



Help us to save the Kortrijk railway station

The site of Kortrijk station is of historical importance.

It was from this station that a train crossed a national border for the first time in the world on 6 November 1842. A temporary station was built as early as 1840, and the first full-fledged station in neoclassical style was opened in 1876. This 19th-century station was badly hit and largely destroyed during the intensive Allied bombing of Kortrijk in 1944.

At the end of the war, it was decided to build a new emblematic station on the same site. In 1951, the Belgian railway company NMBS-SNCB commissioned the famous Kortrijk architect Pierre Albert Pauwels to design the new station.

The new railway station was festively opened in 1956.

This station in Kortrijk is therefore a symbol of the reconstruction of the city. It is one of the most important examples, if not the most important in Flanders, of a station rebuilt after the war. The building has an important architectural and urbanistic value.

Video: <https://youtu.be/rJzOEcgVcg>

It is precisely this station that is now threatened with demolition.

Much of the post-war reconstruction architecture adhered to the neo styles and the traditional, baroque and classical language of forms.

Architect *Pierre Albert Pauwels*, on the other hand, resolutely chose to give form to classical architectural principles such as symmetry and monumentality, but in a contemporary and playful way. While vertical chamfered pillars give a tight rhythm to the quasi-symmetrical building of 28 bays, large windows provide abundant light to the passenger hall. At the same time, the architect has created a frivolous architecture with undulating lines, a special bonding agent for the bricks and fresh colours such as yellow ochre walls and blue-green tiles. In this way, the station building radiated monumentality, while at the same time already orienting itself towards the playful design emerging from the world exhibition Expo'58.

The Kortrijk station thus acquired a very specific formal architectural language.

This architectural approach by architect Pauwels is unique in Flanders.

Thanks to the siting and design of a higher volume in the centre, the imposing building forms a beacon from several streets. It contained the telephone and telegraph offices, the police and customs offices, the ticket hall, the station buffet and the station master's house. The taller central wing, with its curved shape and large windows, invites passengers to enter the ticket hall. On the platform side, a concrete canopy with glass windows provides shelter.

The station building is highly detailed and efforts have been made to integrate works of art. The façade is decorated with a bas-relief by the sculptor Maurits Witdouck (1928-2014), an allegorical representation of travel and transport. Inside, a work of art by the Bruges ceramist Rogier Vandeweghe (1923-2020) adorns the central travellers' room. This work represents the river Leie (Lys) and pays tribute to Kortrijk's industries.



Today, Kortrijk station is one of the last and most important post-war reconstruction stations in Flanders. The other important one, at Mechelen, was recently demolished.

When the inventory of the architectural heritage of the region was carried out at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of this century, little attention was paid to post-war and modernist architecture. The specific architecture of the reconstruction period also received little or no attention. No examples were included for Kortrijk.

The historic monuments department 'did not see' the remarkable station at the time, and did not include it in the inventory. It was not given any heritage protection.

At a time when recent architecture is in the sights of heritage conservationists everywhere, the railway company NMBS-SNCB clearly wants to demolish the station.

