

A new heart for Brussels

Objective

The main objective of the project is to give back the city to the local population by encouraging the use of public spaces by citizens, whether they are Brussels inhabitants, workers, consumers or tourists, by increasing the quality, comfort, user-friendliness, safety and aesthetic aspect of the public spaces in the city centre.

The constant traffic congestion in the capital affects accessibility and mobility to the city centre, as well as its economic attractiveness. The project abandons the current set-up which effectively turns boulevards into motorways which are used by car drivers to cross the city, causing considerable pollution and noise, etc. The project for the centre of Brussels wants to transform these boulevards into a chain of public spaces.

The dynamic, welcoming and convivial centre will be reflected in - besides substantial pedestrianisation, free from through-traffic by closing the city centre's boulevards to cars (which is one of the main factors of inconvenience as regards pollution, noise, congestion, reduced commercial dynamism, public transport, the development of soft mobility, etc.) - qualitative urban mobility, harmonious street lighting, and regular maintenance of the building façades around these spaces.

Mobility

The project is completely multimodally oriented, meaning that the approach is not merely a 'simple' urbanist approach or even a straightforward embellishment of the public space.

The through-traffic will be discontinued and a large pedestrian area will give pride of place to pedestrians. The hundreds of cars which use the boulevards to cross the city centre will be diverted to the inner ring-road and local traffic heading to the city centre will be facilitated by a ring-road for local traffic only.

The existing pedestrian area around the Grand Place will double in size with the new zone. Even more importantly, this pedestrian zone will once again connect the two 'banks' of the capital's centre. The historic Ilot Sacré quarter will be completely connected to the quarters of Sainte-Catherine, Saint-Géry and Saint-Jacques.

The regeneration will additionally ensure the comfort of cyclists and people with limited mobility. In fact this comprehensive regeneration, carried out with comfortable, sustainable and quality materials, will allow all stakeholders (inhabitants, tourists, shoppers, workers, ..) to benefit from the city centre. Taxis will be authorised in the pedestrian area and access for inhabitants and businesses will have a new framework thanks to new regulation which will clearly outline the conditions for access.

The construction of the new pedestrian zone goes hand in hand with the implementation of a new traffic master plan for the centre of Brussels, which maintains access to the city centre, particularly by using existing off-street car parks, and which also provides good public transport connections. At the same time, new infrastructure for cyclists will be constructed, including more than 3 km of cycle lanes. The *Villo* service (the bicycle sharing scheme) as well as the Cambio and Zencar services (the car sharing programmes) will be better integrated in the urban fabric.

The premetro, which runs through the project zone, will be transformed into a real metro line and both the stations in the zone, 'Bourse' and 'De Brouckère', will be fully renovated. The stations will be modernised, not only to cope with the significant and ever-growing passenger numbers, but also to create a more welcoming environment for passengers in the city centre and to make the stations an integral part of the new public spaces. The many barriers will be removed from the underground areas, making them freer and more open. The project also aims to introduce natural light and improve overall lighting, so that the station is perceived as an attractive, high-quality public area. The renovations will pay particular attention to accessibility for people with reduced mobility and to providing a service for all users, with the construction of new toilets and large spaces for use by cyclists. Each station will have parking for 500 bikes, and basic services (rental, repair shop) will also be available. The STIB, the Brussels Transport Company, has developed a high-performing application that allows all travellers to organise their journey in real time and travel in the greatest of comfort.

The surface network, the bus lines, will be completely reviewed. A new bus line will be added to provide a better service to the pedestrian zone. This bus line will comprise electric minibuses travelling between different points of interest in the centre and other important commercial hubs.

Several initiatives are supported for the provision of deliveries, including bike deliveries (electric assist) and a local distribution centre to avoid heavy goods vehicles in the city centre.

Multi-stakeholders collaboration

As the capital of Belgium and Europe and the centre of an urban region, Brussels is a complex city with a large number of stakeholders. The project managed to bring all the stakeholders together, and it is thanks to this collaboration and consultation that the project was completed, a tight schedule was respected and the funding was obtained. The project is the driving force behind the revitalisation of the centre of the city and of the region as a whole.

