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Information Status Report on the Information Point

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1. What is the Project Gent Sint-Pieters?

Gent Sint-Pieters station was built on the eve of the World Exhibition of 1913. It was the driving force behind the development of a completely new part of the city. About a century later, we are facing an operation on the same scale: adapting the station and its vicinity to the needs of the 21st century.

The Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders ('Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen') provides the legislative framework indicating how the various authorities must manage our limited space with an eye for quality. It defines the station vicinity as 'a mixed developmental area for living and working'. Therefore, Project Gent Sint-Pieters will be one of the most important strategic developments during the next twenty years.



Figure 1: Logo of the Project Gent Sint-Pieters

The challenge at the start of this century is to provide a flowing, yet pleasant and comfortable environment. The planned adjustments will mean the various forms of public and private transport are better geared to each other.

Furthermore, swift connections must ensure that more people travel by public transport. That is clearly an advantage from an ecological point of view.

Thirdly, the station vicinity will take on a top class character. Undeveloped or underused sites will be a thing of the past. These will make way for the qualitative new development of residential, commercial, and leisure accommodation.

Finally, a number of highly skilled operations will provide a direct green axis between the Citadel Park and the Blaarmeersen, two green lungs in the city.

The planned work will inevitably cause some inconvenience. The measure management is fully aware of this. All partners involved in the project (the NMBS Holding, Infrabel, Eurostation, De Lijn, the Flemish Region, and Ghent City Council) will therefore give absolute priority to timely and reliable communication.

This is where the information point shows up.

- A spacious, comfortable, and user-friendly station
- One centre for public transport
- Straight from the R4 to the station car park
- The gateway to the modern Ghent
- A new station complex – ready for 60,000 passengers a day

2. Measure 2.9-GEN: An Overview

2.1. Objectives

The objectives of this measure are to:

- raise public awareness and support for the major construction works (redevelopment of the Kortrijksesteenweg; new train station, new terminals for public transport, 10.000 new bicycle sheds, underground parking for 2810 cars etc.) through public communication channels/ Forum;
- develop an information centre to promote the main projects (new public transport hub and Kortrijksesteenweg);
- Change the mobility culture in the area of the CIVITAS-ELAN-corridor.
- Implement innovative communication tools such as a 3D digital model.

