

LPT4 Comparator Case Study – Ghent (DRAFT)

1. Context

Background

Ghent (Gent in Flemish, Gand in French) is the capital of the East Flanders province of Belgium. It is a port city on the River Scheldt, and a university city. It originally started as a settlement at the confluence of the Rivers Scheldt and Leie and in the Middle Ages became one of the largest and richest cities of northern Europe, with some 50,000 people in 1300.

The municipality comprises the city of Ghent proper and several surrounding suburbs. With 262,000 inhabitants at the beginning of 2019, Ghent is Belgium's second largest municipality by number of inhabitants. The metropolitan area, including the outer commuter zone, covers an area of 1,205 km² and had a total population of 460,000 in 2018. The population growth rate is low, with only a 7% increase predicted for the metropolitan area by 2035.

Ghent was occupied by the Germans in both world wars but escaped major destruction. Much of the city's mediaeval architecture remains intact and is well preserved and restored. According to Wikipedia, Ghent has established a blend between comfort of living and history; it is not a city-museum.

The port of Ghent, in the north of the city, is the third largest port of Belgium. It is accessed by the Ghent–Terneuzen Canal. The port houses, among others, large companies like ArcelorMittal, Volvo Cars, Volvo Trucks, Volvo Parts, Honda, and Stora Enso.

Ghent University, with 44,000 students, and a number of research-oriented companies, such as Ablynx, Innogenetics, Cropdesign and Bayer Cropscience, are situated in the central and southern part of the city.

Governance

Ghent City Council is responsible for all policy in the municipality. The current administration is a wide-ranging coalition of socialists, greens, liberals and conservatives, who have 35 of the 53 seats. Its Mayor is Mathias De Clerq, a member of the Flemish Liberal Party.

Belgium is a federal state, with responsibility for transport and roads assigned to the regions, including Flanders, apart from the national railways and traffic regulations, which are the responsibility of the federal government. Within the policy specified by the regional government, transport plans are developed both at provincial and city level, with Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans led by city governments.

Current transport provision

Ghent's city centre is a traffic-free zone extending for over a square kilometre, which was introduced in 1997, with several smaller pedestrian zones in the inner suburbs. The approach to pedestrianisation is comprehensive, and includes creating an effective network, car-free neighbourhoods, 'school, living and playing' streets. Each of these concepts is defined.

Ghent has the largest designated cyclist area in Europe, with nearly 400 kilometres of cycle paths and more than 700 one-way streets, where bikes are allowed to go against the traffic. It also boasts Belgium's first cycle street, where cars are considered 'guests' and must stay behind cyclists. In 2017 the city restricted car traffic circulation which boosts cycling. More cyclists means a higher demand for bicycle parking. In 2010, the plans to renovate Gent-Sint-Pieters railway station, included 10,000 bicycle parking spots. In 2020 several sections of the

underground parking facilities have been built, and the targets have been adjusted to a total of 17,000 parking spaces.

All buses and the network of five tram lines are operated by De Lijn, which is the province-owned public transport operator. The aim is: “More attractive public transport”, including:

1. Facilitating faster flow of buses and trams
2. Redevelopment of existing tram axes
3. Conversion of bus routes to trams
4. Actively responding to new urban developments (new developments must meet their parking needs on site and within agreed standards)

The main railway station, Gent Sint Pieters, and four suburban stations, have services operated by the national rail operator, SNB.

[More needed here?]

2 Transport planning

The Flemish government has required provinces and cities to develop Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans since 1995, and issues detailed guidance on the themes to be covered, the process and the requirements for consultation. A first set of SUMPs was produced in the period to 2005, and a second from 2009 onwards.

Ghent produced its first SUMP in 2003 and started on its second in 2009. It was completed in 2015.



(The cover reads “Engine for a sustainable and accessible city”)

Priority objectives of the Plan

The Flemish government specifies five overarching objectives on which all SUMPs must focus:

- Accessibility to centres of economic activity
- Personal accessibility to allow everyone to participate in social life
- Safety
- Liveability, including the removal of barriers and reduction of noise
- Environmental enhancement and reduction of environmental impacts.

Ghent added to these by considering health, education and social inclusion.

What does the Ghent mobility plan want to achieve?

