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A territorial development project associated with the Brussels RER

An analysis of the fundamental deciding factors

*Pour un projet de développement territorial associé au RER bruxellois. Essai de
mise en évidence des facteurs déterminants fondamentaux*

De plaats van het GEN in een territoriaal ontwikkelingsproject voor Brussel.

Overzicht van de doorslaggevende basisfactoren

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Translation : Jane Corrigan

This contribution first attempts to discuss the challenges of railway development which lie behind the RER project in and around Brussels.

It then proposes conceptual approaches for the optimal implementation of this project, brought into line with the other components of the rail service (in particular the HST and IC/IR services).

It also attempts to decipher the challenges in terms of the positioning of opposed institutional stakeholders, emphasising the objective competition which motivates them and the relatively isolated position of the Brussels-Capital Region which, according to the author, results from this.

Finally, the author proposes approaches to a 'railway strategy' in Brussels, aimed in particular at supporting a different type of territorial development from that which prevails in the current Regional Development Plan, i.e. to favour a multipolar city, targeted spatially.

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Introduction

For the past few years, the population of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) has once again been just over 1 million. Its moderately dense urban territory covers 160km², yet its territorial borders no longer correspond to its metropolitan reality. The best indication of this is the fact that 55% of the jobs in BCR are held by people who live outside the city limits. This explains why the city's rail service is so popular (more than 130,000 commuters each day in either direction). The reason for this situation is not so much a special fondness for rail travel, but rather the inaccessibility of the city and, above all, the many neighbourhoods which are composed almost entirely of offices (with roughly 12 to 13 million m² or over 500,000 service industry jobs, more than 90% of BCR has become part of the service sector).

A very extensive rail service to and from Brussels is therefore available. However, it is centred on access to the city and plays an insignificant role in terms of urban transport. Although the city's accessibility by train is ensured by almost 30 stations and stops, the network is a legacy of the past rather than the result of modern-day development.

Consequently, it is not surprising to see stakeholders in the sector upholding strongly opposed positions, with some feeling that most of these stations are obsolete and that the service should be reduced to a lower number of entry and exit points via high-quality intercity services, and others defending the redeployment of a top-quality urban and suburban service based on an increase in the number of stations.

We shall take a technical and political approach in our attempt to identify the mechanisms which are likely to influence future metropolitan dynamics.

Different determining aspects are likely to have some bearing on the development of stations in Brussels and their surroundings. There appear to be four types of a 'technical' nature; we shall then examine the institutional context.

The evolution of traffic at stations in Brussels and associated determining factors

- The origin or destination of 50% of Belgian railway passengers is BCR, whose area of influence covers most of Belgium.
- The three major stations in the North-South Junction account for 80% of the traffic in Brussels, and the Luxembourg/Schuman stations account for 10%. During the 1991-2001 period, there was a significant reduction in traffic at Brussels-Central, whereas the South and North stations experienced a strong increase (+/- 50%).
- There is a clear majority of passengers in Brussels who take regular trains covering medium or long distances (from across Belgium) (88%), whereas urban and suburban services are very moderate (8%); the international service is also relatively insignificant (4.5%) and is concentrated mainly in the South Station.

Figure1. The (development of the) railway network in Brussels and surroundings
Traffic at stations in Brussels (Sources: STIB (2004) and STRATEC (2001))

•The purpose of travel in the vast majority of cases is home/work (>60%) and home/school (>16%) commuting. Between 1991 and 2001, the home/work purpose of travel decreased from 65% to 60%.

•More than 55% of departures from stations are recorded during the 7.15am-9.15am segment and 30% during the peak hour from 8am-9am (i.e. 38,000 people), which is coherent with the purpose of travel. Between 1991 and 2001, traffic during the 7am-8am segment was surpassed by the 9am-10am segment (due to a shift in the morning peak hour).

- The modes used after rail transport in Brussels are worthy of note: the majority of people still travel on foot (>50%); a growing number of people use urban public transport (UPT) (>40%; of which >50% metro, and <25% for both tram and bus); and a moderate portion travel by private car, especially in the case of occasional passengers who cover medium or long distances.
- The South Station stands out due to the vast area covered by the station and the moderate numbers of people who therefore travel on foot (30%), and instead use public transport, private cars and, to a lesser extent, taxis.

