Prof. Dirk Lauwers, Ghent University
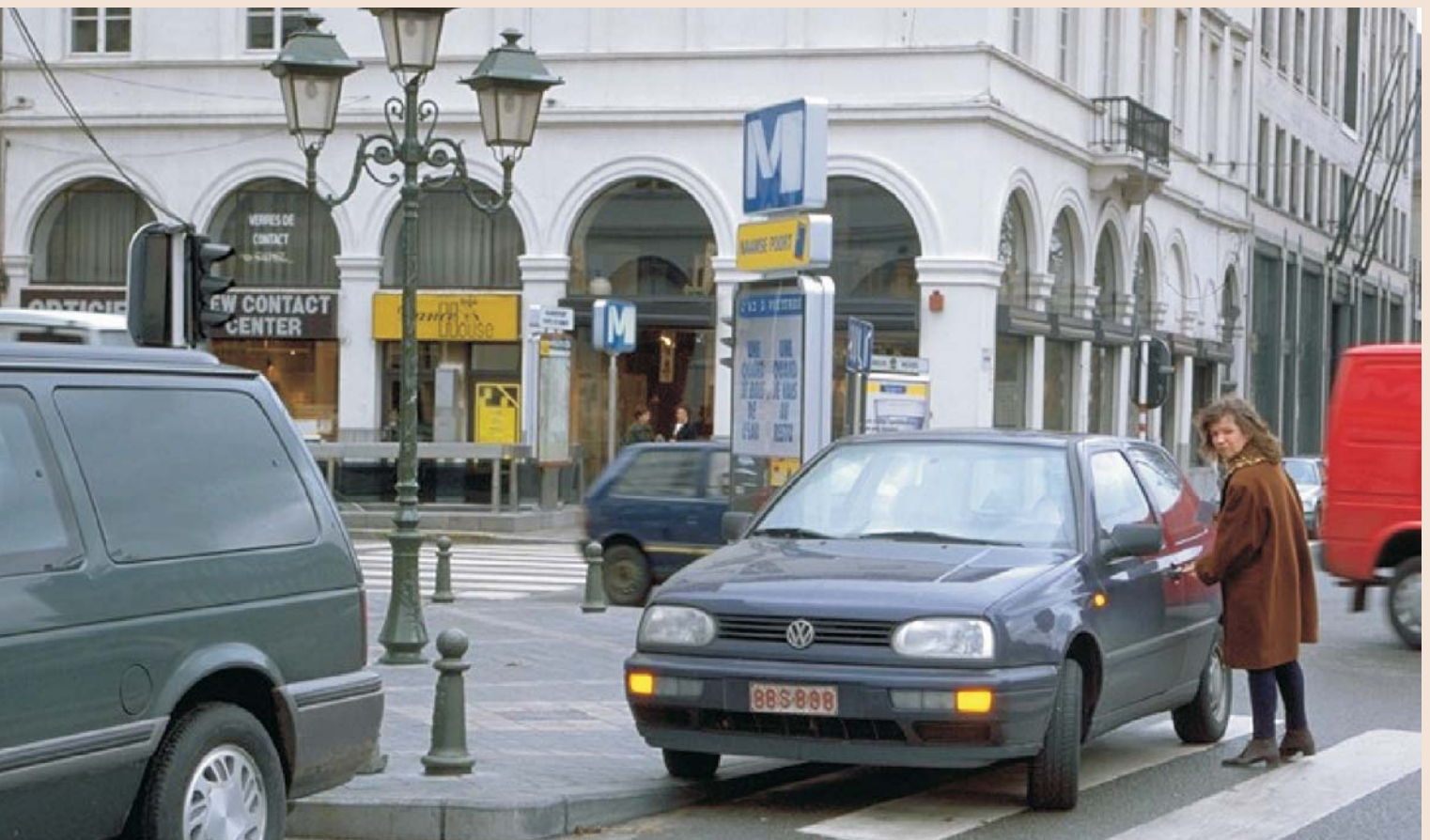Chantal Roland, Mobility Administration Brussels Capital-Region