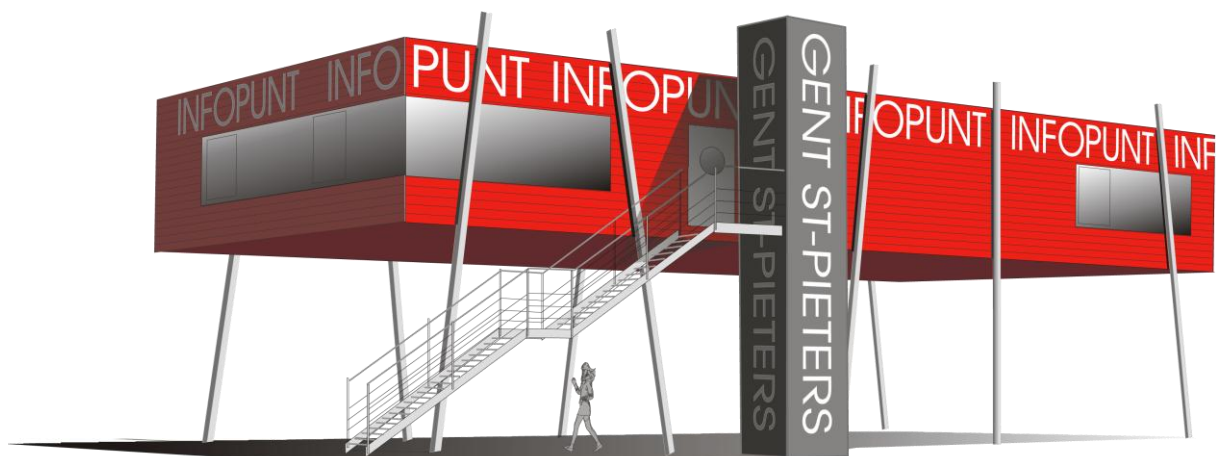
2.2. Innovative Aspects

All involved parties (stakeholders) who participate in the construction works around the station and in the CIVITAS-ELAN-corridor collaborate in the communication (financially and with outsourced personnel). All parties subscribe the objective of participative communication (with inhabitants, commuters, schools, unions of public transport users, cyclists, pedestrians, disabled persons, retailers, administrations, planners, public and private transport organisations, companies, etc ...). All involved parties will have a voice in the participative fora.

Innovative is also the use of a digital 3D scale model showing the future situation in the area, as a participative communication tool. All participants in the communication process will thus be able to process the accessibility and efficiency in modal split (modes of public and other transport before taking the train).

3. The Information Point

When the idea of having an Information Point for the redevelopment of the main train station area took form, all partners of the project were convinced that the actual building in which people could ask for information should be eye-catching. Now, since June 2010, the Gent station area has such a building.



Two pictures of the information point:



3.1. Development of the Information Point

In the beginning the people communicating with the citizens in the station area were housed in a building owned by the city of Gent. The main problem with this location was that it was situated in the centre of town and not near to the station (on foot: half an hour).

This changed when the train company offered the team of communication specialists a temporary office in a building situated at the main square just in front of the station. Between 2006 and 2010 a team of 2 to 5 people worked there. The picture below shows that the office was small and overcrowded: full of furniture, desks and lots of paper.



As the information point functions as a front desk for about 25.000 citizens of Gent, it receives ample visitors. But due to a lack of privacy and space, this was not always very comfortable nor for the visitors and neither for the team members.

Which preconditions had to be fulfilled in relation to the building?

- High visibility for the public and the citizens of Gent
- Near to the station
- Stable and comfortable work environment
- Building should be an eye-catcher in accordance with the architectural qualities of the new train station
- New furniture
- Storage room for archives and various things such as plans and maps
- A meeting space for at least 30 to 40 people

- Office window for the public
- Elevator for handicapped people
- Room for exposition and scale models

All these preconditions were met by the architect and executed by the building contractor on a surface of 200 m². The construction started in September 2009. In the beginning there were some setbacks. Polluted soil was discovered (The Information Point had to be built on a spot where once a gasoline station stood). When this problem was solved, a new and impossible to foresee problem arose. An exceptionally hard winter delayed the construction. But finally, the information point opened its doors officially on 1 July 2010.

3.2. The Information Point today

All preconditions mentioned above have been met and the Information Point is now living up to the goals and standards of a very intensive participative communication policy.

The Information Point is known by the public. The address is Prinses Clementinlaan 215 9000 Gent and has been communicated to the citizens of Gent. Since the opening, the number of visitors has increased with 300 percent per week.

The team now works in a pleasant, comfortable environment and the visibility of the red container construction is high.

For the new Information Point, the opening hours were changed and extended. In the old building the information point was open on Tuesday between 14h and 16h and on Thursday between 10h and 12h. Our new opening hours are:

- On Tuesday from 14h to 17h (+ every first Tuesday of the month from 18h until 20h).
- On Wednesday from 10h until 17h
- On Thursday between 9h and 12h.

Thanks to the new building, the efforts of the staff of the Information Point and the means of communication can be intensified to all of the target groups.

The three pictures below show respectively the meeting room, office space and exposition room.





3.3. Actions and Projects of the Information Point: An Overview

At the middle of this four year project, it is time to make an overview of all the actions and projects which have been developed.

3.3.1. Participative Communication

One of the main objectives of the CIVITAS-ELAN project is to stimulate initiatives that promote the interaction and communication between politics (in a broad sense) and citizens. Since the late nineties Gent has tried hard to improve communication with its citizens. The Gent City Council even created a department called Community Based Planning which is – or should be – specialized in participative communication planning. One of the main tasks of this department is to develop new methods of stimulating participation. The two persons involved in measure 2.9-GEN both work for this Department although the main objective of their project is to stimulate sustainable mobility.

