

Project Sluis

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A while ago, my good modelling acquaintance Lex Hoogesteger asked me to build a joint tramway project with him. His wife was born in the village of Retranchement, and she and her parents lived together with her parents in the coastal town of Sluis (close to the Belgian border) for quite some time. My friend and his wife still regularly come to Sluis. This is how they met someone familiar with the history of the town, and recently received a nice photo book from him: "SLUIS AS IT USED TO BE... in old postcards". After some research on my part I found out that a steam tramway had existed, the "STOOMTRAM BRESKENS-MALDEGEM" (SBM), which operated a branch line from Draaibrug through Sluis to St. Anna ter Muiden (Belgian border).

First we decided which part of Sluis we wanted to represent and in what time frame. After studying the photos in the book, we opted for part of Sluis near the harbour and quayside, partly because there were more tram movements there than elsewhere in the town. There was a passing loop, a water tank and coaling stage there, as well as a siding for the customs office where freight wagons were cleared. Furthermore, a hotel that has served as a "statie" (= tram stop); we chose the customs office of the time as the central theme in the diorama, which included a jetty for the ferry from Bruges, directly opposite this office, where passengers had to pass immigration.

Below is the layout drawn as we have in mind, which is currently at an advanced stage. Fiddle yards and passing loops have been created next to and behind the actual diorama, so that occasionally another steam tram can be shown on the visible part of the model tramway. Even on the visible part of the track, two trams into different directions can pass each other, only one of which can run at a time as the other waits for it to return from its run behind the scene. It is also possible to shunt goods wagons here bound for the customs office or the Central hotel at the 'Statie' (Flemish for station).

None of the buildings on the layout is available from a known model manufacturer, so in most cases it will amount to scratchbuilding. The ferry and the harbour tug will come from my RTM layout "Mouburg"; the half model of the barge to the right of the harbour is yet to be built. The row of houses on the right - in the front of the layout - have an open back, so that the viewer can look inside the different rooms of the houses. These must of course be provided with a suitable interior.

