FUTURE OF THE EU QUARTER

EU Cycling Group's vision for a better place to live and work

June 2023

Vision

The EU Quarter has a problem: its streets, squares and public spaces are not designed for the people who live, work and spend time there. It is instead designed around cars and traffic management. The result is a car-centric, mono-functional office area that is unsafe for people cycling and using other active transport, has poor air quality and noise pollution, and is characterised by unpleasant public spaces.

This is not fair. The EU quarter is not made up of cars - it is made up of people. As the district at the heart of Europe, it should be a space designed for everyone who lives, goes to school and works there - and one that offers equal weight to the freedom of people walking, cycling, children and the community, as it does to people driving and others passing through.

In this position paper, the EU Cycling Group lays out a vision for a healthier, more attractive, safer and more democratic allocation of public space – one that will breed a greater sense of community and that Brussels can be proud of.

Who we are

For the last 25 years the EU Cycling Group (EUCG) has been promoting the use of the bicycle among EU staff and campaigning for bicycle infrastructure and amenities, air quality and road safety around the EU institutions.

With a membership of 2 800 residents of Belgium interested in local issues, we have relationships with a number of local authorities and Belgian bicycle organisations. No other bicycle group in Belgium includes a bigger number of employees from a single organisation.

Our membership is diverse, ranging from casual commuters to serious sport enthusiasts. We have a track record of delivering real impact, ranging from the introduction of Vélomai (an internal challenge promoting bicycle use) to running workshops on how to start cycling in Brussels, how to buy an e-bike, how to avoid theft and how to bike with children.

If you work for the EU institutions and you want to sign up or find out more, send an email to EUCG.membership@gmail.com or check out the EUCG's website.

Executive summary

The EU quarter is divided between several communes of Brussels, but for those who spend their time there (whether residents, workers, students or tourists) it is considered a single neighbourhood - and it should be treated as such. Doing this would open the door to a holistic urban rejuvenation that includes the input of residents, schools, sociologists, urban planning experts, local businesses and employers in the district.

The area is in need of a redesign. Two multi-lane highways disfigure the neighbourhood. They break the district's community cohesion, threaten physical safety, cause the area to have some of the worst air quality in the city and affect health in other ways, such as noise pollution and stress.

Beyond this, the district is characterised by narrow pavements, unprotected cycle lanes, excess on-street parking and other car-centric designs. There is a lack of green space, with many of the modern constructions resulting in unsightly pavements and less pleasant designs (Place Jean Rey, spaces outside the EU institution buildings and the streets themselves).

In response to these challenges the EUCG proposes, as residents and workers, a rebalancing of the district.

This rebalancing would have three interconnected and mutually reinforcing focus areas.

1. Public space for people

We propose the creation of pedestrianised areas based on existing squares (e.g. Place Luxembourg, Sq. de Meeus, Sq. Frère-Orban) with restricted parking and routes for bikes and public transport. Introduction of these safe public spaces, along with street furniture, community resources, and art, combined with traffic calming measures in the areas around them, would raise quality of life and foster a stronger local identity.

2. Balancing road design

We propose breaking the domination of the car-focused East-West traffic axis by slowing existing traffic on these routes to 30kph and making qualitative changes to the routes (wider pavements and reinforcement of existing cycle infrastructure). This would be complemented by introducing a multimodal North-South transit axis with equal priority. This would make for a safer, healthier district and bring down the physical barriers that divide the area.

3. Protecting vulnerable road users

Every two days a vulnerable road user (people walking, biking or on scooters) is killed in Belgium. We propose upgrading the infrastructure across the district to protect vulnerable road users - as well as children and people with disabilities - by widening footpaths, erecting significant barriers between active transport users and traffic, and limiting access to certain areas for private cars.

Brussels is currently in a moment of transformation.
We see similar solutions to these introduced in other parts of the city as part of the Good Move initiative, bringing improvements to people's lives, health and happiness. We want the same for the EU Quarter.

This transformation will require a communal effort from local authorities, residents, local businesses, workers and major employers. The EUCG stands ready to support these efforts with its ideas and experience.

