Welcome to my November 2014 newsletter. Last month I was busy with the new university year, but things have now settled down and, suddenly, Christmas is on the horizon. If you intend to give books or posters as presents, do order as early as you can, especially if parcels need to be sent overseas.

In the media, on the web
- A surprise from the USA, where my New York Subway Circles map has made an appearance in a clothes store on a restored subway car. I’m glad they decided not to cover the map with graffiti!
- Its next appearance is not a surprise, in a book on information graphics published in Singapore.
- Meanwhile, in London, a very significant early design gets another public airing. I’ve written about this map in both of my books, calling it one of the first true journey planners. Its sole purpose is to help people get from their local station to the Wembley Empire Exhibition. All considerations of geographical accuracy are put to one side, and there is a very good reason why, as noted by the blogger, Ollie O’Brien, it is reminiscent of my own curvy map.
- In Germany, my Berlin Circles map gets some more attention, this time in Spektrum magazine.

Web page news
- I’ve added another title to the list of public lectures that I offer. Transit Maps: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly is a light-hearted tour of the best and the worst of schematic mapping, past and present.

Map research
- The German magazine article resulted in a big boost in numbers for my online survey, taking it straight to my target of 500 people. With two months to go before the end of the year, I’ve decided to keep it open in any case, let’s see if we can get to 600 respondents. As ever, opinions and evaluations from women are just as welcome as from men. The survey takes around 15 minutes to complete, and you can access it at www.tubemapcentral.com/survey.

Maps of the month: Step by Step in Boston (Part 3)

Continuing my Boston marathon from last month, I end with some left-field designs. While creating this series, I discovered another benefit of exhaustive exploration. Working with limited angles (three for hexalinear, two for tetralinear), but trying different rotations, highlights which angles are important to show the network at its best, and which are barely missed if not available. Vertical and horizontal lines put pressure on the typography and space of the Boston map, but gentle slants permit nice clean designs, while still allowing geographical distortion to be kept under control. Rotating slightly the hexalinear angles permits a very orderly design, perhaps my favourite of all my attempts so far. I do wish that more transport networks would consider hexalinear maps. They are easy to create and often pleasing to look at.
The suitability of gentle slants for Boston led me to try a twist on the traditional gold standard of schematic maps, octolinearity (four angles, but usually horizontal, vertical, and 45º diagonals). Instead, I tried a configuration with horizontal and vertical lines not permitted, using steep or shallow diagonals instead. It had never even occurred to me that this might be a valid way to design a map – one of the delights of this work is that you never know where the next surprise will come from. This design works well, especially for the Red and Green Lines, with smoother line trajectories and less geographical distortion than is possible with conventional octolinearity. I prefer a dodecalinear (six angles) variant of this theme, but lack of space prevents me from including it.

Finally, it would be unthinkable for me to map a network without attempting a concentric circles version, but it is no accident that you have had to wait until map nine to see one. There are two cities that have resisted this treatment, and fought me all the way. St Petersburg is one, and now, Boston is another. Finding a suitable centre point was hard enough. With four central stations, giving priority to just one seems conceptually wrong, and although there are interesting possibilities for a centre point far north or far south, this doesn’t seem valid for a network where all lines converge on a clear central business district. New York is an exception to this, but there are good reasons for that. I have a lot of out-takes for the Boston circles map, a sure sign that its creation was a painful and painstaking process.

Evaluating the circles design, several lines are very kinked as they try to sneak away from Boston on trajectories that are not quite orbital, not quite radial. For a relatively simple network, the ability of the concentric circles approach to organise its appearance seems limited. Larger networks are more visually formidable and more likely to benefit. This circles design is attractive, and not too distorting (you know when a Boston design is going too far in this respect because the rivers and coastline get very upset) but is this creation really the simplest and most coherent of the three maps presented here? This highlights my philosophy: to try to match the design rules to the structure of the individual network. Feel free to email me about anything map-related. Which is your favourite Boston map?

I have presented nine Boston designs so far, but there are 13 completed, with several more on the list. Perhaps it is time for me to move on before someone suggests that I should rename this newsletter Boston Map Central. If you are interested in my other Boston creations, I’m happy to answer personal emails. I have a fun map on my to-do list for the December newsletter if I have time, but otherwise it will be back to Europe for Christmas and the New Year. I’m open to suggestions for taking a look at any city whose transit network might present some interesting design problems, and also special pleas for assistance if you think that a city has a particularly awful design for its official map. You can subscribe to the newsletter at my web pages www.tubemapcentral.com.

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