



Rijkswaterstaat
Ministry of Infrastructure
and Water Management

Welcome in Amersfoort

Interreg
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CYCLING WATERWAYS

Cycling Waterways

DMI Centre
March 24, 2026





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Ministry of Infrastructure
and Water Management

Cycling and canals in the Netherlands

A historical perspective

Cycling Waterways

Bert Toussaint, Corporate historian RWS

24 March 2026



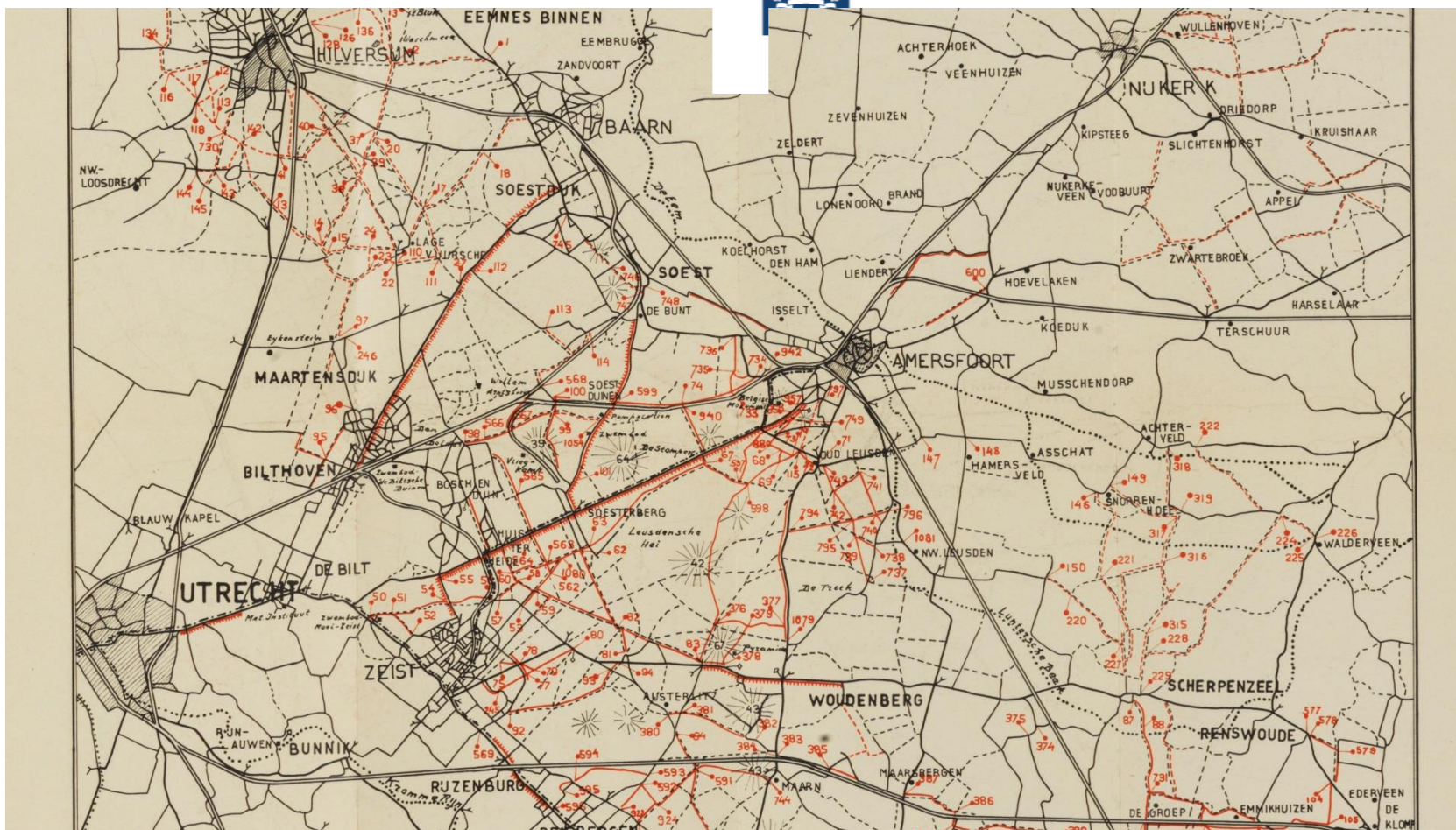
Programme Day 1

- Stefan Grebe Head of Department
- Bert Toussaint - History
- Herbert Tiemens – Utrecht
- Break
- Paolo Ruffino – Reflections on Waterways
- Freek Liek – Cost benefit analysis
- Lunch
- Cycling (until 16.34)