Urban planning

Several years ago, BCR drafted a Regional Development Plan (RDP) which directs fundamental choices in the area of urban development in Brussels. Certain aspects of the RDP are worth mentioning in the context of our analysis, namely that it:

- intends to give greater place to population growth than to economic growth in order to rebalance residential development with respect to the development of economic activities;
- aims to rebalance development in BCR between east and west;
- seeks to favour the development of economic activities around the main stations, claiming that it will encourage the use of PT (public transport);
- aims to encourage the development of social mix in the 'areas of regional interest', in particular around the North Station, as well as in decentralised sites including unused railway land such as the West Station, Delta and Josaphat.

With respect to these intentions, it should be mentioned that:

- for the past decade or so, economic and, to a lesser extent, residential development has been relatively strong around the North and South Stations;
- the development of new sites is having trouble getting off the ground due to initial fixed costs, among others;
- the urban development of the Schaerbeek-Formation site has been postponed for at least 10 years.

Urban public transport (UPT) service

Things are quite clear in this area: the implementation of the STIB's Metro, Tram and Bus Plans (as approved by the former administrations) has been completed with the metro network now going all the way around the small ring. With respect to the rail service, this results in:

- a better connection between the rail and metro networks via the South Station;
- significantly improved access to the West Station by metro, which, in theory, could go hand in hand with the development of the rail service;
- a 'simplification' of the North/South underground tramway line, which should benefit the North and South Stations (somewhat).

The West and South Stations might therefore have a lot to gain from these changes.

Fare structure

Integrated ticketing has been operational on the BCR territory for several years but is confined to its limits, and its rules for application vary according to the tickets concerned. Since the emergence of the RER project, all of the technical and political authorities have agreed that integrated ticketing will be applied; although it appears inescapable, the rules for application have only begun to make progress recently, particularly with the STIB (Société des transports intercommunaux de Bruxelles – the Brussels public transport company) and the SNCB (Société nationale des chemins de fer belges – the Belgian national railway).

Integrated fares are already widespread today, including outside the BCR territory, for many different tickets. As regards the RER, everyone seems to agree on the principle of two interconnected fare zones, namely BCR and the RER zone. But this leads to the question of cost recovery (for which this fare method would prove to be rather inadequate), and above all revenue sharing between the operating companies. When discussions actually begin, they will surely be long and difficult, unless the three new relevant ministers (out of four) from the CD&V party (Christen Democraten & Vlaams, Flemish Social Christian party) agree with each other.

The details of implementation of integrated ticketing and fares will have an impact essentially on public transport users. But they will also have an impact on geographical distribution, as the fare limits could have a significant influence on the behaviour of users. We fear that there might be pressure for the fares integrating the RER zone to be very attractive, thus favouring an urban exodus and limiting the means necessary for a truly appealing service.

Evolution of the rail service

Infrastructure aspects

The SNCB considers that it cannot increase the number of trains going through Brussels via the North-South Junction, i.e. 90 per hour (see Dobruszkes, 2005). The evaluation of the saturation of the Junction is based on different parameters:

- today, its use is not perfectly balanced between the three passages (the tunnel is composed of 2x3 lines, with each double track being a 'passage') in terms of the connections with the entire network, with a view to limiting traffic cuts (intersections of lines or trains). Furthermore, the SNCB aims to keep a maximum number of trains out of the way of the HSTs which are concentrated in the west passage, with domestic traffic being sent as much as possible through the two other passages;
- the central and east passages are punctuated by platform lines at the Chapelle and Congrès stops, resulting in gaps in travel time which limit their capacity, especially with the RER trains which should stop there;
- major traffic cuts remain between the North and South Stations, which also limit the capacity;
- the trains have highly variable characteristics and occupancy rates, so that travel times – especially at Brussels-Central – are rather disorganised;

- providing an equivalent service, the SNCB will reduce by half the number of regular trains (generally running at one-hour intervals throughout the day) in the Junction, inasmuch as Brussels should no longer be a terminus (except for peak hour trains).

In addition, the SNCB would like to increase the number of passages through the capital, by creating or managing new junctions:

- the Schuman–Josaphat Junction passing through the European quarter, with the construction of a new tunnel of only one kilometre in length, would allow line 26 to be diverted; its operation would nevertheless be subject to restrictions prohibiting more than 8 to 10 trains per hour in either direction (traffic cuts on lines and succession of slow and express trains on the same lines);
- line 28 in west BCR (Fig.1) goes through areas with low passenger potential (objective 'competition' of the metro and low density of service sector jobs) and its connection to the rest of the network is very limited, both to the north and to the south.