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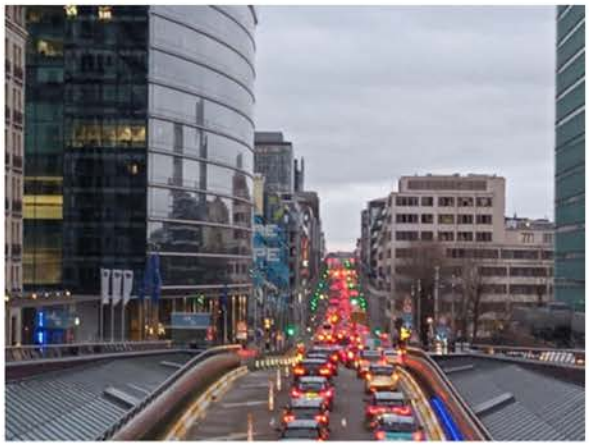
1. EU Quarter: unhealthy, unsafe and unpleasant

The EU Quarter is a major economic hub. It provides 25% of all jobs in the Brussels region. Before the pandemic, it attracted over 100 000 workers every day. Nearly half work directly in the EU institutions (EC 28%, EP 11%, Council 5%) and another quarter for EU-related organisations. As such, it attracts visitors and workers from all over the world.

Despite this, 60 years of poor policy choices and short-sighted urban planning has produced a neighbourhood designed as a mono-functional office district, with streets and public spaces exclusively designed to serve the needs of cars.

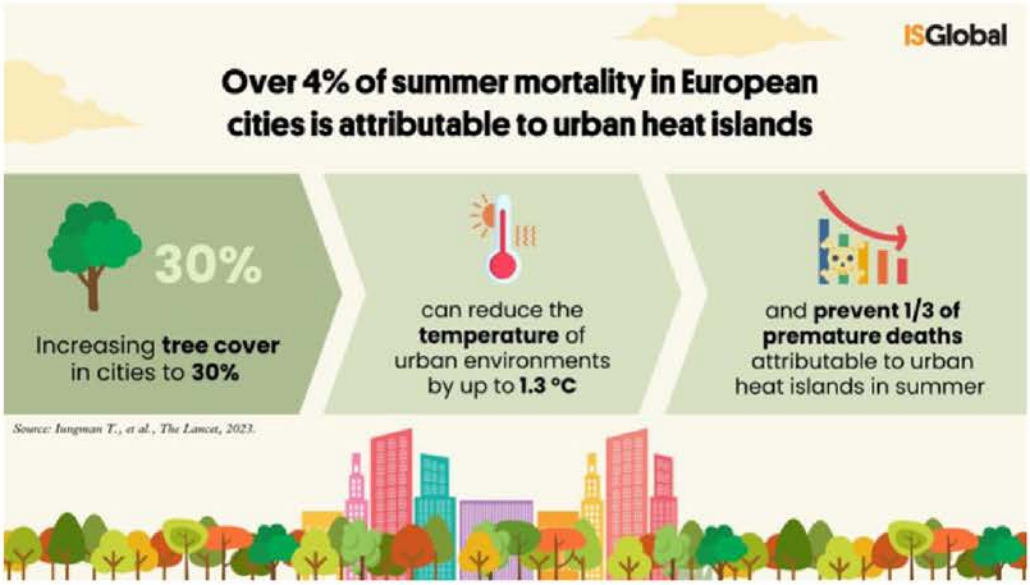
The result is a neighbourhood with:

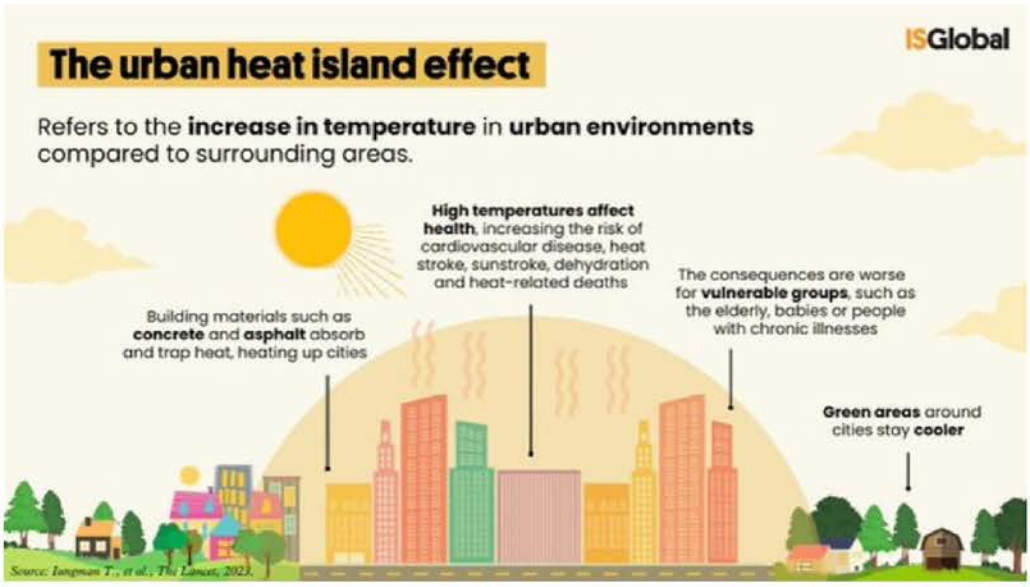
- some of the worst congested streets in Brussels.
- pollution that exceeds acceptable EU standards.
- noise pollution that exceeds WHO recommended limits.
- streets unsafe for vulnerable road users (people walking, cycling, children, etc.).
- minimal green spaces - with the spillover of excess heat in high temperature and poor drainage in heavy rain.



