

Between Exploring and Interpretation
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From Road Planning to Route Design

Spatial Quality as a Cement
in Motorway Developments

DAVID VAN ZELM VAN ELDIK _ interview by Bart de Zwart



1. This text is based on an interview with David van Zelm van Eldik, The Hague, 29 January 2008.

2. The emergence of the term route design can, by extension, be seen to have been prompted by the increased attention to the apparent so-called 'pollution' of the motorway landscape and scenery. Apart from the aforementioned architecture memorandum, this attention was also reflected in the inauguration of a professor in the Aesthetics of Mobility and the appointment of a National Advisor on Infrastructure.

3. The policy document *Ontwerpen aan Nederland. Architectuurbeleid 2001–2004* (Designing the Netherlands. Architectural Policy 2001–2004) was published in 2000 by the Ministries of Education, Culture and Science (OC&W), Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment (VROM), Transport, Public Works and Water Management (V&W), and Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV).

4. The Steunpunt Routeontwerp functions as the proverbial 'spider in the web,' coordinating a large constellation of governmental platforms. Alongside project teams for each route, with civil servants from the Ministries of VROM, LNV and

the Department of Waterways and Public Works, it features an Interministerial Consultation Group with representatives of the Ministries of V&W, VROM, LNV and Economic Affairs and the Dutch Government Advisors, a Route Design Steering Committee with representatives of the Department of Waterways and Public Works, and a Committee of Recommendation featuring ministers from VROM, LNV, V&W and the Director-General of the Department of Waterways and Public Works.

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David van Zelm van Eldik is a landscape architect by trade. He coordinated architecture policy at the Dutch Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, managed the pilot project Routeontwerp A12 and from 2004 to 2008 headed Steunpunt Routeontwerp (Centre for Route Design) as its programme manager. In 2009 Van Zelm van Eldik became the manager of innovation programme Mooi Nederland (Beautiful Netherlands) at the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.

According to anecdotal reports, it was Tineke Netelenbosch, the then Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, who personally placed motorway landscapes on the national policy agenda as a spatial task ten years ago.¹ What motivated the Dutch minister was the common view that over the years haphazard interventions and fragmented policy had turned the motorway network into a cacophony of spatial errors.² It was now up to designers to put an end to this chaos and create order along the nation's roads.

When the A12 motorway was put forward as a pilot project in the architecture memorandum 'Ontwerpen aan Nederland' (Designing the Netherlands), the term *route design* entered policy vocabulary.³ The project 'Regenboogroute A12' (Rainbow Route A12) thus became the first accomplishment of an interministerial working group which, since 2004, has been known as the Centre for Route Design.⁴

A three-track approach

Although initially set out with a rather formal preoccupation, the centre soon extended its remit to promoting spatial quality in a broader sense. By cleverly tying infrastructural investment to spatial developments, it was argued route design could not only solve aesthetic, safety or congestion problems but also fulfil multiple social objectives in terms of landscape architecture. The organization took a three-track approach to the Rainbow Route. Its success ensured that the method was retained for subsequent projects on the A2, A4 and A27 motorways.

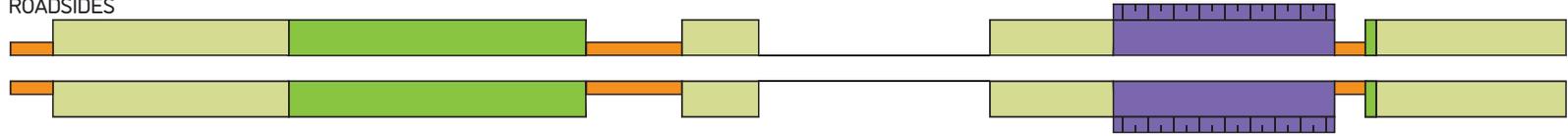
Track 1: longitudinal integration

The method's first track focuses on linear coherence and is targeted primarily at the visual appearance of the road. For the A12 this means, among other things, the installation of a modular noise barrier along the entire route, which should establish formal coherence among sound-proofing facilities. Another outcome is the definition of a set of universal-technical specifications and the agreement of aesthetic controls between the various municipalities along the route.