Operational aspects

It is more in terms of operation that fundamental questions affecting the future of stations in Brussels are raised. We shall review the various components of the service, focusing in particular on that of the RER.

As regards *international traffic*, the South Station will be the focal point of this potential. Although certain services might continue at other stations (North and Luxembourg), they are not likely to provide much structure.

As regards *inter-city (IC) national traffic*, two structural changes will take place over the next ten years:

- a category of services offering an operating speed greater than 100km/h (compared with 'just' 80-90km/h in general today), thanks to a small number of stops and infrastructures allowing a speed of at least 160km/h;
- new IC trains (direct trains between medium-sized towns in the country) as well as the European quarter and Brussels-National airport.

The stations in Brussels to benefit structurally should be the following:

- Brussels-South due to a cumulative effect of all service categories (in addition to a significant and diversified urban and suburban public transport service);
- Brussels-Luxembourg and Brussels-Schuman as a result of the creation of direct express connections with many cities in the country (at least during weekdays);

However, Brussels-North will lose passengers who make rail connections there, due to future direct IC connections with the European quarter and Brussels-National airport.

Finally, as regards *regional and supra-regional traffic*, the RER project raises many essential questions.

Figure 2: Variants of the structure of the RER service (the (schematised) BCR limits in blue).

The first question is related to the fact that the concrete conditions of the future RER rail service are still unknown: What will be the area of the territory served? Will the service only be radial or will it also be made up of (Fig.2):

- bypasses?
- tangent lines?
- 'butterfly wings'?

Figure 3: Spatial presentation of operation during peak periods

During the peak periods, given the overall increased frequency, we feel that direct connections would be better; each connection would have its own high frequency, with good connections as well, thanks to shorter waiting times.

The figure below illustrates the number of trains required to operate between a Walloon rail line (to the south) and BCR (to the north), according to the two future North-South and Schuman-Josaphat junctions; the figures indicate the number of trains per hour in either direction.

Figure 4: Spatial presentations of operation during off-peak periods

On the other hand, two possibilities exist for off-peak periods (Fig.4):

The arrows at the centre of each diagram represent the connections at the crossing stations (for example Moensberg), with the thickness of the arrows depending on the number of connections. The broken lines indicate a long transfer time and therefore a disincentive.

- The first hypothesis is the exact replica of the recommendation for peak periods, except that the frequency will in all likelihood be halved (two and one train(s)/hour between the outskirts and the North-South Junction or the Schuman-Josaphat Junction respectively), detracting from the popularity of certain journeys, in particular those which necessitate a connection; however, the strength of this hypothesis lies in widespread direct lines.
- The second hypothesis consists in reducing the number of direct lines: this would allow good frequencies to be maintained on the operating lines (at 20- or 15-minute intervals) and, thanks to connection stations built especially at the intersection of lines 26 (and 28), would also offer the opportunity to provide widespread direct lines (to and from everywhere) at high and regular frequencies.

The application of the second hypothesis would consist in combining the following services:

- during peak periods: radial + bypass + tangent lines
- during off-peak periods: radial + bypass lines.

Our preferred choice – namely hypothesis 1 – will especially affect the accessibility (and therefore the urban development potential) of sites located at the intersection of line 26 (and probably line 28), i.e. Halle (outside BCR), and above all Moensberg, Arcades-Watermael, Haren-Haren South, Vilvoorde (also outside BCR), and even De Trooz.

The second question concerns the connection stations. Three possibilities present very different spatial characteristics (Fig.5):

- in IC stations in the Flemish and Walloon Regions closest to BCR
- in IR stations closest to the centre of Brussels, only some of which are located in BCR
- in the RER stations in Brussels located at the intersection of radial and bypass lines

Figure 5: Connection stations

The relevant federal public service (SPFMT) confided a major study mission (Article 13) a few months ago to a consortium of specialised consultants.

The strategy which determines the RER development proposal

stemming from this study is based on the existing infrastructure and planned works, in order to ensure the least possible additional difficulties. Although this approach has the merit of being clear, it fails to deal with the issues which concern us here, to such an extent that one may wonder whether all problems likely to trigger a debate are being sidestepped intentionally.

