Welcome to my April 2014 newsletter. March was a busy month, both with setting up the internet survey, and preparations for the international workshop: Schematic Mapping 2014. This took place on 2nd/3rd April at the University of Essex, with 26 delegates discussing all aspects of schematic map design. It was a great success and we hope to stage a similar event in 2016.

Web page news
Photos of the workshop have been added to my exhibitions pages at www.tubemapcentral.com, taken my the co-organiser, Peter Rodgers.

On the web
• The webpages for Schematic Mapping 2014 have been updated with more photographs of the event, plus all the posters and presentations are available for download from this site.
• Zach Morgan of Useful Historian invites us to get lost in digitized maps

Dates for your diary
My diary is empty, no events are booked! I enjoy giving presentations about my work, see the range of topics available at www.tubemapcentral.com/lectures/lectures.html and ask me about a booking. Recent talks include: Abingdon National Trust; the Smarter Travel 2013 conference; GeoMob; the Design Museum the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Sign Design Society.

Map research
The internet survey on map design is still online. So far, 100 people have taken part, and you can access it at www.tubemapcentral.com/survey. It takes around 15 minutes to complete, and I will need many more people to respond to get the best possible data, so do spread the word. Any publicity suggestions very gratefully received.

Map of the month: Gang-ravaged New York meets Cold-war Berlin
Last year in the spring, I had the opportunity to visit Berlin on one of the few weekends when both the U-Bahn and S-Bahn museums are open. These are quite small, but together there is plenty to occupy a transport enthusiast. Londoners are so used to being told about outstanding London Transport design and architecture that they tend to neglect the rest of the world.

Being a map enthusiast is not always easy outside of London. Maps are often treated as disposable technical drawings, used and then thrown away, making their history difficult to research. Unlike advertisement posters, there is no thriving international network of collectors, and so historical records of design and designers are incomplete to say the least. Of course, this is frustrating, but the advantage is that it is always possible to stumble across an unexpected gem.

When Berlin was split, its city transport was divided in a way guaranteed to be unworkable, with the West Berlin S-Bahn lines (mid-suburban commuter rail) owned, operated and financed by East Berlin authorities. Naturally, West Berliners took exception to this, and a program of urban motorway and U-Bahn line construction undermined the main S-Bahn corridors. West Berliners also organised a boycott the S-Bahn campaign. With characteristic German efficiency, the result of these was that S-Bahn network was effectively bankrupted (S-Bahn workers living in West Berlin also had to be paid a living wage in West German currency). Lines closed, and those remaining became run down to the point of collapse. Even to this day the network has not fully recovered.
So, picture the bleak decrepit final years of the defeated S-Bahn network, and look at this 1980 design. Previous maps had been sombre, with services undifferentiated and non-colour coded. Now we have an eruption of rainbow candy-cane colour. A radical redesign of a map can take place for all sorts of reasons, but a last-ditch attempt to market a bankrupt network is certainly a plausible hypothesis. I had never come across this map before. It has to be seen in the flesh full-sized to be appreciated and is one of the most powerful designs I have seen.

Not much English spoken in the S-Bahn museum shop, no prints available, just a tiny postcard. No problem, if I can’t obtain a map, I can reproduce it from a photograph. The typeface is the hardest part. This was so obviously Futura-and-yet-not-Futura (there are many subtle differences, but the capital W stands out) and I wasn’t prepared to compromise by using something that was wrong. I found out that when Germany was divided, there were no sets of Futura in the East, and their import would have been illegal, and so designer Arno Drescher created an East German version widely used by many state organisations, including the Berlin S-Bahn. Two digital versions were available, and I judged the version by Bitstream to be the better match for my needs. It is easy to tell when the font is an appropriate match. Once the spacing and size are set, every word fits into place matching the letter positions of the original. Two days of work, and I had my map.

This was a lovely map to digitise, very precise and organised, making the designer’s intentions obvious, although the typography is a bit more chaotic. However, having recreated this from a postcard, I will need to revisit the original to make sure that the font weights, line thicknesses and colours are satisfactory. There is every possibility that the designer of this map is still alive, and it would be fascinating to find out its story. With more than a nod to Massimo Vignelli’s famous 1972 New York Subway map, this is another design that should qualify for Peter Lloyd’s description of Vignelli-inspired maps as Vignelliano. A colourful swansong of an ultimately doomed regime.

For the map of the month in the May newsletter, we will be taking a trip on the Trans-Europe Express. You can subscribe to this at my web pages www.tubemapcentral.com.

Max Roberts, max@tubemapcentral.com