

Cecilia Beatriz Raffa

Doctora en Ciencias Sociales, investigadora Independiente en el Instituto de Ciencias Humanas, Sociales y Ambientales (INCHUSA), Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET), Mendoza, Argentina, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5109-2679>
craffa@mendoza-conicet.gob.ar

Pablo Federico Ricardo Bianchi-Palomares

Arquitecto. Becario de finalización de doctorado en el Instituto de Ciencias Humanas, Sociales y Ambientales (INCHUSA), Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) - Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9941-3881>
pfrbianchi@yahoo.com

Public architecture: The First State Bus Terminal for Mendoza (Argentina, 1969-1972)

ARQUITECTURA PÚBLICA: LA PRIMERA TERMINAL DE ÓMNIBUS ESTATAL PARA MENDOZA (ARGENTINA, 1969- 1972)

ARQUITETURA PÚBLICA: O PRIMEIRO TERMINAL RODOVIÁRIO ESTADUAL DE MENDOZA (ARGENTINA, 1969-1972)



Figure 0 Panoramic photo of the Terminal. Source: Personal archives of architect Gilberto Olguín (1972).

RESUMEN

Las arquitecturas para el transporte y la movilidad tuvieron, entre las décadas del sesenta y setenta, un período de profusa ejecución en Argentina, impulsadas por un contexto político que propugnaba el desarrollo en todas sus formas. Programas y tecnologías innovadoras fueron empleados en una tipología que suponía desafíos en términos resolutivos para los profesionales de la época. Entre las numerosas obras que se construyeron en el país, el presente artículo destaca el proyecto de la Terminal de Ómnibus para Mendoza, una de las primeras construidas en una capital provincial que, planificada en 1964, llegó a inaugurarse en 1972, después de un acotado lapso de construcción. A partir de la consulta de publicaciones técnicas de época, documentación gráfica del proyecto, prensa, labores de gobierno y una entrevista al proyectista principal de la obra, este texto en clave histórica, busca detenerse en las particularidades de la ideación y ejecución de este hito urbano, reflejo local del grado de avance en materia de tecnología y técnicas constructivas, como también de la capacidad ejecutiva del Estado provincial.

Palabras claves: estaciones de ómnibus, prefabricación, edificios para el transporte, arquitectura pública, ciudades capitales.

ABSTRACT

The architecture for transportation and mobility had, between the sixties and seventies, an intensive period of execution in Argentina, driven by a political context that advocated for development in all its forms. Innovative programs and technologies were used in a typology that posed challenges in resolution terms for the professionals of the time. Among the numerous works that were built in the country, this article highlights the Mendoza Bus Terminal project, one of the first built in a provincial capital that, planned in 1964, was inaugurated in 1972, after a short construction period. From the review of technical publications of the time, graphic documentation of the project, press clippings, government work, and an interview with the site's main designer, this text, in historical terms, seeks to delve into the particular aspects of the ideation and execution of this urban landmark, a local reflection of the degree of progress in terms of technology and construction techniques, and the executive capacity of the provincial State.

Keywords: bus stations, prefabrication, transport buildings, public architecture, capital cities.

RESUMO

As arquiteturas de transporte e mobilidade tiveram entre os anos de 1960 e 1970 um período de profusa execução na Argentina, impulsionado por um contexto político que defendia o desenvolvimento em todas as suas formas. Foram utilizados programas e tecnologias inovadoras em uma tipologia que impôs desafios em termos de resolutividade para os profissionais da época. Entre as inúmeras obras construídas no país, o presente artigo destaca o projeto do Terminal Rodoviário de Mendoza, um dos primeiros construídos em uma capital provincial que, planejado em 1964, foi inaugurado em 1972, após um curto período de construção. A partir da consulta de publicações técnicas da época, documentação gráfica do projeto, imprensa, obra governamental e uma entrevista com o principal idealizador da obra, este texto em chave histórica busca deter-se nas particularidades da concepção e execução deste marco urbano, reflexo local do grau de progresso em termos de tecnologia e técnicas de construção; bem como da capacidade executiva do Estado provincial.

Palavras-Chave: rodoviárias, pré-fabricação, edifícios para transporte, arquitetura pública, capitais.

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on architectural programs designed to facilitate State-led land territorial displacements. The focus is on a specific case within the production of public architecture: the Bus Terminal for the province of Mendoza¹, to understand its production logic in a developmentalist political context and to compare it to other architectures projected for the same program that was being planned/ executed simultaneously in other parts of Argentina. A typology is sought that cross-references the concepts of transport and mobility, understanding mobility as a *performance* (social practice) in the territory, and transport as the means or vector that makes that movement (Gutiérrez, 2012, p. 65).

