Interview with Jean-Claude Delen
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“Metropolitan Brussels 2018” pole

“...and the railroads? The railroads are just another big missed opportunity! Just consider the time wasted on the RER project! And what about the transportation of goods? Goods could have been transported there by rail and afterwards distributed within Brussels via smaller, cleaner and less-noisy vans. I mean lots of trucks nowadays are really EURO 5, which is the highest level of less pollution, and we are already looking for EURO levels climbing up to 6 or 7. These are the trucks that should only be allowed within the city premises and with the privilege of using the bus lines... Specific parking lots within Brussels should then be allocated, even underground, to delivery trucks and to them alone. This way can smaller-scale storage spaces be connected with huge warehouses in the city outskirts like some kind of “Rungs”.

According to the BAK Basel Economics report, Brussels is at the very top when considering its productivity rates but disastrous when it comes to unemployment especially in the transport sector.

It’s true that we just can not find the right people. In our kind of industry we have high-level educated people as well as low-level. The unemployment statistics show that plenty of high-level jobs are easily filled in Brussels, because of the many people with university and engineering backgrounds. The problem is with the lower levels of education. In my opinion it all starts from the basics. And basics are parental and school... coaching. In fact, we do not find the attitude to work that we should be looking for.

What do you mean by “attitude”? The political world has finally understood that we should not let these guys aside and forget about them. The attitude of the schools has not changed yet and the parental attitude has certainly not changed... And that is the big challenge. I think we need to bring the responsibility of the kids back to their parents.

You mentioned the word “coaching”... We do not believe in the current Gare TIR traditionally had been used as the customs entrepôt in Brussels. We think of it being too far inside of Brussels to really play the appropriate role of distribution although it could still be used for fresh food.

And what about the transportation of people going in and out of Brussels? We should try to take out of the Brussels Ring as much transit traffic as possible! All those trucks driving from north to south and vice-versa have nothing to do with Brussels. This is one of the biggest problems that we have in mobility. In fact we need another northern axe at least 25 km up north to make sure this transit traffic will not come through the Ring anymore. And we should rethink about linking Antwerp to Leuven into Liège...

Where do you step in when it comes to definition of the strong points of Brussels? As our ideas will be presented to the political circles, the good thing about all this – and this is why I stepped in – is that we are not only speaking here of VOKA or BECI. It is really a joined initiative which means that the Regions will be involved and not only Brussels! Brussels is not considered as a political entity but altogether with its hinterland and the economical facts and figures they arise. Now, for the strong points, we believe there is heap of opportunities residing in the canal network as an axe between the ports of Brussels and the airport. Other alternatives may be found in the northern suburbs like the new logistic distribution centre nearby Londerzele – maybe the only place where you still have some ground! Where DHL will be managing-partner of the site. We may also go as far south as Huizingen or even Nivelles... Neve where underground warehouses will be filled by truck or any means of transportation and where the shops could refuel. Doing this might reduce immobility during peak hours. Obliging people to deliver from 7 until 10 in the morning really brings a lot more traffic jams than necessary. And of course these infrastructures may be used on a 24-hours basis...