Tube Map Central is finally back to schedule for its anniversary newsletter. First sent in November 2013 to around three hundred people, monthly mailing has been uninterrupted since, and the subscribers list has more than doubled. One of my motivations for the newsletter was to make sure that I kept a proper record of all happenings and, looking back, the last four years have certainly been eventful! Now we have another Christmas almost with us, leaving just a few more days for international orders for posters and books, and not much longer for UK ones.

Web page news
I will be updating my web shop on Monday 11th December, adding posters of my most recent designs.

Dates for your diary
- I am provisionally booked to give my talk Underground Maps Uncharted to the London Underground Railway Society on Tuesday 10th April 2018, 18:40, Upper Room, Allsouls Clubhouse, 141 Cleveland Street, London W1T 6QG. One of my favourite talks, I will be showing highlights from my unique collection of unofficial London Underground maps from around the world. Please wait for date confirmation before putting this in your diary.
- 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: Round in circles, and back again
How does one mark the 50th edition of a newsletter about transit maps? With a map of course, but it has to be something appropriate. With production looming, I had been racking my mind for several months trying to think of a design that could summarise four years of exploration and research.

Which of my maps have prompted the most debate? Concentric circles maps of course, and although they might not be appropriate for every city, the outcomes are almost hypnotically powerful, and for those cities whose structure matches these design rules, such as Amsterdam and Köln, it seems absurd not to take advantage of this! Another source of endless debate is Massimo Vignelli’s distinctive New York City Subway diagram. Although a design classic, admired by many, its history is far more turbulent than for Beck’s London Underground original, and its lifespan considerably shorter. Although now used online, the updated version is larger and lacks the power of the original. Vignelli himself was kind enough to endorse my book, for which I will be eternally grateful, and I have created maps in his style for Berlin and South London, as well as faithfully digitising the original New York City version.

I have already mapped the New York City Subway several times in several different styles; it is one of the world’s great networks that no serious map designer can ignore. I have even created a concentric circles version, that particular design literally came to me in a dream, and was amazed at the positive response to it. But, re-expressing the famous Vignelli Style using these design rules seemed like an entertaining challenge, and a very appropriate idea for the 50th edition newsletter.

The result of this strange fusion is a completely original design. The Vignelli style of individually shown routes causes thick bands that crowd Manhattan, necessitating a wider island and a lower point of radiation than my previous circles map. I needed five attempts at Manhattan before I was happy, but the unintended consequence was a rather nice solution for Staten Island. Overall, the creation of the layout was straightforward: Start at Lower Manhattan and work upwards to the top of Bronx to give the map its
dimensions, trying to keep the design regular and compact, then across to Brooklyn and the horrible tangle of lines converging and diverging along Flatbush Avenue, and then on to the more forgiving, but not trivial, mesh down to Coney Island, then up to north-west Queens (and resignation to the extreme distortion necessary along Queens Boulevard). In terms of the fine details, this turned out to be the most fiddly circles map I have ever created, with many lines of station dots and line labels lying on circular arcs. Geographical purists will object, but the almost other-worldly power and marvelous precision of Vignelli’s original translate well to these design rules. A good geographical map shows where the network is, a good schematic map shows how the network fits together.

Wishing all my readers a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year. 2018 promises to be an exciting, one with more research and maps on the way, and the recommencement of my university module: Transit Maps: Past, Present, & Future; more than enough on the horizon to fill another 50 newsletters. To make sure that you receive them, subscribe at www.tubemapcentral.com.

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