



Sustainable mobility in Carré Sénart

Sénart, one of the new towns in the south of Paris, is looking for ways to better link its major new town centre into the regional transport infrastructure and consolidate the various districts of the new town. Sustainable transport solutions are also thought to improve mobility within the centre itself.

Carré Sénart in the Paris region.

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A two day Connected Cities seminar was organised last November by Sénart New Town on 'Sustainable mobility in the Carré Sénart town centre'. Sénart, which has a population of 110,000, is situated to the south-east of Paris. The event was structured around three workshops in which participants discussed the current public transport network in Sénart and came up with key recommendations on how to formulate guidelines for a sustainable transport policy in Sénart in the long term, to 2020. This article describes the development of Sénart New Town and its new town centre, Carré Sénart, summarises the main outcomes of the European seminar and presents the conclusions of the discussion.

A TOWN CENTRE FOR SÉNART

In the 1970s the French government created five new towns around Paris to prevent uncontrolled urban sprawl in the Ile-de-France region, providing financial support for infrastructure and strategic economic development. Established in 1973, Sénart is the youngest new town in the Ile de France region and it did not benefit from the financial support and economic growth that the others new towns enjoyed. For example, Val Maubuée has Euro Disney and Cergy-Pontoise has a very big university campus. Moreover, since 1983, under the government's decentralisation process, new towns are no longer a priority and central government funding for infrastructure and public transport networks, such as investment in the RERD rail services to Paris, has been cut back.

The Syndicat d'agglomération nouvelles (SAN), which covers eight municipalities, became the administrative body for the new town in 1973. The SAN is responsible for economic development, networks, transport, environment, culture and social affairs. In the 1990s, plans were developed to create a new centre for Sénart, based on the concept of the *carré* conceived by the architect François Tiroit. At that time the eight municipalities each had their own centre and it was felt that an intermunicipal town centre would enhance the identity of the new town, which in turn would help to attract the major developments commensurate with a new town of 110,000 inhabitants.

In 2000, a new type of city centre was built in Sénart. It combines retail facilities and public spaces. It offers space for new leisure →

activities, public services and employment. The Carré Sénart is designed as a 1.4 km x 1.4 km square (220 ha) located to the west of Sénart. An ambitious development programme was carried out and the Carré currently contains 100,000 m² of offices and services, 150,000 m² of retail space (attracting 13.5 million visitors a year), restaurants, hotels, a cinema and Sénart town hall. A national theatre, a regional leisure park and an aquarium will be built in the near future. During the weekend the Carré is very crowded and the restaurants are full – the Carré’s Gaumont cinema is even the seventh most popular cinema in France – but at night the Carré is a dead area.

Today, the Carré is a major urban development providing local people and businesses with new and innovative facilities and services. It is a strategic centre for Sénart. The Carré has also been developed to offer a sustainable environment for its inhabitants through the creation of a green landscape and green public spaces structured around two canals and a total of 22 kilometres of cycleways and footpaths. A wind turbine has been built to provide energy for the street lighting.

UNITING EIGHT MUNICIPALITIES

The Carré was conceived as a response to the specific spatial configuration of Sénart new town, which is spread over eight municipalities. Whereas most new town developments are planned around a traditional town centre, Sénart first expanded without any town centre or any formal urban plan. This was due to a lack of investment by central government and a low level of economic growth during the 1970s and 1980s.

However, to make the most of this situation, SAN launched the Carré as the concept for a new town centre: the creation of a completely new centre to encourage and support new development projects and activities. The Carré has successfully achieved these objectives giving visibility, identity and influence to Sénart new town. It provides new urban facilities and amenities for Sénart and strengthens local synergies. It is an innovative tool that gives cohesion to Sénart’s eight municipalities. Social cohesion and identity in Sénart is also fostered by the *Fête du Carré*, a one-day event which takes place every two years in the Carré, showcasing many original cultural and social activities (30,000 participants in 2006).

