

CALL FOR PAPERS

**Knitting the web. Railways, users and the city. Cities, users
and their railways. Past, Present and Future**

4th INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORY CONFERENCE

Mechelen, 27-29 May 2010

Jointly organized by:

THE CITY OF MECHELEN & HERITAGE CENTRE LAMOT,

THE BELGIAN STATE RAILWAYS (SNCB HOLDING)

THE INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORY ASSOCIATION

The Organizing Committee invites proposals for papers to be presented at this International Conference to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the first commercial rail operations on the European continent, between Brussels and Mechelen, to be held in Mechelen, Belgium, from 27th to 29th May 2010.

The conference is organised by the City of Mechelen and the Belgian State Railways together with the International Railway History Association (Scientific support).

This conference should shed light on the complex relationship between the railways, the cities and the users – consumers of this new transport mode. Railway lines structure cities and create landscape. Cities benefit from the railways, like railways benefit from the cities. Railways bring in new culture, new identities and new representations. The conference theme is: *Railways, users and the city. Cities, users*

and the railways. Past – Present – Future. This call for papers asks for papers in this thematic approach but with a large open view on the topic.

The early 1830s brought not only new forms of transport, but also the speed of the new transport system created new demand for travel, new forms of labour relations and structured the cities in more than one way. New railway lines changed 19th century travel behaviour. To that extent broader and comparative research into the experiences of 19th century rail operations and travel is needed in order to help understand the demand for speed and distance in the 21st century. Rail exploitation comes into a living world of travel and transport experiences. Road networks have existed for many centuries, and railways will add a new dimensions and functions to that existing road network.

railway station was a new object, a new place and a new building in the city's environment. A new territory was born, a place of exchanges that brought cities within a network of national and international connections. With a railway station a city became part of a greater chain of production and consumption in a network without borders. If the railway station became a kind of territorial marker for the cities, it stressed not only the hierarchic relation within the town, but also the position and role of the city in that new network. But a railway station was also constructed within the rationale of a network, built up by others. In the 19th century inhabitants and the town council had a lot of questions about that new place of commerce and travel. The need to accommodate the railway companies posed new questions to city councils, not only about the level of urbanism, but also about network building, the geography of transport and city architecture. Detailed research into the complex relations between cities and their rapidly growing hinterlands and into the transformation of cities by the early railway lines will help us to understand the potential of railway locations for our near future.

But railway stations also affect people's behaviour in other ways. The station not only helps to transport the masses; it brings in new elements in policing the traveller, the user of train transport.

The conference welcomes papers on the first railway experiences in Belgium and in other countries, with attention to the political, geopolitical and economic context of the early and the new adaptors, and the forms of network building, organisational structure and financing of the early projects. Experiences in a transnational context – international exchange of knowledge, etc. – are highly recommended.

The conference will also pay a full day's attention to railway stations as new places in or nearby cities; the role they played in structuring the city and policing the masses; the way an identity is created within that new entry into town; the user – consumer of mobility on 19th and early 20th century railways; the decline of the railway stations in the 1950s and 60s and the revival of the railway station at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century due to new investments in public transport, implementation of high speed rail, investments in city development, etc. Therefore, papers are welcome on these topics.

Papers on new experiences, new uses of heritage railway stations and redesign of neighbourhoods are highly recommended in order to help understand the opportunities and threats of the new urban development planned in Mechelen. A special session or a round table session will deal with this topic.

We especially encourage transnational and comparative approaches, and welcome proposals of a more empirical nature, as well as proposals exploring theoretical or methodological issues. Relevant contributions are welcome from historians as well as from cultural geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, urban planners and designers and other scholars who do not define themselves as historians.

The deadline for abstracts and a short CV (max one page each; Word or rich text format only) is October 15th. 2009. Please send proposals to: trein@mechelen.be

Submitters will be notified by the programme committee by January 15th 2010. Travel costs and accomodation are paid by the organisers for the conference period (27-29 May 2010). It is the intention of the organisers to publish the papers after the conference.

Scientific Committee:

Colin Divall – Institute of Railway Studies & Transport History – University of York UK; Ralf Roth – Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt & IRHA – Guy Vanthemsche – Vakgroep Geschiedenis Vrije Universiteit Brussel; Nico Wouters – Heritage Centre Lamot and vakgroep Geschiedenis UA – Paul Van Heesvelde International Railway History Association.