This chapter focuses mainly on three methods of participative communication – the information market, dialogue café and the more long term structured soundboard group. This part of the report ends by evaluating the different methods.

3.3.1.1. Information Market

The first project year the Gent City Council organized three information markets and one hearing. It will be explained in depth (as the first two were exemplary for the other ones) how the organization of the first two went, and what the main subjects were.

An information market for citizens living next to a major part of the Civitas Elan – corridor (the whole axe between the train station and the R40) was organized. As this axe will be rebuilt from façade to façade the City of Gent not only wanted to inform people living nearby, but chose to give people a chance of participating in the project. Images of how the redevelopment will look like in the future:



Preparation:

- invite all partners
- find a good location (e.g. school, community centre, etc...)
- mailing to all schools, shopkeepers, retailers
- make an invitation for all citizens
- create a powerpoint presentation (or a movie) that is comprehensible to all (see: <http://www.projectgentsintpieters.be/nieuws/p/bericht/presentatie-k-elisabethlaan-en-kortrijksesteenweg-infomarkt-17-november-2008>)

- invite the local and national press

The information market took place on 17 November 2008. All the partners involved in the project were present: Public Transport Operator De Lijn, Engineering Company Arcadis – BUUR, all public utility companies, the Flemish Administration of Roadworks, the City of Gent (mobility, civitas, public roadworks, spatial planning) and the information centre for the redevelopment of the main station area. On the political level, the two responsible Deputy Mayors of the Gent City Council (Mobility and Public Works) were also present to answer questions. The information market focused on two major items: first of all, people had the opportunity to watch a powerpoint presentation explaining in depth what the redevelopment of a part of the Civitas Elan corridor was all about; secondly a plan illustrating the redevelopment of the axe. People gathered around the plan – after watching the presentation - and asked questions and, if not satisfied with the plan, could do suggestions on how to improve the redevelopment of the axe.

Pictures of the central stand:



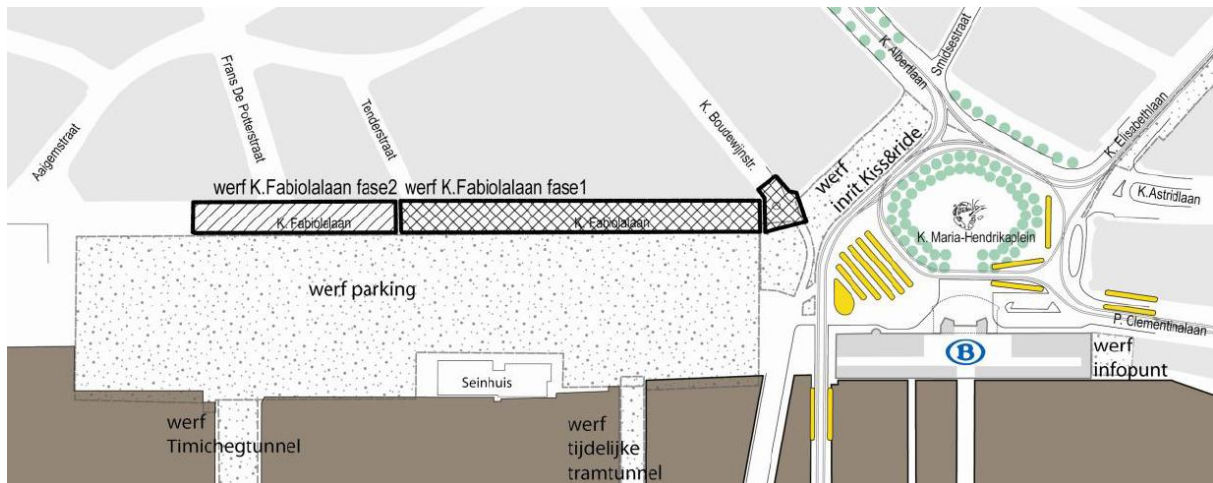
Around this central point, all partners had their information stand. There were stands on:

- what the Civitas – Elan project is about,
- the Pegasus plan of Public Transport Operator De Lijn
- what the redevelopment of the main train station means for the neighbourhood
- parking in this area of the city
- measures to assure full public transport priority

The second information market was designed to inform citizens living in the “Rijsenberg” area and the areas of Sint-Pieters Aalst and Sint-Pieters Aigem. Three quarters situated next to the main train station of Gent.