- Vibrant and dynamic city
- Accessible and accessible
- Child-friendly and pleasant
- Clean and healthy city
- Traffic-safe city
- Durable modal split
- Shorter movements
- Less dependent on cars

The complete SUMP for Ghent is referred to as its Mobility Plan (Mobiliteitsplan). This covers all forms of transport across the city. The central area within the main ring road also has a Circulation Plan (Circulatieplan). This focuses on improving transport within the central pedestrian- dominated area. There is also an overall parking strategy which includes bicycles as well as cars. Details of these plans are available at <https://stad.gent/nl/mobiliteit-openbare-werken/mobiliteit/plannen-projecten-subsidies-cijfers-scholenwerking/mobiliteitsplan-circulatieplan-en-parkeerplan-gent>

The Mobility Plan is the overarching concept and includes the strategic vision of the City of Ghent to manage traffic throughout its territory. The Circulation Plan, which was introduced in April 2017, is part of the Mobility Plan and concerns the area within the city ring (R40). The Circulation Plan is a detailed plan to control traffic flow in and out of the city.

The stimulus for a new Circulation Plan was the rapid growth in car ownership and use, leading to congestion and shortage of parking space. The ultimate goal of the Circulation Plan is to take through traffic out of the city centre - whoever needs to be in the city centre will be able to get there more easily.

The aims of the Circulation Plan are to:

- Improve the quality of life in the city
- Strengthen the attractiveness of the shopping offer
- More space for pedestrians and cyclists
- Smooth flow of public transport
- Car parks and other destinations easily accessible
- Provide destination traffic with easy access

Strategic approach

Ghent's second SUMP focuses on ten "lines of force":

1. Mobility as the driving force for sustainability and accessibility
2. Protection of the historic core from through traffic and for pedestrians
3. A strengthened bicycle network
4. Congestion-free circulation of public transport, with more tram routes
5. Parking management to achieve "desirable mobility"
6. Speed control throughout the city with more 30km/h zones
7. Sustainable and liveable alternatives to existing major roads
8. A dynamic traffic control centre to optimise traffic
9. Extending mobility management to the city region

10. Co-creation as a dynamic to help design mobility.

Principal policy measures

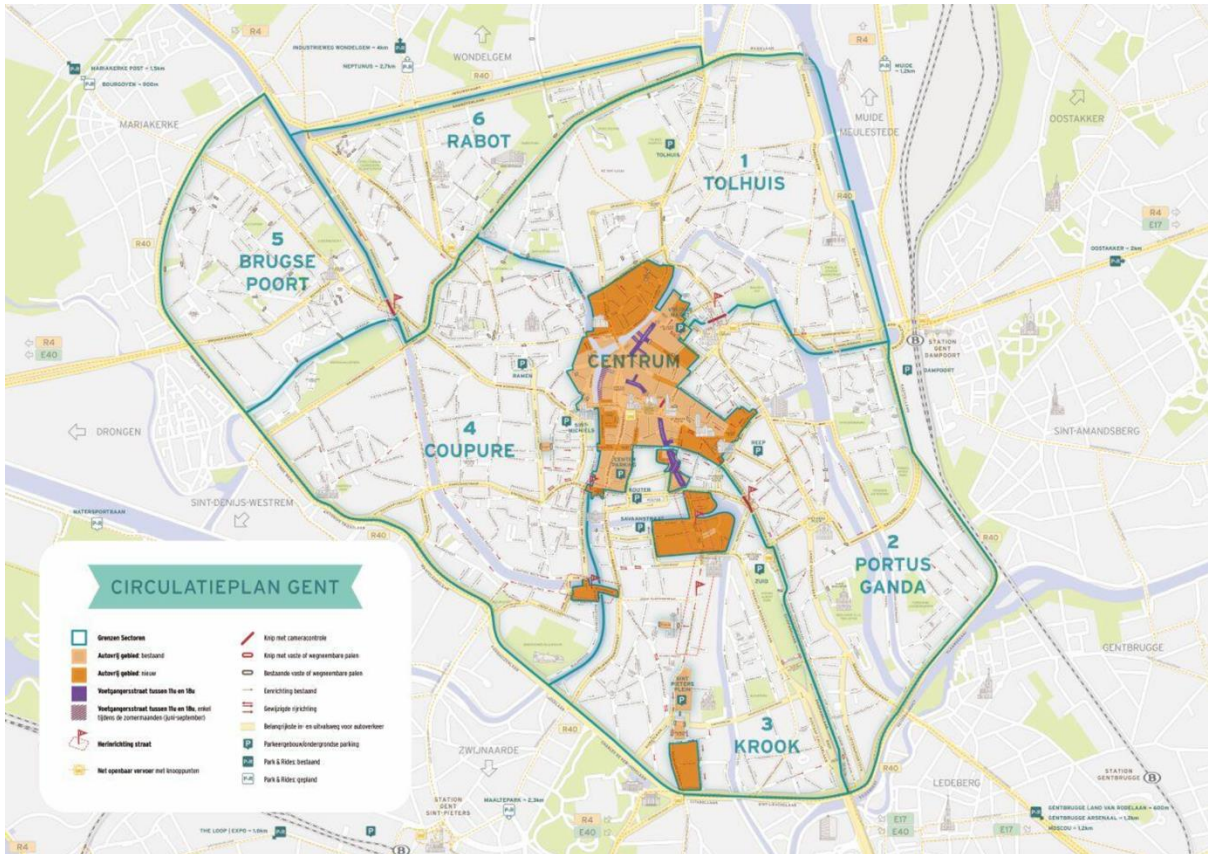
The Flemish government specifies a focus on land use and its impacts on transport; networks for each mode; awareness campaigns; and enforcement. It introduced the STOP Principle, roughly equivalent to York's hierarchy of users, with walking, cycling, public transport and private cars as the order of priority for support. There is an interesting comment in a review of the government policy that the STOP Principle is "too strongly formulated and too weakly implemented".