Parking in Brussels:
Problems and challenges at a turning point for policy

Summary

Uncoordinated responsibilities with regard to parking policies between the Regional Government and local authorities, has led to a chaotic parking situation. At present the Brussels Regional Government is trying to have adopted a coordinated regional parking policy plan and to create a Regional Parking Agency. This Agency will support the implementation of the new parking policy and manage the new parking system. (on street parking control, management of car parks, dynamic parking guidance and routing). The task division between the Agency with the Municipalities can be different in each municipality. Collection of the parking fees and retributions will be the responsibility of the Regional Agency. The Agency will pay the municipalities their effective costs and will pay back their revenues.

About the parking problems and their context

The Brussels Capital-Region is traditionally referred to as the administrative entity which is one of the three regions in the Federal State of Belgium. As such it has its own legislative body, the Brussels Government and its own parliament. The Brussels Government is amongst other responsible for mobility and the management of the main roads (there is no national road in Belgium). So parking policy is to some extent the responsibility of this government. On the other hand the 19 municipalities situated within the borders of the Capital Region have, of course, also responsibilities: they manage by far the majority of the roads (80% of the network length) and in this way the parking regulation of more or less 70% of the on street parking places. As they also have major responsibilities for urban development they regulate the public parking facilities developed by the private sector too, as well as the parking places with limited access related to offices, shopping and dwellings. The until now uncoordinated division of responsibilities between the Government and nineteen different local authorities (managed by different political parties with different points of view on parking policies) has led to a chaotic parking situation.

About one million people are living in the administrative Brussels Capital Region, but just like in many other European metropolitan areas the urban region around Brussels has expanded. In the current urban area around Brussels some 3 million people are living. The Region is one of the major employment areas in Belgium, but less than half of the people working in Brussels are also living inside the city. Together with the attractive educational function of Brussels this causes of course a vast number of daily commuters. As more then 2/3 of the home-work commuters and 1/3 of the home-school commuters choose for the car a large number of cars (more then 350.000 in the morning peak) drive on the Brussels roads, causing traffic congestion problems and an overpressure on the parking system. The chaotic parking system itself causes a large number of search traffic. The lack of parking guidance system is engraving this situation: in the peak hours almost 1/3 of the traffic looks for a parking place, enlarging the congestion on the roads! In 2001 the travel speed on the roads was around 27 km/u and travel time from the boundaries of the large urban area to the centre during morning peak increased with 26 minutes in the past 10 years. Also the environmental pressure of the car traffic in Brussels is calling for a new policy: the Kyoto standards for greenhouse gases emissions were translated in the Brussels Regional Development Plan to clear limits to car traffic: the number of car kilometres on 1990 reference basis should be reduced with no less than 20% in 2010. Car traffic in Brussels contributes with 65% to the NOx emission, causing the exceeding of the threshold limits and threatening public health for inhabitants and other people staying in Brussels several times a year.

Not only the problems for people looking for a spot to park, but also the larger mobility and urban context is calling for a coordinated, sustainable parking policy in Brussels.

## The first steps made to develop a new parking policy

Regarding parking policies the merit of the IRIS plan, the mobility plan approved by the Brussels Government in 1998, is that it formulated a politically sustained coherent vision on parking within a broader vision of the quality of life and multimodal mobility in Brussels and that it identified some strategic measures to take. The main goal of the IRIS plan is to stabilise the number of car trips and to support the shift of surplus trips towards public transport. Regarding on-street parking the plan wants to limit long term parking in the city centre and the central business district and to protect the parking facilities for inhabitants of the city. The plan also foresees the building of 12 Park-and-Ride (P+R) facilities (the so-called 'parking de transit') at the outskirts of the administrative borders of the Brussels Region (total 8400 parking places). However as the Region lacks the instruments to implement this vision ten years after the approval of the IRIS plan, the problems for people looking for a parking space have not improved: the poor legibility of the parking system and the overcrowded on-street supply causes a loss of time, congestion and frustration. It causes also wild and illegal parking behaviour on roads as well as on sidewalks, disturbing and even also endangering motorised traffic as well as pedestrians and cyclists. Inhabitants are not only confronted with a lack of space to park their cars but also with poor liveability of their streets and neighbourhoods. And policy makers are lacking a grip on the mobility management as responsibilities are fragmented and pressure of car traffic is growing day by day.

