



Transport Triumph

ExpatsatHome Essential Guide

Transport Triumph: Your Ultimate Guide to Getting Around Brussels

Welcome to your definitive guide to navigating Brussels! When you first arrive in a new city, the web of metro lines, tram tracks, and bus routes can feel overwhelming. It's easy to feel like an outsider, confused at the platform while everyone else seems to know the secret rules. I've been there, and I promise, it gets easier.

This guide is designed to be your trusted companion, breaking down every aspect of Belgian transport step-by-step. We'll turn confusion into confidence, transforming you from a hesitant newcomer into a savvy local who navigates the city with ease. By the end of this, you won't just know how to get from A to B; you'll have the freedom to explore, be spontaneous, and build your new life here. Let's begin your journey to Transport Triumph.

Your Key to the City: The MOBIB Card

The single most important tool for public transport in Brussels is the MOBIB card. Think of it as your passport to the entire city network.

What is it? The MOBIB card is a plastic, electronic smartcard that you load with tickets or subscriptions. It's not the ticket itself, but the reusable card that holds your travel passes. The standard card is nominative (it has your name and photo on it), but there's also a "MOBIB Basic" card which is anonymous and can be used by anyone (though you can't load season tickets onto it).

Why do you need it? The MOBIB card is the standard for all major public transport operators in Belgium:

- **STIB/MIVB** for Brussels' metro, trams, and buses.
- **SNCB/NMBS** for national trains.
- **De Lijn** for transport in the Flanders region.
- **TEC** for transport in the Wallonia region.

Having one card simplifies travel immensely, especially if you live in Brussels but work or travel in a neighboring region.

How to Get One Getting your first MOBIB card is a rite of passage for any new resident. You can obtain one from any **KIOSK** or **BOOTIK** sales outlet, which are located in most major metro stations.

- The card itself costs **€6** (as of early 2026).
- It is valid for **5 years**.
- You will need to bring your ID card or passport for a personal MOBIB card. They will take a photo of you on the spot.

Loading Your Card: Ticket Options & Prices (2026) Once you have your card, you need to load a travel pass onto it. You have several options, depending on your needs. You can do this at the KIOSK, at a GO vending machine in any station, or via the STIB-MIVB app.

| Ticket Type | Price (2026) | Best For |
|--------------------------|--------------|--|
| 1 Journey | €2.40 | Occasional, one-off trips. Allows unlimited transfers within 60 minutes. |
| 10 Journeys | €16.80 | Regular but not daily travel. A more economical choice than single tickets. |
| 1-Day Pass | €9.50 | Tourists or days with lots of travel across the city. |
| Monthly Pass (STIB/MIVB) | €55.50 | Daily commuters living and working within Brussels. The best value for regular users. |
| Annual Pass (STIB/MIVB) | €583 | Long-term residents who want to set it and forget it for a year. |
| Brupass (Monthly) | €60 | Commuters who need to use STIB, De Lijn, TEC, and SNCB trains within the Brussels-Capital Region. |
| Brupass XL (Monthly) | €84 | Commuters who live just outside the Brussels region and need to travel in. |

💡 Tip: Student Super-Saver! If you are between 18 and 24 years old and are officially registered as a student in Brussels, you are eligible for a school season ticket that costs only **€12 for the entire year**. This is a massive saving and an absolute must-do if you qualify. You'll need an official school attestation to apply.

Mastering the STIB/MIVB Network: Metro, Trams & Buses

The **Société des Transports Intercommunaux de Bruxelles** (STIB) or **Maatschappij voor het Intercommunaal Vervoer te Brussel** (MIVB) is the heart of city transport. It's efficient, extensive, and will be your daily workhorse.

The Metro

The Brussels Metro is clean, fast, and the easiest way to cross the city quickly. It consists of four main lines (1, 2, 5, 6) and two pre-metro lines (underground trams, more on that below). The lines are color-coded and numbered, making them easy to follow on the map.

