

Ten Service Bridges

Design: De Smet Vermeulen architecten, 2012–2014

Construction: 201–2016

Project architect: Tine Van de Wiele

Structural Engineer: Norbert Provoost bvba

Photos: Dennis De Smet

Location: Gent, Belgium



On the occasion of the Ghent World's Fair in 1913, Louis Cloquet designed the Sint-Pieters Station as the final piece of a raised railway embankment. The five railway underpasses in that embankment, which he regarded as a series of city gates, today enjoy listed status. The gates connect to the slope with stone or brickwork quarter cones; they are perfect, skilfully detailed structures that respond to the varying spans and the hierarchy of the streets. Cloquet's infrastructure is architecture.

With the number of railway tracks increasing, there is now insufficient space left for a safe service path. To address that problem, we created new service walkways either side of the bridges. They are identical and as transparent as possible so as not to obscure Cloquet's subtle articulation of the urban hierarchy. Measures to counteract flexure make a construction heavy, so we opted for suspended walkways. Identical coffers form slightly different funicular curves, with spans ranging from 25 to 32 metres, and provide space below the walking surface for cables. The abutments are in the slopes, beyond the quarter cones and the view of the bridges. As such, there is no need to counteract their heaviness, which makes a contrast with the airy bridges.

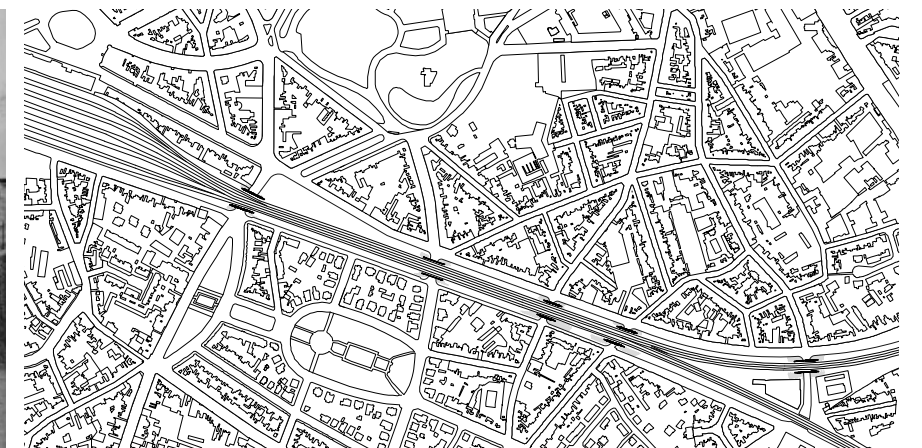
On Krijgslaan the new bridge deck exceeds the width provided for by Cloquet. In addressing that encroachment, we sided with Cloquet and designed a decorative moulding that fills the hiatus between his balustrade and his support. We hung our service walkway in front of this touch-up.



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