These factors make it hard to comfortably exercise, play, socialise or even walk through the streets of the EU Quarter. This, in turn, makes it hard to develop community cohesion or a sense of pride or ownership of the district. It even reflects badly on the image of the European Institutions and on Brussels as a city.

Unless drastic change takes place, the situation is likely to degrade further. Due to a lack of vegetation, few naturally shady spots and the excess of asphalt and concrete, the quarter heats up easily in summer. There is a drastic need for climate adaptation to avoid heat islands, health risks, excess energy demands to cool buildings and other negative impacts.





Source: IS Global

All this means that as long as the situation goes unaddressed, working, living and going to school in the EU Quarter is a health risk in the short-term (accidents, physical threats, etc.), medium-term (stress, heat, noise, etc.) and long-term (respiratory illness, pollution, etc.).

The question then is - why does this continue? Contributing factors include:

- the East-West traffic axis acting as a thoroughfare to and from Brussels centre and the inner ring.
- the excess amount of parking available in the area - around 40 000 off-street spaces and 3 000 on-street spaces in total.
- the fact that all public space, save public parks and the Esplanade Solidarnosc between the European Parliament buildings, are accessible by car.
- the lack of safe and healthy alternatives or incentives for active transport users.
- poor policy choices, like the incentivising of company cars by the Belgian state.
- the presence of the EU institutions, attracting around 8,000 private car drivers on days when staff are required to be on-site and not teleworking.
- political inertia, in part due to the fact this neighbourhood is divided between a number of communes and the lack of a sense of community ownership.
- a heritage of car-centric urban planning in the city at large.

2. People-centred design

Our position is that half-measures and technological solutions are not enough. The neighbourhood needs a shift in design - one that puts quality of life, health and happiness first and the safety of vulnerable road users on an equal footing to efficiency of car traffic.

There are several models of urban design that could be deployed to these ends, such as pedestrianisation, physically protective infrastructure for active transport, or a hoolistic approach, such as the "woonerf" - a living street, as originally implemented in the Netherlands and in Flanders, that includes shared space, traffic calming, and low speed limits.

Reclaiming and repurposing space sacrificed to car use (both roads and on-street parking) opens up an abundance of possibilities in terms of community activities, sports, events, artistic projects, local business and other opportunities. These measures also introduce opportunities for greening, which would contribute to people's health and happiness, as well as the climate resilience of the district.

Source: Brecht Matthys

3. Active transport

We want people to choose active and public transport to commute to the EU Quarter. Active transport includes all forms of travel that do not rely on an engine or motor for movement. This includes walking and bicycle, and using small-wheeled transport (skates, skateboards, push scooters, hand carts, etc.) and wheelchairs.

a) Why it's good, even when you don't use it

More people choosing non-automobile commuting methods means improved health for colleagues and inhabitants, less traffic congestion and safer roads.

There are many advantages specifically to bicycle commuting:

- It is the fastest mode of transport during rush hours.
- It is a sustainable mode of transport for medium distances, attractive to EU staff who are increasingly conscious of climate change.
- It benefits cardio-vascular health.
- It is cheap compared to driving and public transport.

Leveraging these benefits and this interest in bicycle commuting can help overcome many of the urban challenges of the EU Quarter:

- Bikes can fulfil almost all the commuting functions of private cars, but are more space efficient.
- Bikes are less dangerous and leave more space to pedestrians.
- Bikes cause practically no air and noise pollution.

For employers too, there are many benefits to having a workforce who commute by bicycle:

- Biking to work improves cardio-vascular health and reduces sick leave.
- Light physical activity such as biking helps creativity.
- Bicycle parking uses less space and is cheaper to build and maintain.
- For the EU institutions in particular, supporting cycling is in line with the EU Green Deal objectives.

b) Impact of EU institutions

As the largest employer in the district, the EU institutions are in a unique position to influence the modes of transport their staff use - both as a major stakeholder lobbying local authorities and through incentivising and encouraging staff through internal exercises.

