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PRESS RELEASE

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Communication about the Oosterweel connection is failing

Communication about the proposed Oosterweel connection to complete the Antwerp orbital road is failing. Research carried out by Brandhome, the *Gazet van Antwerpen* and the website *Apen.be* shows that no fewer than 50% of Antwerp residents think that the BAM, the organisation seeking to build the link, and Mayor Patrick Janssens have communicated poorly or very poorly. The protest groups *stRatengeneraal* and *Ademloos* were rated highly by the respondents, with 50% stating that they have communicated well to very well.

The big loser in the Oosterweel Link is the 'Beheersmaatschappij Antwerpen Mobiel' or BAM – the organisation responsible for drawing up the plans and seeking government approval to execute them. Mayor Janssens shared in the criticism, receiving a clear 'unsatisfactory' rating for his communication. The study found that only voters for his own SP.a (Socialist) party took a more forgiving view of him. Groen! (Green) voters were overwhelmingly positive about the protest groups, but were crushing in their rejection of the BAM's communication. Overall, the BAM and Janssens received a poor rating among all respondents.

Inadequate communication

'The reason Janssens scored so badly is because people blame him for suddenly shifting his position,' Brandhome's Erik Saelens concludes. 'The BAM's poor score reflects the fact that its communication strategy took insufficient account of the need to create buy-in among the different target groups. Projects like this require you to communicate effectively with the wider community. Communication helps identify common ground among the different points of view. The BAM failed to do that, despite the huge budget it allocated to communication. Fundamental communication errors confirmed the picture of the BAM painted by the protest groups, which steadily increased sympathy for those groups as the underdog. The BAM has suffered immense image and reputational damage. The question is whether it will be possible to repair that damage, regardless of the outcome of the upcoming referendum on the plans.'

Large budget no guarantee of success

'The study results show that a big communication budget doesn't necessarily bring success,' Saelens continues. 'In today's society, spending huge amounts on communication won't automatically translate into people accepting your point of view. Protest groups like stRatengeneraal and Ademloos did achieve that, by contrast, and with very limited resources. The power of their communication is huge. They present an idea rather than a solution, which is a big difference.'

Janssens damaged, BAM in crisis

'The once seemingly impregnable 'Patrick Janssens' brand has been damaged. But we know from experience that brands that suffer damage can come out of it stronger than before. Perhaps Janssens realised that in time, which is why he shifted his position, lining up as mayor with the mass of local people. The BAM brand won't get away with it to the same extent: it's a textbook example of a brand in crisis. The BAM has lost the essential element of a brand – trust. Because of inadequate communication, the BAM brand has become synonymous with negative value associations.'

The study was carried out online via www.apen.be. Over 3,000 Flemish people completed the questionnaire between 24 September and 9 October.

Brandhome is a communication agency that works according to a unique and effective brand-building methodology, the Brandhome method®. The agency's key goals include constantly increasing brand knowledge. Brandhome is headquartered in Antwerp, Belgium.

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Note for editors, not for publication:

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