



Rural area in Sint-Joris-Winge (Flanders) | by Luc Coeckaerts Public Domain Image)



BELGIUM

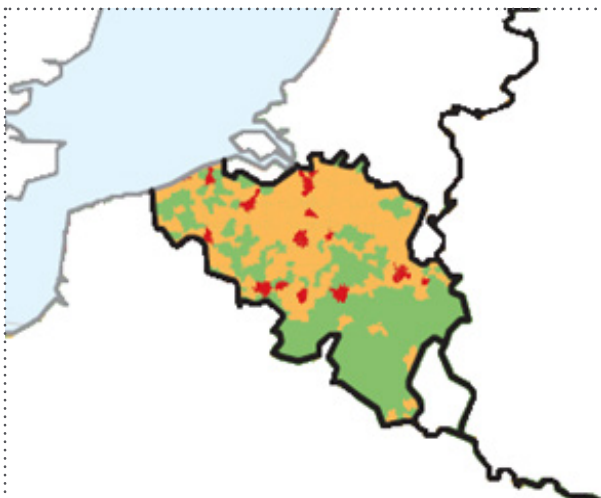
INSIGHT PAPER

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RURALITY (1)

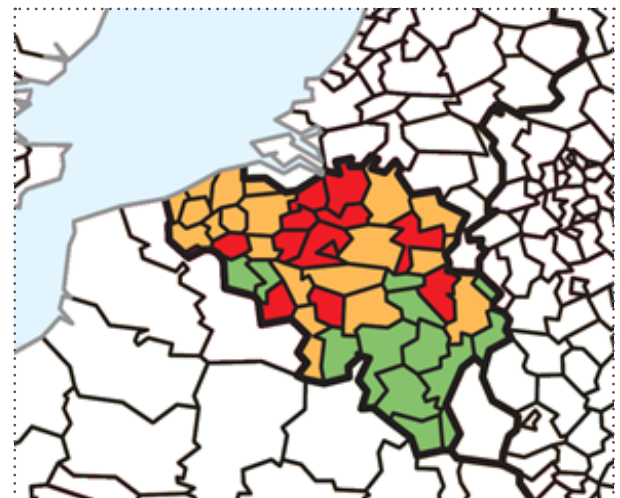
Degree of urbanisation for local administrative units level 2 (LAU2)



- Cities
- Towns and suburbs
- Rural Areas
- Data not available

Source: Eurostat, JRC and European Commission Directorate-General for Regional Policy, May 2016

Urban-rural typology for NUTS level 3 regions



- Predominantly urban regions
(rural population is less than 20% of the total population)
- Intermediate regions
(rural population is between 20% and 50% of the total population)
- Predominantly rural regions
(rural population is 50% or more of the total population)
- Data not available

Source: Eurostat, JRC, EFGS, REGIO-GIS, December 2016

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

28,1%

Share of people living in cities

54%

Share of people living in towns and suburbs

17,9%

Share of people living in rural areas

Source: Eurostat, 2016

GEOGRAPHY

The sovereign state of Belgium is a federal constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of governance. Its institutional organisation is complex and is structured on both regional and linguistic grounds. It is divided into three highly autonomous regions: Flanders in the north, Wallonia in the south, and the Brussels-Capital Region. Brussels is both the smallest and richest region in terms of GDP per capita. It is also the most densely populated area in Belgium.

Belgium shares borders with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Belgium has three main geographical regions; the coastal plain in the

northwest and the central plateau both belong to the Anglo-Belgian Basin, and the Ardennes uplands in the southeast to the Hercynian orogenic belt. The Paris Basin reaches a small fourth area at Belgium's southernmost tip, Belgian Lorraine.

Key challenges: improve its competitiveness and reinforce the sustainability of its economy (in numerous areas including public accounts, the environment, education and so on); rationalize and stabilize its institutional arrangements; and better integrate on society's margins, particularly second- and third-generation Muslim minorities.



