

The developments in Hasselt were accompanied by parallel changes on higher political levels. In 1995, the Flemish elections produced a Social-Democratic state government, with Eddy Baldewijns serving as the new Minister for Transportation. Two members of his team remembered the summer of 1995, when they sat together with their colleagues "over a few beers" (Lieben-Claes, interview 06-29-2000) and brainstormed a completely new mobility policy. The result was—certainly with many steps in between—the so-called Mobiliteitsconvenant (mobility contract), which was adopted by the Flemish government in April 1996. The goal of this political device was "sustainable mobility" (Mulders, interview 06-30-2000) and more concretely, a "shift from car-traffic to public transport and bicycle-traffic" (Proesmans & Nelis, 1997, p. 13). For this purpose, the authors of the Mobiliteitsconvenant stipulated, the state government, the communities, and the public transport company De Lijn would have to enter into a locally-specific "partnership" (Lieben-Claes, interview 06-29-2000; Sourbron, 1996, p. 2). In this new role, the Flemish community would support mobility related efforts of communities only under the condition that the latter could present a strategic and long-term oriented mobility plan that included at least a business-as-usual scenario and a trend-breaking scenario. The Flemish community assigned BEF 360 million (U.S. \$9.7 million) for the implementation of the Mobiliteitsconvenant in June 1996 and earmarked another BEF 2 billion (U.S. \$54 million) for this purpose from the general traffic-infrastructure budget, which totaled BEF 9.1 billion (U.S. \$254 million) (Belga, 1996, p. 3). Three communities, Hasselt not among them, signed the first mobiliteitsconvenants in August 1996 (Standaert, 1996, p. 13); the city of Hasselt followed with its own version in December 1996 (Verdee, n.d., p. 17). The idea proliferated quickly; five and a half years after the introduction of the mobiliteitsconvenant, "80 % of the communities [in Limburg] have a [mobility] plan" (Bormans, interview 11-26-2001).