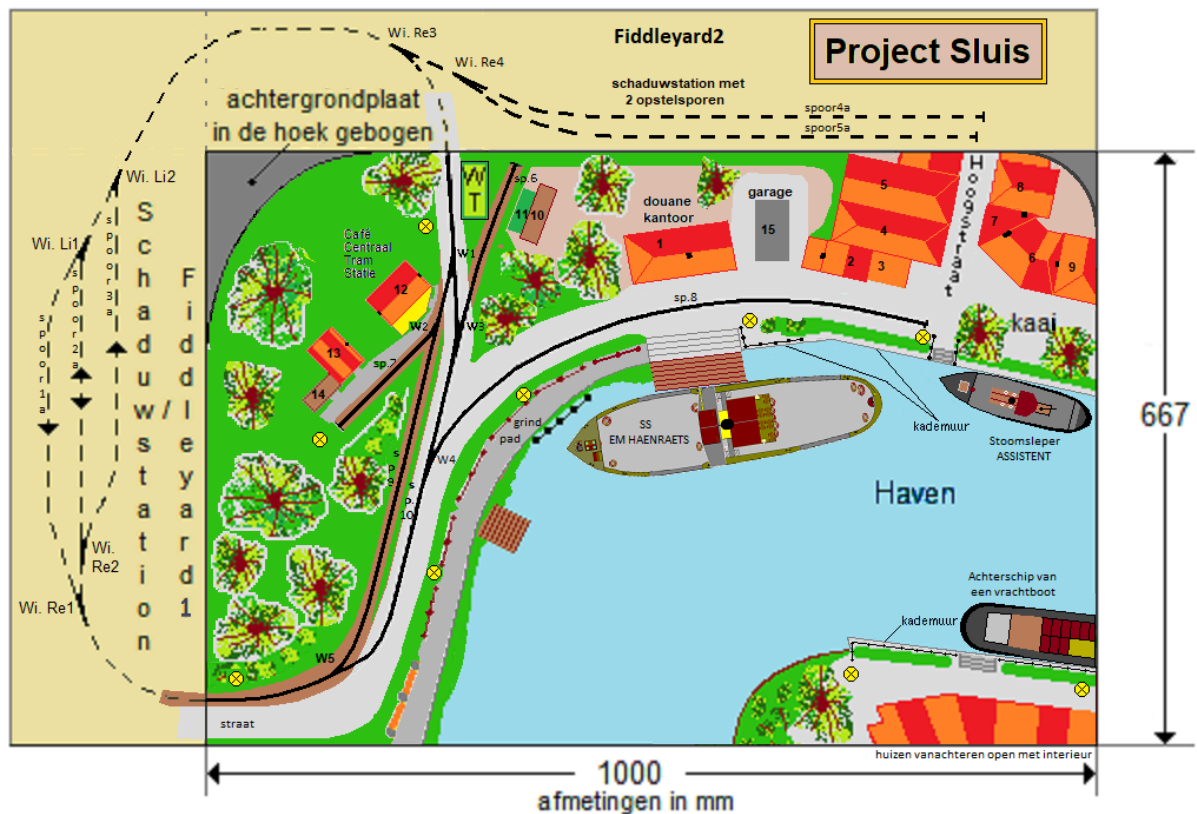


Fig 1 plan of the Sluis steam tramway with harbour, quay and customs office.

Although the SBM naturally used many steam tram locomotives from the Belgian manufacturer Tubize, which I think are so ugly they have become pretty again, but being Dutch, we have opted for steam tram locomotives by Backer & Rueb, the type with the large front and rear window, similar to "OOIEVAAR" of the HTM in The Hague. At least two similar locomotives served the SBM, i.e. № 4 AARDENBURG and № 5 SLUIS. The SBM was a metre-gauge tram line, which in H0 scale (1:87) translates into H0m (12 mm gauge). However, we have opted for a narrower variety H0e (9 mm gauge). The reason for this is that I already had a lot of H0e equipment and that any steam locomotives that I could build myself could be fitted with 9 mm N gauge chassis, which I have a large stock of.

Below are drawings of two Backer & Rueb steam tram locomotives with the large front and rear windows, similar to the prototype locomotives № 4 AARDENBURG and № 5 SLUIS. The image is drawn in actual size and can serve as a template.

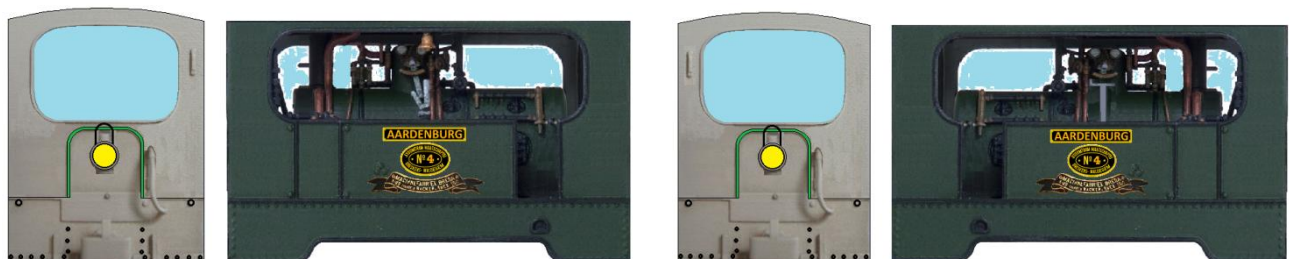


Fig 2 / 3 Front and side view of steam tram locomotive № 4 of the Breskens-Maldegem tramway; this is how the steam tram locomotive № 4 AARDENBURG will look..

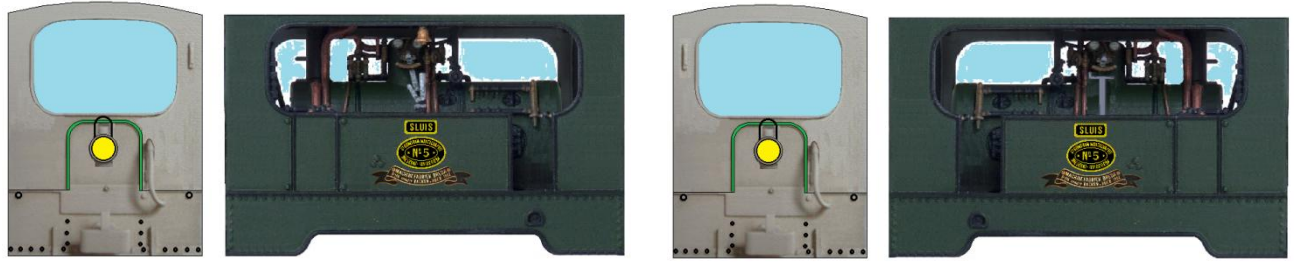


Fig 4 / 5 Front and side view of steam tram locomotive № 5 of the Breskens-Maldegem tramway; this is how steam tram locomotive № 5 SLUIS will look.

