



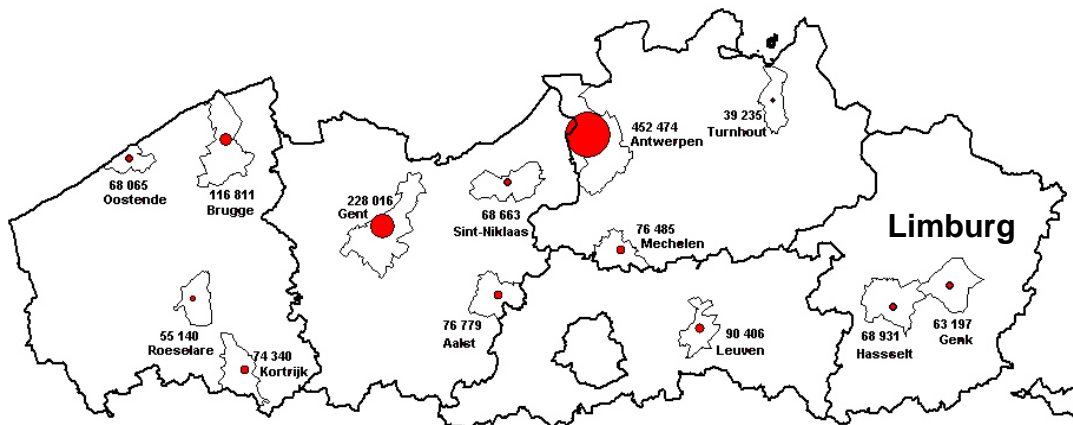
the first Belgian commuter transport coordination centre:
promoting sustainable mobility and supporting employment



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Policy

The Belgian Province of Limburg is located in the North-Eastern part of Belgium, Flemish Region, and at the Dutch border. It is essentially a rural Province without a real metropolis. The most important cities are Hasselt (69.000 inhabitants) and Genk (63.000 inwoners). Therefore, in a way, the Province assumes the metropolitan function.



Map of Flanders with the 5 Provinces, the main cities and their population

The economical activities in the Province are mainly SME-oriented. The number of large enterprises is limited (Ford in Genk is the largest: 6000 employees).

Several factors are responsible for a relatively high car use. The Province has a rural character. Its rail infrastructure network is limited. The development of a high quality public bus network has only started recently. Until the 80ies, the Province had an important mining industry. Since the decline of this industry, Limburg attracts new activities, mainly knowledge based enterprises. Different studies demonstrate that highly educated personnel makes more work related trips. This evolution will also contribute to the increase of the number of car kilometers.

Limburg is also an important transit zone for the international freight transport between the port of Antwerp, Holland and Germany. Nowadays, the road is still the evident solution for freight transport. Only the last few years, the Flemish Government is developing transit possibilities via canals and the old railway link “iron rine” between Antwerp and the Ruhr area.

Because of the still increasing use of the car, and the fact that in the near future a number of traffic congestion points will develop, the Provincial Government has taken a range of initiatives in order to promote sustainable home-work traffic. This policy aims at reducing the economical, social, and environmental costs caused by a deficient mobility.

Since the nineties, there have been several projects about home-work traffic and accessibility in the Province. In the rural region of Haspengouw (South of Limburg) there has been a study in 2001 about home-work traffic and the possibilities of adapting the public bus network. Ford in Genk organises transport for its personnel since the sixties. Different projects have been carried out to optimise this network and increase its attractiveness.

In the last few years, more and more clear indications came from the sector of temporary labour and the Flemish Office for the Employment about people in search of a job that had to refuse one because of transport problems.

All these projects pointed out the need for a co-ordinated organisation of commuting traffic. That is the reason why in 2001, the initiative was taken to erect a provincial commuter transport co-ordination centre: Mobidesk Limburg. The provincial level is the right one for such an initiative: the province is large enough to obtain sufficient critical mass, necessary for mobility measures, but also sufficiently small for solutions adapted to the local realities and needs.

The first step was to make a green commuter plan for the employees of the provincial administration itself. This plan contained 24 mobility measures in favour of pedestrians, cyclists, users of bus of train, and car-poolers. In order to stimulate other companies to develop an integrated mobility policy, the administration should give a good example.

Second step was to put Mobidesk Limburg into place. This project has been made possible thanks to the support of the European Union, in the framework of the European Fund for Regional Development (development of rural and industrial areas).