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RURALITY

20,9%

Share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in rural areas, **2017**

2,1%

Share of people aged 16 and over who reported unmet needs for health care in the previous 12 months due to expense, distance to travel or length of waiting list in rural areas, **2017**

4,9%

Unemployment rate, persons aged 15–64, in rural areas, **2017**

10%

Share of young people aged 18–24 neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) in rural areas, **2017**

Source: Eurostat

NATIONAL POLICIES RELATING TO RURAL MOBILITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Since 1993, there is nearly no **Public Transport policy at national-federal Belgian-level** any more, **except for the railways** that are managed at the federal level. PT is nearly exclusively managed by the **three Belgian Regions** except for railways. Also, some parts of air traffic are organised at federal level.

However, **some** federal policies intervene with some PT in relation with the **health sector and railways**.

Health sector: some reimbursements are possible for transport in relation with sickness/hospitalisation in the framework of the national social security system. Reimbursements take place via the health funds.

Railways: if a railway station is not accessible, the national railway company (SNCB) needs to provide transport to an accessible railway station. The SNCB organises this with small vehicles.

Via fiscal policy, the federal level also promotes company transport (*fiscal deduction up to 120%*)

There is **no specific national policy on rural areas or rural development**.

All policies and policy documents concerning rural mobility and PT are regional. The Brussels Capital Region is not relevant here as it counts no rural areas. Flanders, northern Belgium, and Wallonia, southern Belgium have both have their own mobility plans and rural development plans. The rural development plan pays no (Flanders) or limited (Wallonia) attention to public transport and mobility.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

At federal/national level only the health department intervenes somewhat in the transport and mobility area via reimbursements for transport in the framework of the national social security scheme.

At regional level, the bulk of responsibilities are grouped in the respective Mobility departments (MOW–Flanders, DGO2–Wallonia). Scheduled transport is organised in external independent agencies “*De Lijn*” in Flanders, “*TEC*” in Wallonia.

Some responsibilities concerning mobility and transport are also in other departments, Sports, Wellbeing, Work, (Flanders)... most of the time to bring less-mobile people to places where they need to be. The responsibilities to provide such mobility are decreasing.

At local level some minor services can be subsidised/ provided:

- taxi cheques (14 localities in Flanders)
- “*mindermobielenentrale*” (volunteers transporting less mobile persons) -localities can develop mobility services in collaboration with TEC (monopolist) e.g. “*Proxibus*” or “*FlexiTec*” in Wallonia

Reorganisations are underway in Flanders and Wallonia. These are going in the same directions in both regions. A rationalisation in the organisation, hierarchisation of PT lines, more space for municipalities in mobility basins or transport regions; 5 “*mobility basins*” in Wallonia and 15 “*transport regions*” in Flanders. In these basins or regions are or will be represented, in addition to the municipalities, the mobility department/transport authorities, road agency/department. In Flanders, also the environment department, Belgian Railways and some others are/will be represented.

In Flanders, private operators will probably get more room after the reorganisation.

In Wallonia, the decree was voted in spring this year with some transitional dispositions. From 1st January 2019, the new organisational structure will be in place following the decree.

In Flanders, the new decree has not been voted on yet. Three pilot-test projects are already set up under the new organisational structure, although these often struggle to find the necessary funding.

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Main general services: Trains, buses, "callbus" kind of DRT (PT stop to PT stop on demand), "proxibus".

All train services (local, and national lines) are provided by the National Railway Company (SNCB).

Main operator: PT operator (De Lijn in Flanders, TEC in Wallonia). Those operators have the exclusive right to organise PT. An important share of their services is subcontracted by those operators.

Targeted mobility services are much more scattered. Reorganisation is under way where all targeted services should come under one public authority "vervoersregio" (see left column). In Wallonia, the TEC is also the "general mobility manager".

Targeted mobility services are available for (with some variation among regions) pupils of "special education" schools, people with reduced mobility via the PT operator or parallel adapted transport via a separate service and call centre,, commuting for people with work disability (employment), transport with "service cheques" (people

with reduced mobility) , budget for personnel assistance (agency for persons with a handicap Flanders, taxi cheque (14 localities with varying target group in Flanders)

In both regions the aim is to organise the targeted services from one mobility call centre. In both regions, some projects are underway regrouping part, or all these services, together.