TRANSPORT LINKS

The Carré is well served by road connections, with an exit from the A5 motorway and the national road N104, the Paris outer ring road. Public transport links to Paris, Melun and Evry are equally good. The regional train service (RER D) runs every seven minutes during the rush hour, with the journey to Paris taking just 35 minutes. A bus service with a dedicated lane between Sénart railway station and Evry, via the Carré will open in 2008. A new bus service, the *Citalien*, already runs between the Carré and Melun, and seven bus lines run between Lieusaint Moissy and the Carré. With the development of the Carré and the revision of the train schedule, the bus network was restructured in 2005 to better meet the mobility needs of the population.

Sustainable mobility is a key plank of transport policy for the Carré. Urban developments are connected by an extensive network of cycleways and footpaths, which criss-cross the area. All these cycleways are connected to the network of bicycle routes that serve the urban area surrounding the Carré. Despite all these improvements, though, further connections are needed to create



a really sustainable mobility network and to take full advantage of the link between the Carré and the Ile-de-France region.

EUROPEAN EXPERTISE

At the Connected Cities meeting held in November 2007 European experts discussed the Carré and mobility in the Carré itself and in the surrounding areas. They discussed the urban aspects of this new town centre and drew up advice on potential solutions for achieving sustainable mobility within the Carré and for improving links between the Carré and the surrounding urban areas. First of all, the European experts considered it inappropriate to build a new town centre so far away from the railway station. From an urban point of view, those three kilometres between the station and the town centre look like an impassable barrier. To use the railway station as an anchor for a vibrant urban centre, the public authorities will have to come up with a transport solution to bridge those three kilometres. It would have been easier to build the town centre next to the railway station, but this is no longer feasible. The experts underlined two points concerning the Carré town centre buildings:

- The centre consists largely of monofunctional boxes set in a coarse-

grained urban fabric and each parcel of land has only one function. Moreover, there is no housing. Obviously, employees working at the offices and visitors to the shops and leisure facilities cannot stay in the town centre and have to go back home, which generates traffic. At the end of the working day, the whole centre becomes a dead area.

- All the buildings are situated far apart from each other, making the centre unattractive to pedestrians. It seems as if the Carré has been designed for the car. A smaller grain would have been better.

However, as the Carré has been designed this way, the experts considered the options for creating a system of sustainable mobility in the town centre and proposed the following solutions.

LOCAL MOBILITY

As outlined during the European Connected Cities seminar, such large-scale urban developments are suited to the use of the private car, but are less ideal for walking or cycling. The first idea for developing sustainable mobility solutions for the Carré is to upgrade the existing cycleways and footpaths and make the routes more

efficient. Better signposting to help people find their way around could be introduced.

To promote non-motorised mobility, a network of bicycle rental points could be developed in the Carré, like the Velib in Paris or the Velov in Lyon, with one bicycle point next to each building and a central rental centre at a strategic location in the Carré. Bicycles can be picked up at any point and dropped off at any of the other points, the first half-hour being free of charge. This system promotes short journeys. As the Carré is only 1.4 km square, such a system could be very efficient.

REGIONAL MOBILITY

To develop the economic and business potential of the Carré Sénart, it is necessary to have an efficient connection between the Carré and the other major strategic areas in the Ile-de-France region. The first step could be to reinforce the link between the Carré and the nearby railway station. Apart from the bicycle points, which could be extended as far as the train station, a dedicated bus lane with a frequent service would provide a very efficient public transport link. A dedicated bus lane is in the making between Evry and the Carré. Another could be built between →



Melun and the Carré to link the Carré with the southern part of the district.

All these public transport lines could be connected at a multimodal transport hub in the centre of the Carré to facilitate interchange between transport modes and support economic and social development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As moving the Carré nearer to the train station is politically not a feasible solution, the challenge is to find solutions for sustainable mobility in an area built for the private car. The experts of the Connected Cities project have drawn up some recommendations for a link between the Carré and the railway station and for mobility within the Carré.

