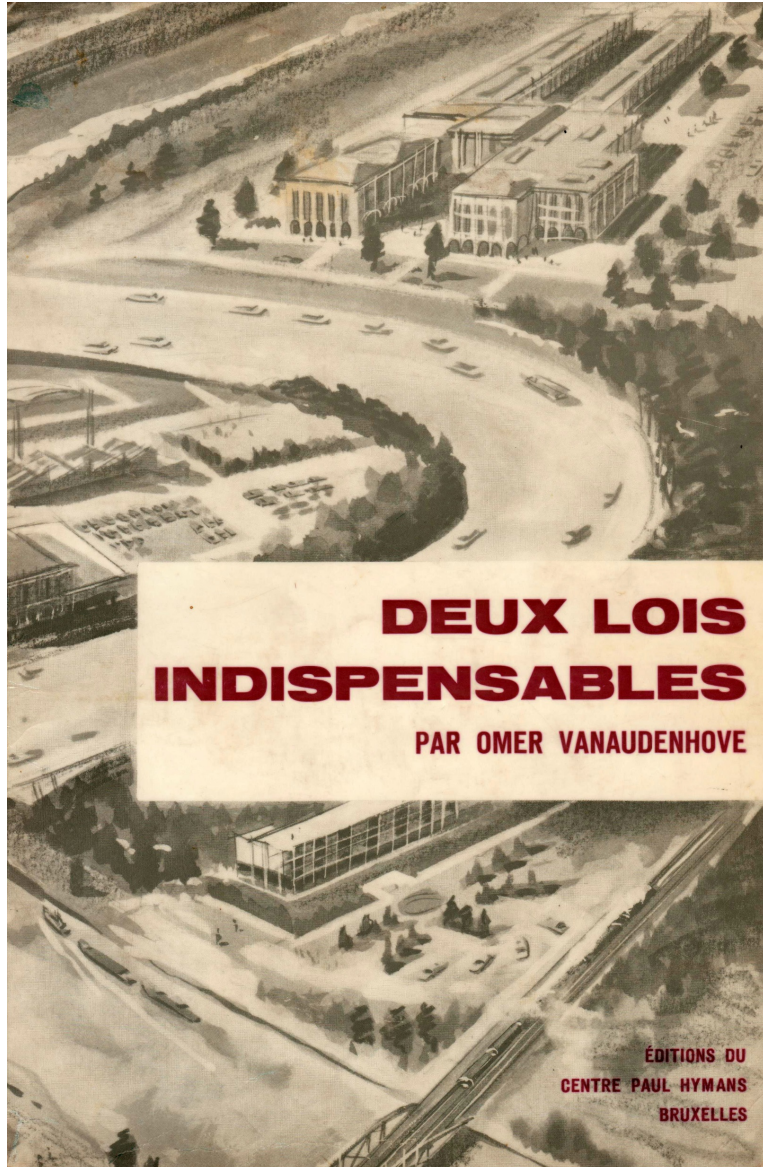
This process has been characterised as “urbanisation without urbanism”. This was helped by a conjunction of central state institutional instruments favouring urban sprawl and road traffic such as:

- Subsidized access to individual homes in peri-urban areas most often accessible only by road (De Taeye Law 1948)
- Subsidized peri-urban industrial parks (1959 laws on regional development)
- Deductibility of commuting cost by car from income taxation,
- company car tax subsidies and
- liberalisation of new shopping centres.

The main incentive to sprawl and automobile travel was perhaps related to:

- The Planning Law of 1962
- The road-programming Laws implemented between the 60's and 70's.

Both had been prepared by a strong political statement (ILL, 1),



**DEUX LOIS
INDISPENSABLES**

PAR OMER VANAUDENHOVE

ÉDITIONS DU
CENTRE PAUL HYMANS
BRUXELLES

1. The Planning Law of 1962

1.1. Local planning

The Law of 29 March 1962 organized planning and building permits, both in urban areas and in peripheries. Its central piece was the Special Development Plan - BPA/PPA, with no legally defined size, in many cases only one block.

The rule set for urban redevelopment was that:

- the developer who owned half of that block could obtain expropriation of the rest (A 25)
- in case of refusal by the State planning official he had a right of appeal to the provincial council, a lower level elected body (A 55)
- most importantly, he had a right to compensation if his land could not be developed (A 37).

The law entailed URBAN high rise developments wherever developers wanted them e.g. The Philips or ITT towers in Brussels, or the Europa Centrum in Ostend.

The Europa Centre in Ostend (ILL, 2) was built as a special development plan on one city block in the middle of the urban fabric. The developer acquired half of it and expropriated the rest. He gained a multiple increase of density.



1.2. The 1962 planning law and sub-regional zoning plans (plans de secteur/gewesplannen)

Use of the road as access to work was further encouraged by adding compulsory minimum provision of off-street parking space in proportion of the built surface, even if the building was next to a railway station (Shoup 2005).

It also encouraged the proliferation of RURAL low-density land subdivisions, most often accessible only by road and thus encouraging urban sprawl.

The sprawl was reinforced by generous free land allocations for “future housing extensions” in the 48 sub-regional zoning plans (Gewestplannen/plans de secteur). The subregional zoning plans were part of the 1962 law but their implementation started in the 70s after regionalisation of the planning law. The land allocation for “future housing extension” gave the owners of these lands an instant quasi-property laws to be taken away by expropriation.