How to Use It: A Step-by-Step Guide

- Plan Your Route:** Use the official STIB-MIVB app or Google Maps to find the best route. They provide real-time information on schedules and disruptions.
- Enter the Station:** At the station entrance, you'll see electronic gates. Tap your MOBIB card on the red circular validator. You'll hear a "beep" and a green light will flash, opening the gate for you.
- Find Your Platform:** Follow the signs for your line number and the direction of travel (indicated by the name of the last station on the line).
- Board the Train:** Let passengers off before you get on. The doors open and close automatically.
- Exit:** When you arrive at your destination, you can simply walk out. You do not need to validate your card to exit the metro system.

⚠ Important: Always Validate Your Ticket! You must validate your MOBIB card at the start of every journey, even when transferring. This includes tapping on the validation machines inside trams and buses. Plain-clothed inspectors conduct frequent checks, and the fine for not having a validated ticket is steep.

The Trams & “Pre-Metro”

The tram network is even more extensive than the metro, reaching nearly every corner of the city. It's a fantastic way to see the city's beautiful architecture while you travel.

A unique feature of Brussels is the **pre-metro**. These are tram lines that go underground in the city center to avoid traffic, effectively acting like a metro. You'll enter a station just like you would for a metro, but a tram will arrive on the platform. Key pre-metro routes run along the North-South axis through the city center (lines 3 & 4).

The Buses

The bus network fills in all the gaps left by the metro and trams. They are essential for reaching more residential neighborhoods. The **Noctis** night bus network runs on Friday and Saturday nights from midnight until around 3 AM, providing a great option for getting home after a night out.

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The Brussels Metro & Tram Map: A Visual Breakdown

The STIB/MIVB map can look like a colorful spaghetti junction at first glance, but it's logically organized. When you receive your welcome pack, you'll find a physical copy of this map. Pin it to your fridge!

How to Read the Map

- **Solid, Thick Lines:** These are the four main metro lines (1, 2, 5, 6). The color and number correspond to the line.
- **Thinner Lines:** These represent the numerous tram routes.
- **White Circles/Ovals:** These mark the stations. A larger circle or a symbol with interconnected lines indicates a major interchange where you can switch between different metro, tram, or train lines.
- **Station Names:** Names are usually provided in both French and Dutch (e.g., Gare Centrale / Centraal Station).

Key Stations & What's Nearby

- **Gare Centrale / Centraal Station:** Your gateway to the historic heart of Brussels. Alight here for the Grand-Place, Manneken Pis, and the Royal Palace.
- **Schuman:** The center of the European Quarter. This is the stop for the European Commission (Berlaymont) and the European Council.
- **Louise / Louiza:** The main hub for high-end shopping and upscale restaurants.
- **De Brouckère:** Located at the end of the main pedestrian shopping street (Rue Neuve) and close to Place Sainte-Catherine, famous for its seafood restaurants.
- **Gare du Midi / Zuidstation:** The main international train station. This is where you'll catch the Eurostar to London or the Thalys/ICE to Paris, Amsterdam, and Cologne. It's also a major hub for metro, tram, and bus lines.

- **Arts-Loi / Kunst-Wet:** The only station where all four main metro lines intersect, making it a crucial transfer point.

Hitting the Road: Driving and Parking in Brussels

While public transport is excellent, you might still need or want a car. Here's what you need to know about the administrative side of driving.

Exchanging Your Driving License: A Critical Step

This is a non-negotiable task for most expats. The rules depend on where your original license was issued.

For Non-EU License Holders

⚠ Important: You **must** exchange your foreign driving license for a Belgian one within **185 days** (approximately six months) of registering your address at the town hall. After this period, your foreign license is no longer valid for driving in Belgium, and you could face serious penalties if caught.

The process takes 4-6 weeks, so start early! Your original license will be held by the Belgian authorities and will not be returned.

For EU/EEA License Holders Your life is a bit simpler. You can continue using your license until it expires. However, if you have an older paper license or one without an expiry date, you are required to exchange it within two years of registering in Belgium.