The scheme within the SUMP which has attracted the most attention is the 2017 Traffic Circulation Plan, which bans through traffic from a ring around the pedestrian area extending to a radius of 1.5km from the centre. According to the city's website, it is designed to ensure that people:

- Will get more space to enjoy Ghent
- Will be able to move safely
- Will be able to live, work and study in a healthy living environment
- Will be able to easily reach their destination.

The whole area, which is surrounded by a dual carriageway orbital road, is divided into six cells, with movement other than on foot, bike or public transport between them prohibited. While certain vehicles are allowed permits to access the central pedestrian zone, they are now required to enter and exit via a specified route, and not permitted to drive through the area. It is reported to have reduced car traffic entering the inner city by 15% in the morning peak and 20% in the evening peak. While traffic cells such as this have been in use since Gothenburg introduced them 40 years ago, Ghent's is by far the largest such scheme.

One interesting example of item (7) in the list above has been the removal of the B401 viaduct leading to the city centre, and its replacement by park and ride facilities and dedicated bus and bicycle corridors. Interestingly, this project involved co-creation, with people with local knowledge working in collaboration with professionals, and critics included in the engagement process to reduce the potential for media criticism.

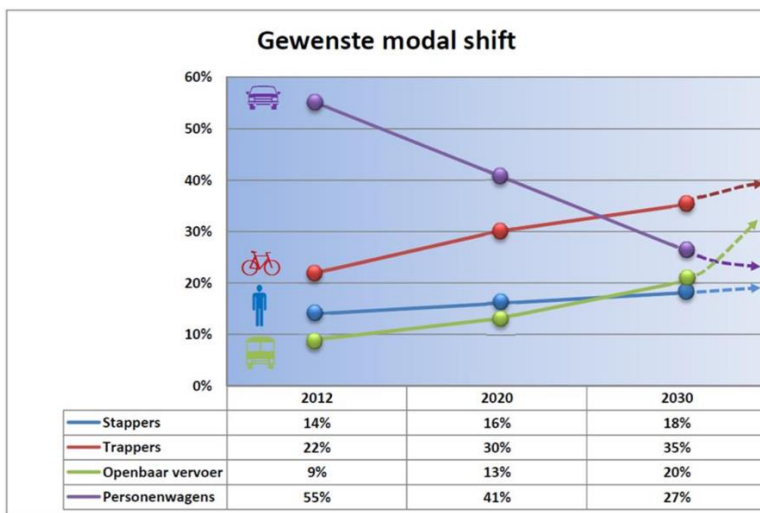


(The plan shows the extent of the area covered by the Circulation Plan, and the areas which are pedestrianised).

[There may be other interesting examples in the Mobility Plan – e.g. new tram lines.]

Modal shares

In 2012, the modal shares were car: 56%, cycling: 22%, public transport: 9%, walking: 15%. The SUMP sets targets for 2030 of car: 28%, cycling: 32%, public transport: 21%, walking: 19% [note: these are rounded up; the quoted total was 95%]. This represents a halving of journeys by car, and more than doubling journeys by public transport.