The Terminal is part of a set of projects that were materialized within the framework of an intended territorial integration, developmentalist economic-political ideas, changes in the industrialization of construction, and renewed design processes (Müller, Shmidt & Parera, 2020). Work was carried out on mobility-related programs fostered by the great strides experienced by the transport of passengers and cargo by air and land, and the consequent decline of the railway system: several bus terminals were designed and built throughout the country, in addition to airports. These policies, based on the premises that the Alliance for Progress² projected for Latin America, were also complemented with support for tourism (Carsen & García Bossio, 2020). The application of new technologies and design logic is made legible in the proposals for the typology addressed, particularly regarding the possibilities of functional flexibility. Some of the projects arose from national tenders, others were developed within state technical offices. The latter is the case of Mendoza, whose Terminal was designed by the Province's Directorate of Architecture and Planning (DAyP, in Spanish), part of the Ministry of Public Works and Services (MOySP, in Spanish), joining the modernization processes that were taking place nationally.

The study of architecture generated by/for the State in Argentina has, in general, been immersed in the general history of the area. It is from relatively recent works that this cataloging has acquired its own space. The research linked to the topic of transport is specifically oriented to the development of infrastructure³ (Ballent, 2005; Piglia, 2019; Zunino, Grustchesky & Piglia, 2021; Raffa & Luis, 2020). Other papers specify, in different concepts, the identification of aspects of the Argentine architectural culture contemporary to the execution of our case study (Shmidt, 2014; 2016; Müller & Parera, 2016; Müller, Shmidt & Parera, 2020) or the infrastructure linked to energy (Costa, 2016; 2020). To a lesser extent, it is possible to find works that have focused on the architectures associated with communications/regional displacements of terminals for the land transport of people and goods (Scherer, 1983; 1985)⁴. The works carried out by the State in the mid-sixties show the interest in modernization in the so-called "developmental era", characterized in political terms by a succession

1 Mendoza is an intermediate-scale province, located in the center-west of the Argentine Republic.

2 This is the economic aid plan promoted by the United States for Latin American countries, which sought to finance "development" by building affordable housing, eliminating illiteracy, increasing access to drinking water, improving productivity, etc.

The main action points were:

a) Agricultural production and export; b) Housing; c) Means of transport and communications; and d) Public development and administration (Carsen & García Bossio, 2020, p. 200).

3 "Infrastructure" comprises a set of elements, endowments, or services needed for the proper functioning of a country, a city, or any organization, such as bridges, roads, tunnels, pipelines, etc. (Bianchi, 2022a).

4 As an exception, the profuse bibliography on railway architecture on a national scale can be mentioned, among which the work of Jorge Tartarini (2000) stands out.

of confined democracies and de facto governments between 1960 and 1972. This is probably the last moment of the 20th century where the State functioned as a promoter of major works and plans, a situation marked by full recognition of “modern architecture” from the technical and political ones (Liernur, 2001). Developmentalism was a difficult period in terms of political and social aspects (political instability, social upheaval, and bids for formal and real power), but it was also a cycle that triggered regional projections associated with public works that had a positive impact from a development and modernization point of view. The development process focused on the substitute industrialization of intermediate and durable consumer goods, where the increase in demand was ensured by investment, public spending, and consumption from high-income urban social strata (Auyero & Hobert, 2007). Seeking to “reach the first world”, the State at its various scales began to promote policies aimed at improvements in equipment and infrastructure, regional connectivity, and the installation of heavy industry (Liernur, 2001). It was from planning processes that medium- and long-term plans (economic, urban, etc.) were fostered, to broadly transform and modernize the country’s structures⁵.

Based on the consultation of technical publications of the time, graphic documentation of the project, government work, press clippings, and an interview with the main designer of the Terminal, this article - anchored in Cultural History - seeks to position inquiries that break the paradigm of the national aspect, as a research horizon. The histories of each province appear as necessary to really complete the Argentine map of architecture, to understand contexts and producers, and even to emphasize the contingency and autonomy of these manifestations or their dependence on the centers (Raffa, 2020).

The passenger transport system

During the first third of the 20th century, the foundations of public motorized transport systems were laid in the province (Moyano, 1997) and the rest of the country. In fact, between 1900 and 1930 taxi, bus, and shared taxi services were launched. The bus would appear in Mendoza in 1914. The poor condition of the roads was one of the main obstacles to the development of this new form of motorized transport. Fuel supply was another issue, until the foundation of **Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales** (YPF) in 1922, which opened the doors to the long history of crude oil extraction and refining in the country.

Throughout the 1930s, the relevance of motorized collective transport increased, benefited by the available fuel and the improvements in the road network. In this regard, the statistics of the Provincial Directorate of Highways showed progress in the construction systems used, which optimized the network with paving: by 1931, only 1% of the roads were paved (asphalted or concreted), and by 1942 this percentage had risen to 8% (Raffa and Luis, 2020). In those years,

⁵ Part of this process was guided through the creation of development plans formulated by the National Development Council (CONADE) which, starting in 1962, institutionalized planning as a discipline (Jáuregui, 2015).

the first collective transport companies were consolidated, such as the *Compañía Internacional de Transportes Automóviles SA* (CITA) and the *Compañía Argentina de Transportes Automóviles* (CATA) which, in addition to intercity trips, connected the province with Buenos Aires, San Juan, and Chile. Other companies linked the capital with the eastern part of the urbanized area (Villa Nueva, Colonia Segovia, Corralitos, and districts of the department of Maipú) and with the departments of the southern zone (General Alvear and San Rafael). By the 1940s, there were 66 lines dedicated to interdepartmental passenger transport (Giménez Puga, 1940).