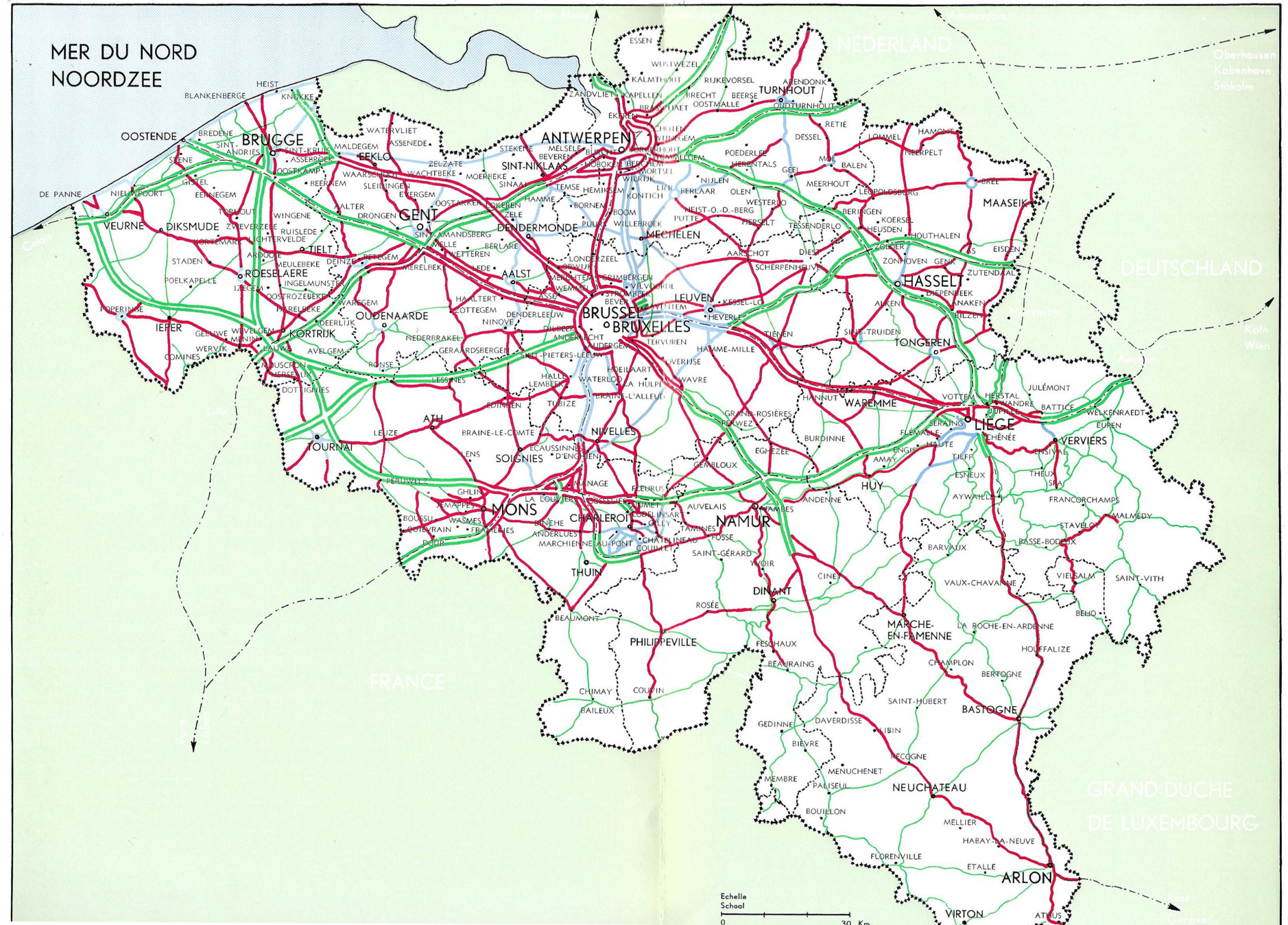
2. The road-programming laws

The road programme was seen as a response to expected demand generated by the urban development and increase of personal income (“Predict and provide”). A contrary approach was taken in the UK following the « SACTRA » (1994) Report on induced traffic that took into account the congestion generated by new trunk roads themselves and opted for containment.

In Belgium the road-programming laws provided an extensive central State financed development toll-free motorways network*, the densest in Europe with the Dutch one ILL, 3,, This network was regionalised and transferred to the newly created regions as an exclusive competence, without a coordination body .

* https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_des_autoroutes_de_la_Belgique

Avant-projet réseau routier 1980 - Voorontwerp wegennet 1980



Bleu pâle : 2 x 4 voies/rijstroken
 Rouge : 2 x 3 voies/rijstroken
 Vert pâle : 2 x 2 voies/rijstroken
 Vert foncé : 2 x 4 voies/rijstroken

QUESTION 2

And how should mobility policy be coordinated with urban development policies and its objectives, such as adequate housing and a concern for green spaces and biodiversity?