Cycling lane construction

- In 1927 first national highway building scheme
- Substantial funding from bicycle tax
- Tourist Organization ANWB demands cycling lane construction in return
- Separate cycling path construction by RWS (national highways) and provincial roads, including canals, by provinces



Cycling path scheme, Utrecht, 1934





Post-war policies: 1950s/60s

- In 1950s/1960s, provinces continued cycling path construction
- Ministry of Culture and Recreation subsidized cycling path, as a pillar of recreation policy making
- Utilitarian use (as commuters) was not prioritized
- Accommodation of the car had top priority



1970s: activist claim cycling revival

- Protest movement in 60s/70s
- Promotion of cycling as a sustainable transport mode
- No environmental harm
- More cycling paths needed to reduce traffic casualties and injuries
- White bike project: 750 bikes for free public use
- Similar initiatives in Denmark and Switzerland



1980s-2000

- National and local funding continued
- More local cycling path construction
- Continued political support for cycling as a healthy and sustainable transport mode
- Road construction often concomitant with cycling path construction





Cycling campaigns, 1970s

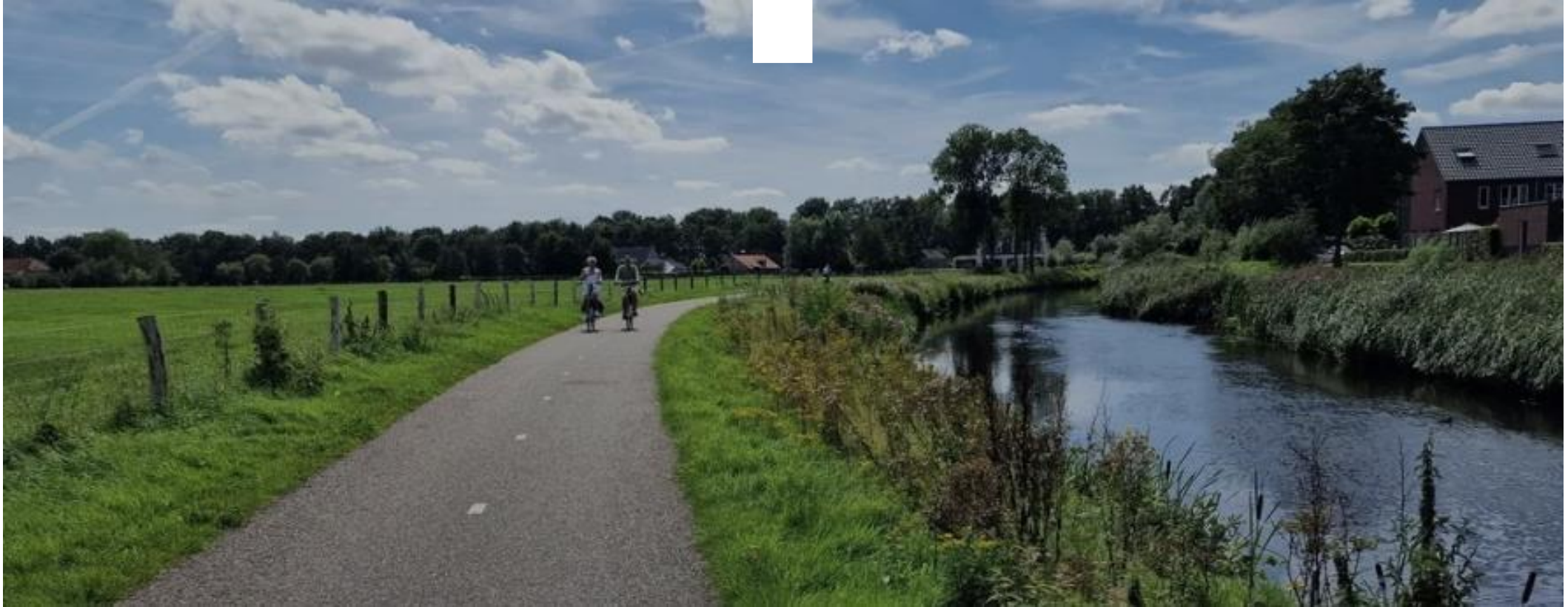
- Tourist organization and Dutch Heart Foundation, 1979
- Support from the royal family