The following subjects were explained:

- a new road from the main motorway around Gent (R4) tot the station (Valentin Vaerwyck-weg)
- a tunnel connecting the road with a parking garage underneath the railroad tracks
- the development and renovation of an avenue (Koningin Fabiolalaan) essential for the next phases in the redevelopment of the main station area:

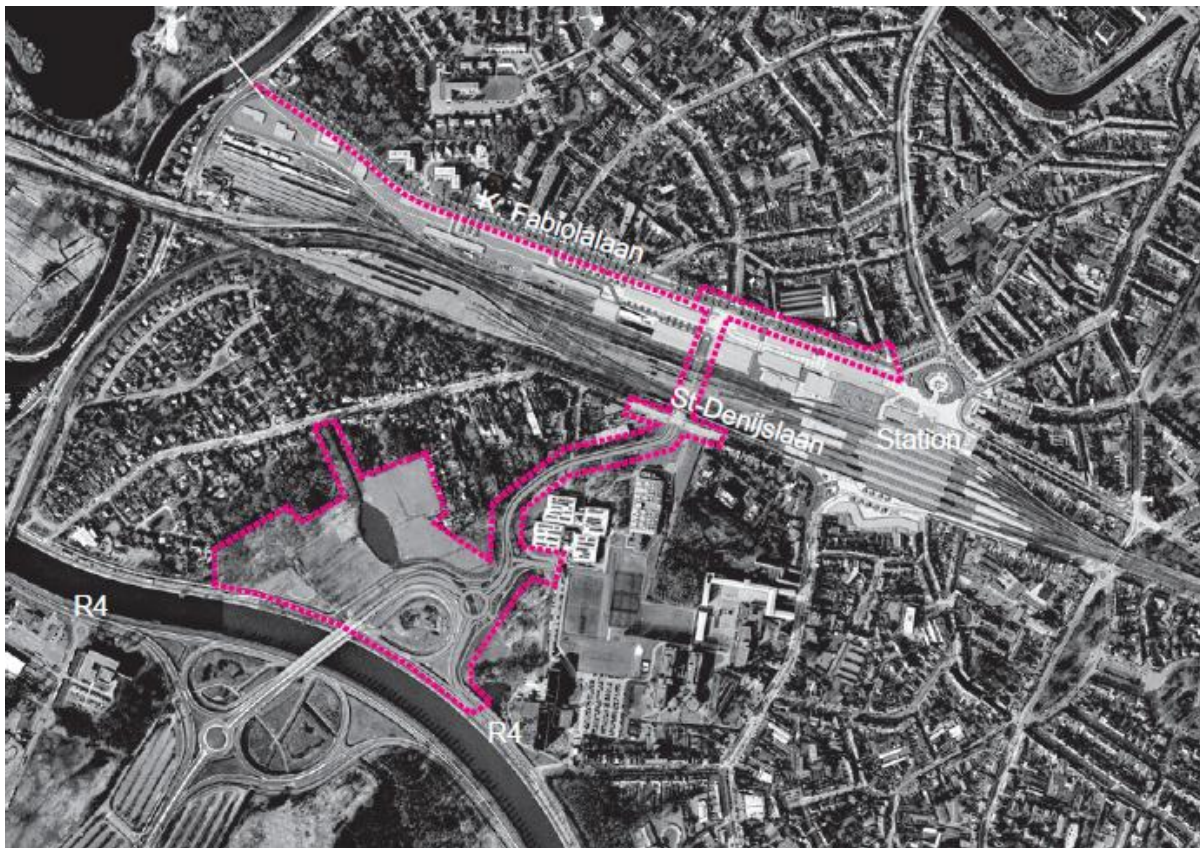


- creation of a nature park, next tot the new road and behind the railroad tracks. This park will be accessible to all people in Gent, but the two main objectives are: educational (for schools and nature clubs) and recreational (biking and hiking)