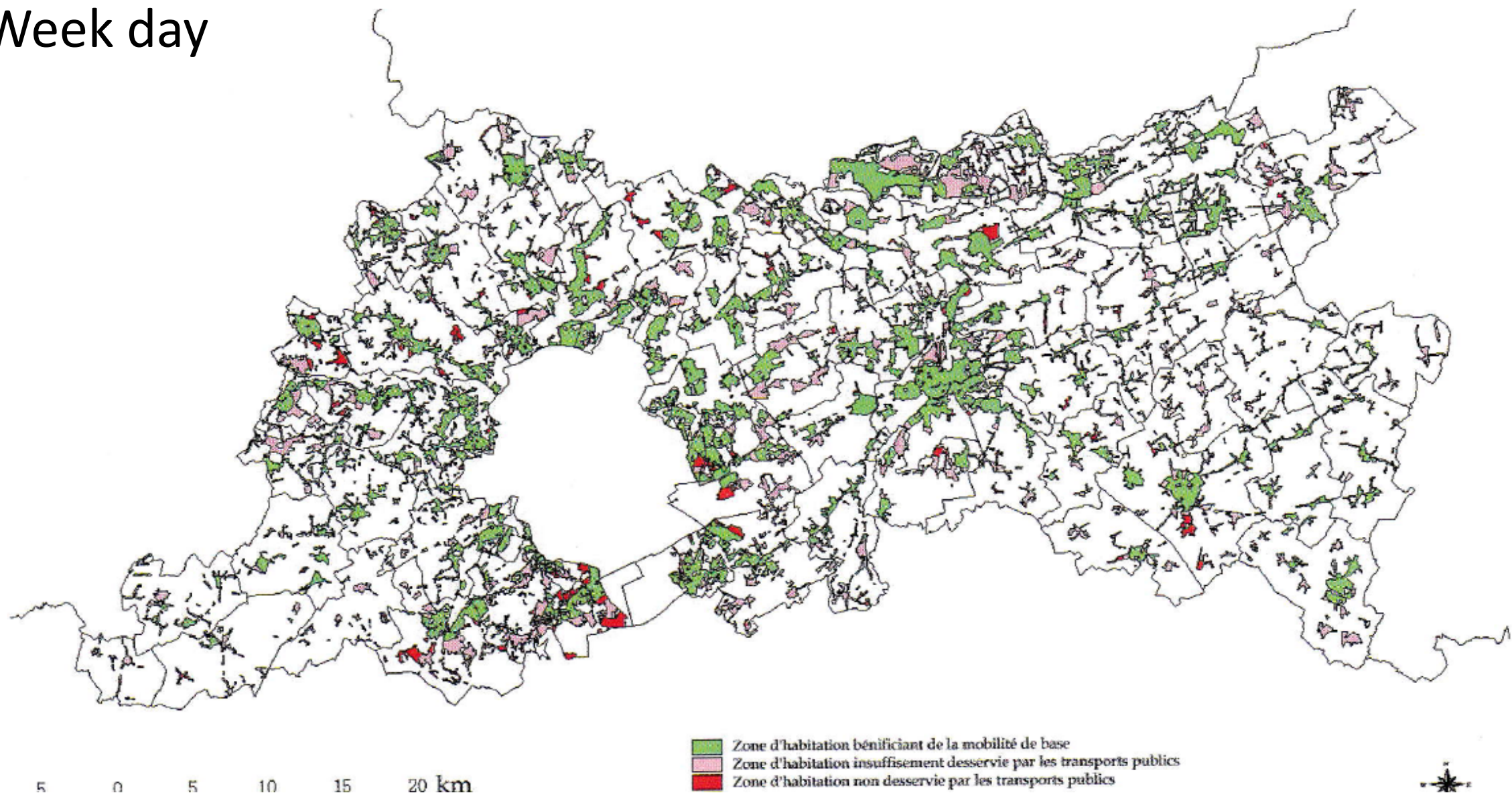
II. Coordinating urban development and mobility policies at regional level:

the Flemish regional government Decree on generalised public transport access (2001)

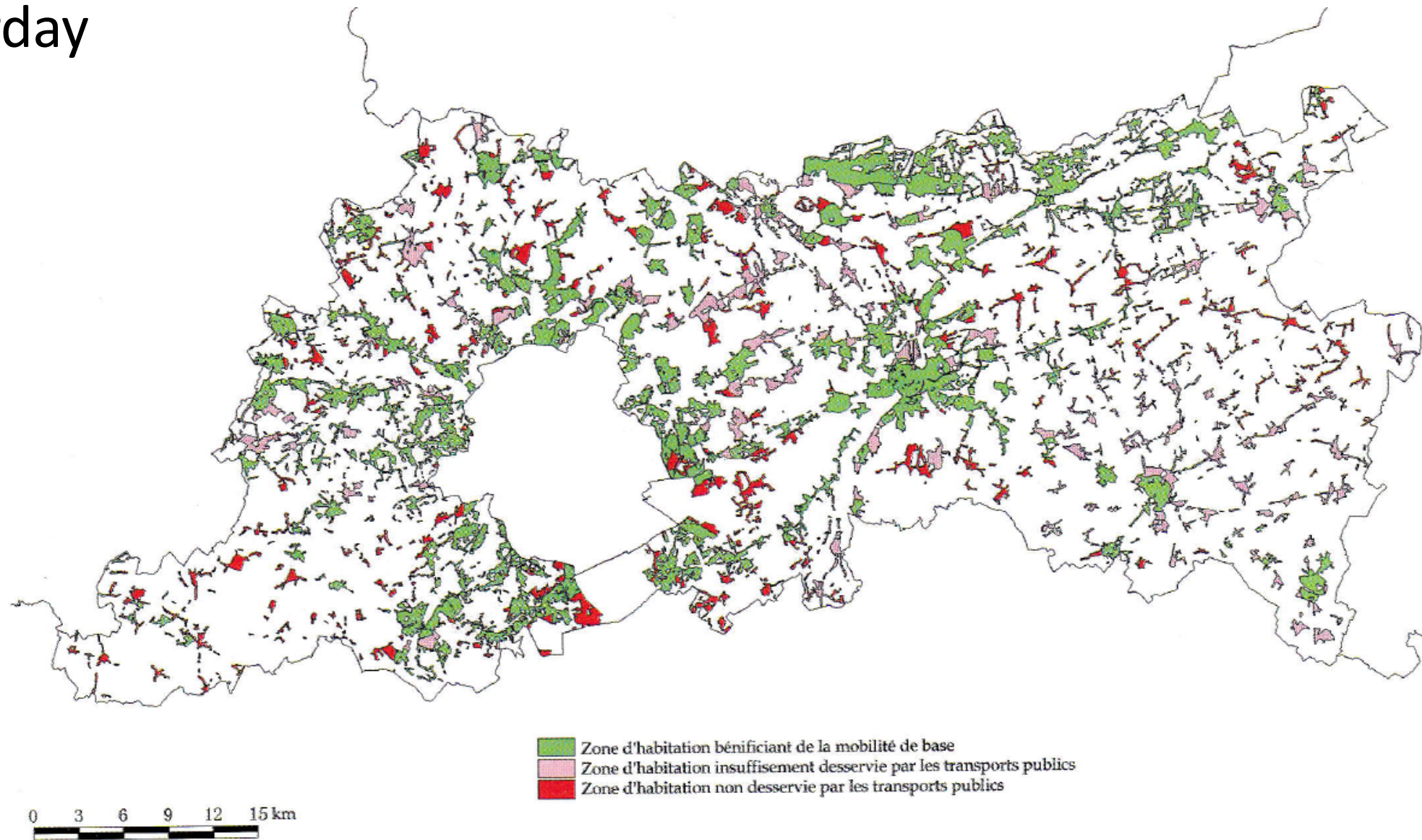
That Decree was taken at the initiative of the minister of Transport (S. Stevaert). The Decree was based on a set of maps* (covering the entire territory of the Flemish Region), which classified the existing settlements (cities, villages and hamlets) into green, yellow and red categories according to the quality of access to public transport services, on workdays and at week-ends.