As for the location of the bus stops, the short- and mid-distance passenger lines arrived and departed from different points of the city, since they used the workshops or coachworks that the companies had as garages. Some years later, the stop for all the companies was moved to Las Heras Avenue, in the center of the city, which caused serious traffic problems in the area. Among other causes, this situation encouraged CITA to build its own terminal around 1940, near the heart or zero-kilometer point of Mendoza, which operated until the inauguration of the new Terminal, in 1972 (Bianchi, 2022b). From 1950, it was increasingly evident that the competition between trains and buses regarding intercity passenger transport was beginning to be won by the latter. This produced a modification in the structure of transport flows that changed from railways to buses⁶. By 1971, the provincial government, led by comptroller Francisco Gabrielli (1970-1972), had allocated funds together with the Nation for the widening and conditioning of provincial and interprovincial routes, increasing the road network to more than 10,000 km (Provincial Government, 1971, p. 15)

⁶ This phenomenon also occurred in other southern cone countries, such as Brazil, and was replicated in cargo transportation where trucks displaced the railway. A similar process also took place between 1950 and the beginning of the 1960s, when vehicle numbers in Argentina grew by more than 100 % (Nuñez & Ortega, 2016, p. 11).

⁷ The project for Luján was won by the studio of Juan José Llauro and José Antonio Urgell; for Tandil, by Jorge D'Elía, Roberto Ferreira, Tomás García, Elsa López, Roberto Ramírez, and Williams Simioni; for the town of Azul, the proposal of the Antonini, Schön, Zemborain and associates Studio was chosen; while for Monte Hermoso, it was Álvaro Arrese and Luis Caporossi (Schere, 1985).

A Terminal for Mendoza

The issue of land communication began to be, as was mentioned, of interest to the State on its various scales. Regional connectivity was understood in the political context as a condition for economic development. The construction of the different Bus Terminals was not planned as the regional structuring of the railway system had been. These were, in any case, individual development projects, carried out according to the need or scale of the locality or city where the decision was made to locate them and that, for the most part, had as background, stations built by the private transport lines running in each place. During the 1960s, the projects for mid-scale Terminals were put out to tender, in the Buenos Aires towns of Luján (1960), Tandil (1965), Azul (1966), and Monte Hermoso (1967), among others⁷; and in regional cities such as the one planned for the city of Santa Fe, projected by the province's Ministry of Public Works. The Córdoba Terminal, whose project dates back to 1970, also devised by the state technical teams was added to the list, in this case, from the provincial Architecture Directorate. A year later, buildings were designed for the towns of Venado Tuerto in Santa Fe, and Puerto Iguazú in Misiones. Both

works are part of a tourism plan carried out by an ad-hoc team of the FAU-UBA, comprising the architects Jorge Moscato and Rolando Schere (Müller, Shmidt & Parera, 2018). In most cases, the solutions were linear, based on extended sites on the available land, connected by open galleries. The exclusive material was concrete, usually pre-molded.

It is in this context that, in 1964, based on a project presented by Congressman Tomás Guillot, the proposal to build a Terminal suitable for what the province of Mendoza needed, arose. At that time, a bicameral commission was formed to deal with the issue and the location was established. Its surface area was then extended along with the general characteristics of what it should contain (The year of the decision, 1972). Five years later, the then director of the DAYP, architect Juan Carlos Rogé, suggested a national tender for the project, an idea that was rejected by the political-military leadership that determined, on one hand, the formation of an advisory committee, and on the other, that the project's decision would be left in the hands of a team from the same state body, which in a span of four months had to have completed the proposal, as well as all the executive documentation for its call to tender. The Advisory Commission, whose main mission was to establish the program of needs for the building to be built, was made up of representatives from different divisions. For the Provincial Highways Directorate, the engineer Robello participated; and for DAYP, the architects Raúl Panelo Gelly and Gilberto Olguín⁸ were hired to coordinate the project. They were joined by Engineer Negri, as a representative of the Provincial Directorate of Transit and Transport (Olguín, 2022). The team of designers led by Olguín included the architects Miguel Ángel Guisasola, Osvaldo Cocconi, and Hugo Alba, all members of the permanent staff of DAYP⁹. The structural calculation was led by the engineer Agustín Reboredo, who was also part of the state agency. Meanwhile, the work's technical direction fell upon Olguín himself and the engineers David Dimov, Pedro Portillo, and Benjamín Mathus (La terminal de omnibus de Mendoza, 1976, p. 30).