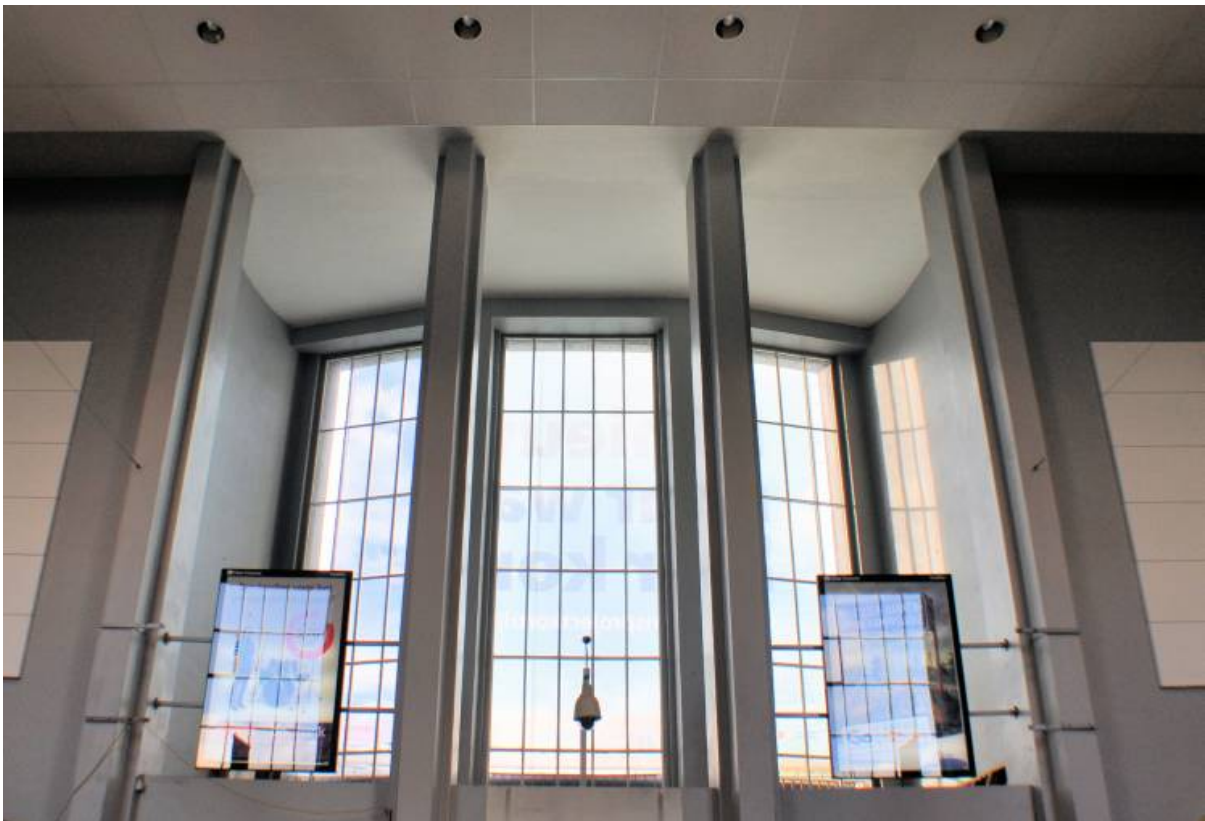
In Kortrijk, the demolition plans have already caused a stir, and a large-scale campaign has been launched to save the station.

The current problem is not the station building, but the accessibility of the platforms which are only accessible by stairs and are not high enough to facilitate boarding.

In our opinion, the station is perfectly adaptable to new needs. This does not require the demolition of the station building. One only needs to raise the platforms and install escalators and lifts from the tunnels that pass under the tracks, as happened in the stations of Leuven and Hasselt.

Preservation and reuse are also much more environmentally friendly than demolition and construction of new buildings.

The problems of Kortrijk station can therefore be solved in a more cost-effective and environmentally friendly way.





On 13 April, it was announced that the station was included in the list of the seven most endangered heritage sites in Europe, "*The 7 Most Endangered*", drawn up by an international group of experts. This is a programme supported by the Europa Nostra heritage platform, the European Investment Bank Institute, with the support of the European Commission (Creative Europe programme).

https://belgium.representation.ec.europa.eu/actualites/la-gare-ferroviaire-de-courtrai-classee-parmi-les-7-sites-patrimoniaux-les-plus-menaces-deurope-2023-04-13_fr

In the meantime, an application for legal protection of the station as a monument has been submitted to Minister Diependaele, the Flemish minister responsible for built heritage.

Despite the European signal, NMBS-SNCB wants to continue with its demolition plans.

Kortrijk citizens protest strongly against the project

A petition has already been signed by more than 3,000 people. You can still sign it:

https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/nl/nmbs_save_the_kortrijk_railway_station_red_het_station_van_kortrijk/



We also invite everyone, individuals and organisations, to urge the preservation and protection of the station by letter or email.

An "amnesty international" campaign against the condemnation of heritage.

You can send your letters to

* Mr. Matthias Diependaele

Flemish Minister in charge of the Immovable Heritage

Avenue Roi Albert II / Koning Albert II laan 7 (seventh floor), B-1210 Brussels

kabinet.diependaele@vlaanderen.be

* with a copy to

Agentschap Onroerend Erfgoed (Flemish Heritage Agency)

Herman Teirlinck Building, Havenlaan 88 bus 5, B-1000 Brussels,

info@onroenderfgoed.be

Also do write a letter to the Kortrijk city council to insist on the preservation of the station.

* Stad Kortrijk / Ville de Courtrai, Grote Markt 54, B-8500 Kortrijk

info@kortrijk.be

and/or to the Mayor Mrs Ruth Vandenberghe, ruth.vandenberghe@kortrijk.be

Thank you for your support.



The *Vlaamse Vereniging voor Industriële Archeologie* (Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology) was founded in 1978 and is the oldest national association for industrial archaeology in the European Union. It is the platform for volunteers and voluntary associations dedicated to industrial heritage in Flanders and Brussels.

In 2019 it received the *European Heritage Award / Europa Nostra Award for Dedicated Service*.

<http://www.industrieelerfgoed.be>

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