

Connected Cities

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Nova Terra is a not-for-profit magazine. It publishes mainly in Dutch and is distributed to two networks in the Netherlands: Habiforum and the Netherlands Institute for Housing and Planning (Nirov). Both work to raise and maintain the quality of spatial plans, urban design and development projects. This English language supplement to Nova Terra is dedicated to the activities of the Connected Cities project, an EU-sponsored Interreg IIIC network for sustainable mobility and spatial development, and dedicated to improving accessibility and quality of life in urban and rural areas.

Connected Cities will 'travel' through Europe; every six months the focus and the location of activities will shift to another region. Starting off in the Belgium/Netherlands region, it will proceed to Bulgaria/Greece, Portugal/Spain and Italy/Greece, before concluding in the England/France region. The central issues during the first six months are changing urban relations, high-quality public transport and Transport Development Areas. This supplement reflects that focus. New Towns, once a promising solution to deal with metropolitan growth in Europe, now seem to be struggling with the development of multi-centred urban areas. Originally built to serve a one-to-one relation with their mother city, the New Towns are being forced to reinvent their role, identity and transport provision.

Fifty years have gone by since the first New Towns emerged. Metropolitan development in South East England is now guided by the Sustainable Communities programme, which revolves around four growth areas adjacent to London. It will be interesting to see during the course of Connected Cities how this new thinking engages older practices. Prominently located in the growth areas outlined by the Sustainable Communities programme are two New Towns: Basildon in the Thames Gateway and Milton Keynes in Milton Keynes-South Midlands. The idea of Transport Development Areas (TDAs) may play a key role in these new or reinvented ideas. TDAs are about concentrating urban growth in areas well-served by public transport, an approach that

can readily be incorporated into the spatial or urban planning of many cities and regions in Europe. But it is the first time that such a practice has been explicitly labelled and presented as a coherent set of actions. This may help to focus attention on existing policies and plans that support the idea, as well as implant the concept where no such 'tradition' exists.

The Dutch province of Zuid-Holland is struggling to become metropolitan and seems to be developing its own version of TDAs: Stedenbaan. This conversion of older transport systems into new ones goes hand in hand with a shift in spatial policies. But as the transit systems in Zuid-Holland goes through a period of rapid change, who is actually keeping an eye on the network as a whole? The fact that technical distinctions between light rail, metro, rapid transit, commuter train and regiotram have all but disappeared has not been reflected in practice. For underground construction it matters little what direction the development of such a network takes, and in dense urban areas it is clear that vast stretches will have to be built underground. After decades of experience in the use of underground facilities, we have come to understand that underground facilities need different design and management strategies to deliver their full potential.

With so much attention for rail-based transport one could easily overlook Bus Rapid Transit. Cities that do not yet have a high-quality public transport system might want to look into the improved bus systems currently offer, which can meet high standards at a much lower price. The case of Phileas in Eindhoven shows that the planning of such a transport system can be integrated into the urban planning process. Which brings us back to the core of Connected Cities – the cutting edge of sustainable mobility and spatial planning.

