

The Amsteltram case: Amsterdam regional light rail – 1999-2024



Photos: Amsterdam region, Uithoorn Centre, Rob van der Bijl, July 22, 2024

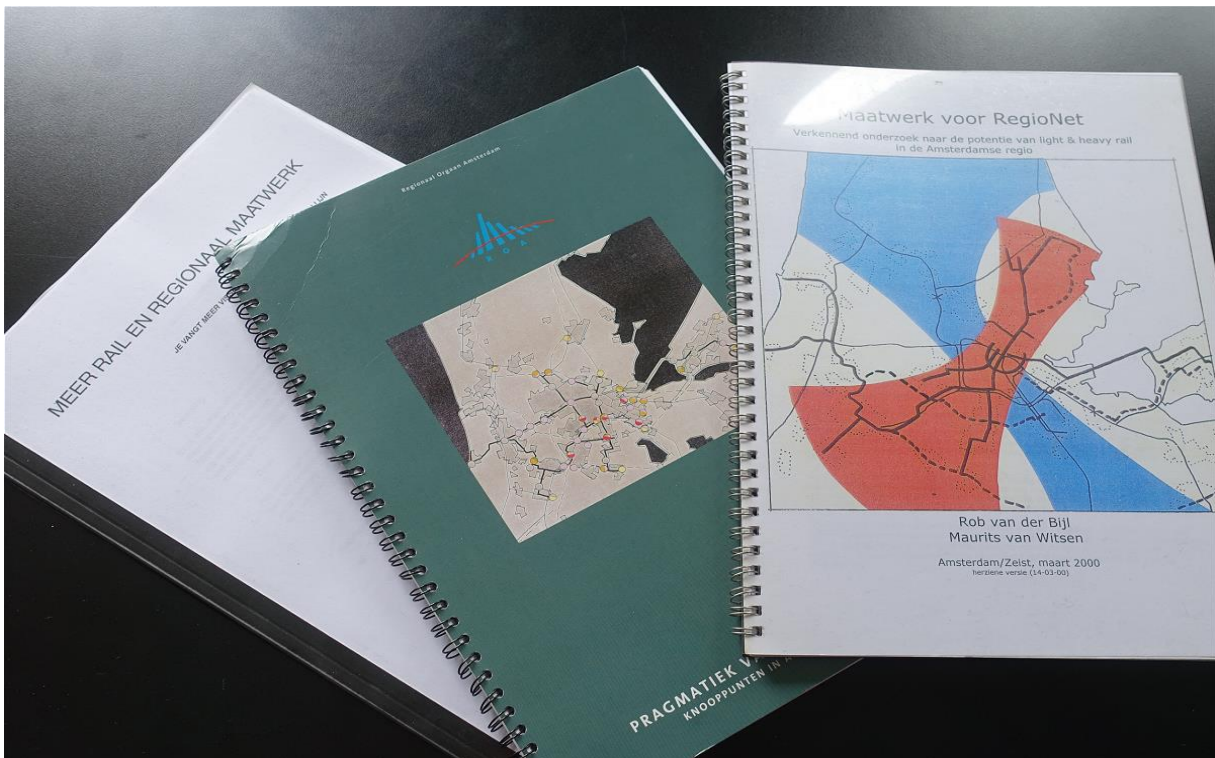
Lightrail.nl looks back at design and consultancy work from 25 years ago. The opening of the Amsteltram (R-net line 25; project Uithoorn line, July 2024) gives every reason to do so, because the idea to develop this line as light rail was already proposed in our studies from the period 1999-2001.



In our major study (*'Maatwerk voor RegioNet'*, March 2000), we mapped out the possibilities of a regional light rail network for the north-south corridor in the Amsterdam region. According to our proposals at the time, the North/South line, which ultimately has been in operation as a local, conventional metro since July 2018, should be operated with light rail vehicles (with a capacity comparable to that of the current metro sets), because this would make regional expansion less complicated and, above all, less expensive. The feasibility of regional branches in the form of light rail lines (*sneltram*) would also be increased, because, unlike the construction of metro lines, these projects can be phased more effectively and, in addition, pragmatic use can be made of (existing) bus lanes.



Today's Uithoorn line (the *Amsteltram*; R-net line 25) represents exactly what we had in mind 25 years ago: a regional light rail line that partly consists of newly built sections on predominantly ground level. And additionally these lines use existing tram infrastructure in the city, while in the region for large parts share existing bus lanes. We are still convinced that this concept can also be rolled out in the northern direction of Amsterdam-Noord, Zaanstad and Purmerend, in the west to Schiphol, Hoofddorp and Haarlem, and finally east towards Almere and the 't Gooi. The current North/South line then functions via transfer stations on the edge of the city as a local carrier of a comprehensive regional network. Incidentally, the trams from the region can penetrate into the city beyond the metro station.



The idea of a light rail conceived Uithoorn line originates, as mentioned, from the March 2000 study, an exploratory research into the potential of both light and heavy rail in the Amsterdam region (by Lightrail.nl / Rob van der Bijl & Maurits van Witsen, commissioned by the former Amsterdam metropolitan agency). Van der Bijl and Van Witsen had already started their preparatory research a year earlier and summarised in their report on a customised proposal for a light rail network in the northern wing of the Randstad (May 1999). The current Uithoorn line was intended as one of the lines in this regional network (*RegioNet*).