Recommendations for sustainable public transport from Lieusaint station to the Carré:

- Improve signage for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Establish a more secure parking system for bicycles at the railway station.
- Increase the frequency of bus services to the Carré.
- Enhance cycle use and soft access, in such a way it will not compete with the use of the bus line

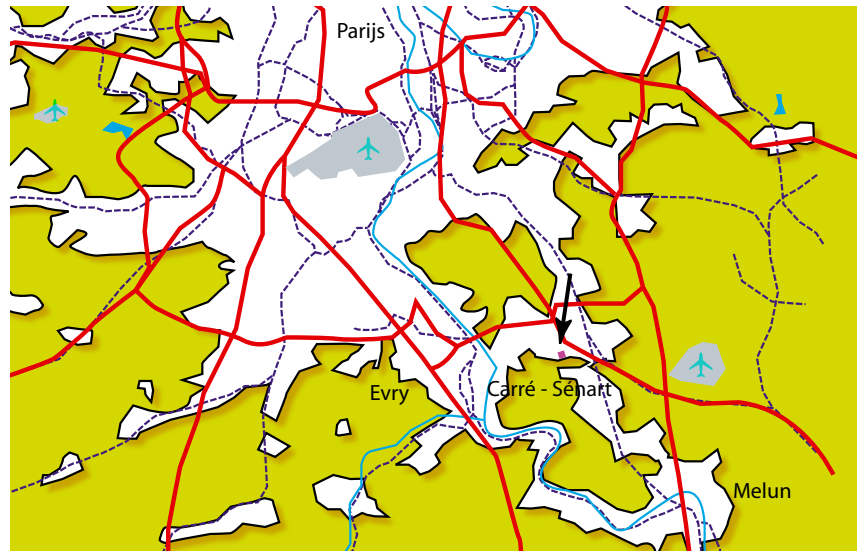
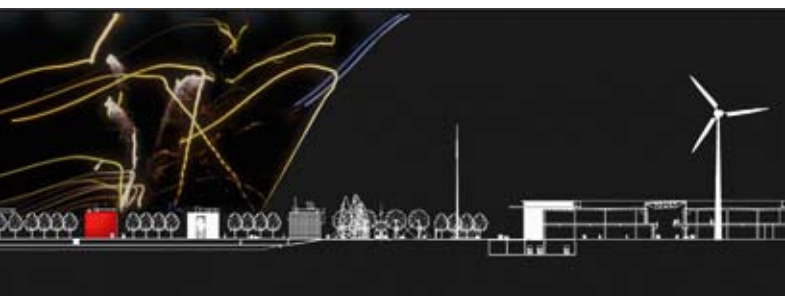
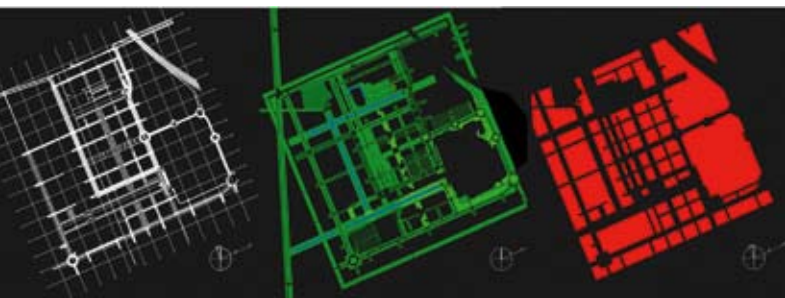
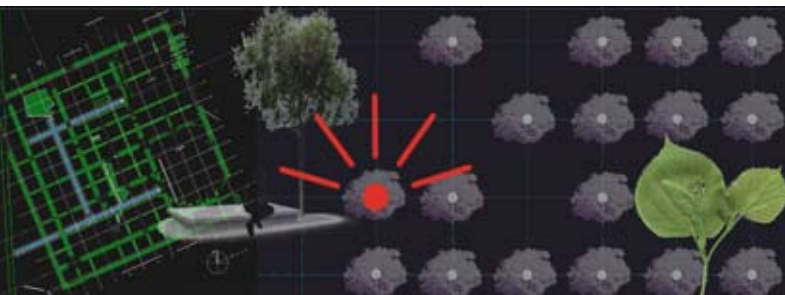
- Create a multimodal transport hub in the Carré to connect all transport services.

All these recommendations are realistic, considering the local context. However, a solid political consensus will be indispensable for adopting the policies needed to pursue an effective sustainable mobility strategy in Carré Sénart and make the required budget available.



Recommendations for mobility within Carré Sénart:

- Introduce parking fees in the short term.
- Introduce new modes of transport in the Carré (such as Pedelec and cybercar).
- Make pedestrians access more visible and convenient.



(illustration: Karin Dekker)



Carré Sénart in Sénart.