Highway construction with
budget for cycling

Cycling route Midden-
Delfland, along polder canals

Concomitant with
highway construction
A 4



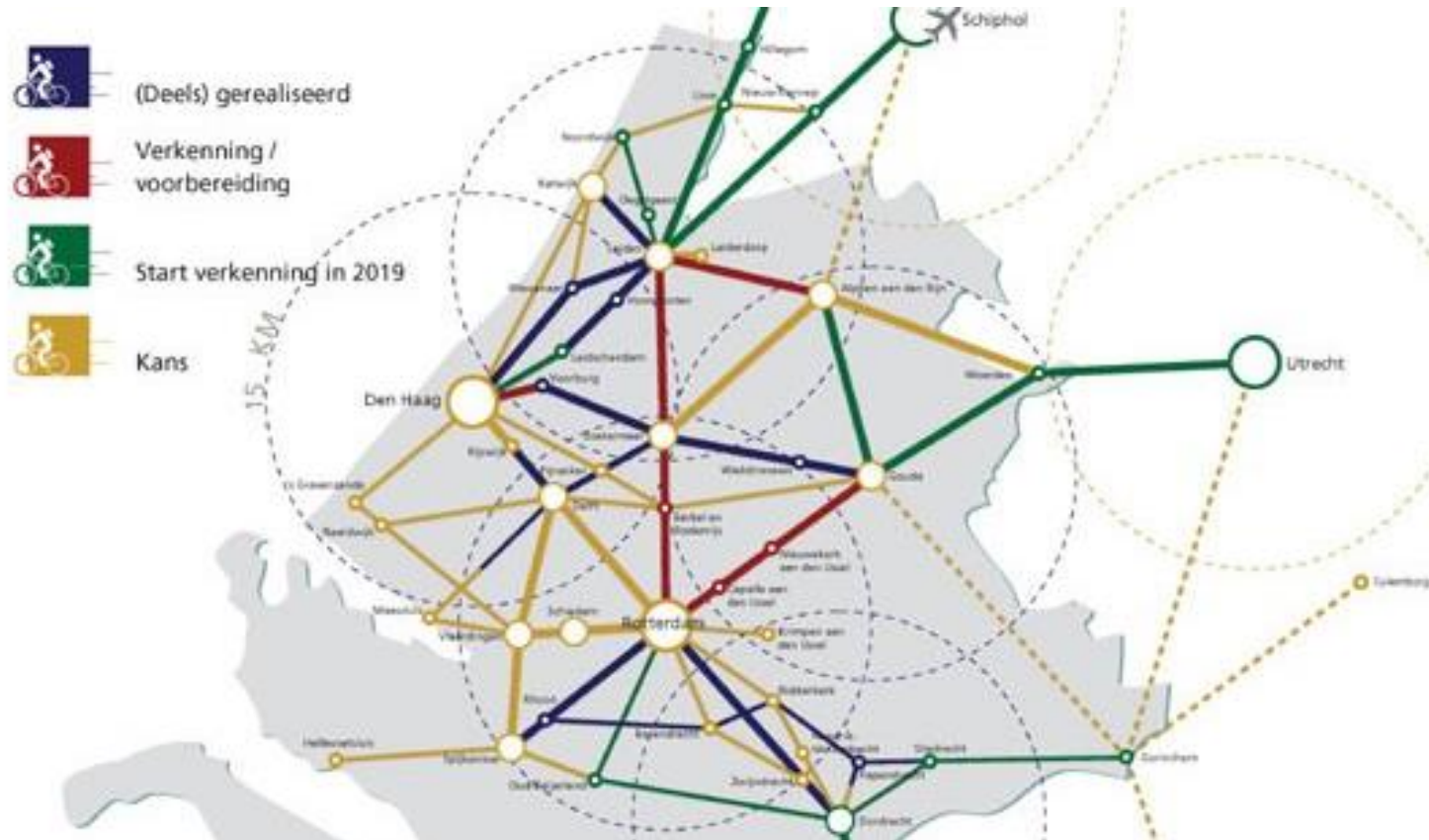
Development und upgrading: Recreational cycling nodes

Cycling path along the Valleikanaal





New national and provincial cycling path schemes, since 2000





Recent projects

Houten, de Staart 2017



Cycling bridges crossing rivers and canals

Cycling bridge crossing the Rhine near Arnhem



New cycling bridge over Rijn-Schiekade canal



Amsterdam- Rhine canal cycling bridge, 2018





Last decade: Cycling highway construction

Havenkanaal, Assen 2024



Conclusion

- Cycling deeply embedded in Dutch society
- Coalition ANWB, RWS, provinces, cities
- Cycling network for utilitarian use and recreational use, since 1960s recreation prime goal, also along canals
- Rebranding biking since 1990s and more cycling path construction as a sustainable and healthy transport mode