We expect that that changing street design is highly effective to influence the commuting behaviour of EU staff, because

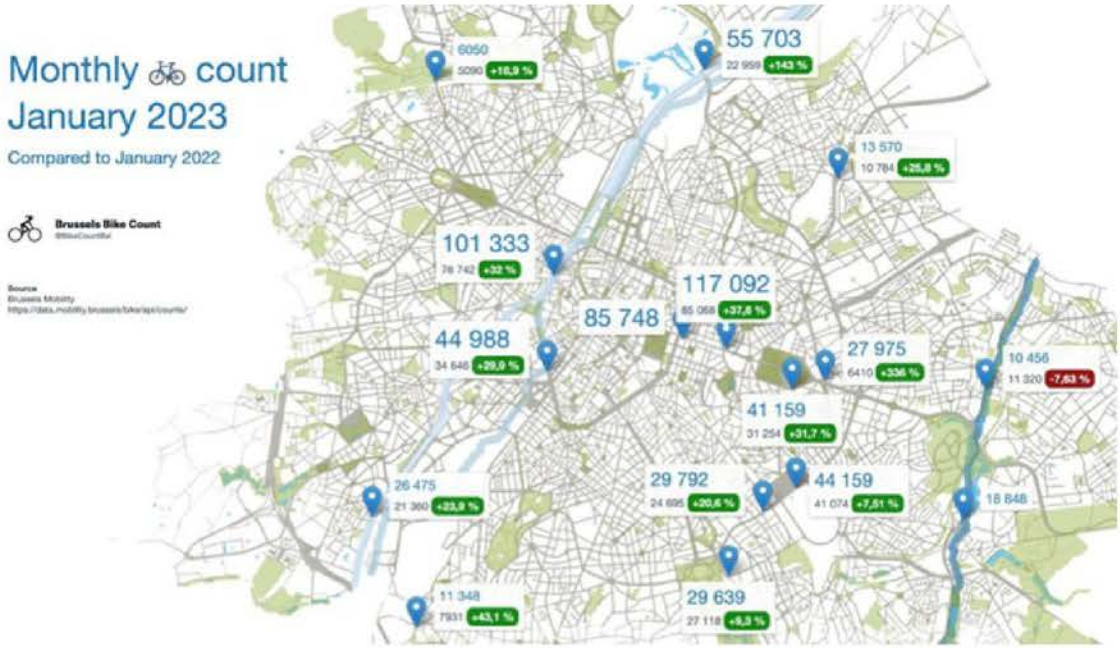
- More than half of all EU staff live within a 5km range from their office; 75% within a range of 10km from their office, and 82% within a range of 15km.
- Most of the EU staff live in the communes in the South of Brussels, so that improvements could focus on a few axes.
- EU staff enjoy large roads and free parking at destination, but they receive no other in-kind incentives to drive (i.e. company cars or fuel vouchers).

c) Technological progress

Improving technology (especially electric bikes) makes cycling more comfortable and accessible, also for people of a broader range of age and physical condition.

d) The Brussels bicycle boom

Brussels is experiencing a boom in biking, with average increases of 64% on major axes. This is mirrored in the EU institutions - in fact, EU staff are already more inclined to bike to work than the average Brussels resident.



Source: Brussels Bike Count

4. Bridging the gaps

When the bicycle becomes a valuable choice - through providing equal status on the road in terms of infrastructure and safety - it is likely that many more people would choose to commute to the EU Quarter by bike.

However, every time someone commutes to the EU Quarter, they are presented with a series of incentives and disincentives - and the balance currently discourages people to choose active transport. The benefit of physical exercise is compromised by lungfuls of pollution. Financial benefits are balanced against the possibility of injury or death. Personal ambitions to be more sustainable can be made untenable by poor road surfaces for cycling, such as cobblestones and potholes.

a) The "last mile" effect

These negative experiences are amplified given “the last mile” phenomenon in commuting. While calculations must include intermediate stops (like schools, kindergartens, sports clubs, etc.), “the last mile” can fundamentally affect the perception of the experience - influencing satisfaction, time and attractiveness of the activity as a whole.

This is why improving infrastructure on the last mile is needed to encourage healthier and more sustainable means of transport.