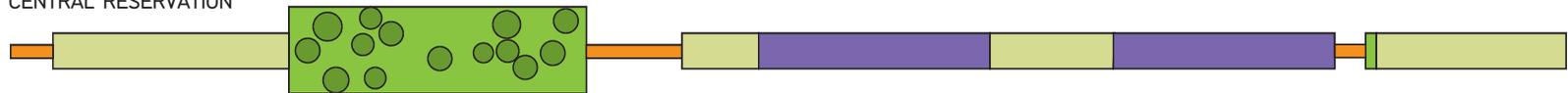
LANDSCAPES



ROADSIDES



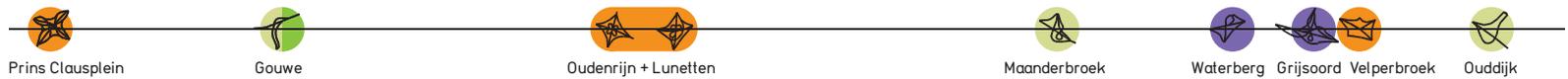
CENTRAL RESERVATION



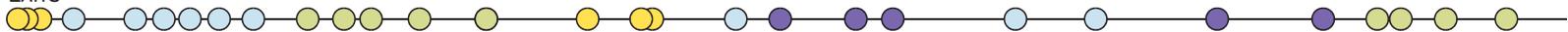
LIGHTING



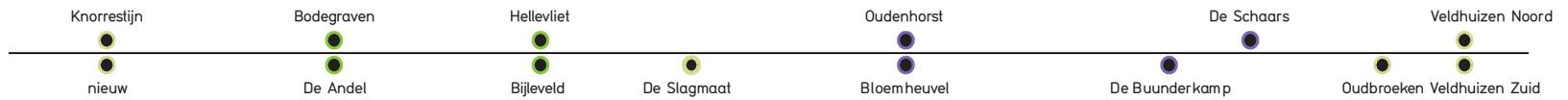
INTERCHANGES



EXITS



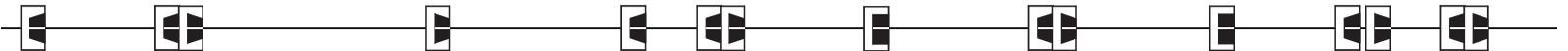
PORTS OF CALL



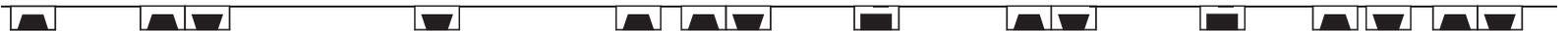
BRIDGES AND AQUEDUCTS



FLY-OVERS



UNDERPASSES



NOISE BARRIERS



'Score' for the Rainbow Route

5. Wim Nijenhuis and Wilfried van Winden have pointed out that scenic and aesthetic considerations have played a major role in the design of the motorway network. Wim Nijenhuis and Wilfried van Winden, *De diabolische snelweg*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007.

6. The centre identifies three levels at which it seeks to establish links: the interests of stakeholders; the four phases of the working process

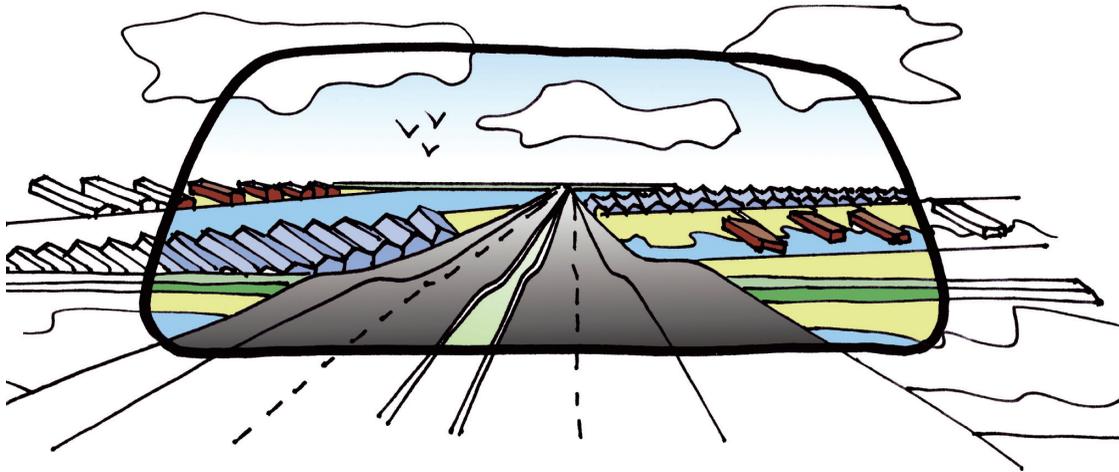
(survey, planning, implementation and management); and the four levels of the motorway system (route, road, area and site). Peter Heerema (ed.), *Routes! Startboek routeontwerp*. The Hague: Steunpunt Routeontwerp, 2008.