Preparation:

- invite all partners
- find a good location (e.g. school, community centre, etc...)
- mailing to all schools, shopkeepers, retailers
- make an invitation for all citizens
- create a powerpoint presentation (or a movie) that is comprehensible to all (see: <http://www.projectgentsintpieters.be/nieuws/p/bericht/presentatie-infomarkt-4-maart-2009-film>)
- invite the local and national press

Project area:



The information market took place on the 4 March 2009. All the partners involved in the project were present: Public Transport Operator De Lijn, Engineering Company Eurostation, all public utility companies, the Flemish Administration of Roadworks, the City of Gent (mobility, civitas, public roadworks, and the information centre for the redevelopment of the main station area). On the political level, the three responsible Deputy Mayors of the Gent City Council (Mobility and Public Works and Environment) were also present to answer questions.

The information market focused on two major items: first of all, people had the opportunity to watch a powerpoint presentation explaining in depth what the subjects all were about (see movie on website); secondly a plan illustrating the redevelopment of the area. People gathered around the plan – after watching the presentation - and asked questions and, if not satisfied with the plan, could do suggestions on how to improve the redevelopment of the area. Plans showed: the new road, the tunnel, the renovation of the avenue and part of the main train station square.

Around this central point, all partners had their information stand. There were stands on:

- the new road (Valentin Vaerwyckweg),
- the creation of the nature park (called Overmeers)
- what the redevelopment of the main train station means for the neighbourhood
- parking and mobility aspects in this area of the city

Image of the main (redeveloped) square:



It is important to mention that each information meeting or market generates questions. Although the knowledge of the project is elaborated, the answer or part of the information has to be delivered by different partners involved in the project (e.g. De Lijn (bus) and NMBS (train)) for questions concerning public transportation, Eurostation for questions on master planning, different services of the City of Gent for road, mobility, parking, environment related topics. The information point gathers these questions, and tries to deliver an answer within two weeks. All the questions are put into a database (which is quite labour intensive) so that the City of Gent always has a good overview of what the current problems are. In two years, 1422 questions, complaints and suggestions have been registered, part of them generated by public meetings

Other public meetings:

- Hearing on 15 June 2009 for shopkeepers and retailers of the station area on the situation near to the station
- Information market on 15 September 2009 for the people living near to the Kortrijksesteenweg on the start of the redevelopment

3.3.1.2. Dialogue café

Together with GCC's Community Based Planning department, a new form of participative communication called the dialogue café was tested. The principle is to gather people from a neighbourhood (the main train station area), to show them a presentation and ask three to five questions concerning one topic. People discuss the questions in groups of four to six participants. One person functions as secretary and presents the results of the discussion. When every group has presented his results, a moderator rounds up and summarises what has been said in plenum.

Two dialogue cafés were organised. The first one on 18 April on the main mobility aspects of the measure (closure or not of a road, parking in the station area) was attended by 70- 80 people. The results of this meeting will serve as a foundation for decision-makers (Mayor,

Aldermen, project partners). The second dialogue café was held on 22 June on aspects related to project development and the consequences of this city renovation project on the neighbourhood. It was attended by 90-100 people. GCC also combined an information market with the dialogue café. The results of the debate will be processed and included in a synthesis which – after approval of all partners – will serve as a manual for the building programme.

Pictures:

Dialogue café on Mobility:



Dialogue café and information market on project development:



3.3.1.3. Sound board group

When the project started, the need for a coordinating instrument to inform and involve the main stakeholders in this neighbourhood was clear. From 2004 on, with the signing of the collaboration contract and the raw plan schedule ready, the participation system for stakeholders was started. It was the first time in the city that the exercise was made to think about a real participation frame.