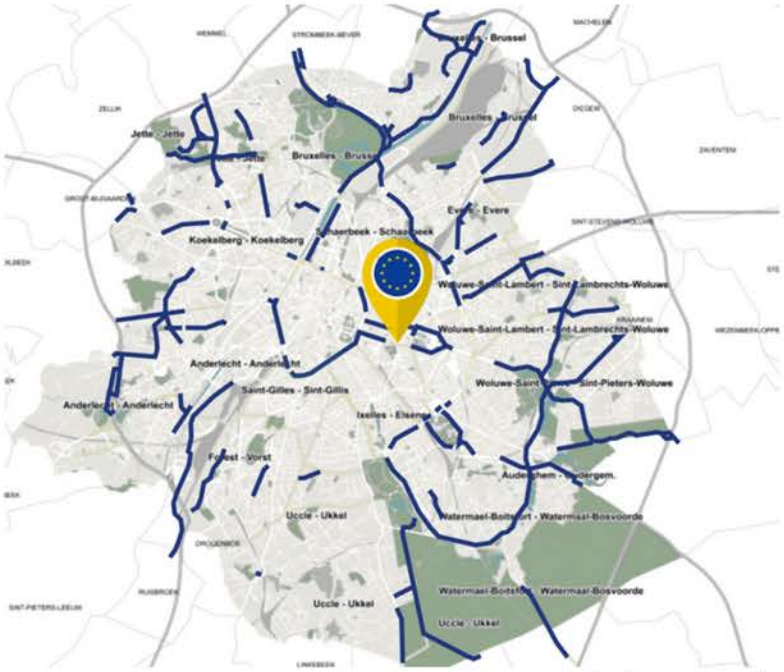
The best solution to this is appropriate and secure cycling infrastructure - not paint on asphalt as an afterthought, but continuous, pleasant corridors designed for cycling, with good, physical protection.

b) Building a network

Better cycling infrastructure will have the biggest effect, where many people have good reasons to use it. Just as it made sense to start building a continuous bicycle ring road around the centre of Brussels, bicycle networks towards employment hubs will be highly effective.

Currently it is not possible to reach the EU Quarter on continuous bike lanes from the South, where most EU staff live. There are a number of critical axes for entry into the EU Quarter - all of which exhibit one or more problematic features when it comes to the cycling experience, ranging from poor road surfaces to insufficient protection from traffic. These axes would be early excellent targets for expanding and improving cycle infrastructure:

- Avenue Marnix.
- Avenue de la Couronne.
- Rue Gray.
- Chaussée de Wavre.
- Avenue d'Auderghem (European Commission's creche in the area - making it a critical safety concern).
- Avenue de Tervueren.



Source: Critical Mass Brussels

Recommendations for EU Quarter Commuting Infrastructure

From the people who bike there every day

Access from the North

- Build bidirectional bike lanes on Chaussée d'Etterbeek.
- For bike lanes on Boulevard Clovis a building permit has been delivered and works are ongoing. For the continuation via Boulevard Charlemagne a building permit has been requested.

Access from the East

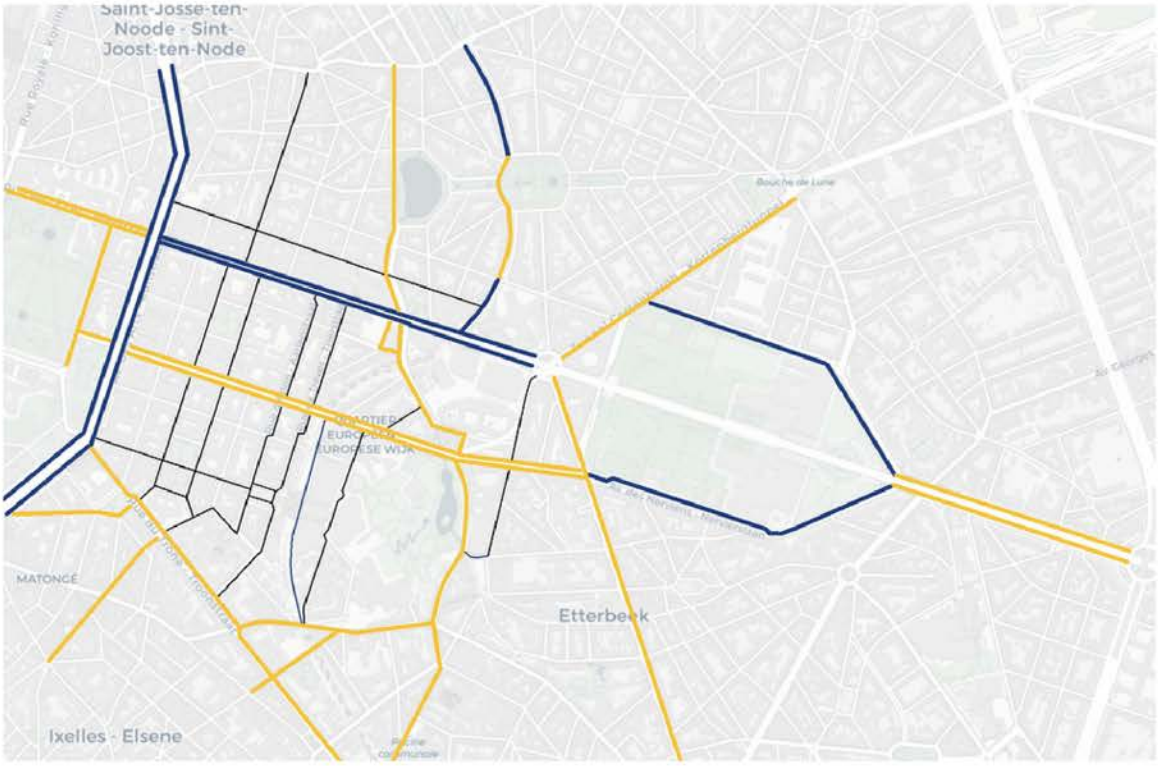
- Build a bike lane on the north-side of Avenue de Cortenbergh.
- Build continuous, bidirectional bike lanes on each side of Avenue de Tervueren.
- Build mono-directional bike lanes on each side of the Rue Belliard slope between Rue Froissart and Avenue d'Auderghem.