The length of the side walls is adapted to the length of the chassis of the donor locomotive, the 2-axle steam locomotive 7000 in scale N (1: 160) by Fleischmann Piccolo. The narrow gauge steam tram locomotive is built in H0 scale with a track gauge of 9 mm (H0e). The walls of the body are cut from plain Evergreen plastic sheet with a thickness of 0.25 mm according to the drawings above. For a complete construction description of these locomotives, please refer to the building descriptions of locomotives № 4 AARDENBURG and № 5 SLUIS, elsewhere in my project pages.

Both steam locomotives have now been realised in the maintenance workshop in my home at Bergen op Zoom. Below are pictures of both locomotives shown on my layout "Uivernest" and a picture of № 4 AARDENBURG on the track at Sluis.



Photo 1 Both steam tram locomotives at Uivernest.



Photo 2 Loco AARDENBURG at Sluis (under construction)

Note that the carriages don't belong to the Sluis project.

As mentioned before, the former customs office is the focal point of the diorama; this is currently the only building that still exists and today it serves as a cafeteria, called l'Empereurke (translates as 'the little Emperor'). To the left of this building is now a large roundabout, while on the right in the years after the Second World War all "new" buildings have appeared. This means that we can only find all buildings in old photos. To date, we have not been able to obtain original drawings of buildings, surroundings and track plan. All buildings still have to be (home) made; only the track plan has already been realised on the layout and both fiddleyards, see photo 3 below.

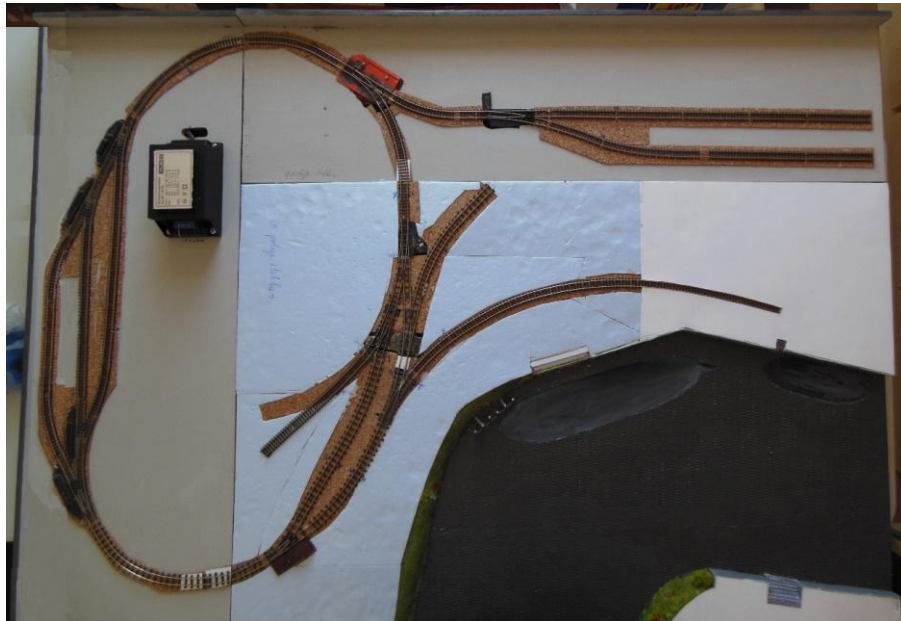


Photo 3 Only the rails have been laid; left fiddle yard 1, above fiddleyard 2

But after I wrote this, we have already proceeded a bit further with the project and built a number of buildings using old photos using all kinds of roof and wall plates, not to mention Evergreen's material. That has resulted in the following photos made in mid-May 2020.



Photo 4 Overview photo of the entire runway with the Sluis quay



Photo 5 The steam tram at the passing loop at the "Statie" and the shop. Carriage still under construction.



Photos 6 and 7 The buildings at the back right of the track on the Hoogstraat

Recently we have asked Ronald Visser of AlsaCast (resin model building, such as Artitec and Tilly Models) whether he would like to make the customs office for us as a resin building kit. To this end we have sent him a number of (old) photos of the object and he is currently very busy with this.