The project 'notes' the capacity limits, not only of the North-South Junction, but also of the future Schuman-Josaphat Junction, in order to justify the decision not to 'congest' them. It thus seeks to use these two junctions 'as much as possible', but 'the excess traffic must be sent elsewhere', namely to the west Brussels bypass (the existing line 28).

As regards the North-South Junction, despite the fact that only just 10 years ago the SNCB wished to concentrate the service, it is deliberately pursuing the opposite objective today. There is a will to 'restrict' as little as possible the IC/IR (Inter-City and Inter-Regional, according to the terminology in effect at the SNCB) and above all international service, thus relegating the RER service to a position of 'secondary' importance.

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Although the diversion of many services to line 28 is presumably favourable in terms of territorial development, it may not be very advantageous (at least in the next 10 to 20 years):

- the (realistic) urban development potentials of the West Station are fairly small, with major subsoil constraints: 'unavoidable' spatial changes given the position of the lines, impossibility to build above the metro infrastructures, and soil pollution in historic Molenbeek;
- many people living outside Brussels will have a connection via the west interchange rather than benefiting from direct lines to the two major areas, namely the city centre and the European quarter. Travel times will be considerably longer for many commuters going to the east of the city with a metro connection (via the West Station rather than South/Central/Schuman);
- the direct lines will not be very useful to the inhabitants of Brussels, for example between the Uccle stops along L124 and the city centre or between the European quarter and the airport;
- the maximum passenger loads of the metro will not be reduced, at least not in the busiest sections (Central – Montgomery and South – Porte de Namur).

Furthermore, the project does not mention the connection methods between RER services (where? how?), or between RER and other services.

As regards the 'specialisation' of RER services ('frequent stop' services as well as other trains which will not stop at every station), the modes differ from structuring conceptual models (see Fig.4 above and the related comments) to the benefit of technical and political criteria.

The dominance of the infrastructure in the project's approach stems from the unrelenting will of the SNCB not to hinder the IC/IR and above all HST services in the North-South Junction with RER services, which are thus relegated to a position of 'secondary' importance within the BCR rail service. This is probably also due to a Belgian veneration of engineers.

This quick overview reinforces our critical stance regarding the RER project: it focuses far too little on accessibility and does not propose a sustainable structuring of the territory. It can therefore be contrasted with the remarkable 'Rail 2000' project in Switzerland, which is based on a will to optimise services and adapt the infrastructures in a selective manner.

In our opinion, the *combination of different services* should be based on an operational diagram (of principles) such as follows (Fig.7):

Very diverse services departing from a major city such as BCR (on the right) should be combined and superimposed. The frequency of stops would decrease as the final destination of these services gets further away. The distance between stops would not be random, however: as the approximate area of influence (the metropolitan area) of Brussels has a 50-kilometre radius, for the longest distances, it would be advisable to provide frequent stop services at all stops located furthest away from BCR, and then, starting at an average-sized station, (semi-)direct services.

Figure 7: Recommended principles of rail operations per line. RER U = urban component of the RER ; RER + = semi-rapid component ; RER ++ = 'rapid' component

In this context, we see the need for two or even three types of RER service, combining frequency and travel time (the closer the service, the more frequency prevails over travel time) in an optimal manner, i.e. by offering an adequate service at a reasonable cost.

During peak periods (Fig.8), services would be provided twice per hour and per direction; local services (urban RER) would be provided four times per hour and per direction, in order to deal with a high level of urban and suburban commuter traffic.

Figure 8: Principles of rail operations during peak periods

During off-peak periods (Fig.9), certain services would still be provided twice per hour (or more), such as the IC trains – given the multipolar urban reality of the Brussels territory – as well as the local services (urban RER).

Thanks to this type of structural organisation, the operator would no longer have to worry about connections between RER and IC trains. This would be a very good option for an optimal use of infrastructures – even on double tracks (but not quadruple) – located at more than 15 to 30 kilometres from the capital.

