



Polis' **Marko Lovric** spoke with **Frank Vanden Bulcke**, Director of Ghent's Mobility Company about the impact of Ghent's circulation plan, the power of parking policy and the difficulties to finance a public transport system that deserves the name

Making space for mobility

Ghent's most recent major mobility measure has been the implementation of the new circulation plan, earlier this year. Has it been a success? We can absolutely confirm that it has. Initially, it was expected that users of our city would only really accept the plan by summer 2017 but the acceptance has actually spread much



Cyclist numbers in Ghent have increased by 14 per cent in four months

the B401 - a major traffic artery for cars to drive into the centre - has dropped by almost 20 per cent during these first months after launch. Simultaneously, the traffic flow on the R40 ring road did not deteriorate, despite the fact that cars are being diverted here to avoid the centre. The complete evaluation report is scheduled for spring 2018. That report will provide a more complete picture of the situation before and after the implementation of the plan.

How was it possible for the circulation plan to have such an imminent impact?

We decided to first roll out a full parking plan that almost doubled the area in which motorists must pay for parking. In addition, parking time in the city centre has been reduced to three hours while rates have risen fundamentally and are up to almost 300 per cent now. Ultimately, price and time are key drivers to steer the behaviour of the people. As a consequence, prior to the introduction of the circulation plan, the number of cars coming into

faster. The circulation plan is part of Ghent's SUMP, our sustainable urban mobility plan.

What impact does the circulation plan have on traffic and vehicle numbers?

There are a number of traffic arteries in the inner city where the traffic

dropped immediately. There were also many more cyclists on the streets. At the two locations where we continuously count cyclists, their number increased by 14 per cent during the first four months after the launch, compared to the same period last year.

Additionally, the traffic volume on

Ghent's centre was already reduced and parking capacity was freed up.

The parking plan was complemented by additional mobility measures such as a car-sharing plan and the development of a cycling network that is also part of the SUMP.

Local newspapers have held Ghent's circulation plan responsible for a decrease of inner city business revenues for shops and hotels. Do you think the circulation plan has shortcomings?

There are actually no clear figures regarding the turnover of the businesses in that area of the city, including the hotels. We determine that the centre itself still attracts a lot of people, but the peripheral zone right around the centre complains about less sales. A city should act from a long-term vision in any case. It is the attractiveness and accessibility of a city centre that will determine the profit margins in the centre. With the circulation plan and the parking plan, we managed to ensure that the driver who really has to be in the centre can still get there and will find a parking lot. Others can drive to the park and ride belt around the city. In the medium term, Ghent will continue to invest in the construction of six car parks around the city.

Has public transport become the true backbone of mobility in Ghent?

Unfortunately not. In order to be a real success, there should be additional supply of public transport services at the moment as the circulation plan is launched. De Lijn, the Flemish public transport company, is, however, facing budget cuts and as a consequence the city of Ghent is confronted with a drop in supply rather than an increase. That's why the city has taken responsibility and provides additional funding, for example for the evening network. If this additional offer would not be provided, public transport services



Castle of the Counts, Ghent

in Ghent would be completely shut down by 23:30h.

In order to promote Park&Ride to commuters, the city itself provides a shuttle bus from the parking facilities. Ideally this would be integrated into the regular parking transport offer.

We hope that in the future public transport in the city will be strengthened, also taking into account the basic accessibility requirements the Flemish government wants to apply. In the end, public transport should indeed be the backbone of urban mobility to make and maintain livable cities. The growth of cities the world over will certainly bring additional challenges.

In 2015, Ghent was announced as a finalist in the European SUMP

Award for your monitoring and evaluation activities in the SUMP process. What have you learned in those evaluation processes that improved the new SUMP?

An important aspect is to start elaborating the evaluation process in an early stage. This gives you time to define clear targets and indicators, to discuss the evaluation process with the stakeholders, to set up collaboration with internal and external partners and to conduct baseline measurements. We also participated in CIVITAS ELAN, in which we could extend our expertise in evaluating SUMP measures

We have extended our unit responsible for monitoring and evaluation in recent years. Right now, we are evaluating our latest circulation plan. We



Further findings

Frank Vanden Bulcke (*left*) will further elaborate the findings of Ghent's circulation plan in a presentation at the 2017 Polis Conference in Brussels, December 6 and 7, in session 3E.



collect and analyze data for a period of four years to evaluate whether the pre-set goals are met. An important portion of the data collection is conducted by our own traffic research unit. Besides, we are looking for innovative methods to collect and analyze more relevant traffic data.

A multimodal route planner including walking, cycling and car use was launched for Ghent along with the circulation plan. What are its most innovative features?

In the run-up to the implementation of the circulation plan, a route planner

was launched which simulated the future situation. In this way, people could already investigate which new routes they could use soon. This was a very good tool in communication. Shortly after the launch of the circulation plan, this route planner was put back offline once the commercial route planners such as OpenStreetMap, Waze, Google Maps, Here, Apple maps and TomTom were adapted to the new situation. It is important in the context of the launch of a new circulation plan to involve the suppliers of such professional route planners much in advance in order that they can prepare themselves well for the new situation.

Ghent is one of three cities in Europe that has been granted 5 million for Urban Innovation Action. What are your plans for this and how will it change people's lives?

The multi-modal approach of Traffic Management as a Service (TMaaS.eu) enables citizens to gain immediate access to up-to-date information about their choice of transport and their route, for example by sending personal push messages through social media. The platform gives users the option of directly giving feedback on those messages. All mobility data will be monitored and used to evaluate and prepare mobility measures when needed.

Co-creation sessions and an inclusive design approach with the major Flemish universities will put the citizen in the driver's seat. The needs from inhabitants and traffic operators will serve as an input for our diverse

partners in the project. They will develop the www.tmaas.eu platform that can be used in any small-to-medium sized city around the world.

Will MaaS be the future virtual traffic control centre? The new approach to traffic management puts less focus on owning a vehicle and more focus on providing information on the existing transportation possibilities to our citizens. Traffic Management as a Service will help prepare the City of Ghent for innovations like Mobility as a Service and put us on the map as a trailblazer for innovative and smart mobility.

After continuous work throughout almost 30 years, Ghent has built up a thorough system of SUMP practice. What is your key advice to other cities working hard to make sustainable urban mobility plans a reality?

It is important to make action plans containing realistic goals. The advantage of a SUMP is that after several decades such sustainable urban mobility has become the basic reasoning for many of us. The sustainability idea becomes, at that point, an integrated way of thinking and acting. 🌱

FYI

Frank Vanden Bulcke is the head of the Mobility Company in Ghent, one of the most innovative city services in Belgium. With a team of 160 employees, he is concerned with (bicycle) parking, bicycle routes, transport management, traffic guidance and related transport services in Ghent.

Educated as an engineer and expert in urban planning and traffic management, Frank Vanden Bulcke has previously served as Mobility Manager for the Flemish government and as an undersecretary for the Minister of Mobility.