Access from the South

- Build bike lanes on each side of the axis Rue Gray-Chaussée d'Etterbeek, from Place Flagey to Place Jean Rey, suppress parking space along Parc Léopold, build a ramp between Rue de Toulouse and Rue de la Loi (between "The One" building and the future congress centre).
- Build a bidirectional bike lane on the west side of Rue du Viaduc between Rue Goffart and Chaussée de Wavre.
- Build a bidirectional bike lane on the north side of Chaussée de Wavre between Rue du Trône and Avenue du Maelbeek.

Access from the West

- Build mono-directional bike lanes on each side of Rue de la Loi between Rue Royale and Avenue des Arts. Build mono-directional bike lanes on each side of Rue Ducale.
- Extend the Rue Belliard axis via Rue Lambermont with a mono-directional bike lane on each side.
- Build a bidirectional bike lane on Rue du Champs de Mars in extension of the axis Rue de l'Industrie.



Existing bike lanes are marked in blue. Axes, which should get built bike lanes for commuting are marked in yellow. Axes, which should get bike lanes for local bicycle traffic are indicated using light, black lines.

Taking action on these key points would be a great step towards improving “the last mile”, but only if they are addressed appropriately with quality infrastructure (outlined below in section 4c: Protecting vulnerable road users).

Recommendations for EU Quarter
Local and Transit Infrastructure

From the people who cycle & walk it every day

a) East-West connections

1. Rue Belliard, Rue de la Loi, Rue Joseph II

These street could turn into multimodal transit axes, with vegetation to avoid heat islands. Intense car traffic makes people cross the street as little as possible, so that they use unidirectional bike lanes in both directions. Existing or temporary unidirectional bike lanes on Belliard and Loi need to be transformed into large, comfortable, bi-directional bike lanes.

2. Rue du Luxembourg

Rue du Luxembourg could turn from a bus station into a multifunctional street, attracting daytime activity around shops and restaurants. Likely action would include: suppress car parking, turn buslines into tram lines, expand side-walks, introduce vegetation in sections without shops.

Existing bike lanes are marked in blue. Axes, which should get built bike lanes in the future, are marked in yellow.

b) North-South connections

Currently, no built bike lanes exist to cross the EU Quarter from North to South, or vice-versa.

Narrow axes cannot fulfil all mobility functions at once. Ideally, slower axes (with priority for walking) and faster axes (with dedicated bike lanes) alternate.

1. Axis Rue de Paris - Rue de l'Industrie - Rue des Deux Eglises
Suppressing parking space could create an efficient bike lane connecting Rue de Paris, Square De Meeûs and Rue de l'Industrie to Saint-Josse.