Aims of Mobidesk

Mobidesk Limburg has a double aim :

1. to support the authorities' efforts to control car-mobility in Limburg
2. to support employment and social integration by preventing that people do not have access to jobs due to insufficient transport :
 - by improving accessibility of industrial sites;
 - by organising specific mobility for sections of people having difficulties to afford car-mobility.

Tasks

The transport coordination centre Mobidesk Limburg is active in the development and promotion of sustainable mobility in commuter traffic.

Its primary tasks:

1. creation of a platform for mobility management in Limburg

Mobidesk approaches companies, other employers, the Flemish Employment Office (VDAB) and temporary employment agencies to encourage them to participate in mobility management.

Mobidesk sets up awareness raising campaigns (mailings and targeted publications and also a proper newsletter) to traffic generators, followed by visits to – at least - the most important actors (companies with over 50 employees).

There is a close cooperation between the Flemish Employment Office (VDAB) and Mobidesk to compose accessibility information for several VDAB-initiatives. E.g. VDAB has set up employment cells as a result of mass redundancy at the Ford company. Mobidesk has composed the accessibility profiles that were enclosed with the invitations. Mobidesk also makes accessibility profiles for the VDAB's training centres.



A separate brochure about Mobidesk's services was edited specifically for job-seekers and temporary employees.

2. support to employers wanting to set up mobility management activities

This includes :

- Assistance with the composition, processing and interpretation of user surveys about collective transport systems. In some companies Mobidesk has first done a survey on interest of personnel in alternative means of transport (bike, carpooling, public transport). Such surveys help companies to know their employees' feelings and opinions.
- Feasibility studies. To this end Mobidesk has designed the Mobiscan, a short but thorough analysis of mobility in and around a company. By composing both a mobility profile and an accessibility profile and by comparing both profiles Mobidesk gains insight in the problems and at the same time the opportunities for the most efficient kind of actions in the company. Mobidesk has already composed several Mobiscans.
- Assistance with selection and preparation of specific measures. Mobidesk has an extensive range of product fiches for several transport products: carpooling, guaranteed ride home, privileged parking places for carpoolers, bicycle lease, vanpooling, collection service, mobiscan, financial advice, awareness raising campaigns, helpdesk, etc.. Companies are thus informed of what each of these products includes and what kind of support Mobidesk can give.
- Assistance with implementation of specific measures
For example, Mobidesk has set up a very extensive carpooling campaign at Ford where many employees were facing mobility problems due to a reorganisation of the company's busses. Thanks to Mobidesk's campaign over 1600 employees registered in the Flemish Carpooling database which obviously facilitated the composition of carpooling teams. A similar campaign to set up a carpooling database takes place in the region of Haspengouw.
- Proper website that is regularly modified and updated: www.mobidesklimburg.be

3. distribution of information and promotion of car-alternatives Mobidesk distributes targeted information about alternative means of transport to specific target groups and actively promotes the use of car-alternatives. This is done by:

- Composing accessibility guides at the level of industrial sites. To this end Mobidesk has designed the Mobihow. This is a brochure that gathers all information about the accessibility of a specific industrial site by different alternative means of transport. It includes bicycle routes, public transport connections and carpooling possibilities. Mobihow was distributed for the first time in an industrial zone in Tongeren.
- Individual advice by phone and email to the employees of the companies involved or to job-seekers and temporary employees. Mobidesk regularly gets telephonic requests of employees in search of a carpooling partner.
- Information stands and campaigns in companies.

Mobidesk has given extensive information about the carpooling system during a staff meeting in a company wanting to work around carpooling.

At Ford's too Mobidesk held several information sessions for the personnel during which employees could present their mobility problem. Mobidesk checked whether carpooling could offer a solution.

4. development of new transport products and services

Mobidesk develops "tailor-made" alternatives for its customers. Transport alternatives are developed in cooperation with specific partners in the operation area. Mobidesk tries to stimulate interaction and partnerships to realise the projects.

At this moment Mobidesk is working on a test project for organised transport in the South of Limburg. To this end Mobidesk cooperates with several partners: temporary employment agencies, VDAB, cities and companies. A spot check with a number of temporary employment agencies showed that many temporary workers have to refuse job offers because of transport problems. Mobidesk wants to offer a solution to such problems by setting up a proper bus project.

In the field of bicycle lease Mobidesk has contacts with bike manufacturers and bicycle repair shops. It can now present concrete proposals to interested companies, offering a fixed price per year (inclusive of maintenance and insurance).