The creation of the RER will in any case have major structural effects on the stations in Brussels:

- Brussels-South will quickly become the most important station in Belgium, not only due to the diversity of services, but also to the amount of traffic; this evolution should be influenced only slightly by the strategic choices which we have just set out;
- Within the next 10 to 20 years, Luxembourg and Schuman stations should undergo an increase and diversification in their clientele, which could lead them to work together with Brussels-North as the third most important station in Brussels;
- Schaerbeek and above all Etterbeek stations should benefit from the future evolution of the service, given their position in the planned network. They should provide a large number of RER services (radial as well as bypass and tangent lines), in addition to IR and peak hour services;
- The maintenance or not of an IR (or equivalent) service and privileged connections with the RER urban services could have a noticeable influence on the role of the Boitsfort, Uccle-Calevoet and Jette stations;
- The operating procedures will affect the future of the surroundings of crossing stations for radial and bypass lines – intersections which we strongly support (as a reminder, in BCR: Moensberg, Arcades-Watermael, Haren).

Figure 9: Principles of rail operations during off-peak periods

Institutional aspects in Belgium and Brussels and their impacts on the RER

Until the 1970s, the state was in charge of investments in the area of public transport and covered its operating deficit. Strong budgetary restrictions intervened in the 1980s and were followed by structural reforms at the end of the 1980s, which coincided with a very widespread regionalisation of competences in the area of mobility.

Until now, only the SNCB has avoided this trend and remains under the supervision of the federal state. Similar to what has been happening to railway companies in other European countries, it was recently divided – apart from general holdings – into an entity responsible for the infrastructure and another responsible for operations.

What fundamental consequences might this context have on territorial development and on the role of stations in Brussels? Several elements must be taken into account in this respect:

- as regards international passenger traffic, a choice was made at the end of the 1980s in favour of Brussels-South;
- as regards national passenger traffic (IC/IR), no one questions the objective importance of a few large stations in Brussels: thanks to the exceptional asset represented by the North-South Junction, Brussels-South, North and Central stand out clearly; Schuman/Luxembourg (just 500m apart) mark out a new junction which will go right through BCR in a few years;
- the role of medium-sized urban stations is much more uncertain, with no clear strategy determining their future;
- small-sized stations should be the main beneficiaries of the planned development of the RER. But objectively opposed strategies have emerged, dividing BCR. It is having a hard time convincing the SNCB, the federal state and the other Regions of the importance of a high-quality urban service for its territory, as their aim is to favour long-distance services above all.

Powerful financial interests underlie these positions. This is noticeable in various ways:

- all of the stakeholders were easily convinced of the importance of huge investments aimed at creating four lines for the different rail infrastructures leading to Brussels, 'to make the RER and its operation a reality';
- the main issue has not been settled yet, i.e. the financing for the rolling stock and, above all the operating deficit coverage; there is a very poor understanding of the deficit, whose level will be greatly affected by the implementation of accompanying measures which depend on various institutions, including BCR;
- thanks to the RER, BCR seeks to improve the service provided in its territory through public transport, via means which do not fall within its remit or, consequently, its budgets; the quality of life of its inhabitants could be improved indirectly (better environment and accessibility), as well as its finances, thanks to reinforced residential appeal;

- BCR wants to avoid the reinforcement of suburbanisation by the RER at all costs, which would contribute to impoverishing it directly and indirectly:
 - directly, because the inhabitants are among its main net financial contributors via the law on the financing of the Regions, a significant part of which is still based on personal income tax, i.e. just 8.5% of the national wealth, whereas the Region is home to 10% of the population of Belgium, and above all, generates 19% of the national wealth;
 - indirectly, because the price of land and real estate would collapse, which would harm the Region's finances considerably as well as the process of urban renewal begun more than 20 years ago;
- the two other Regions have an objective interest which is exactly opposed to that of BCR, i.e. to drain BCR of its inhabitants, especially the middle and fortunate classes with the most money;
- the federal state is silent on the subject, as the effects of the RER project on the localisation of inhabitants and activities do not really concern it from an objective point of view;
- the SNCB focuses its attention on commuters (journeys from home to work) and on a maximum decrease in travel time; it is therefore opposed to opening new urban stations, arguing that this would lengthen travel time for users;
- the SNCB also wishes to focus on a limited number of stations in order to favour IC/IR services.

As regards conflicts of interest, we would schematise the situation as follows: BCR is alone against all the other main stakeholders in the debate, namely the two other Regions, the SNCB and the federal state.