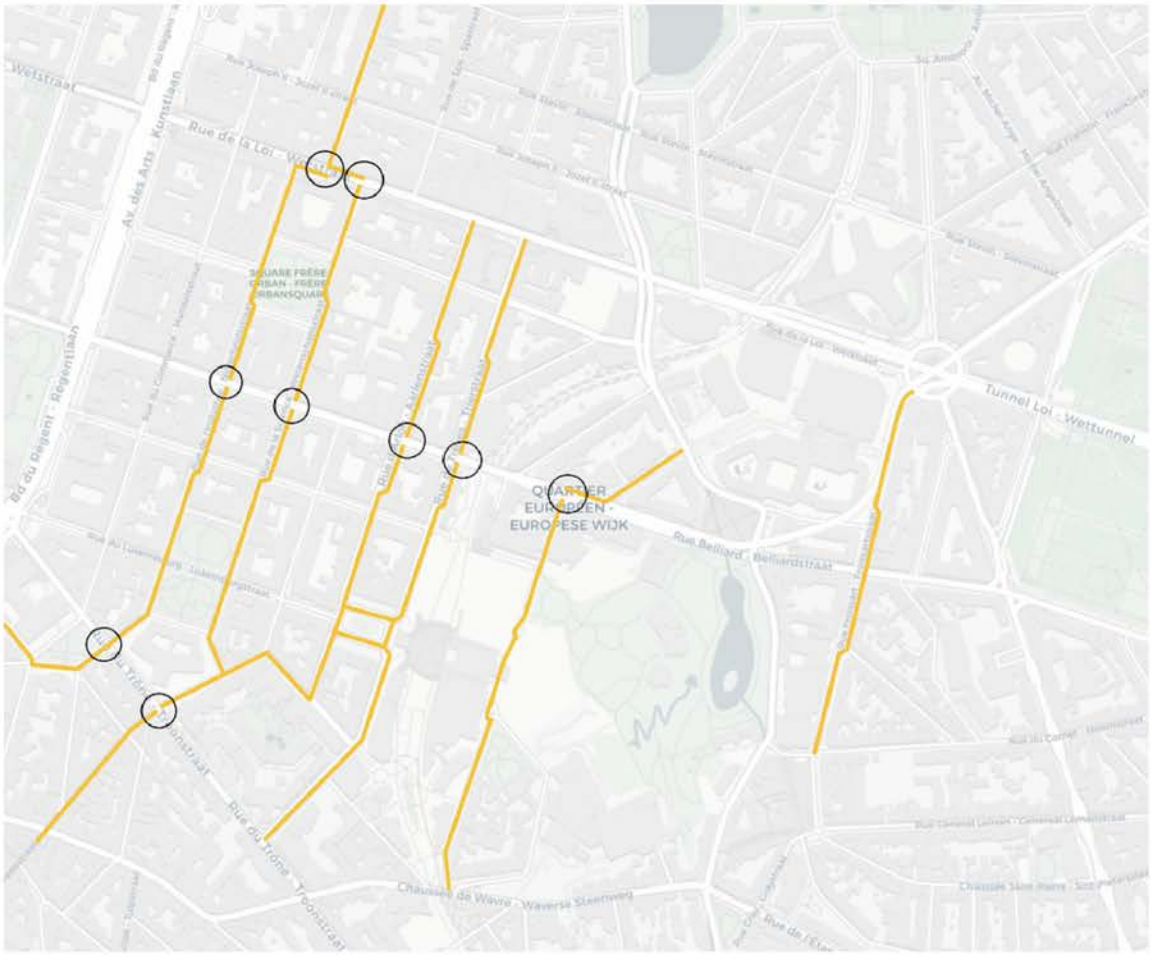
2. Axis Rue Caroly - Rue du Fleurus - Rue de la Science
A full redesign of Rue de la Science would create shared space for walking and careful biking, with zones dedicated to trees and rain water absorption. Such plans are explored by the city of Brussels. Both mentioned axes would require a well-designed crossing at Rue de la Loi before converging in a bicycle street, with access limited to local traffic in the first section of Rue des Deux Eglises.

3. Rue Caroly - Rue de Parnasse - Rue d'Arlon - Rue de Spa
A multimodal slow axis could connect lively Place de Londres and Place du Luxembourg. Shared space, without car parking, only local car traffic, on the axis Rue du Trône-Rue Caroly-Rue Parnasse. Pedestrian zone between Rue Parnasse and Place du Luxembourg. Place du Luxembourg should be pedestrianised as much as possible, with taxi access limited to Rue de Trêves. Pedestrian zone on Rue d'Arlon between Place du Luxembourg and Rue Belliard.

4. Rue de Trêves - Rue de Toulouse
The efficient restructuring of car lanes should allow for a bidirectional bike lane, preferably next to the sidewalk on the Eastern side.

5. Rue Wiertz - Rue du Remorqueur - Rue Van Maerlant
A comfortable pedestrian axis between the European Parliament and public transport facilities on and around Place Schuman. Separated bike lane between Chaussée de Wavre and the Rue de Vautier roundabout. Suppress car parking in Rue du Remorqueur and Rue Van Maerlant, enlarge sidewalks along the entire axis, and increase vegetation.

6. Rue Froissart
Unidirectional bike lanes on both sides will make it easier to commute towards Place Schuman from the Flagey neighbourhood.



Taking action on these key points would be a great step towards improving "the last mile", but only if they are addressed appropriately with quality infrastructure (outlined below in section 4c: Protecting vulnerable road users).

5. Vision: Democratising public space

a) Public space for people

Good civic space is the anchor of any community. It serves as a stage for public life - it is the setting where celebrations are held, meals are eaten, exercise is taken, social and economic exchanges take place, friends meet, and cultures mix. When well-designed, they contribute to people's health and happiness, add a sense of character to a neighbourhood, and make a district liveable.