Several federal, regional and communal administrations have worked with the STIB and the emergency services to create a sustainable and high-quality project.

This process was constantly driven by public consultation. The project was launched at the end of September 2014, with a general assembly and almost 200 people were informed of the project. Local workshops and working group sessions took place in the autumn of that year. A survey of shop owners led to the wishes of this category being included in the project. The observations and comments received were presented during a second general assembly in early 2015 together with information on how these elements were integrated into the project. Local stands and kiosks kept the public informed

of the progress of the project during spring 2015, and after the summer there was a public survey on the project. The urban development permit was issued at the very beginning of January 2016 and the work could be planned. Another information sharing process could start.

From the very start, the city wanted the project to include the zone's many cultural stakeholders. The events that took place during the summer of 2015, at the start of the test phase, were organised by the Bureau de Grands Evènements (Major Events Bureau) in collaboration with Ancienne Belgique (concert hall), the Beursschouwburg (multidisciplinary cultural centre), La Monnaie (Opera), the Muntpunt (Library) and others. The public area on Place De Brouckère will feature a large-scale work of art. The project was also planned in consultation with another major project in the city, to transform the listed Bourse building into a Beer Museum. Finally, it should be stressed that the archaeological site containing the old city remains will be preserved and showcased using an unusual method - urban periscopes; the general public will be able to see this archaeological site via these devices which create a link with the history of the Bourse.

The project is also being carried out in close collaboration with other city stakeholders, to increase commerce on the Boulevards and in the centre of Brussels as a whole. First of all is the 'Grétry' project that will define the building fronts of the Grétry block. Shop windows will supplement the offer within the zone.

The Beer Museum project will also have a beneficial effect on all the commercial stakeholders in the zone. Kiosks will be installed in the pedestrian zone, adding to the existing commercial offer.

A sustainable design!

The project involves the majority of boulevards in the Centre but other roads in the zone will also be transformed to become part of the city's new heart.

The redesign extends from the La place de Brouckère to La place Fontainas.

La place de Brouckère is a large square which will be made predominantly traffic-free. The square's layout will allow passers-by, residents and visitors a breath of fresh air in this very built-up part of the city. By diverting the traffic the square will also become a lovely place for events to be organised. A work of art in the form of a statue will adorn the square without in any way deterring from the view of the Hôtel Continental, which is the feature of the square.

Ever since the Bourse was built La place de la Bourse has been the place for people to gather for political events, and sporting or other occasions. The design will transform the square into a veritable urban theatre. La Bourse will be made a highlight and the unhindered walk-in design will include a water feature placed in the first stretch of Rue Orts and aimed at accentuating the view.

Le Square Fontainas, which is an integral part of the redesign project, has been conceived as a green square or additional urban garden. Le Square is connected to Parc Fontainas, which is to be transformed into high quality green zones, which include a number of sporting infrastructures and accommodation. Together with the green zones on Le Boulevard, Le Square and Le Parc are the

foundation of a green fabric which, in the longer term, will be extended out to the rest of the city centre.

Considerable efforts are being made to provide the best possible green infrastructure on the Boulevards. Despite the presence of an underground complex (metro, channels for the river Senne, drains) an avenue of trees is anticipated along the entire length. Thanks to an innovative system allowing the collection of rainwater it will even be possible for large trees to be planted in the green zones.

When it comes to materials, the project aims to find a good balance between comfort, sustainability and price. Belgian blue stone is indeed the material traditionally used in Brussels. This material also offers many advantages, particularly when it comes to sustainability; excellent wear and tear, locally sourced, avoiding the need for excessive transport which is harmful to the environment and adding beauty to the areas concerned. Comfort is optimised thanks to the layout and the use of a special format.

This project aimed at revitalising the heart of Brussels is also an opportunity to demonstrate the city's vision to become a digital city serving of all those who visit. The pedestrian zone will be equipped with Wi-Fi, the compact bins will be fitted with lighting operated by photovoltaic cells and which consume little energy. The city is also researching the placement of photovoltaic panels, which will allow the general public to recharge their mobile devices.