* https://www.ffue.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/GareEtLaVille_chapter.pdf

Week day



Saturday



- The decree compelled the transport operators to increase their level of service (red had to become green), but only to all EXISTING settlements.
- New settlements were therefore authorised only if the public transport service met the target. The Minister for Land use therefore had to finance additional buses or refuse the new land subdivision request.
- The indirect effect has been that no new estates unconnected to public transport have been built and that empty spaces have gradually been filled.
- On the other hand the budget for new buses strongly increased.

III. The role of municipalities in mobility, adequate housing and a concern for green spaces and biodiversity

Local level possibilities exist for adaptive reuse, taking advantage of unused space next to trunk ways to build higher density housing:

- green apartments could be built on top of shopping malls (success story of Plochingen/Stuttgart garden estate above a large supermarket next to a motorway at minimal cost) or
- green apartments could be built as noise buffer along motorways (Newcastle Byker Wall Estate built on the northern side of a motorway: quiet and sunny).



Plochingen (Stuttgart), apartments and garden above a supermarket next to a motorway.



Newcastle, Byker Estate, Northern wall facing the motorway.



Newcastle, Byker Estate, Southern side protected from the motorway noise.

QUESTIONS 3 - 4

At what level(s) should investments in transport infrastructure be decided and at what level should they be funded?

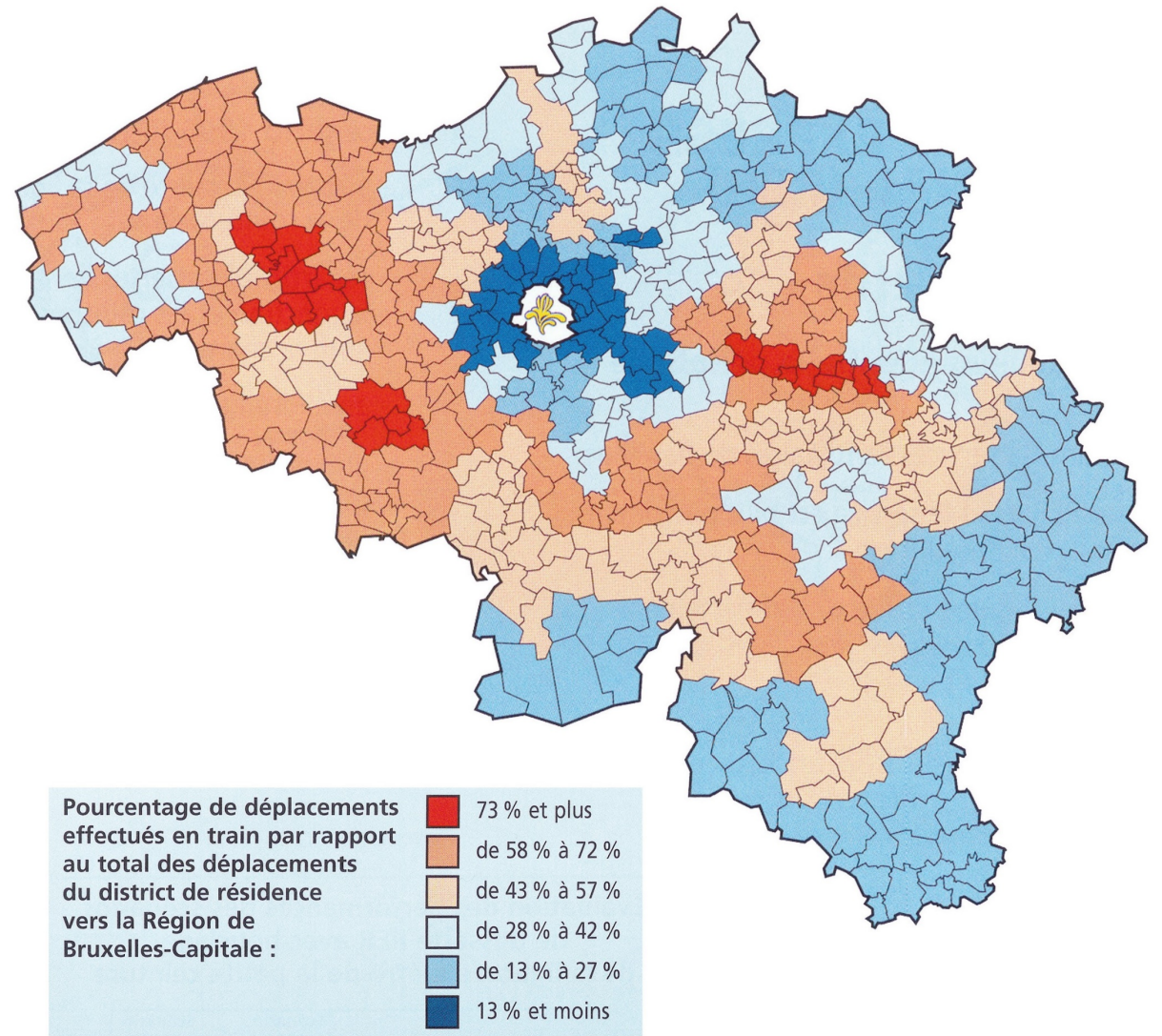
Can decisions about the allocation of space stop at the borders of a commune, a region, the federal state?