7. Related developments include the extension, since 2008, of the Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur en Transport (MIT; Multi-Year Programme for Infrastructure and Transport) of the

Ministry of V&W into a Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur, Ruimte en Transport (MIRT; Multi-Year Programme for Infrastructure, Space and Transport), and the introduction of a Steunpunt Gebiedsgericht Werken (Centre for Area-based Work) and an Innovatienetwerk voor Duurzame Infrastructuur en Gebiedsontwikkeling (INDIGO; Innovation Network for Sustainable Infrastructure and Area Development).

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Directive for polder areas

Track 2: transverse integration

The second track aims to establish a relationship between the road and its surroundings, which should improve the motorway's integration in the landscape. A survey was carried out to identify the various types of landscape along the A12 Rainbow Route and eleven sub-areas in four different 'milieus' were defined. Design studies for each of these areas resulted in the formulation of eleven directives in a joint document.

Track 3: stimulating area developments

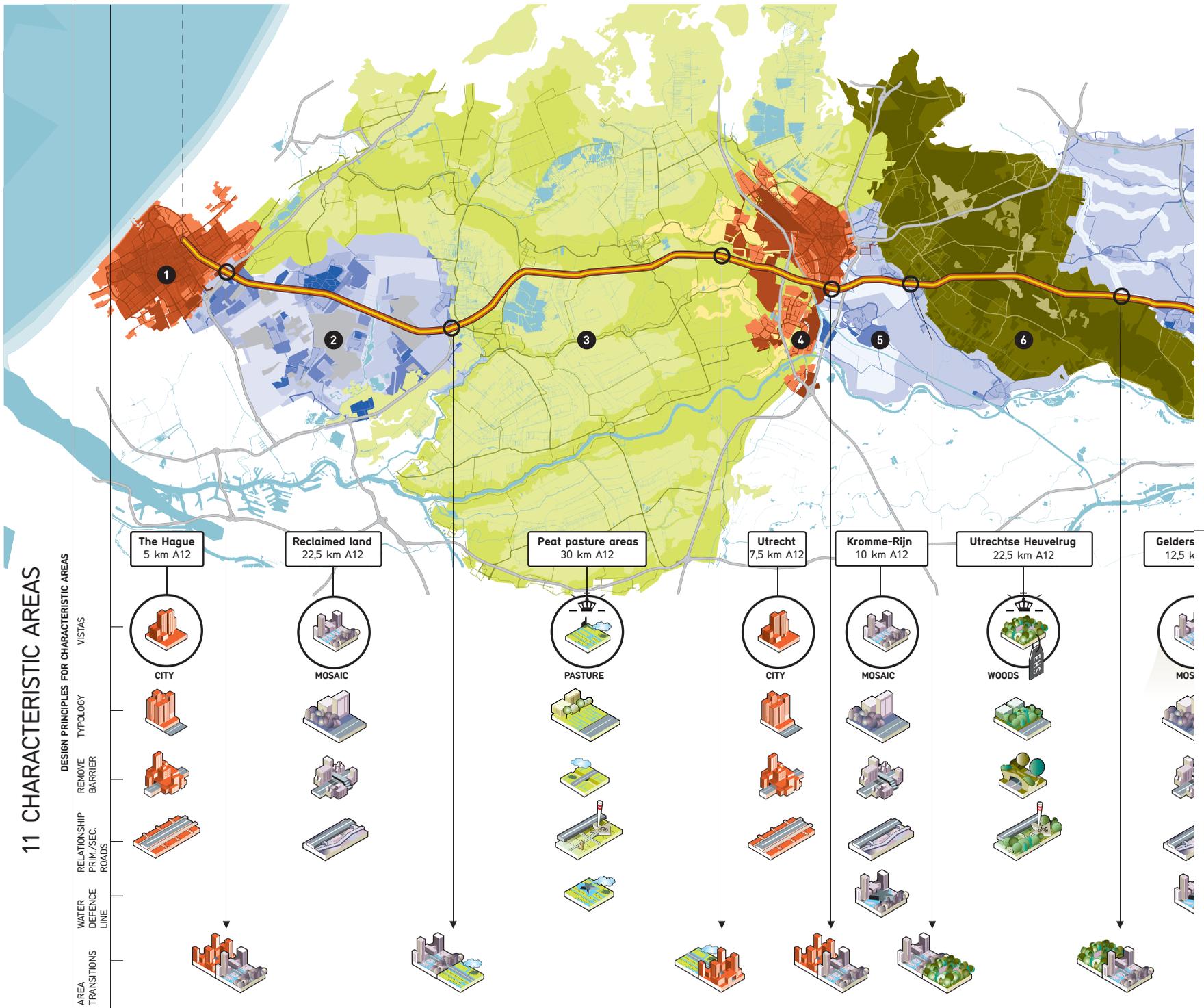
The final track focuses on the individual sub-areas as designated in the landscape analysis. The objective here is to take advantage of infrastructure developments to breathe new life into projects at local and regional level. As part of this process, the centre seeks to exchange ideas with local stakeholders and uses design to articulate shared views and ambitions. These exploratory designs resulted in a series of individual documents outlining a spatial plan for the various sub-areas.