5. Follow up of the actions that have been set up and other initiatives

It is very important to refresh and follow up actions that have been set up. Mobidesk tries to do this by a permanent promotion, by keeping up databases (subscriptions to transport systems) and by taking care of the daily organisation of the implemented measures.

6. Coordination of actions in different companies

Mobidesk tries to increase the effect of its communication policy by conducting it over the different companies involved. Involving as many companies as possible in a specific action increases its strength, its critical mass.

An example: three companies in the same industrial site planned to set up a carpooling campaign. Mobidesk composed a Mobihow containing a carpooling subscription leaflet. However, before distributing the Mobihow, Mobidesk approached all other companies on the site to give them the opportunity to join in. As a result, four other companies did join in. Obviously a carpooling campaign that is held in 7 companies has better chances for success than one held in 3 companies.

Another example: the Limburg university want to set up a carpooling campaign. Mobidesk approaches all 3 other colleges that are situated on the same campus to boost the campaign.

7. Intermediate between companies and authorities

Mobidesk intermediates in the following two directions :

- Mobidesk distributes government mobility information to the Limburg business community. The Flemish authorities have recently taken a number of measures to encourage companies to start with mobility management. One of those measures is the distribution of company transport cheques to companies actually implementing mobility measures. Mobidesk includes this information in its information to companies.
- Mobidesk has set up an integrated database on commuting traffic in Limburg to support its activities. Authorities who wish to substantiate their mobility policy may consult this database.

Results

Companies interested in implementing measures in the field of commuter traffic, can register with Mobidesk. To become a Mobidesk member companies should undertake to implement at least one mobility measure and supply their mobility data to Mobidesk.

Since its foundation in May 2003 Mobidesk assisted 20 companies in promoting sustainable mobility in commuter traffic. These actions involved 14327 employees, not including the temporary employees and the people receiving training at the employment office VDAB.

1. Activation of companies

Mobidesk organises the activation of companies in geographic phases. Limburg is divided into several regions and a planning for the activation of the different regions has been made.

The first step in an activation is a mailing to all companies in the region involved. This mailing contains an introductory Mobidesk brochure with an accompanying letter.

Active follow-up is given to companies with over 50 employees: Mobidesk contacts them by phone and tries to get an appointment. During this visit to the company Mobidesk illustrates its activities. After internal consultation based on the information given by Mobidesk the company may decide to enter in a co-operation. If this is the case, Mobidesk advises the company on potential measures (Mobiscan) and gives concrete support to the elaboration and communication of those measures.

Cities and communities in the activated region are also approached. They are on the one hand employers (of the municipal employees) and on the other hand suppliers of transport infrastructure and information.

2. Spontaneous requests of companies

Next to the activation of companies, Mobidesk also gets spontaneous requests. In this case there is generally an immediate cause for the company to start with mobility management.

Some examples :

- A company is moving and employees are confronted with a new commuter route. As many employees are living close to the company the number of bike-riders is relatively high (almost 9%). However, due to the move, the distance will in most cases be too far to bike. In cooperation with Mobidesk the company examines possible measures to organise the commuter traffic as smoothly as possible. The company will set up a carpooling campaign, provide shuttle bikes and bicycle repair kits, and organise transport from the bus station to the company.
- Due to infrastructure works a large number of parking places in the centre of a town will be lost. A non profit organisation representing the traders in the centre, has asked Mobidesk to set up a promotion and awareness raising campaign to promote bus and bicycle as alternative means of transport.
- A university is confronted with parking problems as more and more students come to class by car. Mobidesk and the university set up a carpooling campaign aiming both at the students and the staff.
- A union points out problems with the connection of the cycle track on company grounds to the public road and asks the company to contact Mobidesk. Mobidesk is now looking into this matter with the authorities involved.

Conclusions

Mobidesk tries to contribute to solving concrete mobility problems as is described above. The most urgent problems in this rural and almost not congested province are related to the social aspect of mobility: how to participate in the employment market if you don't have a car? At the same time, but on a longer time scale, Mobidesk contributes to the development of sustainable mobility.

First step was to try and control the flow of information concerning commuter traffic in Limburg and to bring all parties involved together. In the longer term Mobidesk Limburg

wants to become a catalyst to obtain sustainable solutions and more specifically to develop transport products that will better comply with the needs of commuter traffic. They should be the result of a constant interaction between supply and demand in the field of transport (authorities and transport providers on the one hand and business community and employees on the other hand).