The works began on July 1st, 1970, and were completed in February 1972. They were paid for with the issuance of internal public bonds. The total budget of the works amounted to \$1,400,000,000 (Provincial Government, 1971, p. 47). Once inaugurated, via Law 3832/72, it was established that a Board (created alongside the Terminal's director) would be in charge of the administration of the new Bus Terminal. It would report to the MOYSP, and had among its responsibilities, the organization, management, and control of the services offered, as well as public transport services in its area, and the commercial operations conducted onsite. This law also established the mandatory use of the facilities for any natural or legal person who provided public transport services in the province (regular, national, and international)¹⁰. This disarticulated any action of transport companies outside state control and also entailed a series of State obligations for them, including the

⁸ Graduated from the University of Buenos Aires in 1962. In 1967, he was called to work in the design team who developed a standardized design for urban and rural schools. He was part of teams that competed and won projects for the Social Welfare Bank (1969) and the building for the Municipality of the City of Mendoza (1965-1969) (Raffa, 2019, p. 213).

⁹ Data on the professional background of the rest of the participating architects can be found in Raffa (2017; 2019).

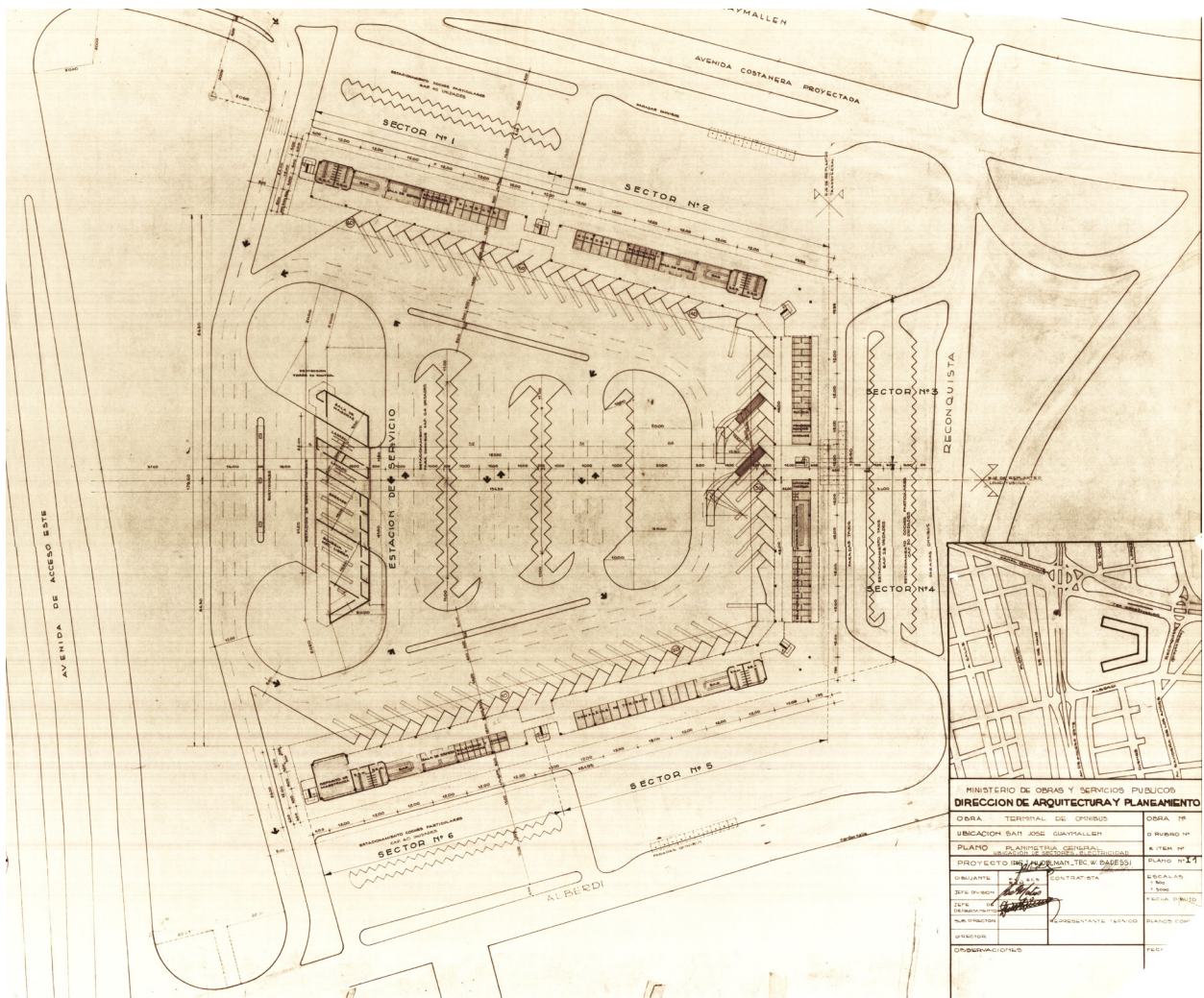
¹⁰ The inauguration was made under the (de facto) governorship of Felix Gibbs. The events were attended by President Agustín Lanusse (The year of the decision, 1972, p. 2).