What is at stake for the Brussels parking policy?

A benchmarking of the parking policy between Brussels and other European cities – using the reference frames of 'City Parking in Europe' and the COST action 342, described in the Decem-

Breakdown of on-street parking supply – November 2003

- free
- paid
- reserved
- deliveries

13% 3% 2% 82%
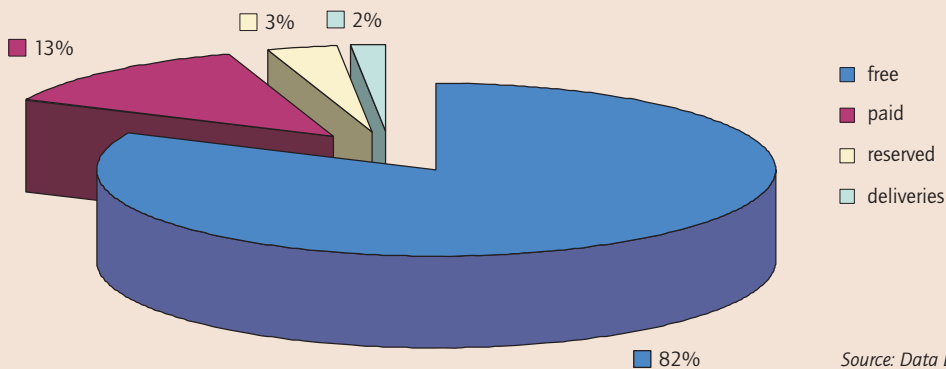
Source: Data Brussels Mobility.

ber issue of Parking Trend International*, a clear tension arises between on the one hand the vision formulated, which places Brussels on top of the evolution, integrating parking policy not only in mobility but also in urban development policy (in Brussels laid down in the so-called IRIS plan for mobility and the PRD 'Plan Regional de Dévelopment') and on the other hand the policy action, which places Brussels in the bottom of the pack of European cities with only very limited implementation of parking control and regulation (also in the Central Business District (CBD) and city centre more than 80% of the on street parking is free parking) and a supply that relies for a large extent on on-street parking (75% of the parking supply in Brussels is on-street parking), lacking sufficient and modern parking buildings and underground parking facilities).

Today the implementation of the vision about on-street parking included in the IRIS plan designed in 1998, namely to limit long term parking in the city centre and the central business district and to protect the parking facilities for inhabitants of the city, is still at stake. And the challenges regarding the off street public parking facilities are also high:
- to install a dynamic parking guidance system referring to the public car parks;
- to rise the capacity of the existing the P+R facilities;
- to promote the parking facilities for the inhabitants of the city.

A recent new step taken: the principle of coordinated regional parking policy
The Brussels Capital City Regional Government agreed the principle of a coordinated regional parking policy very recently (last February). The Region will be responsible for the formulation of the on-street parking policy: i.e. harmonising the parking zones and the parking tariffs and defining the categories of exception on the general parking regulation in the different zones. The municipalities will elaborate local parking implementation plans.

* City Parking in Europe, some lessons learnt from an Interreg IIIC project, Dirk Lauwers, Parking Trend International December 2007, page 26-31, EPA, Koln

In the Regional parking policy plan the Region will stipulate: the maximum number of on street parking places on regional and local road for each municipality, he number of regulated parking places per zone, the minimum number of reserved parking places (for disabled drivers, medical services, deliveries,...) and the tariffs per zone. The Municipality will elaborate a local parking implementation plan that will have to be approved by the Region, detailing the policy plan on street level and stipulating the different actions (infrastructural, parking regulation,...) and elaborating a financial prognosis of the measures to be implemented.

The decree proposal that is being approved stipulates three kinds of zones for on-street parking:
- red zones in which everybody will have to pay for a parking space;
- green zones in which everybody will have to pay, except for inhabitants, medical and social carers;
- blue zones: free parking but limited to two hours, except for special categories.

