Now back from an enjoyable and productive trip to Karlsruhe, where the local transport operator, KVV has wholeheartedly embraced the idea of curvilinear maps, and we can expect to see their continuing development and some very refined designs in the future. I also gave a presentation at the Karlsruher Institut für Technologie where researchers are investigating automated transit map design. Map of the Month was inspired by the ensuing discussion the following day.

In the media, on the web

- The Paris Circles map still attracts attention, this time with an article in Dutch from a geography news website. The French transport magazine, Revue Transport Public also interviewed me. Currently the website is down, so if you would like a copy of the article (in French) then email me.
- Something different, but inspired by my work on concentric circles maps, a Galactic Transit map has been created for the online game, Star Citizen. It is a very fine design that nicely integrates twin focal points. It is also described in French.

Map research

Radi(c)al departures: Comparing conventional octolinear versus concentric circles schematic maps for the Berlin U-Bahn/S-Bahn networks using objective and subjective measures of effectiveness (co-authored with E.J. Newton and M. Canals) has now been accepted for publication by the Information Design Journal. A pre-print of the final accepted version can be downloaded directly from my updated publications page.

Dates for your diary

- I have been invited to give an address at Typo Berlin, Saturday 14th May 2016 at 15:00. The title of my talk is Round in circles and back again: Simplicity, coherence, and the need for evidence-based design. There will also be a small exhibition of my work.
- I will be presenting a paper at DRS2016, the Design Research Society 50th anniversary conference at Brighton, 27th-30th June 2016. The title of my paper is Expectations and prejudices usurp judgements of schematic map effectiveness. The day and time will be posted when I have this information.
- I will be giving my talk Transit Maps: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly to the University of the Third Age Hillingdon branch, Monday 9th January 2017, 11:00 at Winston Churchill Hall, Ruislip, HA4 7QL.

Map of the Month: Köln ist eine Kreisstadt

One of the delights of an eclectic approach to map design is that you never quite know what your next creation will be. A chance comment, a flash of inspiration, and something totally unanticipated can result. When I was visiting the researchers at the Karlsruher Institut für Technologie, we talked about the procedures that are used by human designers for creating schematic maps. I suggested that it might be interesting to choose an unfamiliar network, and attempt a live design session. One of the researchers had lived near Köln in Germany, and so we looked for a geographical map, finding one on the Wikipedia page. In what must have been one of the shortest design sessions ever, we looked at the image and all agreed: concentric circles map.

Of course, there is more to creating a map than choosing the design rules, but in the case of Köln, the structure of the city so closely matches a concentric circles and spokes
approach that, apart from a difficult configuration around Deutz station, much of the process was merely an attempt to keep the size compact. The official map distinguishes between underground and surface stations, and so I’ve tried to show this too, but in an intuitive and less obtrusive way.

I have always argued that different networks have different structures, and therefore each should be mapped in a way that is compatible with it. Forcing a network into design rules that do not suit it well can only result in a loss of simplicity and coherence. The final version here preserves the shape of the city, and is much clearer and more elegant than the official octolinear version. Observant readers who compare the different designs will note that the concentric circles version seems less compact than the official one, but they should also note that the former has fewer abbreviated station names, and that none of these interrupt lines.

Apparently, Kreisstadt in German means a county town, so I hope that the people of Köln appreciate that this is a play on words, rather than a belittling of the status of their city! This was of those months where the intended map was pushed to one side by unexpected developments. If any readers know of a city whose rail network is more closely matched to concentric circles than Köln, then do let me know, I’m always interested in reader suggestions. My next Paris Metro map is drafted, but needs some re-working before it is ready. A good task for me to take with me on my forthcoming trip to Berlin. You can subscribe to my newsletter at my web pages, www.tubemapcentral.com.

Max Roberts, mjr@tubemapcentral.com