From wrong-way drivers to trailblazers

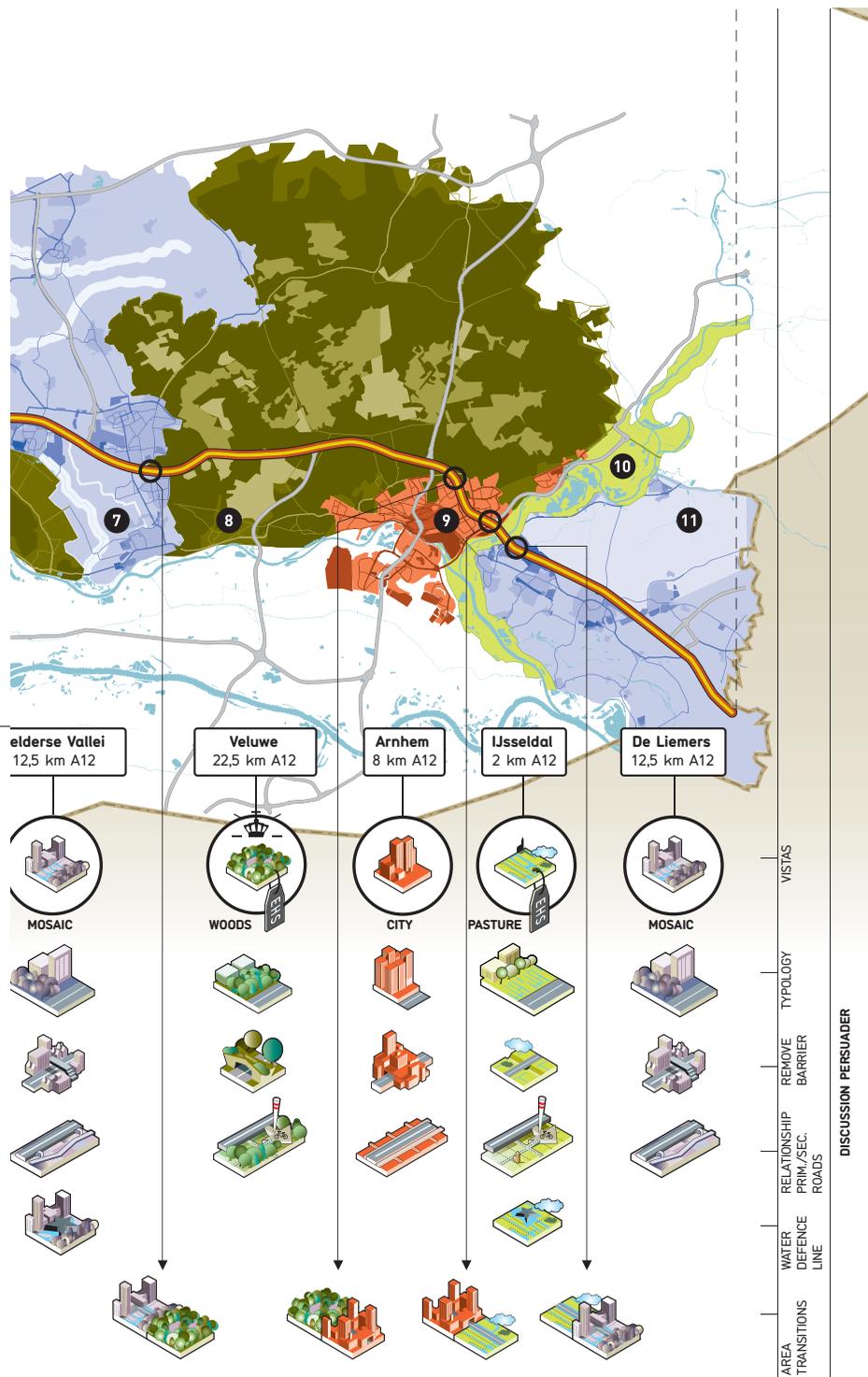
Despite the fact that the centre was strongly embedded in the governmental administration, the former head of the centre, David van Zelm van Eldik, frequently experienced the early years of route design in the Netherlands as 'swimming against the stream'. Whereas in the world of water management an integral approach – or at least the aspiration to have one – appears to be almost universally accepted, a similar transcendence of sectoral boundaries remains the exception for 'dry' infrastructure, even though road infrastructure can be seen as one of the major drivers of economic developments and spatial transformations.