(The diagram shows desired modal shift between 2012 and 2030. The index refers to walkers, cyclists, public transport and private cars).

Ghent's broader mobility plan has set out clear targets with regards to the modal split it wants to achieve by 2030 (the figures that the targets are compared to come from 2012). These are:

- Car usage reduced from 55 to 27 per cent;
- Cycling increasing from 22 to 30 per cent;
- Public transport usage increasing from 9 to 20 per cent;
- Walking increasing from 15 to 18 per cent.

Key performance measures

The Flemish Government requires progress to be monitored every year, but it appears that this is principally for output indicators in terms of what has been implemented.

[Check Mobility Plan]

Provision for disabled travellers

Disabled drivers are able to obtain permits to access the pedestrian areas but, like other car users, are not able to drive through it. All permits are checked using Automatic Number Plate Recognition.

[Check Mobility Plan]

3 Relevance to York

Useful lessons and pointers

Ghent has made major changes to its transport system and patterns of travel over a ten year period, and its hierarchy of users (the STOP Principle) is similar to York's. It appears to manage access to its extensive pedestrian area effectively. Its focus on expanding the cycle network is directly relevant to York, as is its intention to ensure that public transport is free of congestion.

The approach adopted is: "Everyone can continue to make their own mobility choices. It is a matter of choosing the right means of transport at the right time".

The traffic cell scheme, and particularly its application in the pedestrian zone, offers an example of what might be done to remove non-essential car traffic from York's city centre. While the wider scheme could not be directly be applied to York, many of its principles could be, particularly in controlling movement between radial roads and introducing low traffic neighbourhoods.

Ghent's engagement approach is of particular interest. While it started with a focus on consultation rather than more interactive engagement, it has now adopted co-creation for scheme design, both in minor schemes to reallocate road space and in the major project to remove a highway viaduct. It should be possible to adopt a similar approach at a ward level in York.

Ghent's approach shows good integration between policies:

1. Close link between mobility (transport) and spatial planning
2. Economic developments and sustainable mobility can strengthen each other

3. Interaction between residential density, public transport and new cycle routes
4. Link with other policy documents (Spatial Structure Plan, Climate Plan, etc.)

Ghent introduced a Low Emission Zone in January 2020. The most polluting cars are no longer allowed to enter the zone within the city ring (R40). The aim was to improve the health of residents and visitors.

Ghent makes extensive use of electronic monitoring systems to record and manage traffic. There are complementary policies on freight management and coaches.

Any aspects which make it less relevant to York

Ghent is larger than York, and has a major port, which will influence transport patterns in the north of the city. It has more purpose-built roads than York, and was able to introduce its extensive traffic cell scheme on this basis. A scheme on this scale in York would require a suitable orbital route at approximately the distance of Clifton Bridge from the centre.

Ghent's public transport makes use of an extensive tram network, which it is expanding. All public transport is managed by the regional government; though this may offer some pointers for York's new Enhanced Partnership.

Ghent took much longer to prepare its second SUMP than York has allowed for developing LTP4, but the reasons for this are not clear. Ghent appears to be an outlier in this; most European cities take two years to produce a SUMP from scratch, and a little less in which to update an existing one.

Demonstrator new neighbourhoods

Ghent's population growth rate is small, and there appear to be no references to new planned neighbourhoods.

[Check Mobility Plan]

Engagement and consultation

The extended process for developing Ghent's second SUMP started with plan development led by the city administration, and production of a draft SUMP. There was then a series of public debates, followed by a public inquiry in parallel with a series of consultations with stakeholders. The list of stakeholders was drawn widely, to include environmental bodies, health practitioners, emergency services, local schools and representatives of minorities.

While the engagement process appears focused on consultation, there are examples of collaborative approaches in formulating specific schemes, and some situations in which local communities were empowered to redesign the layout of their local streets. This is encapsulated by the role of co-creation as one of the ten "lines of force" in the SUMP.

The underlying principles of co-creation are that:

1. Traditional relations between government and stakeholders are shifting
2. Innovative, creative initiatives can come from all corners (residents, schools, companies,...)
3. Ghent wants to support positive initiatives and give them every opportunity to succeed
4. Co-creation can help shape mobility in Ghent

Possible contacts

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