Good news for April, my Chicago El map, inspired by the stained glass work of Frank Lloyd Wright, has been chosen for inclusion in the forthcoming Atlas of Design, volume 4. Published biennially by the North American Cartographic Information Society, the atlas is intended to showcase some of the world’s most beautiful and intriguing cartographic design. I’m delighted that the care that went into creating this map continues to be recognised, the four years in its making were definitely worth the effort!

Dates for 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. Event is fully booked.
- 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 titled Latest Academic Research on Map Design from The Universities of Kent and Reading on Thursday 10th May, 18:30, at Atkins, 26th Floor, 286 Euston Road, London, NW1 3AT.
- Peter B. Lloyd will be presenting a paper, also on this joint research, titled Metro Map Colour-Coding: Effect on Usability in Route Tracing, to the Diagrams 2018 conference on 19th June, 16:00, at Edinburgh Napier University.
- Elizabeth J. Newton will be presenting a paper on the joint University of Essex–London South Bank University research into the effects of design on objective measures versus subjective ratings of usability, titled Concentric Circles Maps: Data and Implications, to the Diagrams 2018 conference on 20th June, 11:25, at Edinburgh Napier University.
- 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 reports back will be welcome.

Map of the Month: Bridging the Great Manchester Divide

People occasionally contact me with suggestions for cities to map. I take every one of these seriously, and have a good look at the network in question if it is not one that I am familiar with or have investigated closely before. A network needs to capture my attention with an interesting shape, or the potential to showcase the style of an artist or designer that is close to my heart. Past cities that have managed this include Liverpool, Houston, Paris (in Art Nouveau style), and even Cork. So, a recent request to think about a map for Manchester led me to the usual internet searches for geographical maps of the region, and also the current state of play for the official schematic maps.
Manchester is one of those cities where a number of competing Victorian railway companies converged, with the unfortunate result that these remained disconnected north and south, effectively giving two separate networks. An ambitious 1970s scheme to link the railways with a tunnel under the city centre came to nothing, with a developing tram network, and cheaper, less effective, railway links above ground eventually fulfilling the role of north-south cross-city connection.

I therefore was not expecting much inspiration from my research. Fragmentation, by definition, rarely offers interesting shape. Contrast this with Liverpool, where the Loop and Link project created a unified network, ideal for circles map treatment. However, there was some shape: a spine with interconnects, and I realised that concentric circles don’t just provide a powerful way of unifying a network, they can also emphasise disunity if used in the right way.

The outcome is a double-concentric circles map of Manchester. The separate north and south networks are literally poles apart, and each occupy their own orbits, but bridged in the centre by Metrolink trams. Double-concentric circles create interesting problems for how straight lines should be integrated into them (although it is hard to imagine a more effective double-circle solution than this one). In the case of Manchester, I decided to use just one angle of straight line, which matches the trajectories of the routes quite well where they are applied, so this is effectively a tetrilinear map (just two angles), but with those lines parallel to one axis being curved, which counters the lack of diagonals nicely. Topography purists will object to the merging of the Windsor Link and the Ordsall Chord, but I defy any real passengers to notice.

Perhaps not the most complimentary map of a city that I have ever created, but this does emphasise the structural problems faced by rail users in Manchester, and the key role of Metrolink trams in bridging the gap. Map of the Month for May is not yet decided. Maybe Washington, DC, perhaps Bristol, or something very different. Subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com to find out what I decide.

Max Roberts, mjr@tubemapcentral.com