IV. National and regional Railways network

Commuter data maps show the weakness of putting exclusive priority on intercity connections and the need for reinforcing the suburban network, starting gradually from the 70's.

The official 12 years GEN-RER Master plan was adopted in 2000 to be implemented in 2012 and covering most of the Central Belgian conurbation.

Part de marché de la S.N.C.B.
des déplacements domicile-travail entre
les communes belges en 1991

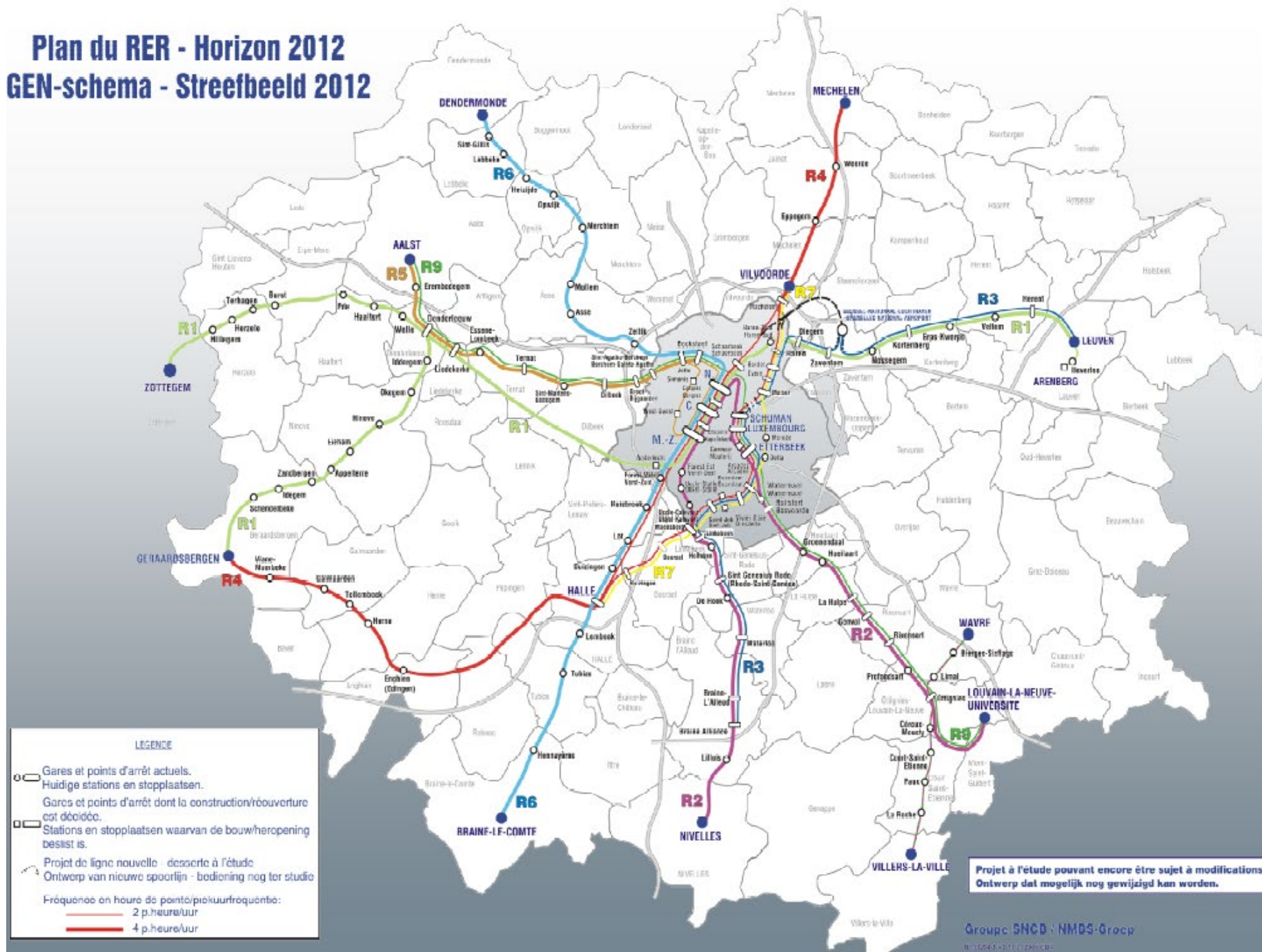


1. Commuter rail, institutional construction of the National Railways “Gewest Express Net/Réseau Express Régional” (now S-NET)

- The national state railways conceived a plan for an express commuter rail network inspired by the Paris RER concept and its implementation by the Syndicat des transports de l’Île-de-France (STIF). Its governance included the appointment of a “strong” manager, i.e. politically appointed but independent in his decisions.
- This structure was replicated in Belgium, in view of a completion in 2012, but the coordinating rail-road operators’ body lacked the needed strong governance, almost never met and thus this structure did not work, nor the completion calendar.
The plane was there but there was no pilot.
- The Minister in charge of railways governance could of course revive it at any time.

Plan du RER - Horizon 2012

GEN-schema - Streefbeeld 2012



2. The Brussels metro: from state to regional management.

The planning of a metropolitan railway network in Brussels and Antwerp started from 1963. The coordination with the local transport operators was managed by the state (Ministry of communications – Special task force for the promotion of urban transport) and led to the successful first Brussels metro line and pre-metro network (see map).

After the regionalization the responsibility for planning and investments was taken over by the newly created Brussels-Capital region officials.