The Exchange Process: A Step-by-Step Guide

- 1. Make an Appointment:** Contact your local **Maison Communale / Gemeentehuis** (Town Hall) to book an appointment.
- 2. Gather Your Documents:** You will typically need:
 - Your original, valid driving license.
 - Your Belgian residence permit (E/E+/F/F+ card).
 - A recent passport-sized photograph conforming to ICAO standards.
 - If your license is not in French, Dutch, German or English, a sworn translation may be required.
- 3. Attend Your Appointment:** At the town hall, you will fill out a form and pay a fee, which is typically between **€25-€35**.
- 4. Wait:** It can take several weeks for your Belgian license to be issued. You will receive a letter when it is ready for collection.

Demystifying Brussels Parking

Parking in Brussels is managed by `parking.brussels` and is divided into color-coded zones. The closer to the center, the more restrictive and expensive it is.

| Zone Color | Max. Duration | Key Feature |
|------------|---------------|---|
| Red | 2 hours | High-turnover shopping streets. Most expensive. |
| Orange | 2 hours | Slightly less busy commercial areas. |

| | | |
|--------------|-----------|--|
| Grey | 4.5 hours | Mixed residential/commercial areas in the city center (Pentagon). Paid until 9 PM. |
| Green | Unlimited | Mainly residential areas. Paid during the day, but free for residents with a permit. |
| Blue | 2 hours | Residential areas where you must display a blue parking disc on your dashboard. Free but time-limited. |

💡 **Tip: Get a Resident Parking Permit!** If you own a car and live in Brussels, apply for a resident parking card (*carte de riverain / bewonerskaart*) from your commune. The first card is very affordable (around €10-€30 per year) and allows you to park for free and without time limits in the green and blue zones of your residential sector.

Exploring Belgium: The SNCB/NMBS Train Network

To see the rest of this beautiful country, the train is your best option. The national railway company, **SNCB (in French) / NMBS (in Dutch)**, runs a dense and reliable network connecting Brussels to cities like Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and Liège in about an hour or less.

Main Stations in Brussels

- Brussels-Central (Gare Centrale/Centraal Station):** Best for accessing the city center.
- Brussels-North (Gare du Nord/Noordstation):** Serves the northern business district.
- Brussels-South (Gare du Midi/Zuidstation):** The largest station and the hub for all international high-speed trains.

Ticket Tips

- The SNCB App:** The easiest way to check schedules and buy digital tickets.
- Weekend Ticket:** Offers a 50% discount on a return journey anywhere in Belgium between Friday 7 PM and Sunday evening.
- Go Pass 10:** A pass with 10 single journeys for travelers under 26, making each trip very cheap.
- Rail Pass:** The same concept as the Go Pass, but for travelers 26 and over.

Key Transport Vocabulary

Navigating signs and announcements is easier when you know the key terms.

| English | French | Dutch | Context/meaning |
|-----------------|---------------------|---------------|--|
| Station (Train) | Gare | Station | Used for major train stations. |
| Stop | Arrêt | Halte | Used for bus and tram stops. |
| Ticket | Billet / Ticket | Ticket | A single-use pass. |
| Subscription | Abonnement | Abonnement | A monthly or annual pass. |
| To Validate | Valider / Composter | Valideren | The act of tapping your card to start a journey. |
| Town Hall | Maison Communale | Gemeentehuis | Where you go for administrative tasks like license exchange. |
| One Way | Aller simple | Enkele reis | A ticket for a single direction. |
| Return Trip | Aller-retour | Heen en terug | A ticket for a round trip. |

Laurine's Local Insider Tips

- The STIB-MIVB app is your best friend for real-time information. It will tell you exactly when the next tram is due and alert you to any service disruptions.
- For a scenic route, take Tram 44 from Montgomery towards Tervuren. It travels through the beautiful Sonian Forest (Forêt de Soignes) and feels like a miniature escape from the city.
- Don't be afraid to use the regional operators (De Lijn and TEC) if their routes suit you. A Brupass ticket will cover you for seamless travel across all operators within the Brussels region.
- The train is almost always the fastest and most stress-free way to get to Brussels Airport (BRU). There's a special "Diabolo" fee added to the ticket price for airport travel.
- When you first arrive, take a ride on the full loop of Metro lines 2 and 6. It's a great way to get a sense of the city's geography from below ground, seeing how different neighborhoods connect.

ExpatsatHome.be | Your guide to feeling at home in Brussels