Figure 1. Panoramic photo of the Terminal. Source: Personal archives of architect Gilberto Olguín (1972).

payment of fees (general and for platform use), subjection to safety, health, or morality inspections, and even the possibility of receiving fines. One of the main companies that began to have the Terminal as its headquarters was the old CITA, which in 1960 had changed its corporate composition to a cooperative, called **Transportes Automotores de Cuyo Ltda.** (TAC), an association that had about 50% of the trips that departed by land to and from Mendoza, until late in the last decade of the 20th century.

Now, what were the characteristics of the project for the Mendoza Terminal? The land chosen to build the project was the site of the old Guaymallén Fair, to the east of the regional capital, delimited by Acceso Este Avenue, Reconquista Street, Costanera Avenue, and Alberdi Street. A strip of land was annexed to the original property to the east, which required the expropriation of several properties, reaching a total of 5 and a half hectares of available surface. Although the site was considered to be far from the downtown area, it had the benefit of having a fast connection with important interprovincial roads, because it was adjacent to the junction of two primary avenues, National Routes 40 and 7 (Figure 1).



The site, where horizontality prevailed, sought the greatest efficiency in the internal circulation of the units, along with minimum congestion for the surrounding streets given the movement of the Terminal itself. Hence, the building was located so that it left all sides free. It had a U-shaped floor plan, open to the south, and a covered area of 19,000 m² (Figure 2). On the ground floor, there were ticket offices and premises for long and mid-distance companies, a luggage reception area, premises for tourism companies, commercial premises, a waiting room, toilets, and three bars located at different points of the floor plan. All these functions were linked using open circulation galleries, which ran throughout the building's wings. It also had services such as mail, telephone booths, a first aid room, a police post, and general offices in the north wing, where the main access was. A restaurant, a candy shop, and a bank branch were planned on the top floor. The decision to locate the food sectors on the first level is repeated in the rest of the contemporary Terminals since the users could watch the arrival and departure of the buses. The terminal's administrative offices and those of transport companies were also located on this level. Developing the layout at different levels was one of the complexities of the typology, insofar as it was essential to be able to solve (or restrict) the crossing of

Figure 2. General planimetry.
 Source: Digital Archive of the Directorate of Architecture and Engineering, Ministry of Planning and Public Infrastructure (DAI-MIPI), Government of Mendoza.

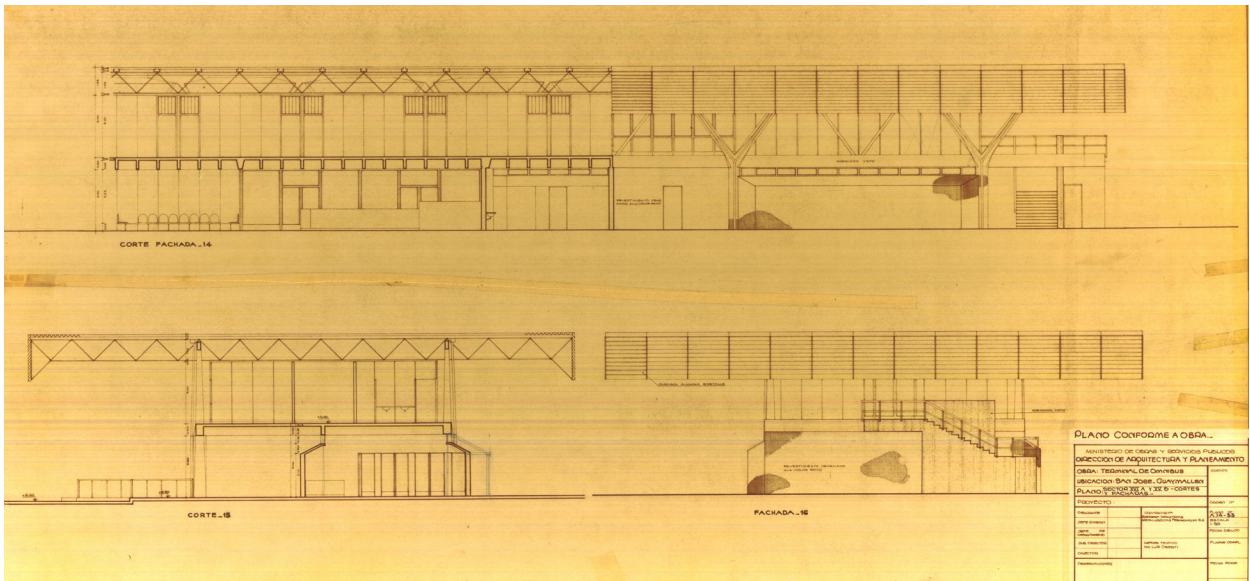
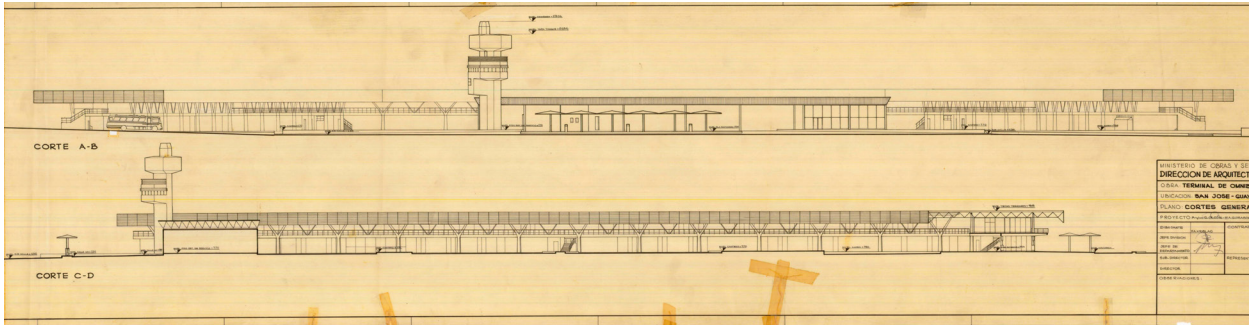


