

Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the grounds of the Antwerp Zoo, situated alongside the 4<sup>th</sup> most beautiful station in the world (*according to Newsweek magazine*). Both of these 19<sup>th</sup>-century masterpieces (*the Zoo was built in 1844 and Antwerp Station in 1895*) are places that inspire travel: with the Zoo, distant countries are placed at your fingertips, while the train carries you away to a variety of landscapes and different cultures.

The two buildings are examples of sustainability:

- the conservation of protected historical heritage for future generations enables visitors to project themselves into an architecture that bears the imprint of historical riches. The renovation works to Antwerp Station have been conducted with respect for its heritage and have returned the lustre of yesteryear to Antwerp Central.
- an important social / societal mission. The expertise of the Zoo with regard to the conservation of animal species is praised throughout the entire world. The station itself is the place of transport par excellence: train, Thalys, tram and bus converge there, and passengers can easily transition from one means of transport to the others. Nearly 3,500 members of our staff work there, and they work every day to satisfy our clientele. Moreover, Antwerp Central is not only an economic centre (with its shops and restaurants), but also an intense cultural location; here, every day, one can discover an exhibition, a concert or a guided tour ...
- each, in its own domain, is positioned within the ecological plan and aims to achieve the best possible energy efficiency.  
For example, the roof of the zoo restaurant recuperates the maximum amount of rain, which is then used mainly for cleaning the stables, enclosures and sanitary facilities. All of the materials used are sustainable and, when possible, the Zoo also uses alternative and economical means of energy, such as heat pumps and solar boilers. In the stations, the buildings are insulated in order to avoid unnecessary energy consumption; sorting bins for rubbish enable us to lower the cost of removing or recycling waste. The rubbish sorting bins also help to make our passengers more responsible in their environmental behaviour.

The SNCB is proud to organise this conference together with the UIC and Infrabel. As you all know, more and more passengers make use of our trains every day, and more than 30,000 citizens pass through our lovely Antwerp Central Station on a daily basis.

It should be emphasised that the SNCB spends significant resources on modernising, renewing and maintaining its 550 stations and stops (Belgium has a dense and extensive network). In 2013, SNCB invested **more than 64 million** euro in its **stations** and nearly **54 million** euro in **car parks**. These investments are primarily intended to improve the reception areas and passenger information.

The station plays an essential role in the economic development of the city: offices, a working corner, day care centres, boutiques, supermarkets and restaurants. This role, moreover, is more essential when it brings together professional and cultural activities. Antwerp Central Station, for example, is home to the headquarters of Alcatel. It also attracts a large number of visitors to the Zoo – last year more than 800,000 people – particularly on account of the combined train & Zoo tickets. Another example of the station as a centre of urban and real estate development is Leuven Station, which has seen the development of numerous offices in its immediate vicinity. The town hall even left the central square and moved to the station (*in 2009*). All of its employees have reached their destination when they get off the train!

Multinational corporations are also interested in our stations on account of their architectural quality: Coca-Cola has notably used the cathedral that is Antwerp Central as the setting for its latest advertising campaign. Passengers unwittingly have to put themselves in the shoes of James Bond, to the theme of “Unlock the 007 in you”, with the task of obtaining free tickets for the latest film, “Skyfall”. The clip has created quite a buzz and has brought Antwerp Station to the attention of the whole world.

But the need to further improve energy efficiency and to reduce our ecological footprint is a strategic, economic and ecological priority for SNCB. In order to do so, we must constantly be on the cutting edge of innovation: pursuing the renewal of our rolling stock, implementation of the new transport plan by the end of this year – the current transport plan dates from 1998 and was not adapted to mobility needs – the decision to equip all the locomotives with energy meters by 2018, and the motivation and commitment of all our railway workers will enable us to realise this objective.

Consequently, we are counting on you and your valuable work within the UIC, for which I would already like to express my thanks.

I wish you all a lovely conference, and I now have to pleasure of handing the floor over to Richard Marcelis, from Infrabel.