A warm welcome to the 150 newsletter subscribers added last month, and apologies for the late mailing, the two are not uncorrelated. All the interest generated by my recent interview by Geoff Marshall on the future of the London Underground map, alongside a busy teaching term in which Transit Maps: Past, Present & Future had its second successful outing, meant that some delay was inevitable!

On the web
The interview by Geoff Marshall is here, with over 80,000 views so far.

Web page news
Time for spring updating. Two books loosely linked to transit map design will be added to the writing pages soon, and the link to the video added to the speaking pages (bringing the total to fourteen). Reworked lectures for my university module have been posted, but I am planning some changes to the course content next year, so the current lectures should not be regarded as definitive.

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 6QG.
• I will be giving my talk Transit Maps: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly to the International Financial Reporting Standards Foundation on Wednesday 18th April 2018, 12:00, at 30 Cannon Street, London EC4M 6XH.
• 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.
• Peter B. Lloyd will be discussing the joint Universities of Kent-Essex research on the effects of colour-coding on map usability at a Sign Design Society meeting in May. More details once they are finalised.
• Diagrams 2018 is a biannual multidisciplinary conference on information visualisation, this year held at Edinburgh Napier University on 18th to 22nd June. Two papers on map design co-authored by myself will be presented: Metro Map Colour-Coding: Effect on Usability in Route Tracing, and Concentric Circles Maps: Data and Implications.
• For a bigger dose of discussion, a Transit Mapping Symposium has been organised by Jug Cerovic and Richard Archambault in Montreal, Canada on June 28th-29th 2018. I won't be attending, but any reports back will be most welcome.

Map of the Month: A missing New York City Subway map?
Gaps in New York City Subway map issues are not uncommon, but the three years between 1969 and the Vignelli design of 1972 is longer than usual, at a time when users were coming to terms with the changes to the network on completion of the Chrystie Street connection. The then official map was a fragmented bastardisation of George Salomon’s elegant work of the late 1950s but, in the background, it is possible that alternatives were being investigated. The first hint comes from evidence that, in the mid 1960s, Unimark – the design agency that Vignelli co-founded – implemented preliminary studies of the New York City Subway map as well as their review of signage. The second is the surprising 1967 New Routes Map that shows the first phase of the revised services. Its stark jagged simplicity contrasts with previous NYCTA maps, and in a number of ways it points towards the future Vignelli 1972 map, five years early.
The New Routes Map shows only new/modified lines, and seems to have been created in a hurry. There are many errors and inconsistencies, and the BMT Broadway line is depicted as an impossible jumble of zig-zagging lines and wayward dots. Intriguingly, there are strange gaps, hinting at absent lines. This leads to the question, was there a full base map from which this was derived? Did Vignelli create a prototype New York City Subway map, inexperctly used as the basis for the New Routes Map?

Unfortunately, the ineptness of this map, and lack of space for all missing services, means that extrapolation to a notional base-design is pure speculation, with many possible solutions. All I could do was try to get an idea of some general design priorities and preferences from what was already there, with a result that is inspired by the New Routes Map. The worst features are removed, but enough of the original ideas retained to give an idea of the possible effect that would have been created if applied system-wide. The result is not pretty: sharp corners on a grand scale give unrelenting harshness, and cause unsolvable problems where lines branch. The gaps between lines cause awkward effects where they cross.

Was there a lost Vignelli map, a mid-1960s precursor to his famous design? Possibly, but the New Routes Map does not provide a path to it and, if it really did exist, surely commentators of the day would have been more exuberant; their writing implies nothing more than concept sketches and presentation graphics.

Is there nonetheless a lost system map, related to the New Routes Map? There is the unprecedented graphic outing to explain, and the long hiatus. I wonder whether MTA staff were unsatisfied with the then official map and embarked on an internal project to streamline and modernise it. The New Routes Map was not impressive, and the notional all-system version might have looked so bad that it was abandoned, and Vignelli eventually commissioned to do the job properly.

Everything points to New Yorkers having a narrow escape, the unique style of the New Routes Map was not ideal even for just eight services, and scales up poorly to the full network. Next month, a chance email leads me to an unusual solution for Manchester, never before attempted for a network map. Subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com to receive it by email.

Max Roberts, mjr@tubemapcentral.com