The rest of public domain will be free and unlimited parking, within the limits of the traffic regulation.

- The decree also fixes the tariffs.

The Government can also stipulate a maximum allowed parking time in these zones, in order to improve the parking rotation.

From policy to action
The decree proposed by the Brussels Minister of Mobility Pascal Smet and approved by the Brussels Government has not only outlined the principle policy coordination but also included the creation of a Regional Parking Agency. The task of this agency will be twofold: supporting the implementation of the new parking policy (consultancy function, preparation of policy documents) and managing the new parking system (parking control, management of car parks, dynamic parking guidance and routing). The tasks arrangement between the Agency and the Municipalities can vary in each municipality but will be defined in such a way that there is only one organisation responsible for the parking control for all the on-street parking in that municipality, for the regional roads as well as for municipal roads. A Municipality can decide to delegate the parking control of her territory to the Agency. However, the collection of the parking fees and retributions will be the responsibility of the Regional Agency. Indeed the

choice has been made for a regional retribution as it is the only way to obtain uniformity of the tariffs over the whole territory. The revenues of that retribution belong by definition to the Agency. The Agency will pay the municipalities their effective costs (e.g. if they perform the parking control) and also keeps for itself an allowance for the costs made for the collection of the parking fees and the follow-up of no payment of parking fees. It will also count an overhead of 15% on the income to guarantee the functioning of the Parking Agency. This percentage is lower than the part of the parking supply alongside the regional roads.

Enforcement of the conformity to the regional parking policy plan

The decree provides a substitution mechanism with regard to the municipalities in case they oppose in the Regional Parking Policy Plan. The region can substitute the municipality by taking over its responsibility if it neglects the implementation of the Regional Plan at three different moments :
- with the elaboration of the local implementation plan;
- with the implementation of the local plan;
- with the organisation of the parking control for the regulated zones.

## Tasks and frame for the parking agency

The main tasks for the Parking Agency as described in the decree are:
- elaboration and maintenance of a database, for use by both well the Region and the municipalities;
- elaboration and advice regarding the parking policy plan and the parking implementation plans;
- performing the management and control of the parking policy (at first on the regional roads but possibly also on the municipal roads in case of substitution or on demand of the municipalities);
- organisation of a breakdown service;
- elaboration of a regional parking routing system;
- organisation, management and control of all public and transit car parks owned by the Region;
- organisation of the use of private parking facilities during non working hours;
- provision of parking facilities and signalisation for tourist cars and for trucks;
- development of a supply of secured, public and covered bike sheds.

Parking Congestion 5h30 a.m.

