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## The first railway

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1839

## The first railway

### Acceleration

On 20 September 1839, the first railway line in the Netherlands was opened with a festive celebration. The steam locomotive “*De Arend*” took twenty-five minutes to travel from Amsterdam to Haarlem. A lot of people were not impressed: the train went too fast and made much too much noise. Was this novelty really necessary and was it safe? Near Ghent at the beginning of the same year, the steam boiler of a departing train had exploded. This innovation was doomed to failure and after all, barges were a fine mode of transport, weren’t they?

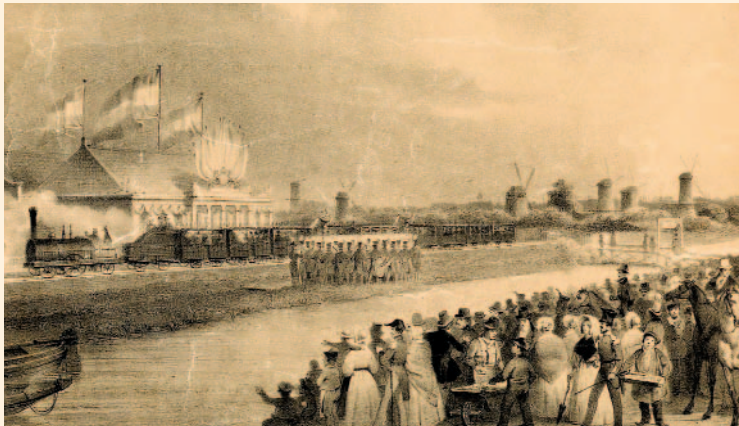
Despite all the initial scepticism, the first train heralded a time of enormous change. The Amsterdam-Haarlem line was quickly extended into what became known as the “*Old Line*” running from Amsterdam to Rotterdam. Work on the

second major rail link began in 1843, connecting Amsterdam with Utrecht. More lines followed, all run by different railway operators. By about 1900, the train had become the most important mode of transport in the Netherlands.

Today, it is hard to imagine the enormous changes the railways brought about in Dutch society. Before the arrival of the railways, travelling cost a great deal of time. It was too expensive for most people and was sometimes dangerous. In terms of travelling time, the railways made the Netherlands much smaller. The improved links and travel comfort contributed greatly to the unification of the country: people from different regions came into contact with one another more often and the state was able to better organise its national territory.

The railway network was a pre-condition for the industrialisation of the Netherlands, which only really took off after 1870. Raw materials, products and workers too all had to be transported. In its turn, industrialisation contributed to the further expansion of the railway network. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Netherlands had a dense railway network. In the thirties, however, many lines

were closed – particularly local ones. In 1938, all the lines were incorporated into one nationalised company: NV Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS) that continued to exist until the reorganisation of 1995. The state and all kinds of lobby organisations are still actively involved in the now privatised NS and its services. This indicates that railways have remained a vital component of Dutch society.



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## Sub-topics

### Primary education sector

Traffic and transport (from barges to trains and further)  
Steam engines and steam trains

### Secondary education sector

Infrastructure in the Netherlands, also from the European perspective  
The English Industrial Revolution  
The industrialisation of the Netherlands  
Mobility issues

### Past and Present

What are the advantages and disadvantages of public transport versus private transport?  
Railways today (compare nineteenth-century and modern-day travelling times)  
The Netherlands: from trading nation to industrialisation and back again?

### In the Treasure Chest

An old model train, preferably “De Arend”  
The first Amsterdam-Haarlem ticket  
Steam engine

## References

### Places to Go

Utrecht: Spoorwegmuseum  
Utrecht: Mobilion  
Brussels: Belgian Railways Museum

### Books for young people

Arend van Dam, *Complot op het spoor* (9+)

### Background literature

Guus Veenendaal, “Haarlem: Centraal Station. De eerste spoorweg in Nederland” in Jan Bank and Marita Mathijsen, *Plaatsen van herinnering. Nederland in de negentiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 2006

### Websites

[www.kinderpleinen.nl/spoorwegen.html](http://www.kinderpleinen.nl/spoorwegen.html)  
[www.spoorwegen.startkabel.nl/k/spoorwegen/index.php?nr=1](http://www.spoorwegen.startkabel.nl/k/spoorwegen/index.php?nr=1)  
[www.ns.nl](http://www.ns.nl)