Congratulations to Mark Ovenden for his recent TV programme on BBC4, *Two Types: The Faces of Britain*, in which he discussed the history and impact of Johnston and Gill Sans. This is available on BBC iPlayer if you missed it but, unfortunately, not to overseas readers. August is usually a quiet month, and this newsletter will not be bucking the trend, but there are three new events added, and September is going to be very busy indeed.

**Dates for your diary**

- For newsletter readers working at TfL, the Corporate Archives are holding an internal exhibition on *Mapping London* on 10th/11th August at the Palestra building, 197 Blackfriars Road, SE1 8NJ. Several talks are also scheduled, including one by me: *London’s Secret Railways: Mapping the Underground’s Rivals* on Monday 21st August at 13:00. I am also hoping to have some maps on display at the exhibition.
- The Sign Design Society will be hosting a debate: *Architecture versus People* on Wednesday 6th September, 17:30 to 20:30 at The Gallery, Alan Baxter & Associates, 75 Cowcross Street, Farringdon, EC1M 6EL. I will be on the panel, arguing for improved methodology in evaluating signage systems.
- I will be giving my talk *Transit Maps: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* to the University of the Third Age Broomfield and District branch on Wednesday 9th May 2018, 14:30, at Broomfield Village Hall, Main Road, Broomfield, Chelmsford, CM1 7AH.

**Map of the Month: Making sense of the Southern Electric**

My interest in schematic maps started, like many people, with a collection of London Underground designs but, living in Dulwich, the Underground was conspicuous by its absence. For people in South London who wanted to be reasonably mobile, there was no choice but to learn to get to grips with another urban rail network, which I will collectively label using its historic brand name, *Southern Electric*.

For Underground users, trains are grouped together into orderly high-frequency routes and, with a few well-signed exceptions, passengers can be confident that if the route of a train is via their desired station, it will definitely stop there. The Southern Electric routes are, by contrast, effectively 19th century-style steam services that happen to be run by electric trains. A mind-boggling tangle of low frequency routes run seemingly from every possible origin to every possible destination via every conceivable route in between. These combine to offer good(ish) links from each suburban station to a London terminus, but makes travel from one suburb to another viable only for people with a sense of adventure. Network incomprehensibility is compounded by changes at rush hours and on Sundays, and trains arbitrarily skip stops even when their destinations are well inside London.

An incomprehensible network will deter people from using it. Compare any Southern Electric station with an equivalent for the Underground in terms of distance from Central London and local population density, and the Southern Electric station will typically have between one-half and one-third the ridership. These days a computer can take away the need to consult complex timetables and understand the service. Even so, this method of scheduling has two problems. First, complex infrequent services are inherently brittle. Arrive at Streatham five minutes early to catch a train to London Bridge, and find that it is cancelled? The result is a thirty-five minute wait for the next one. Second, complex infrequent services cannot thin gracefully at quiet times. For example, West Norwood has six trains per hour direct to London during the
day, four to Victoria, two to London Bridge, but what about late at night when six trains might be too much? Halve the service (two trains to Victoria, one to London Bridge) or cut the London Bridge trains and leave the Victoria ones intact? Neither of these is satisfactory.

To show the deranged tapestry of the Southern Electric in all its glory, a Vignelli-style diagram is a good basis, the one-line-per-service and dot-stop/no-dot-no-stop principles can easily be applied and the (lack of) direct connections and complexity can be appreciated. I hoped to show part-time services on this map: the rush-hour additions, and also the alternatives that run on Sundays, but it would have collapsed under the weight. Even so, the multiplicity of weekday off-peak daytime services is staggering, and most only run every 30 minutes. Hence, although South West London is sensibly configured, Kingston gets a rotten service. From a design point of view, the thick bundles of lines cause bizarre scaling issues, and the lack of logic to routes from Victoria/London Bridge to Croydon/Sutton prevents implementation of meaningful colour coding schemes to differentiate them, making it tricky to follow exactly which routes skip which stop. I make no apologies for this, a good map can’t fix a bad network!

Thameslink engineering work is causing disruption to South London, and current services will be revised next year. It would be nice to believe that something more orderly and organised might result. South Londoners deserve better; it’s time for the people who specify these services to be dragged into the 20th Century. Expect this design to resurface as Map of the Month some time in the future to show the changes. Subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com to make sure that you see it.

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