December 2015

Wow, what a busy month that was! Mark Ovenden's and Peter Lloyd's trips to the USA generated a lot of interest, and there were some surprises too. To mark these events, I've been offering my book, *Underground Maps Unravelled* at a discounted price of $65, including delivery by airmail. There is still a chance to order at this price, so if you are interested, here is the (now hidden) special offer page. This price is open to anyone who is enterprising enough to find and use the link. Don’t forget, for Christmas presents, do order as early as you can, no later than Friday 11th December for delivery to the USA.

In the media, on the web

- The transport operator of Karlsruhe, Germany (KVV) has [officially announced](#) that they will be using curvilinear designs for their network maps.
- Theodore Ditsek suggests that I might be unique amongst ‘transit map people’ in [disliking](#) the official Paris Metro map. Well, I might also be unique in conducting objective [usability studies](#) on the design!
- Very naughty. A [Portuguese newspaper](#), which seems to be called ‘i’ has posted one of my [digitisations](#) without my permission and removing all credits and contact details from the original.
- Mark Ovenden's latest edition of *Transit Maps of the World* included some of my own designs, and these caught the eye of the [Washington Post](#), the [Wall Street Journal](#), [Time Out New York](#), [Spoiled NYC](#), and [Curbed Chicago](#).
- On 20th November I took part in a studio discussion on [Science Friday](#) with Ruth Rosenholtz of MIT to discuss the science of transit map design, this also got a mention on the [Map of the Week](#) blog.
- My Chicago El map, inspired by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, was semi-officially launched by Mark Ovenden in New York and Chicago last month. It caused a bit of a stir, with [Transit Maps Tumblr](#) leading the way, then [Curbed Chicago](#), [The Atlantic Citylab](#), [CBS Chicago](#), [Map of the Week](#), the [Wednesday Journal](#), [Slate](#) magazine, and [DNA Info](#).

Web page news

- I am trying another experiment with Twitter. The official Tube Map Central feed is [@TubeMapCentral](https://twitter.com/TubeMapCentral). This is a good way of giving out information at short notice without the need to send an email to the full newsletter list, such as for notifications of sudden invited lectures and snap special offers. I might also send out images of works in progress, or comment if an interesting map catches my eye. The newsletter will continue to be my main method of communication, but if you are a Twitter user then do subscribe.
- I have improved the navigation of my web pages. There are now [quick links](#) on my home page, so that if you know what you are looking for, you can go there straight away.
- My print-on-demand poster pages have been [completely reorganised](#), with the maps divided into categories. It should be easier to find a specific design, and it will now be much easier for me to add new maps. This is also my main image repository, so if you are looking for a specific map that you know I have created, go there first.

Dates for your diary

- I have been invited to give an address at [Typo Berlin](#), 12-14th May 2016. More details will be posted when I have them, we are currently investigating the possibility of including a small exhibition.
- I will be giving my talk *Transit Maps: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* to the University of the Third Age [Hillingdon branch](#). **NOTE THE CHANGE OF DATE:** now Monday 9th January 2017, 11:00 at Winston Churchill Hall, Ruislip, HA4 7QL.

Map of the Month: The Chicago El network inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright

The main purpose of transit maps is to get the user get from A to B as quickly as possible, but they can also have an emotional appeal, for example, as reminders of youthful exploration or exotic holidays. The desire for simplicity and clarity means that the aesthetics of classic transit maps tend toward minimalistic beauty, but if the purpose of a map is to delight rather than direct from A to B, then that changes everything.

I've created quite a few [decorative maps](#), inspired by different genres, especially Art Nouveau and Art Deco, and I have always loved the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright. The [stained glass](#) of his Prairie Houses is masterful; the way the patterns repeat and yet never quite repeat is mesmerising: pure geometric bliss.
Frank Lloyd Wright designed many houses in and around Chicago, and so the historic El network seemed a very appropriate setting for a map celebrating his work. Of the cities in America with major rail transit systems, Chicago probably has the strictest grid, and I knew from my previous designs that if you go into battle with this, you end up losing. I cooperated with the grid, allowing it to give shape and structure to the design, so that the outcome is a good map in its own right: take away the decoration and it succeeds very well at simplifying the city without distorting it unduly.

The basis of the decoration is eight Frank Lloyd Wright stained glass windows, each re-envisaged in two colours, inspiring the graphic identity of each line. I did a lot of work trying to decide how much intricacy the map could withstand, and eventually decided that every station would have to be unique (repeating the same design looked like a cookie cutter project) and simple station tiles were required, otherwise they would clash with each other. The strands along the lines hold the station tiling together, and help the lines work with each other. A lot of thought is needed to get a decorative map to succeed. The elements have to function holistically otherwise the result is a jumble of stylistic clichés. I wasn’t happy with this design until I reached Plan H.

I had intended to release this design earlier, but it needed more work than I was expecting before I was really happy with it. In fact, my first test sketches were created in 2011; you can’t hurry a decorative map. I am very careful to say that this creation is inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, rather than in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright. I suspect the master architect would have been aghast at an attempt to impersonate him. Even so, it would be intriguing if more designers and artists decided to have a go at celebrating genres via maps. How about the New York Subway inspired by Jackson Pollock? Not one for computer graphics, and I don’t fancy redecorating my garage. It would be fantastic if it was done well. Any takers?

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all my readers. I haven’t decided on Map of the Month for January yet, so it will be a surprise for all of us. You can subscribe to my newsletter at my web pages, www.tubemapcentral.com.

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