A likely explanation, Van Zelm van Eldik notes, is the fact that water is easily thought of as a regional issue, whereas roads tend to be viewed as linear elements. On top of that, the motorway appears to be in constant conflict with its surroundings and seems to resist any association with beauty or landscape.⁵

This makes it all the more relevant that the centre has learnt that one of route design's key strengths is its mediating capacity.⁶ In contrast to the



Design of the route's surroundings: design principles for the road's environs as a palette of 11 characteristic zones



8. See for example David Hamers, Kersten Nabielek, *Bloeiende bermen. Verstedelijking langs de snelweg*. Rotterdam-The Hague: NAI Publishers-Ruimtelijk Planbureau, 2006; Francine Houben, Luisa Maria Calabrese (eds.), *Mobility. A Room with a View*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003; Tracy Metz, 'Ontwerp een reis', in: Robert Schütte (ed.), *Bouwen aan de snelweg*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2003, pp. 10-23.

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conventional method, in which infrastructural planning processes have increasingly become a legal matter and are cloaked in suspicion and opposition, the design approach, as propagated by the centre, is capable of fostering collaboration and reducing resistance.

A second explanation for route design's success is the considerable dynamism generated by infrastructure planning. Because any developments surrounding the motorway network are propelled by great administrative pressure and huge financial means, this ability to press ahead can also be used for mobilizing actors in area developments that are linked to infrastructure. Besides, due to the many maintenance interventions and road works, the motorway has the character of a permanent project that keeps prompting potential new developments. Van Zelm van Eldik speaks of a 'moving train' that can be boarded anytime to kick-start both new initiatives and processes that have come to a standstill.

Finally, the multilevel aspect of route planning should not go unmentioned, since it is the prime example of a project in which design operates at all levels. From the detailing of street furniture to national mobility problems: each individual element is a link in the overall chain and each intervention has a potential effect on other levels of planning. These dimensions continuously converge in the route design, which assumes a great adaptability on the part of the design instrument.

With its design-driven approach, the Centre for Route Design has in recent years tried to push for a more integrated approach to transport infrastructure developments.⁷ By focusing attention on the spatial context and conditions of these projects, route design has transcended its initially fairly narrow focus on visual appearance and has assumed a more substantial role in establishing a relationship between the road and its surroundings. Route design thus complements the reality of contemporary infrastructural planning, in which the emphasis has shifted from road planning to designing motorway landscapes.⁸