Integration of shared-mobility services: shared bicycles/cars at some bigger railway stations-shared cars in cities. Shared bicycles are more present in Flanders than in Wallonia. Wallonia has some pilots with particular attention for the bicycle + bus combination (signposting towards express bus stop and bus parking)

Public-private: The regulated transport is public, although a lot of the PT lines are subcontracted. Unregulated transport is more market oriented.

In Flanders, terminology is regulated and non-regulated transport, while in Wallonia terminology is public transport and individual transport.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

No/few particular regulatory instruments for rural policy. The rules concerning frequency, distance to bus stop, are different depending on the area population density (Flanders).

In Wallonia, there are particular actions put in place to improve rural mobility. The Walloon mobility plan mentions explicitly the importance of rural transport. *"The objective for 2030 is to guarantee to everybody, especially people living in rural zones;"*

In 2011, a round table was organised in Wallonia to better coordinate initiatives of rural mobility. Plans were made to set up a regional coordination and different local coordination (IMRA, initiatives de mobilité rurale alternative.) These initiatives want to regroup initiatives besides the TEC and to raise awareness about alternatives to car use among people. It provides answers to which TEC cannot respond. 2 local coordination's are in place (2011 and 2016). Those services work also with volunteers and raise awareness about active mobility.

Regular service/scheduled PT

Main regulatory instrument in Flanders is the decree on "basic mobility" 20-04-2001 regulating, among other things, distances to bus stops, frequencies, starting time

and end time of operation depending on type of area (rural, pre-urban, urban,...). A yearly budget envelope is available for the PT company.

There is a monopoly for "De Lijn". It can subcontract part of its lines and does so for 50% of the bus kms. A revision is to come in the next year(s).

The situation is quite similar in Wallonia. The regulating decree is Decree 89 from 1989. The decree on public transport of people in the Walloon region was last revised in March 2018. The last revision simplifies drastically the structure of the PT operator.

Non-regular/unscheduled transport/individual transport:

Main regulatory instrument in Flanders: The Taxi decree. Main regulatory instrument in Wallonia is the decree of 18 October 2007 concerning taxi services and location of cars with a driver.

***Since 31-03-2018 "no rule zones" are in place in Flanders for local transport. These are zones where lots of the rules for regular service transport are not applicable. For example, tariffs for taxis and buses are deregulated, there is no monopoly of De Lijn for regulated person mobility.*

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

There's no specific or dedicated financial support for mobility services in rural areas.

One general envelope for mobility services of De Lijn for rural and urban together. There are some other small budgets for some targeted services.

The **funding** is mainly generated at the **regional level** and only marginally at the local level.

The **targeted mobility services are dispersed across multiple funding sources and multiple delivery parties.** (see also organisational framework above).

The main transport services are delivered by De Lijn and financed by the Flemish department of mobility.

For "*individual*" transport, mainly of people with reduced mobility, there is the "Compensation" decree of 21-12-2012 in Flanders. Transporters need to be selected via a procedure. Once selected they are paid a fixed and a variable amount. The public transport operator, De Lijn, doesn't intervene.

In Wallonia there is a similar system, although it is operated via a contract with the public transport operator.

Financing plans exist for particular companies, e.g. Proxibus (TEC) is financed by localities (the driver cost) + TEC (the bus investment), beside that, the operational costs are divided among both partners. Also, the Flexitec service (pilot experiences in rural areas) is co-financed by localities.

