Two lots of book news this month. After reviewing sales to date, I can now offer *Underground Maps Unravelled* at lower prices for all purchases: £30 for UK, £40 for Europe, and £50 for the rest of the world (including USA and Canada). Prices include delivery and there are further discounts for multiple orders.


### Dates for your diary

- **Breaking news:** an exhibition is planned by Wiener Linien to celebrate the start of construction of an extension to Line U2, and the creation of Line U5. This will commence on 17th October 2016, and it is planned to display a number of my own designs. More details will be released when I have them.

- **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 research

The main news is that the University of Essex has granted me a year’s sabbatical, commencing September, and this should provide an impetus to a number of projects planned on a variety of topics. Elsewhere, Peter B. Lloyd starts a PhD in automated transit map design at the University of Kent. I have also finished drafting a reply to this controversial article, and hope to be submitting it for review within the next few weeks.

**Map of the Month: Brussels round in circles, back again**

2013 was definitely the year of the circles map, and I experimented with designs for around 20 different cities. They were varied in their success, but a few of these captured the attention of the general public, and, for the Brussels version, I was invited to give a public lecture and was interviewed for local television.

Street transport, especially bus networks, is always difficult to show schematically. The roads of most cities are haphazard and irregular, resulting in geographical distortion irrespective of design rules. An important element of orientation is often vehicle positioning along the streets themselves and their intersections, and this is made much more difficult if a map visibly fails to match local topography. Trams can be more amenable to schematic maps if there are clearly named and defined stops, and segregated running. Even so, with multiple routes often running along the same tracks, colour-coding can be problematic.

Brussels has a large tram and metro network, and clear orbital and radial elements. It is one of my favourite cities, and I am familiar enough with it to know what I can get away with in terms of distortion. Even so, there are unique problems to solve, particularly caused by station names that are not only long, but also bilingual. A perfect circle for the metro ring (Currently lines 2 and 6) is not possible, although the resulting “cat-head” shape at least provides a link with a famous Belgian comic-strip character. Like all designs based upon concentric circles and spokes, there are difficulties with topographical distortion and balance, but the strong axes that result, along with the clear network structure that is revealed, offers compensation for this.

The result was quietly put online until a chance blog post alerted Belgians to its existence, and favourable comparisons were made with the official octolinear design, which struggles to give the network shape. Of course, this includes bus routes too, and it can be debated whether a rail-based transport map of Brussels is adequate. In favour of this, we can note that coverage of the city is reasonably complete, and that there are relatively few important missing-links filled by the bus network; that the concentric circles map is simpler and more compact; that tourists might prefer to focus on the relative certainty of rail-based options; and
that the MIVB/STIB itself produces a rather peculiar map showing the metro lines along with unfathomable rail services and also tram routes 3, 4, and 7. These routes have underground and segregated sections, but are not unique in this, and the map itself scarcely provides more than a basic skeleton of city coverage.

Three-years on, I have been asked if I could update the map for a forthcoming event in Brussels. One advantage of rail-based transport is that networks evolve relatively slowly. Even so, individual services can change frequently, and with route-based colour-coding, substantial reworking can be necessary. For example the 9x-series Avenues Louise services are subject to delays as a result of on-street running, and frequent changes are made in an attempt to improve their reliability. I have also taken the opportunity of the revision to show part-time services more clearly, so that the design is more practical for everyday use.

There are major changes planned for Brussels, including conversion of the north-south tram tunnels to full metro specification, and upgrading various commuter lines to form an RER-style network. This is definitely going to be a map that I will continue to revise, if only for my own personal use. It may even feature as Map of the Month again one day. To make sure that you see how it develops, subscribe to my newsletter at my web pages, www.tubemapcentral.com.

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