Figure 3. General Cross Sections. Source: Digital Archive of the DAI-MIPIP, Government of Mendoza.

Figure 4. As-built cross-sections and facades. Source: Digital Archive of the DAI-MIPIP, Government of Mendoza.

pedestrian and vehicular access to the platforms, but also to the retail sector and other services offered by the station (Figures 3 and 4). This brought some problems such as, for example, the presence of residual or dead spaces on the first levels since the greatest circulation was (and continues to be) at the platform level. Unlike other terminals built in the same period (Venado Tuerto, among others), the project for Mendoza was conceived in an oversized way concerning the demand of that time (45 vehicles every 10 minutes), for which no extensions were foreseen (The Mendoza bus terminal, 1976, p. 53).

Regarding the construction system, a mixed structure of reinforced concrete and steel was used, organized using a succession of reinforced concrete porticoes and triangulated lattices, developed along the top of the upper level, with columns molded on-site and set 12 meters apart. Mezzanines used ribbed slabs and, together with the columns, formed a mechanism of connecting rods and braces, to transmit the load of the roofs to the ground, but also to endure lateral thrust during the most unfavorable seismic movement, i.e., the plane perpendicular to the longitudinal center lines of the building's wings (Figure 5). To minimize the roof load, a metal tubular stereo-structure was used, pre-fabricated and assembled onsite, with trapezoidal aluminum sheet roofs and ceilings with modular panels of

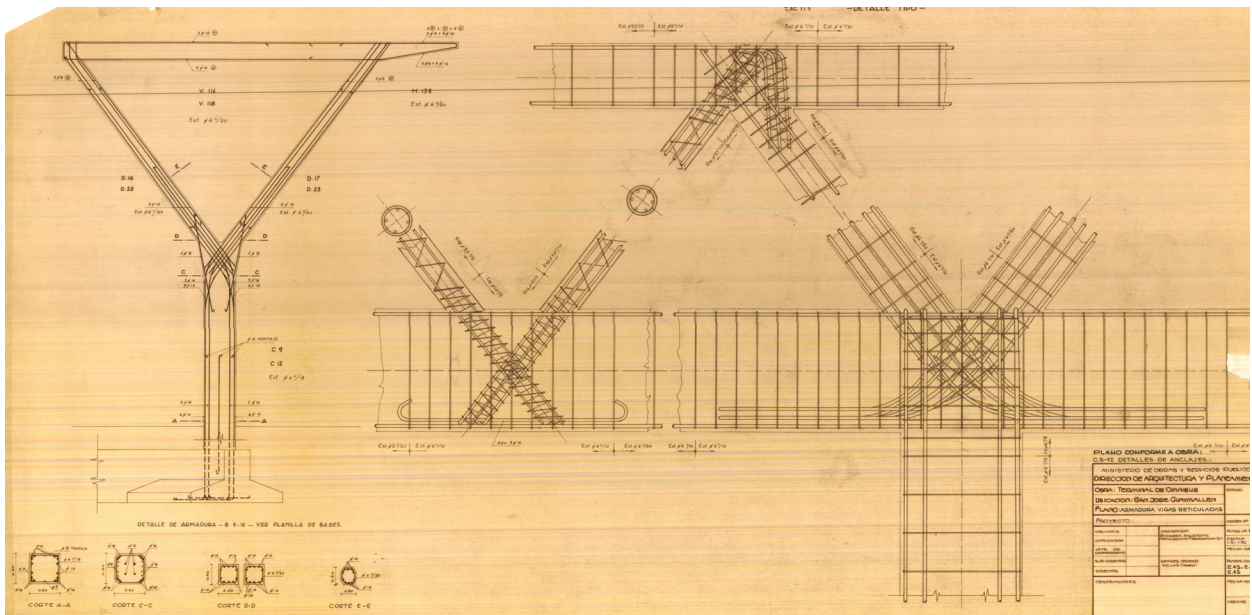


Figure 5. Detail of the reticulated beam trusses. Source: Digital Archive of the DAI-MIIP, Government of Mendoza.