Some examples of stakeholders who are invited:

- Neighbours, local businesses, horeca, schools, hospitals, leagues (biking league), representatives city departments, representatives stakeholders, etc.

One rule of the game was that the meetings, - 2 to 3 monthly- were put in the hands of an independent chairman and moderator of the soundboard group. This became Filip De Rynck; he is an academic in administration at Gent high-school and the University of Antwerp. He was paid from the overall communication budget. He decides on the agenda and has lots of moral power to organise the dialogue and to force the partners to dialogue and come to an agreement.

With the group of stakeholders, a gentlemen's agreement was made on not going to the press, and on having a priority role in being informed about ongoing studies.

Pictures of the Sound board group:



3.3.1.4. Evaluation of Participative Communication Methods

After these two years of experimenting with new methods, even combining methods in order to find the right balance in communicating and dialoguing with the citizens, GCC thought it was time to evaluate the different methods used. Not included in the evaluation is the sound-boardgroup. This method generates a long term effect whilst the other methods are more ad hoc instruments.

Method	What?	Strengths	Weaknesses
Traditional Hearing	<p>Several speakers (politicians, technicians, civil servants) give information; one at a time.</p> <p>The citizens listen to the speaker(s)</p> <p>A moderator organizes a two-way dialogue between public and speaker</p>	<p>Underlines the importance of a project, investment or redevelopment and the formal commitment to it, of its main partners</p> <p>Good formal instrument as a first means of informing the public</p>	<p>All interested citizens have to be there at the same time (e.g. shopkeepers and retailers can not attend because of fixed starting hour)</p> <p>One person with malicious intentions can have an influence on the audience: bad atmosphere</p> <p>Favours the citizens who are used to speaking in public</p> <p>Emphasis on one-way communication (from technicians, politicians to the audience)</p> <p>No possibility for the citizen of explaining his personal situation</p>
Information Market	<p>A general powerpoint presentation (with or without voice-over) is shown to the public</p> <p>The presentation can be watched the whole evening/afternoon</p> <p>Project partners have stands where interested citizens can discuss the plans/the project</p> <p>Every project partner brings his/her own information, illustrations</p> <p>Alderman or mayor are present during part of the evening/afternoon</p>	<p>Neutralizes opponents by splendid isolation (one-on-one): no impact on general atmosphere</p> <p>Everybody can discuss with a technician or politician his personal situation and come to an agreement</p> <p>Easily accessible</p> <p>Repetitive element of the presentation enhances knowledge</p> <p>Organizer is in control of the information</p> <p>The public can choose out of a wide range of information present</p>	<p>Preparation is very labour intensive. A good powerpoint presentation with voice-over takes a lot of time</p> <p>The evening itself: a lot of technicians and civil servants needed to obtain a good result: between 15 and 20 people present</p> <p>Organization: you need a good venue to combine the stands and the powerpoint</p>

		<p>Two-way communication is guaranteed</p> <p>One-on-one relation favours those people not used to speaking for large audiences</p> <p>Direct contact between politicians and civilians reduces the gap between civil society and decision makers</p>	
Dialogue Café	II	<p>People are very enthusiastic</p> <p>Everybody present gets the opportunity to give his opinion</p> <p>Relaxed atmosphere with motivated self-conscious citizens</p> <p>All remarks are written down: this is a mine of information for the political and administrative people</p>	<p>Preparation is very labour intensive. A good powerpoint presentation with voice-over takes a lot of time</p> <p>You need to work with registrations: this means that you have to limit the number of participants</p> <p>The evening itself: a lot of technicians and civil servants needed to obtain a good result: between 15 and 20 people present</p> <p>Organization: you need a good, flexible venue to accommodate the people</p>

After this evaluation the GCC came to the conclusion that all methods can be used depending on the stage of development a project is in. It is not a question of excluding methods, but of choosing the right method at the right moment. The City of Gent is convinced that if the GCC will continue to invest in two-way-communication with its citizens, the dialoguing and understanding will grow in the near future.