The vast majority of so-called "public space" in the EU Quarter is currently reserved for motorised transport. This not only sacrifices the myriad benefits of public spaces shared by all, but it introduces a range of limitations, risks and harms to the people who live, work and spend time there. Beyond this, there are other limitations to "public space" in the EU Quarter - a woman might not feel safe walking in a deserted and dark area after dark, a wheelchair user might meet poor surfaces or any number of other obstacles, and children might find themselves more at risk on narrow pathways on high speed roads and blind corners.

A priority focus for the EUCG is the redistribution of public space so that the needs of the community are met in a more balanced way. This in part involves giving equal priority and attention to users of other forms of transport, but also to activities beyond mobility.

We propose the creation of pedestrianised blocks based on existing squares (e.g. Place Luxembourg, Sq. de Meeus, Sq. Frère-Orban) with restricted parking and pathways for bikes and public transport. These safe public spaces should be established along with street furniture, community resources, and art - and combined with traffic calming measures in the areas around them.

We recommend that such public spaces be designed taking into account ten principles for great public space:

1. Space that can be adapted and utilised for a diversity of uses - from markets to sports to music and theatre.
2. Design that stimulates the local economy, attracting people to local shops and businesses that contribute to the community.
3. Facades that create a connection between the ground level of the buildings and the street itself - e.g. outdoor seating, areas for shelter, aesthetic features.
4. Social dimension and urban vitality - accessibility, furniture, shade, shelter, green spaces and other features that encourage interaction.
5. Places designed at a scale that humans can navigate, avoiding large, empty and inactive areas.
6. Efficient and people-oriented lighting facilitates the occupancy of public spaces at night, enhancing safety.
7. Contributions that help shape the local identity of the district - from areas for office workers to have walking meetings or have lunch, to art that reflects the spirit of the area.
8. Streets and squares designed as "shared spaces", whose infrastructure, signage and furniture consider the needs of all users.
9. The inclusion of green areas that contribute to air quality, help to ease temperatures in the summer, lower stress levels and provide strategic value in terms of drainage and biodiversity.
10. Spaces designed and shaped through local participation, with residents and users being given the chance to highlight the community's distinct needs.

b) Balancing road design

Community cohesion and accessibility in the EU Quarter is undermined by the fact that the district is currently cut into three parts by two multi-lane motorways. These roads undermine free movement across the district for people walking and cycling, but also for more vulnerable road users, like people with disabilities and children.

We propose breaking the domination of the car-focused East-West traffic axis through slowing existing traffic on these routes to 30kph and making qualitative changes to the routes to encourage drivers to keep to these speeds - for example, speed bumps, speed tables, and raised intersections - along with wider pavements and reinforcement of existing infrastructure that supports active transport.

This would be complemented by introducing a multimodal North-South transit axis with equal priority. This would make for a safer, healthier district and bring down the physical barriers, unifying the district and making all parts accessible to everyone.

c) Protecting vulnerable road users

Every two days a vulnerable road user (people walking, cycling or riding a scooter) is killed in Belgium. We propose upgrading the infrastructure across the district to protect vulnerable road users - including children and people with disabilities - by widening footpaths, putting up significant barriers between active transport users and traffic, and limiting access to certain areas for private cars.

Paint is not protection - we need a system that respects good principles in cycle infrastructure design. We recommend the following principles be followed in pursuit of this goal:

- **The biggest danger for people cycling is cars.** Where possible, maximising separation from car traffic is ideal, both at junctions and on the stretches of road between them - whether through physical obstacles (e.g. poles or barriers) or by positioning (e.g. avoiding shared space between people cycling and other modes of transport).

Source: Bruxelles Mobilité

- **Sufficient space** - cycle lanes should be at least 2 metres wide for a one-way lane and 3-4 metres for a bi-directional track.
- **Don't just adapt car infrastructure and make it smaller** - design specific infrastructure for bicycle use. For example, "Banana" and "Chip Cone" crossings are junction infrastructure designed around the real behaviour of cyclists.
- **Bicycle lanes must be designed as a coherent network of routes**. Ideally, people cycling should be able to enter the EU Quarter and reach their destination without having to dismount or finding the cycle lane disappearing before them.
- **No shared-use pavements** - bikes should be treated as vehicles, not as pedestrians. Where possible, people cycling should be physically separated from people walking and where possible should not share the same space.
- **Cycle routes should be direct and simple**, avoiding excess stopping and starting.
- **Plans for maintenance and enforcement of rules** - particularly upon introduction of these new rules - should be accounted for.
- **Planning for cycling** in the EU Quarter should be designed with the needs of the community, pedestrians and public good in mind. The streets are for everyone.

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