Legend:
— + 100%
— 80% - 100%
— 50% - 80%
— - 50%
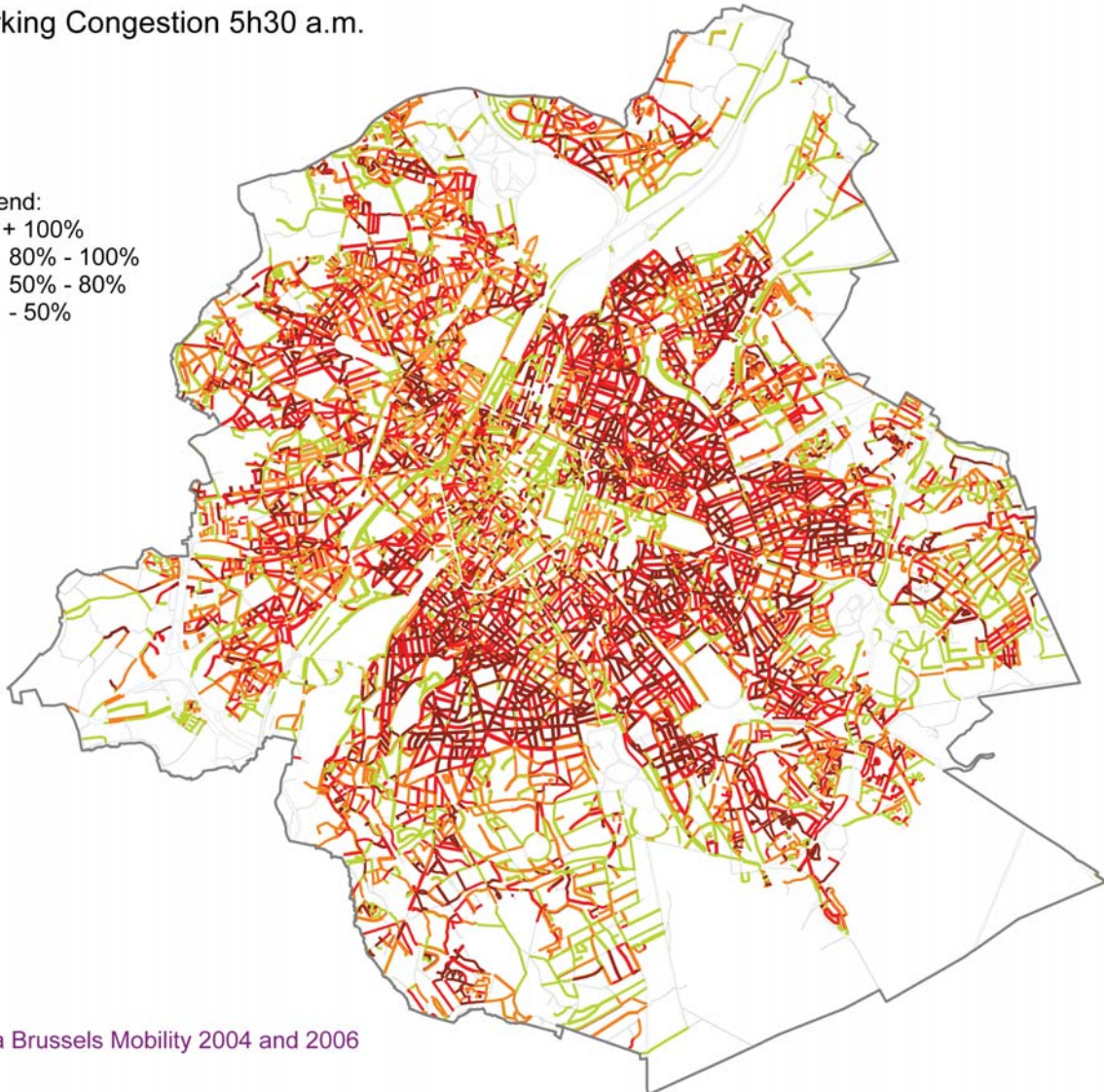
Data Brussels Mobility 2004 and 2006

The decree stipulates the headlines of the organisation of the Parking Agency. It concerns a public limited company, working on the basis of a five years management agreement with the government, financed mainly by the parking retributions and the administrative sanctions.

The turning point: parking policy as a key element for a new mobility culture in Brussels

The Brussels Government has set up a clear timing: at the moment the business plan for the Agency is under study. The Agency should be operational in 2009, without deploying an effective management of the regulated parking yet; full operation with on-street parking control should be starting in 2010.

The development of a coherent parking policy for the whole of the political and administrative fragmented city region is fairly ambitious. To develop an efficient parking system, legible for the car drivers searching for a parking place and an effective management of this system and getting grip on parking behaviour, is no less ambitious, taking into account the unstructured and congested current situation.

But the ambition goes beyond the functioning of the parking system itself: the new parking policy can be seen as the cornerstone in the development of a new mobility culture, as it is described in the Green Paper on Urban Mobility, recently published for public debate by DGTREN. But more than that it is described in this Paper and demonstrated by some 'fashionable' urban policies relying on new instruments as congestion toll (see London, Stockholm and others). Brussels relies on the existing instrument of parking policy and management to reach a more sustainable mobility and city. Good practice of parking policy in European cities as Vienna (implemented in the 90's, minus 30% of car traffic in the central area) and Amsterdam (recently implemented, minus 20% of car traffic in the central area) shows that parking policy is the largest single management tool in modern mobility management. Good practice revealed in the 'City parking in Europe' project shows two critical success factors for parking policy:

- First a clear set of policy goals, for example priority for parking needs of inhabitants.
- Second having in place a dedicated organisation to parking that integrates the implementation of the financial as well as legal tools. Business model based approaches such as Antwerp, Bologna, Malaga and more and more others, show that parking can be a motor for urban development and a valuable economic asset for the local community and that parking contributes to the cities budget instead of taking money off this budget.