OTHER INFORMATION

- Blue Bike and Cambio are national Shared Transport schemes (station-based) for bicycles and cars. These are available in main railway stations and in cities (cars) and a few bus hubs (bicycles). In rural areas these are absent. In Wallonia, Blue Bike is even more absent.
- In Flanders, an ambitious reorganisation program is underway where the main public operator today will only keep decision rights on the main lines ('*kernnet*') with advice from community of localities ('*vervoersregio*'). The community of localities will decide on functional lines and all kinds of demand responsive transport. All targeted transport services should be organised by one "*manager*" in that new framework. Today, finding the necessary budgets remains unfortunately a problem to ensure the advancement in the short run in pilot sites. In Wallonia, the reorganisation concerns the internal organisation of the PT operator.
- In some pilot areas in Flanders, in the framework of the reorganisation, rules will be relaxed to enable these areas to test new concepts. The obligation of using the PT transport operator is lifted.
- In Wallonia, several rural mobility initiatives are financed in the framework of the EU leader program

Restrictions/freedoms within the framework relevant to local mobility services. For vehicles up to 8 passengers + 1 driver, legislation on taxi or rental of vehicle with driver is applicable. For vehicles with higher capacity, the regulated transport framework is applicable. Both frameworks are very strict (tariffs, amplitude,) and don't leave much freedom.

In some "test" areas in Flanders, these rules are for a large part not applicable and leave much freedom to explore other more market oriented solutions.

Community-led and/or innovate forms of mobility service are not possible in the general framework of public transport. For individual transport, there is more flexibility. An exception on the public transport operator monopoly are specific test zones in Flanders since 31-03-2018. (Westhoek = very rural Aalst = semi-rural parts, Mechelen. = semi-rural parts, Antwerp = semi-rural parts)

Limit to the possibility to implement shared-mobility schemes: today, **no particular rules**, however, to get physical space on the public area, an authorisation of the city will be necessary. Flanders is working on a regulatory framework for shared mobility that should be finalised within some months.

Information provision: no comprehensive journey planners besides "*Google*" are available.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND MINISTRIES ADDRESSING RURAL AREAS

TITLE	ROLE
IPO	" <i>Interbestuurlijk plattelandsoverleg</i> ", brings different local stakeholders together on a particular topic concerning rural development (mobility was not topic until now) www.vlm.be/nl/themas/platteland/IPO/Paginas/default.aspx
Vervoersregioraden	Discussing mobility issues in a transport region with localities, regional administration and stakeholders
Taxistop/ autodelen.net	Organises among other things " <i>minder validen centrales</i> ", " <i>carsharing</i> " and " <i>carpooling</i> " facilitation/promotion www.taxistop.be/en
Blue-bike	Provider of shared bicycles www.blue-bike.be/nl
De Lijn	Designated monopoly provider for regulated transport of persons www.delijn.be/en
MOW	Flemish department of mobility and public work http://departement-mow.vlaanderen.be/nl
TreinTramBus	Movement for better public transport – www.treintramabus.be
DGO2	Regional public service of mobility and waterways www.wallonie.be/fr/guide/guide-services/16059



Photo by Philippe Bourhis on Unsplash

LINKS TO WEBSITES

- www.wallonie.be/sites/wallonie/files/actualites/fichiers/visionfastmobilitwallonie2030.pdf; - Mobility Plan
- www.asta.be - Association providing transport for people with reduced mobility

REFERENCES

- Decrees organising the actual Flemish mobility system from the mobility department legislation: www.mobielvlaanderen.be/wetgeving.php?a=22 and www.gtl-taxi.be/3_28_3415_0_NL_De_Regionale_Wetgeving
 - Decree 20-04-2001 on organisation of transport of persons - basic mobility (adapted by decrees (of execution) of 13-02-2004, 8-05-2009, 4-04-2014) and under revision now
 - Decree 18-07-2003 on taxi services and rental of vehicles with driver (adapted/completed by decrees (of execution) of 28-05-2004, 27-06-2008, 30-04-2009, 18-12-2009, 18-06-2010)
 - Decree 17-01-2013 on compensation transport for people with a handicap or a seriously reduced mobility
 - Decree 8-07-2016 on "rule-free" zones in the framework of test projects for basic accessibility
- Decrees organising Walloon mobility system:
 - Decree 18-10-2007 and different execution decrees
 - Decree 21-12-1989 with last adaptation in March 2018
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- www.dienstencheques-vlaanderen.be/gebruikers/waarvoor-dienstencheques-gebruiken/diensten/
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- Sempels Erik, coordinator of the reorganisation of public transport, especially demand responsive transport, in Flanders, discussion on 12-06-2018.
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