The Central government metro team was dismantled and metro plans restarted some 10 years later.

However the regional government did no longer appoint a coordination team between the state railways operator and the Brussels regional transport operator (MIVB/STIB).

This contrasted with cities like Paris, Lyon, Zurich, Madrid, etc. that all have put into place an intermediary coordination structure, politically appointed but with independent technical expertise.

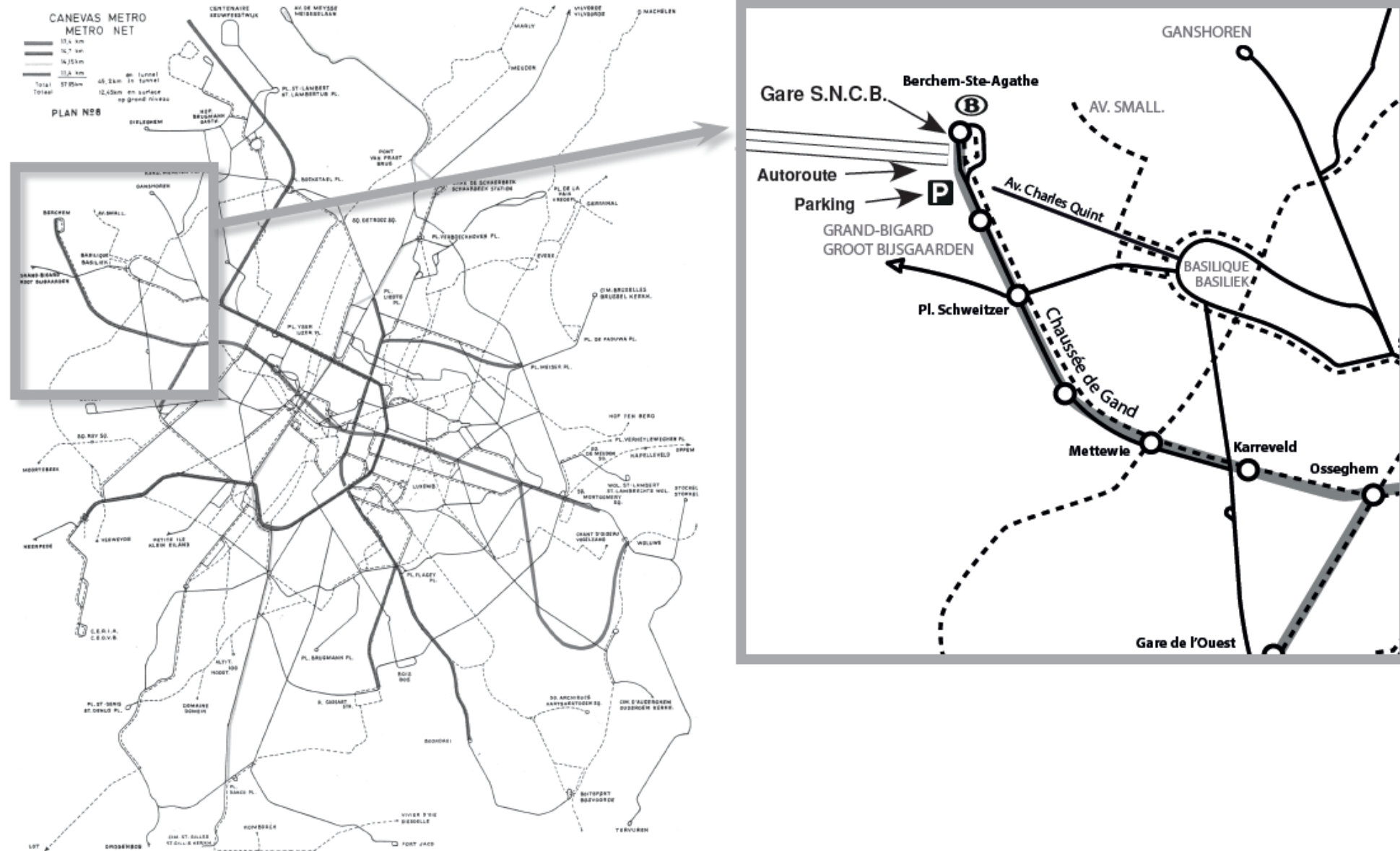
* https://ffue.org/archive/PDF/CercleGaulois_ALF_28092012.pdf

As to the design network the regional Government became directly in charge and was led by municipal perspectives, It ignored the broader investment priorities approved by the state government in 1963. These plans favoured an extension of Line 1 to Berchem Railway station and motorway terminal and a (possibly privately managed) Park and Ride allowing the commuters from the West of the region to leave their car in safe hands and switch to metro line 1 and avoid the intra urban congestion (Avenue Charles-Quintlaan).

This connection to the west completely disappeared from the metro plans and was replaced by a new line towards the north of Brussels (Bordet), notwithstanding the reports stressing its very limited passenger potential (see map).