So the approval of the decree in Brussels aiming at a coherent parking policy and the creation of a Parking Agency holds a unique chance to join the good practice of metropolitan integrated parking management in Europe and the growing number of urban city regions with a more sustainable mobility culture.

The Brussels Capital City Regional Government agreed the principle of a coordinated regional parking policy very recently. The decision also included the creation of a Regional Parking Agency. The task of this agency will be twofold: supporting the implementation of the new parking policy and managing the new parking system (parking control, management of car parks, dynamic parking guidance and routing). The tasks arrangement between the Agency and the Municipalities can vary in each municipality, but collection of the parking fees and retributions will be the responsibility of the Regional Agency. The Agency will pay the municipalities their effective costs.

The approval of the decree holds a unique chance not only to obtain a more efficient parking system for the users but also to obtain a more sustainable mobility culture in Brussels and to ameliorate the quality of life in the city. ∎

Ungeklärte Zuständigkeiten zwischen regionalen Regierungsbehörden und Kommunalbehörden bei der Parkpolitik haben in Brüssel zu chaotischen Parkverhältnissen geführt. Vor kurzem hat die Brüsseler Regionalregierung eine koordinierte regionale Parkpolitik verabschiedet. Nach dem neuen Plan soll eine Regionale Parkagentur die Umsetzung der neuen Parkpolitik unterstützen und das neue Parksystem managen. Dazu gehören die Kontrolle des Straßenparkens, das Parkhaus-Management und dynamische Park- und Verkehrsleitsysteme). Die Aufgabenverteilung zwischen der Agentur und den Stadtverwaltungen kann je nach Stadtbezirk variieren. Für die Einziehung der Parkgebühren und Bußgelder wird die Agentur zuständig sein. Diese wird den Stadtverwaltungen ihren tatsächlichen Aufwand vergüten.

En matière de politique de stationnement, le manque de coordination des responsabilités entre le Gouvernement Régional et les autorités locales a induit une situation de stationnement chaotique. Actuellement, le Gouvernement de la Région bruxelloise tente de faire adopter un plan coordonné de politique régionale de parking et de créer une Agence Régionale de Stationnement. Lors de sa mise en place, l'Agence soutiendra la mise en oeuvre de la nouvelle politique de stationnement et gérera les différents volets du nouveau système de parking: contrôle du stationnement dans la rue, gestion des parkings automobiles, guidage et fléchage dynamiques de stationnement. La répartition des tâches entre l'Agence et les Municipalités pourra varier d'une commune à l'autre. La collecte des frais de stationnement incombera à l'Agence Régionale. C'est également l'Agence qui paiera leurs frais réels aux municipalités et leur rétrocédera leurs recettes.

Las responsabilidades descoordinadas respecto a las políticas de estacionamiento entre el Gobierno Regional y las autoridades locales, ha llevado a una situación caótica en cuanto a estacionamiento. Hace poco el gobierno Regional de Bruselas ha adoptado un plan de política regional de estacionamiento coordinada. En el plan, la Agencia de Estacionamiento Regional apoyará la implementación de una nueva política de estacionamiento y administrará el nuevo sistema de estacionamiento (control de estacionamiento en la calle, gestión de parques de estacionamiento, orientación dinámica respecto a estacionamiento y asignación de ruta). La división de tareas entre la Agencia y las Municipalidades puede variar de una municipalidad para otra. El cobro de los precios y retribuciones de estacionamiento serán de la responsabilidad de la Agencia Regional. La Agencia resarcirá a las municipalidades de sus gastos efectivos.