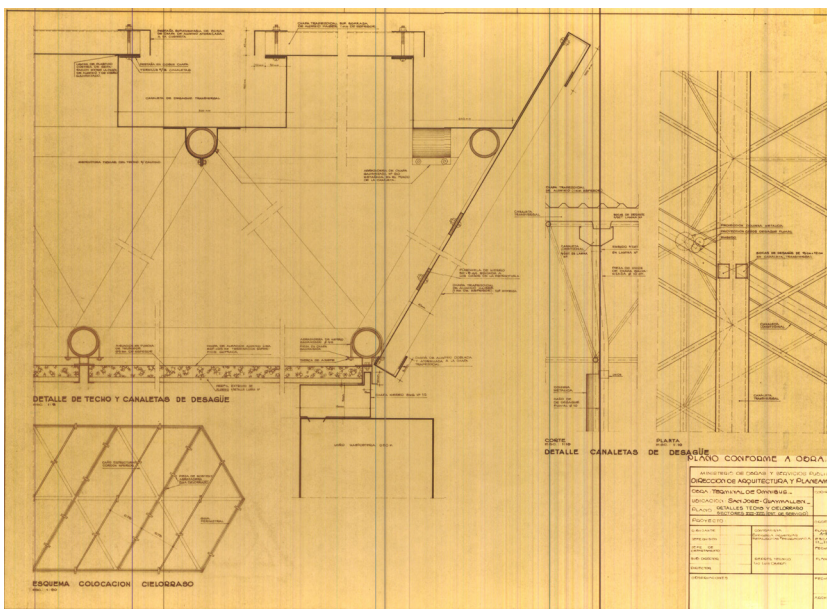


Figure 6. Details of the roof and ceiling. Source: Digital Archive of the DAI-MIIP, Government of Mendoza.

the same material. The interior and exterior enclosures sought to provide the building with the greatest possible flexibility (Figure 6). For this purpose, metal modular panels coated in PVC, filled with insulating material, and painted with different colors were used, each related to the activities to be carried out in the premises they separated (ticket office, services, shops, offices, etc.). (Figure 7).

The execution of the structural type foreseen was made possible by the intervention of the local company IMPSA (Industrias Metalúrgicas Pescarmona S.A.I.C.), winner of the tender and specialist in the construction of large steel structures, in addition to electromechanical equipment. The work was executed in temporary association with the