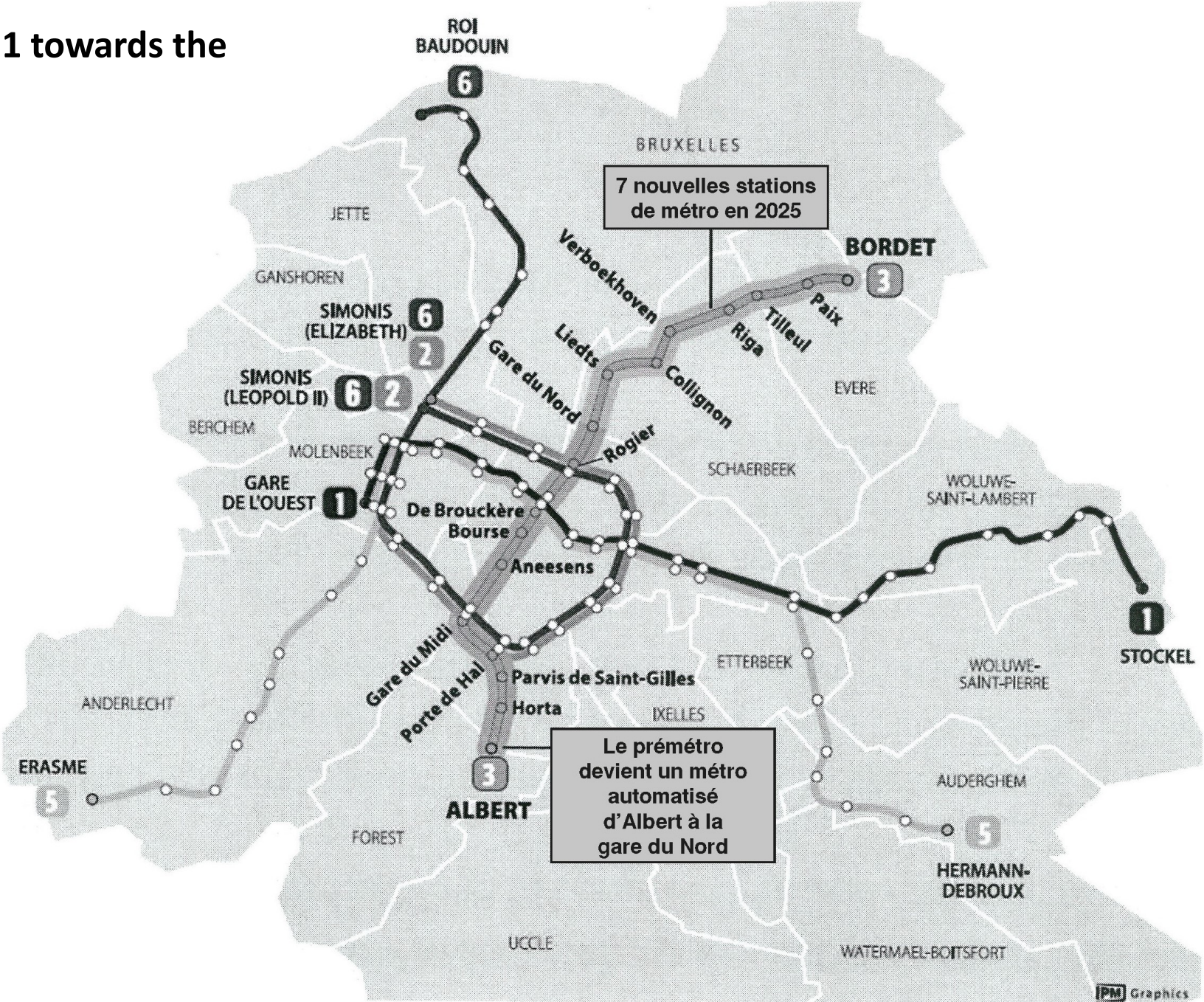
The connection to the West (extension of line 1 to Berchem Station) would be of 3,5 km, under existing roads. It would require no special techniques, nor expropriation. Its cost is estimated at 600 million € (2018).

Plan du projet de métro approuvé par le Gouvernement National 1963



Metro future projects 2018

5 lines – no completion of line 1 towards the West



3. Ideas from similar conurbations abroad?

ZURICH.

For the coordination between transport modes, parking and urban development a parallel can be made with Zurich, with no impopular measures.

TRAFFIC.

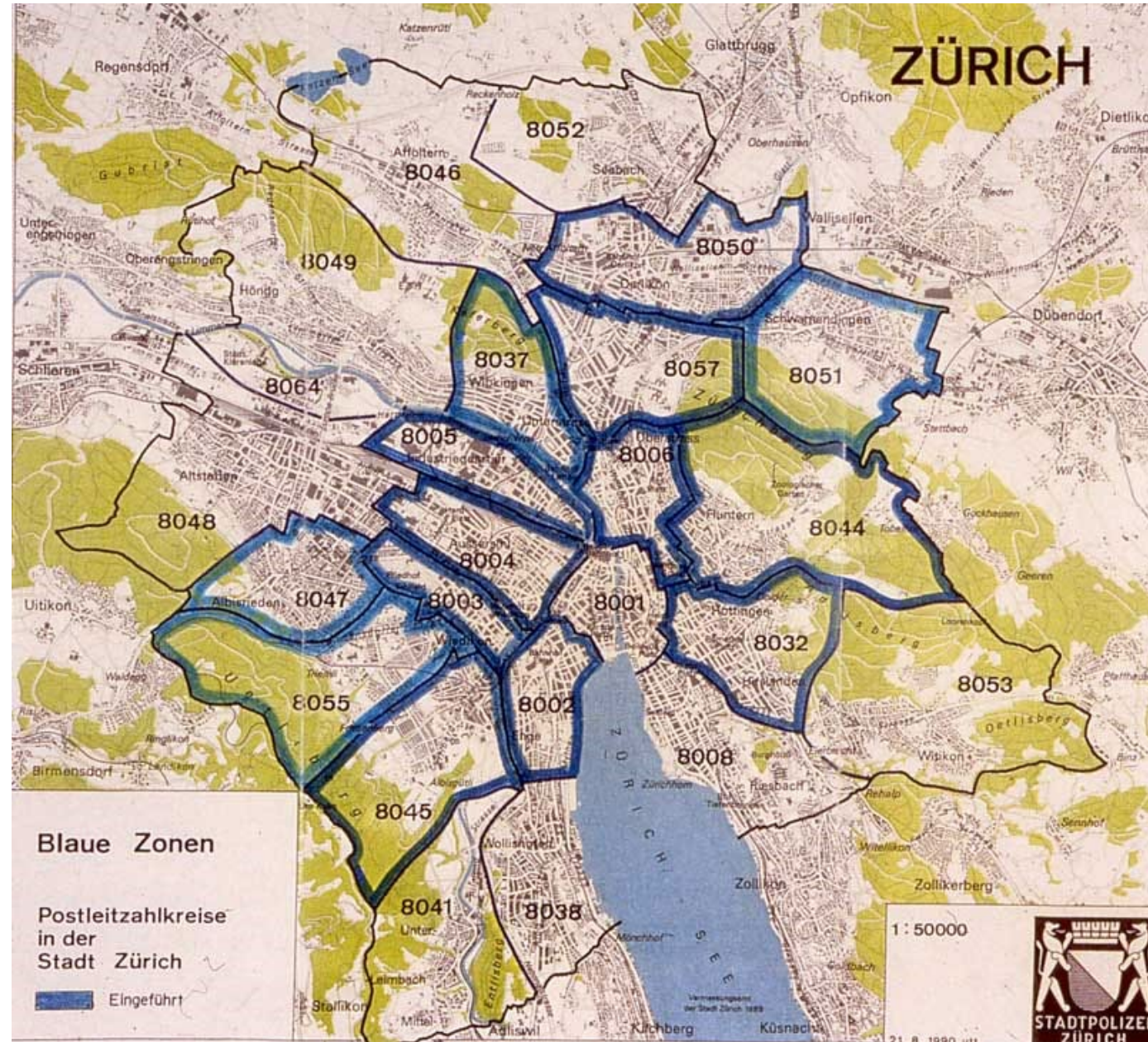
Trams and buses enjoy absolute priority on street. When approaching a traffic light the sensor shown on the lower left ensures they have a green light at any time of the day. The City's modal split is around 80% in favour of public transport. Photo: City of Zurich Police Department.



