

The interconnection of public transport networks in central stations: a key issue for metropolitan areas

The French renewal of urban transportation has heavily relied on the implementation of tramway projects, favouring a successful urban renewal. However, it is now necessary to expand the « tramway » effect to extended metropolitan areas through a smart combination of all public transport modes.

The main railway stations play a key role in this process, and must be also designed as metropolitan hubs, gateways to the main points of interest (city centers, universities, business areas, hospitals, stadiums). A smart approach of urban composition and a fair treatment of public spaces are powerful tools in the process of « metropolizing » railway stations.

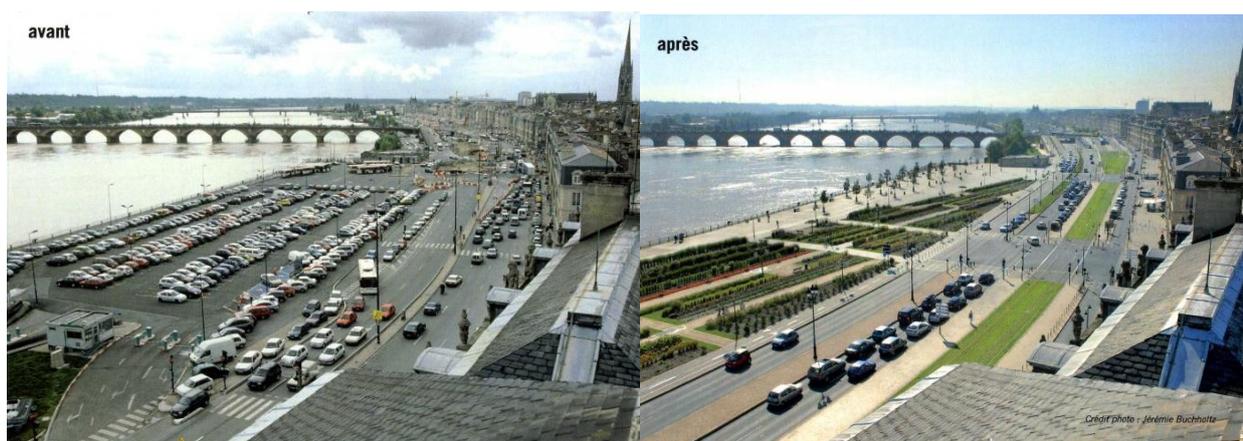
How urban transport projects have been used to renew major French Cities

Since always, the Human civilization has been looking for improvement in its mobility and ways of transportation, searching for the fastest, the safest, and the cheapest.

In Europe, until the mid of the nineteenth century, the major part of the population would walk or use animal's traction force to move around. With the Industrial Revolution, the rural civilization jumped into a civilization relying on railways. Population began to be more and more attracted by urban areas, where railways are triumphing over horse-drawn carriage. In the mid-twenty century, individual cars rapidly replaced tramways and light rail trains. This new era is characterized by a society of consumption, where everything is accessible by car (drive through) and which has led to urban sprawl.

Nowadays, human society is evolving into a post-carbon civilization, where fossil energies are replaced by renewable ones, and consumption is rethinking in a more sustainable way. The mobility is also evolving, and private cars are more and more banished from city-centers. In order to renew city centers, the emphasis is now on public transport solutions and non-motorized transportation (walking and cycling).

The city of Bordeaux is a particularly good example of successful urban transformation with the implementation of the tramway. The historical area was completely renewed and a great work on public space was done. Bordeaux is now known as a feel good city and is very attractive since a couple of years.



The river bank of Bordeaux before and after the implementation of the tramway: complete change of the urban functions.

Metropolizing French cities: the new frontier

Major French Cities are now almost all equipped with brand new public transport systems, metros or tramways. Public spaces have been renewed, and a modal shift has happened: less private cars, more public transport, bikes and pedestrians at least in the city centers. It is now

necessary to expand this "quiet revolution" to the scale of whole metropolitan areas, combining central cities and more remote secondary urban centers.

This new metropolitan mobility pattern should be a basis to re-think a number of thematic at a wide scale: balance between natural and artificial areas, urban shapes, urban health and resiliency, purpose and location of employment areas, identity of leisure and cultural areas.

How the interconnection on national, regional and suburban railway networks can organize the metropolizing process

Railway networks have been extended to mostly every area. Even if there is competition with others transport modes (airplanes, buses, cars), railways are present on multiple geographical scales, from the international to the local scale, which position railway station as a major hub of interconnection inside the city center (whereas airports and major roads avoid the city centers).

How the central station should be re-designed to become a key asset in the metropolizing process

The central station, which is the intersection of multiple scale networks, needs to be well designed in order to facilitate the journey of all the travelers, whether they commute on short trips or travel a long way. It is necessary to make the station readable for everyone (local, national, international), with different and specific amenities, such as comfortable sitting room, restaurants and commercial areas for the long trip passengers, and direct access to the trains for the local commuters.

Information and connection with the city's public transport system is also very important, and need to be thing accordingly to the size of the railway station and the passenger flows. The station becomes thus a multi-scale hub and attracts people and economic activities from everywhere, creates density and urban renewal. This is the case of Bordeaux railway station, where the surrounding urban areas are evolving according to the next arrival of the high-speed line from Paris and to Toulouse and Spain.

The station can thus be seen as a gateway to the city but also a key asset for the development of the city and its surroundings. The integration of public transport network with railways allows a smart connection to all the point of interests of the city (economic, cultural, social, natural, architectural) and support the metropolizing process. For instance, Richez_Associés worked on several projects of railway station design such as Orléans and Reims, which are middle-sized cities that have widely relied on a good synergy between railway stations and a new tramway network.



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