3.3.2. Major Event for the People of Gent

Twice a year the Information point organizes a major event for all the citizens of Gent. The event consists of a visit of the different construction places of the main train station area (multi-storey car park, the train station, the two tunnels – for cars and for busses and tramcar, the minus 1 kiss & Ride zone and the new, yet to be built, squares) for people of Gent. Due to the great success of this event the City of Gent has to work with a system of subscription – organized by the city. The maximum capacity is 800 people on one day and this twice a year.

The mayor of Gent welcomed the citizens. Then, a presentation gave the people a general overview of the project. After the presentation people are divided in groups of 25 and get a guided tour of the main construction places. The visit is concluded with a reception.

Pictures:



3.3.3. Daily Activities: Communication Output

In the previous chapters of this document the focus was on the more special activities the Information Point deploys. But the daily business is as important as the special features that were enlightened. Daily activities includes the information letters, press releases, answering the questions, remarks complaints of the people, organizing visits for smaller groups and informing them about the project, receiving visitors in the information point. Those items will not be discussed in details. However, it will be presented shortly what the item is about and how many /much were handled in the past two years.

3.3.3.1. Information Letters

An information letter points out what the major changes in a certain phase of the project will be. It signals changes in the direct environment of a street, a neighbourhood.

In the area of the main train station 44 information letters were delivered to the people informing them about one or other aspect of the city renovation project.

3.3.3.2. Press Releases

If an item is important enough to be communicated to the wider area (Gent or Flanders), the GCC writes press releases which are distributed to the written press, television stations and radio stations. Also, the more specialized press (railroad related or public transport related magazines received press releases. In total: 35.

3.3.3.3. Citizens' Questions

The Information Point tries to answer all questions, remarks and complaints within two weeks. During the past two years GCC received and answered more than 1.350 request from the public. Some of these requests were quite easy, others deserved more attention.

3.3.3.4. Visits for smaller groups

Since the beginning of the construction works, several companies, pressure groups, social organisations, NGO's, etc. have asked to visit the area. Since this was such a success, and most of all very time consuming, it was decided to limit the number of visits to maximum three a month. Every visit takes about two hours. People can watch a movie and get a powerpoint presentation accompanied by the expert explanation of one of the members of the Information Point. This takes about one hour. Then, the group was taken to the construction sites to visit the more interesting parts of it.

3.3.3.5. Reduced hindrance meetings

On a two weekly basis (sometimes also on weekly basis; depending on the urgency of the matters in question) reduced hindrance meetings were held: This meeting functions as a bridge between the project partners and the neighbourhood. Together with the police and fire department of the city of Gent all involved stakeholders try to come to the best solution possible concerning reduced hindrance for the neighbourhood, pedestrians, cyclists, car drivers and other transport modi. Recurrent topics are: signalisation on micro, meso and macro level; traffic diversions due to the works, permits for all sorts of works in the main train station area, noise hindrance caused by the activities. For the technical aspects this meeting is sup-

ported by a bureau – Traject – which is specialized in signalisation and mobility related aspects.

4. Next steps and future plans

The next step in the development of the communication activities consists in consolidating the means and techniques that were applied in the past two years. Several new phases on different construction sites are taking place:

- Information market on the 30 November 2010 about tram track works on the R40 (one of the most important roads in Gent).
- Announcement of the start of the creation of the second part of the underground parking garage next to the Gent Sint-Pieters station. Especially for pedestrians, commuters and cyclists this phase will be important. A lot of construction works are coming together. It has to be assured that the people still can cross the construction site to take the train.
- Preparations for one dialogue café in the first part of 2011, where the people will be informed and a dialogue will be held about the decisions the stakeholders have made based upon their participation in 2010.
- The train station itself: the actual renovation starts in February 2011. This means that two tracks (out of the twelve available) will not be used anymore. For commuters the GCC in cooperation with the other project partners is developing a communication plan explaining how to deal with these developments.