Welcome to my March 2014 newsletter. Apologies for the delay, but setting up the internet survey took much more time than expected. It is now live, and open to all, so please pass on the word. The more people who take part the more interesting the data! More details below. Many thanks to Clare Web Design of Brightlingsea for stepping and doing an excellent job at such short notice.

Web page news
A direct link to the internet survey has been added to my front page at www.tubemapcentral.com

On the web
• Last year, the online Umbrella Magazine published a nice article about my circular maps. This is now available here.
• Wired Magazine has this article about the image analysis research performed by psychologists and computer scientists led by Ruth Rosenholz at MIT. It is good to know that one of my designs came out well (and a relief!), and this research has a lot of potential. It would be particularly interesting to follow it up by looking at how journey planning behaviour is related to their findings about the visual properties of maps.
• My Sydney circles map features in this article about real and fictional maps of Sydney.
• And my Paris and Berlin circles maps are included in this survey of European transit maps.
• A mention by Londonist in an article about a creation by Ollie O’Brien. I am looking forward to seeing a version which includes all the station names!

Dates for your diary
Workshop
• Schematic Mapping 2014. An international workshop on the design of effective schematic maps, to be held at the University of Essex April 2nd/3rd, 2014. The program is now online here. We still have a few spaces for people who might wish to attend, full details on how to book a place here, or contact me directly. The workshop is open to everyone, irrespective of profession or background and a diverse program of papers and discussions are planned.

Map research
The internet survey on map design is now live, and you can access it directly here. It involves looking at a set of nine specially-designed London Underground maps, and deciding whether some could be easier or harder to use than others. The survey is open to everyone, and will be online for at least three months. To my knowledge, this is the first time that large-scale canvassing of opinions about schematic map design has ever been attempted, so do spread the word. Results will be published online later this year, and might even influence future map design.
Map of the month: Lightning fails to strike twice in the same place in London

When Circles Tube Map was released, I was intrigued about why it had caused so much fuss. Obviously it was visually striking, but which of the design rules and priorities were particularly responsible for this? The map had the inner orbit of London Overground as a perfect circle, and the Circle Line moulded into the shape of the Underground roundel. A good coherent map turns chaotic reality into easy-to-identify regular shapes and patterns, and so I wondered whether these two priorities would have similar effects when applied to other design rules.

Hexalinear angles (horizontal lines and 60° diagonals) suit the London Underground network well, and result in aesthetically pleasing equilateral triangles, and so I wondered whether these design rules incorporating a hexagonal London Overground orbit, and an equivalent Circle Line roundel, could produce something as stunning as Circles Tube Map.

No. The result is reasonable, but a little bit contrived owing to the hexagons causing excessive geographical distortion and a lack of balance. Applying these design priorities when creating a hexalinear map gives no aesthetic/visual impact payback whatsoever. On the Circles Tube Map, the circles-and-spokes design rules themselves must have have been responsible for its impact and coherence, rather than any individual features. I created several prototype maps based upon hexagons and octagons, but only one was actually completed. It became clear to me that this approach was a blind alley in my quest to understand and maximise schematic map coherence, and so instead I embarked upon a study of circles-and-spokes maps for cities round the world.

For the map of the month in the April newsletter, we will be taking a trip to Cold War Berlin via gang-ravaged New York. You can subscribe to this at my web pages www.tubemapcentral.com.

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