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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

THE GREEN BOULEVARD – A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION
FOR MOBILITY IN URBAN AREAS

Presenter: Jean Vandeputte

Organisation: City of Hasselt, Belgium



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Overview

Hasselt, in the Flanders Region of Belgium, is a popular service and trade centre. As with many regional centres, by the late 1990s traffic management was becoming a major issue, with heavy congestion leading to a decreasing city centre population, poor public transport service and the highest level of major accidents in the province. Addressing the issue of sustainable mobility became a priority.

An initial proposal was made to solve the congestion problem by adding a further road to the existing inner and outer ring roads. However, a mobility study revealed a remarkable result – the third ring road might not prove necessary after all. And so, the Green Boulevard project – an initiative based on revitalising a traditional area of the city in a sustainable way – was conceived.

With the outer ring road, measures were aimed at improving traffic flow, including better co-ordination of traffic lights and intelligent signposting. The development of the inner ring was more radical. The aim was to remove the majority of the traffic from both it and the city centre. Approach roads were completely rebuilt, parking facilities for the park-and-ride scheme added, car lanes narrowed and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists improved. City centre parking for visitors was drastically reduced, and parking fees significantly increased to dissuade people from using their cars.

The inner ring itself was completely reconsidered to incorporate a nine metre wide pedestrian area bordered by a double row of trees. Along the inner reaches, space was provided for resident parking, with short-term parking for visitors. On the outside of the ring road, traffic lanes were rearranged to accommodate cars, buses and a cycle path. Public transport was priority, with technology enabling buses to influence the traffic light sequences, and dedicated bus lanes adding to radial approach roads. The result was a the revitalisation of the town centre, boasting increased pedestrian areas and a green, traffic-free environment.

To encourage residents and visitors not to use their cars, a number of incentives were offered. A vastly improved free public transport network was implemented. In addition, subsidised garage facilities were offered on a park-and-ride basis, while bonuses were offered to people travelling by bicycle.

The Hasselt public transport network now offers highly efficient bus services between key points in the town centre, with a shuttle service running between out-of-town locations every five minutes. Heated waiting rooms have been provided at key stops and a dynamic, real-time system offers passengers up-to-date information on bus schedules.

Since the introduction of the Green Boulevard in 1997, Hasselt



Photography: Renzo Mazzolini

has witnessed a 10-fold increase in use of public transport; mobility problems in the city have been solved; accident levels have decreased, and the decline in population has been reversed.

The cost of the Hasselt project, in terms of compensation to the bus company for lost ticket revenue, is in the region of €750,000 per year or 1% of the annual city budget. A further €3 million is paid into the scheme by the Flemish Government. While the city does not gain income from any congestion-charging scheme, such as that currently being considered in Edinburgh, there are financial benefits in terms of reduced expenditure on road maintenance.

Following the five-year evaluation of the Green Boulevard initiative, not only has Hasselt been given the green light for a further five years of regional investment, the initiative is also now being implemented across Flanders.

The key to the effective delivery of the project was partnership. The three main stakeholders – City of Hasselt, The Flemish Government and De Lijn Public Transport Company approached the challenge of developing a strategy for sustainable mobility with openness and creativity. A multi-disciplinary team, including traffic experts, architects and engineers, ensured that technical, architectural and environmental issues were considered simultaneously. Rather

than work as one big, spectacular innovation, the Green Boulevard exists as a combination of independently effective initiatives.

For further information, please go to www.hasselt.be

Organisation Profile: City of Hasselt, Belgium

Hasselt is the capital of the Belgian province of Limburg and is a major service and trade centre with a population of 69,000.

The city centre is the commercial heart of central Limburg, with Hasselt ranking sixth on the list of most important commercial centres in Belgium. Hasselt also serves a surrounding population of 310,000, and offers a large variety of shopping facilities. As a result it is ranked fourth as a place to shop in Belgium.

Hasselt also serves as an important educational centre: more than 39,000 pupils attend school within the outer ring of Hasselt, with more than half of them coming from surrounding communities.

Presenter Profile: Jean Vandeputte

Jean Vandeputte is Chief Engineer and Director of the technical Authorities in Hasselt, Belgium. He graduated as a civil engineer from the University of Leuven in 1968. Vandeputte was co-ordinator of the Green Boulevard project, which was realised in collaboration by the City of Hasselt, the Flemish government and the public transport company, De Lijn.

Sust.: The Lighthouse on Sustainability aims to raise awareness of sustainable design in architecture. It was devised by The Lighthouse: Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City on behalf of the Scottish Executive and in support of the aims of the Policy on Architecture. It is funded by the Sustainable Action Fund.

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