After a relaxing Christmas break, Tube Map Central is back in action. 2018 brings the second run of my University of Essex module *Transit Maps: Past, Present, & Future*. For the curious, the online materials are from 2016, and will need to be updated to include latest research.

In the media, on the web

- My *Vignelli New York City Circles* map, featured in my 50th Newsletter, managed to catch people’s attention in the run-up to Christmas, with articles in *Untapped Cities*, *6 Square Feet*, and *Viewing NYC*.
- Time Out magazine assembled yet another compilation of strange London Underground maps, with two of my creations in the line-up.
- A lovely article on European schematic rail maps by Retours includes a design from my collection.

Dates for your diary

- I will be giving 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 6GQ.
- 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: Why isn’t the Circle Line circular?

In 1949 the London Inner Circle service was renamed the *Circle Line* and given its own colour, yellow. Its first incarnation was an irregular polygon, but several designers have noted that the name warrants something more regular, with an ellipse featuring in Metropolitan Railway maps in the 1920s. In contrast, Henry Beck used a rectangle for his controversial 1953 design. However, a discovery of a British Railways Festival of Britain guide of 1951 led me to wonder whether a rectangle was the only shape that Beck contemplated. It is well-known that he later tried an ellipse for his personal experiments with the Victoria Line, but suppose this was revisiting earlier ideas?

A circular Circle Line is almost impossible to implement: geographically distorting, and conflicting with horizontal station names. An ellipse solves the second problem, but then leads to issues about how its shape should influence the remainder of the map. **Diagonal lines present particular difficulties**: when crossing the ellipse they look neatest when they are perpendicular, but 45º diagonals give only four opportunities for this. The focus of the design therefore shifts towards horizontal and vertical. An ellipse is also greedy for vertical height, so that the resulting spacious central area is at the expense of crushed suburbs. Diagonals are necessary to counter this.
A 1950s-style ellipse Underground map was intriguing to create. With a horizontal Central Line, and Circle Line stations evenly distributed around the ellipse, many aspects of the design were automatic but, even so, explaining all the decisions that had to be taken would have filled several newsletters!

Irrespective of how pleasing this outcome might look, the concept would have been almost impossible to implement. It just about squeezes into station poster dimensions, but the personal pocket-sized card folder is proportionately shallower. Crush an ellipse down to make more vertical space available and ... you effectively get a rectangle. Is that what happened in the early 1950s?

The elliptical Circle Line gives a nice impression of Beck’s own description of imagining the centre of London enlarged by a magnifying glass. Map of the Month for February will revisit Washington, DC. To make sure you see the results, subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com.

Max Roberts, mjr@tubemapcentral.com