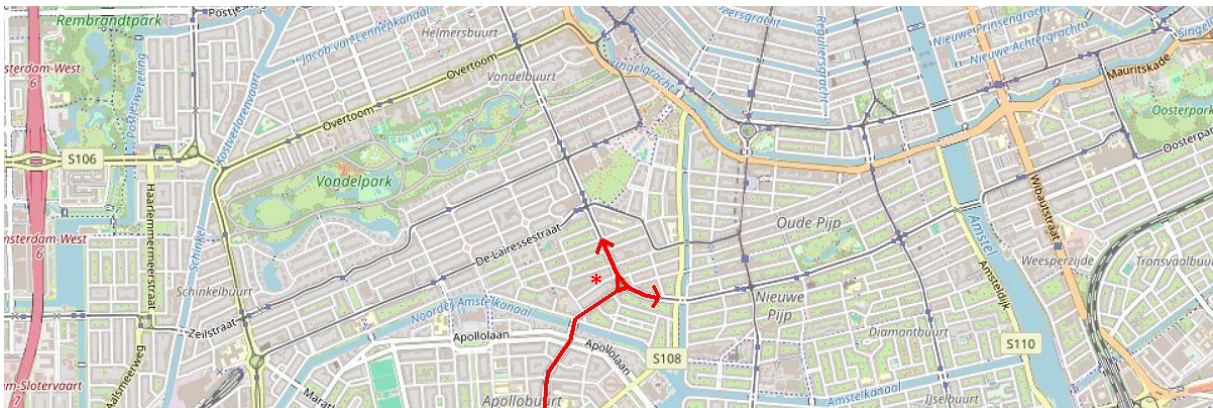
In a bespoke study on development nodes in the Amsterdam region (February 2001, by RVDB Urban Planning, in collaboration with Lightrail.nl (Rob van der Bijl et al.), commissioned by the then Regional Authority Amsterdam – ROA), all relevant nodes for spatial development within the period 2010-2030 were mapped out for the intended regional network. On the line in Uithoorn, three nodes were projected for (combinations of) housing, businesses and amenities (Legmeer, West, Centre).



On the old Haarlemmermeer railway lines (1), final passenger transport closed in 1950 and freight transport in 1986. The Amsteltram and various bus lines partly use the historical rail corridors (2). Our proposals at the time (1999-2001) considered the re-use of these corridors, both in terms of intended public transport routes (3) and in terms of spatial development by means of nodes (4).



September 2000 Van der Bijl and Van Witsen presented their ideas (according to their studies) to a former working group of directors of the transport companies Connexion, GVB and NS who deliberated on the future design and scope of the urban-regional public transport network. Now that the Amsteltram is in operation, it is time to consider creatively future network opportunities.



Southern section of central Amsterdam, Netherlands – OpenStreetMap

The realization of the Uithoorn line represents a joyful event, but in the short term some repairs and additions are indispensable. July 2024 we exchanged ideas about this with Marinus de Jong (Board Member of Rover, the Dutch national travellers association). We came up with the following proposals.

First of all, the Amsteltram must be extended to the central area of Amsterdam as soon as possible (not to replace existing city lines). This can and must be done in the direction of Roelof Hartplein (*) and from there in an easterly direction and in a westerly direction to important destinations in the city, such as Leidseplein and surroundings.

Furthermore, the complementary bus line (174) in Uithoorn deserves improved frequency and accessibility. Now that the R-net bus lines have disappeared, at least the function of shuttle connection of bus 147 with the tram line should be strengthened, for example with the help of a supplementary, high-frequency local intermediate service.

In Westwijk (Amstelveen), the bus stop complex on Sacharovlaan should be given the status of a transfer hub in terms of logistics and design. With the disappearance of the old R-net bus line, this is the first opportunity for travellers from Aalsmeer to take the tram to South station. In addition, travellers from Uithoorn must transfer to the bus here to reach the bus station and the shopping centre (Stadshart) in Amstelveen. In any case, the bus stop towards Aalsmeer should be moved up to the tram stop here as soon as possible.

Finally, it is obvious to develop a P&R at the intersection of the Uithoorn line with the N201 provincial road. A reservation has already been made for the required tram stop.



Lightrail.nl is looking even further ahead, because the potential of the current Uithoorn line has not yet been fully utilised. The Amsteltram could be extended towards Mijdrecht and towards Aalsmeer. If the existing terminus of tram line 5 in Amstelveen were (finally) moved to the bus station on the west side of the shopping centre, the foundation would be laid for a regional network in Amsterdam's backyard. As a supplement and extension of the Amsteltram, express and peak-hour trams could realise fast connections between Mijdrecht, Uithoorn, Aalsmeer, Amstelveen (Stadshart) and Amsterdam (South station). Local bus networks in the aforementioned places could provide access from the local transfer station (tram-bus). In the short term, an R-net bus line should continue from the direction of Uithoorn to Mijdrecht (Centre), which would restore the route of bus line 340 that was closed in December 2021.



References

Van der Bijl, R., Van Oort, N., Bukman, B. (2018). Light Rail Transit. 61 lessons in sustainable development. Elsevier.

Van der Bijl, R., Van Oort, (2024). Betere bus. BRT en andere vormen van hoogwaardige bus. Acquire Publishers.

www.lightrail.nl/

www.favas.net