This is how BCR appears to defend an RER which has an importance as an urban service. It does not, however, seem ready to implement accompanying measures worthy of the name, especially in terms of parking management and road traffic control. Consequently, it is not clear as regards the perverse effects of the RER in terms of the exodus of various urban functions in the absence of measures coordinated with the two other Regions.

The Flemish and Walloon Regions defend a reinforcement of the (semi-)rapid rail service with all the major poles of activity in Brussels; their main (hidden) motivation lies in extending the Brussels metropolis as much as possible into their respective territory, in order to derive a maximum of economic and financial benefits to the objective detriment of BCR.

The federal state avoids getting involved in policies which do not fall within its remit and in so doing supports the Walloon and Flemish Regions. It thus avoids debates on taxation (car and especially land and real estate), which falls within its remit, but whose reform would agitate citizens and could cause unproductive debates from an electoral point of view.

The fact that the Walloon and Flemish components greatly dominate the inhabitants of Brussels within the party apparatus carries much weight with almost everyone who is in favour of dominating objective interests.

Finally, the SNCB appears to be using the RER as a pretext to benefit from favourable conditions for the development of its medium- and long-distance services¹ in order to increase its profitability as much as possible (its cover ratio), as imposed by the federal state in its management contract. Its objective interests converge with those of the two dominating Regions.

At the same time, there are many differences of opinion in Brussels, opposed in a struggle to dominate.

Conclusion: Which Brussels territorial development project should be associated with the RER?

There were many questions posed by the case of the RER, and for a long time the choices were unlimited. But the decision-making process remained at a lengthy standstill due to the many conflicts between institutional stakeholders and the contradictory positions, especially in BCR.

The technical approach currently favoured does not bode well, even if it has the great merit of speeding things up.

We shall not delude ourselves as regards the outcome of these (non-)debates, in which BCR does not carry much weight. But we regret what appears to us to be a lack of strategy on its behalf in order to at least channel the railway projects to its advantage and to avoid becoming a victim of them. It could have developed a strategy based on the following principles:

- impose an operation which promotes an improvement of the quality of urban mobility for BCR and its inhabitants;
- set out the necessary accompanying measures in order to avoid a new urban exodus and to reinforce BCR's appeal, thanks to better accessibility and an improved quality of life due to the reduced impact of road traffic;
- strive to make the RER a multilevel project which meets the various needs of the metropolitan community thanks to a permanently efficient service;
- confirm the position of Brussels-South as a major national and international doorway, whilst giving Brussels-North and Brussels-Luxembourg an international role;
- promote the development and expansion of the IC service not only in the North-South Junction but also in a concentrated service to the European quarter;
- encourage the development of a type of IR service in some secondary stations such as Uccle-Calevoet, Boitsfort, Etterbeek, Schaerbeek, Bordet and Jette, thus establishing the basis of an approach which BCR and the municipalities con-

¹ The progressive generalisation of four lines for all railway lines leading to Bruxelles, combined with an improvement in the travel time of express trains as well as their capacity and regularity, will allow an obvious improvement in IC/IR services, signifying an increase in revenue and controlled costs (which we are not opposed to in principle).

cerned could support through strong development projects in line with local urban development plans;

- promote the operation of the RER in the form of efficient radial and bypass lines (in addition to tangent lines during peak periods), with the development of major interchanges at their crossing points (the SNCB as well as the STIB and other public transport operators), associated with major urban development poles. We therefore strongly defend a rail service (and more generally a public transport service) which favours a progression from a monocentric city to a multipolar city, gradually composed of 'secondary' centres around Haren/Bordet, Josaphat, Delta, Boitsfort, Etterbeek, Moensberg, Calevoet, St-Job/Vivier d'Oie, Cureghem, West and Bockstael;²
- strive for the development of a service which combines 'slow' and 'semi-direct' RER services, in a structuring manner with respect to Brussels and not with respect to other cities along its outer edge which could derive the essential benefits. This applies above all to the Flemish Region which appears to have understood the importance of this project in terms of favouring its own interests and territorial development strategy (which, incidentally, is coherent and interesting). The Walloon Region, on the contrary, appears to have financial objectives and is not at all concerned about 'sustainable' territorial development.

² In addition to 'secondary' Walloon and Flemish cities whose future is certain anyway, regardless of the Brussels RER; but Flanders has understood that the 'Brussels' RER could also (and above all?) become a Leuven, Mechelen, Aalst, etc. RER, according to the policies which are emerging more and more.

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