RAIL COMMUTING has benefited from an increased service. The parking privilege for residents has brought a large return of inhabitants and tax income to the city, and has been politically rewarding for the city fathers, while suburban rail travel has benefitted suburban residents and their elected officials (see high capacity suburban trains) .

PARKING management.

Unrestricted on-street parking is reserved for Zurich-registered residents with sticker on the windshield, while cars entering the city from other municipalities or sub-municipalities are subject to a parking strictly limited in time (blue zone). This boosted the demand for off-street parking facilities (public/private).



TRANSPORT INVESTMENTS COORDINATION

Verkehrsverbund Zurich (1990) is the intermediary structure in charge of:

- Coordination of supply and passenger information from the 31 public transport operators, including national railways (SBB), tramways and buses
- General tariff integration (1 card for all public transport modes)



QUESTION 5

What is the best way of allocating and coordinating decision powers between these various levels?

NB: This summarises the topics of the conference « Mobility, transportation policy and urban development ».

V. SUMMARY AND PERSPECTIVES .

1. The Federal state keeps an important overarching role in mobility policy through the federal taxation power, and related tax incentives hopefully to improve mobility and urban development, but in fact rich in undesirable effects. It may be preferable to cancel them all wherever politically possible and use the amount for other social benefits.
2. The role of the regional planning legislations on mobility can be important if the regional ministries for transportation and those for planning are coordinating their action, e.g. in the case of the « Flemish Decree on mobility » (2001). It has certainly been a well functioning model as long as the minister and his center-left political party was in place.

3. Policy conflicts between public transport, traffic and parking management should clearly be arbitrated at regional level for the sake of coherence and no longer at municipal level (see example of Zurich).
4. The coordination of transport investments has generally proven to be better ensured by intermediary technical bodies politically appointed but with strong autonomy in their relation with transport operators the examples being the German/Swiss Verbund of public operators e.g. Zurich or the French Syndicats de transports, e.g. Paris STIF or Lyon's SYTRAL, in charge of coordination and management contracts with operators. Operators should operate but not be in charge of transport policy, In Brussels it may not be too late to set up a coherent institutional structure, and achieve coherent governance.

5. Rail transport investments by the federal State and by the Brussels-capital region are presently decided independently from each other. This has led to an underuse of the 19 Brussels railway stations and to investments in metro lines dictated by municipal interests, ignoring the investment priorities of the initial plans of the metro network (complete Line 1 to the West). The intermediary structure successfully operating abroad could be used as a negotiating platform between the railways and the regional operators. As part of the deal the Brussels Capital Region should be ready to pay part of the additional railways cost for higher level servicing of the 19 Brussels stations which would partly benefit local transport.

6. Cars are the dominant mode of transport, They can be used as public transport mode and not just a subject for taxation. Taxis could possibly be modelled on the Madrid or Berlin taxi system, which deliver licenses to individuals based on examinations and are not transferable. New cooperative platforms for collective use of private cars include the Blablacar initial success story and other short term individual car rental systems (car-sharing).
7. Higher density of housing projects combining higher housing supply without threatening green space have proven successful, e.g. green apartments on top of shopping malls (success story of Plochingen/Stuttgart) or as noise buffer along motorways (Newcastle Byker Wall Estate).
8. In the perspective of “Business as usual” congestion context, a gradual shift could take place to medium or smaller sustainable mobility clusters around reinforced rail infrastructure nodes such as Vilvoorde, Kortenberg, Waterloo or Louvain-la-Neuve.

9. The inevitable development of autonomous vehicles has to be taken into account. It will boost unmanned individual transport, small public transport vehicles and light motorised individual vehicles (including two-wheel e-step type). However their external costs should be recouped, Otherwise they will cause a further increase in truck and car on the roads and increase congestion.
10. Alternatives to physical travel: tele-working, local office rentals (along the Amsterdam example) will increase as a way to avoid road congestion. Development of teleshopping reduces shopper travel needs but increases traffic of delivery vans and packaging waste. Teleshopping consumers protection should be regulated by the Belgian federal state rather than by Ali Baba.

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