A nasty cold in April slowed me down, but there is no risk of my running out of newsletter maps! Map of the Month for March was the reconstructed competition-winning New York design by Raleigh D’Amado, researched by Peter Lloyd, and implemented by Reka Komoli. We have now printed it at its intended size, 36” wide, and it looks very impressive.

In the media, on the web
- Another article on my Brussels concentric circles map, this time by GUTB.
- Underground Maps Unravelled is reviewed by Laurent Vermeersch, the City Geek.

Dates for your diary
- On Tuesday 9th of June, I will be giving a presentation to the London Underground Railway Society titled Underground Maps Invigorated, 18:40, Upper Room, Allsouls Clubhouse, 141 Cleveland Street, London W1T 6QG. I will be discussing the benefits and pitfalls of digitally reconstructing historic maps. If you are a LURS member, I look forward to seeing you there. Guests are admitted, but space is limited.
- The TfL archives are holding a two-day event on 5th/6th August at the Palestra building in Southwark. The theme will be TfL’s design and innovation heritage, and I’ve been invited to take part. This will be a closed event, but quite a few people from TfL are on my mailing list, so look out for further details.

Map of the Month: Creating a London Underground night network diagram
As many of you will know, 24-hour weekend services will be introduced on selected Underground lines in London later this year. An exciting new innovation needs an exciting new map to publicise it, so what are the options? The people creating a suitable design will be faced with some difficult decisions. The obvious starting point is a daytime map with non-running services deleted. Unfortunately, only a small proportion of lines and stations will be running initially, and the result of removing everything else will be an inefficiently-sized map full of empty space, and lines making unfathomable twists and turns, rather like dance partners swerving bizarrely on a dancefloor, avoiding obstacles invisible to the audience.

Should a special reconfigured map be created to show Underground night services? There are two schools of thought here: on the one hand, there is the suggestion that differently configured maps are confusing for users (plus there will be the additional resources necessary to maintain two different versions). On the other hand, there is the observation that people seem reasonably resilient to this. For example, individual lines on strip-maps in trains are often completely different shapes to the same lines on the network map: at an extreme, a meandering line roughly heading north-south might be straightened and aligned east-west to match the space available on the train. Given this, along with the argument that a map should be optimised to display in the best possible light the lines that are present, rather than the lines that are absent, and we certainly could contemplate a completely new design for a sub-network of services that operate all night. [Creating a special map every time there is a line closure for engineering work might be going too far!]

Readers of my book will know that I am an advocate of hexalinear maps (three angles at 60º rotations). For the right city, a dynamic orderly design can be created, with pleasing collections of equilateral triangles at the centre. London is very well-suited, and the opportunity presented by this reduced network is perfect for creating something simple, distinctive and exciting, showing what can be achieved using these neglected design rules. A visual contrast is required so that users don’t mistakenly consult the incorrect map – a dark background presents a conceptually appropriate cue for night-time – and the compact design means that it
will have larger text for a given print size compared with the daytime map. Finally, as a dramatic flourish, I applied the neon backlighting effect that I have developed for other designs – fiddly, but worth the effort.

Would this be an effective map to publicise all-night Tube services? As a marketing device, it looks spectacular and clear printed out large-size, but its focus is more on visual excitement than usability. Perhaps it would work as part of an app that morphed between hexalinear day and night versions, and allowed users to toggle visual and text effects, so that they could choose pretty versus legible displays. Night bus information would also be important, so that if an Underground station had no service, it could suggest railhead/bus alternatives. But don’t hold your breath for this killer-app, I’m a designer, not a programmer!

If do you like this map, enjoy it while you can. More night services will be added in the future; great for travellers, but bad for the simplicity and size of this design. Still, it was nice to have an opportunity to create a simple London Underground map for a change.

My powers of prediction for Map of the Month are not always accurate, sometimes a design on the backburner comes to fruition sooner than expected, and this month I decided that the result was worth releasing as soon as possible. A higher-resolution version can be downloaded from the newsletter archive on my website. Peter and Reka are now heading to the USA for three months to officially launch the New York reconstruction, and research several books. Wishing you a successful trip. You can subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com.

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