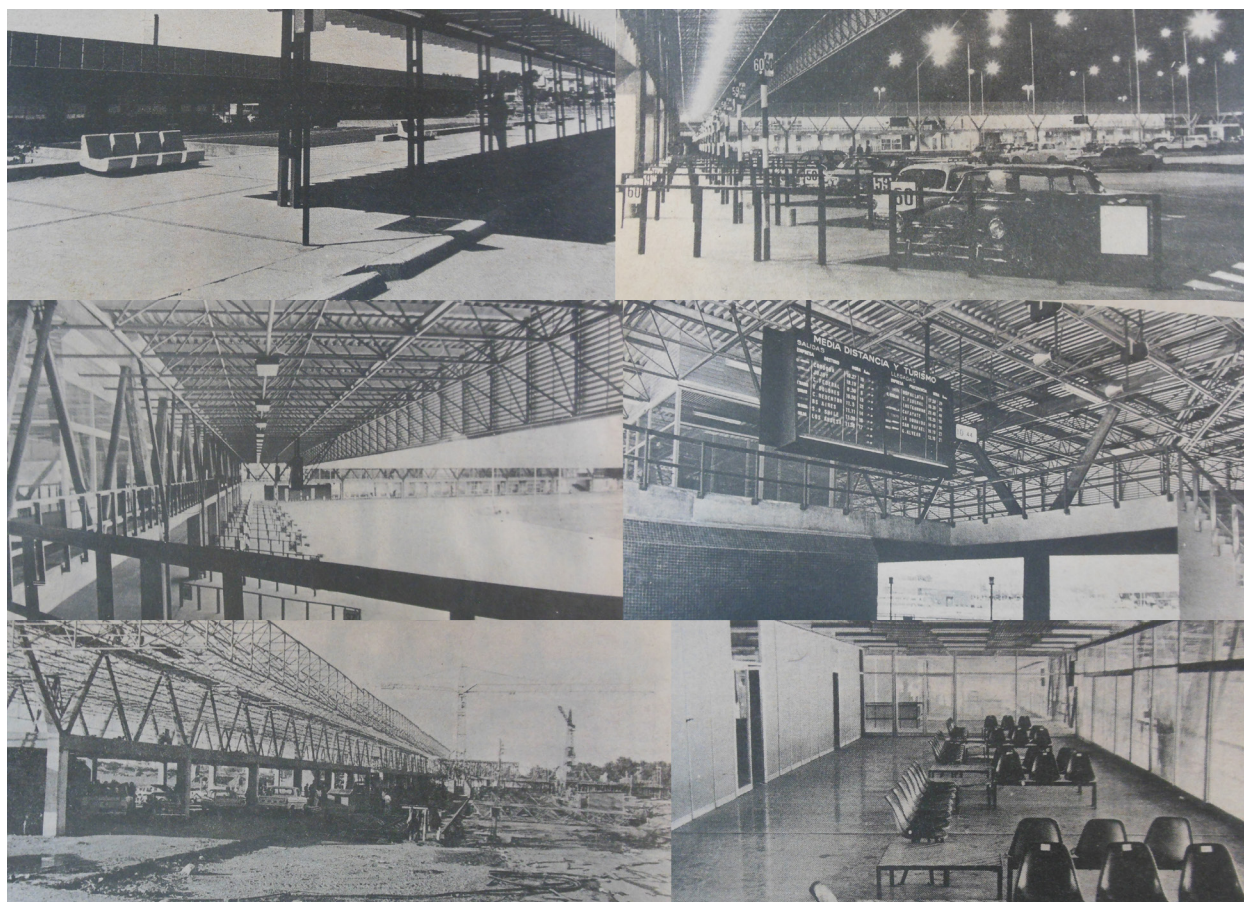


Figure 7. Mosaic of images of the Terminal. Source: Diario Mendoza (November 10, 1972, pp. 2-23.

construction company Depetris, which took care of the civil part. Before the Terminal, there was no other public building that used stereo-structures as part of the roof solution, the “big theme” of this typology (Schere, 1985, p. 50) which, along with its uniqueness and its “urban landmark” role, reflects the architectural thought, the techniques available at that time, and the efficient response to a problem arising from inserting the project in an area with high seismicity. A similar roof was used for the Córdoba Terminal, which started a year before that of Mendoza and that was part of the cases consulted by the local designers as “background information”¹¹. The large paved surfaces were also handled by IMPSA, by subcontracting other local companies.

The exterior areas included a parking sector for 240 vehicles, as well as surrounding gardens using terraces, which absorbed the large unevenness of the terrain. Provision was made for the afforestation of all the building’s perimeter areas, as well as the parking lots and the waiting spaces of the shared taxis, separated by reinforced concrete breakwaters. A premise of the project sought to facilitate the pedestrian connection between the new station, and the city, which demanded the development of a pedestrian walkway alongside Alem Street, which ran under the lanes of Costanera Avenue and over the Cacique Guaymallén canal.

¹¹ Another project revised was the George Washington Bridge Bus Terminal (1963), in New York, but programmatic differences reduced its relevance as background information (Olguín, 2022).

The Terminal had 60 passenger platforms. Using a control tower, designed at the southwest end of the site, arrivals and departures were assigned through a telematic notification system, that carried the occupation information of each platform to the command room in the tower. Its position also allowed staff to have a visual record of platform occupation. The bus yard had a service station for fuel and a parking sector for the units.

Working on this article allowed getting to know the details of the project and construction of the Mendoza Bus Terminal, in the particular context of the “development era”. First, some aspects common to the issue of land transport were confirmed, among them, the relevance that terminals began to have, both in regional capitals and in peripheral towns, to consolidate a system of stations to the same extent as the road network, and to the detriment of the railway. Secondly, the typology used, which was a shared demand in other enclaves, also highlighted its own issues, such as the location on the edge of the urban fabric or the development of suitable structural solutions for a seismic zone. The “great ceiling” that held within its bosom all the activities from the program of needs was a common solution to other proposals. Alongside this, the definition of internal corridors constituted the second problem to be solved, since this was a building with intensive public movements; an aspect that is also confirmed in the examples of other provinces.

Perhaps one of its greatest successes, as one of the designers also observed, was the building’s location, at the intersection of two highways, enhancing land links. In parallel, its oversized capacity was favorable, since it would not require major interventions until 2019, when a comprehensive plan was implemented to adapt the terminal to current functional and safety specifications. Thirdly, the typology adopted, and the versatility of the layout, have allowed service improvement and expansion tasks to be done under the premise of attaching closed volumes to already existing ones in much of the site, moving the mobile partition (using the project’s premise of flexibility), but maintaining the circulation layouts and the functional particularities under which the building was conceived. Although remodeling work is ongoing, a high degree of adaptability of the original structure to new uses and needs can be confirmed.

Finally, the project was a unique opportunity to show the executive capacity of the province, not only in terms of public policies, but also regarding the materialization of the building, since it turned to special reinforced concrete structures that had to cover large spans, and steel, for the roof, which revealed the degree of progress in terms of technology and construction techniques.

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CONCLUSIONS

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