

# TUBE MAP CENTRAL

Monthly Newsletter

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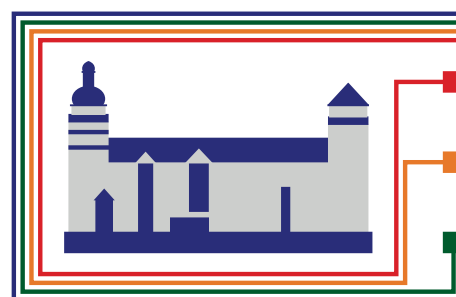
It has been a productive summer, and the heatwave certainly hasn't been the reason for this late newsletter! If everything goes to plan, there will be a choice of map books for Christmas ...

## Book news

We can confirm that [Airline Maps: A Century of Art and Design](#) will be simultaneously released in the UK and the USA on 29th October, although it is not yet showing on the UK website. I have also just completed the manuscript for *Tube Map Travels* which is planned for release in late November. More details soon.

## Date for your diary

The third [Schematic Mapping Workshop](#) will be held on 15th/16th April, 2021, at Universität Würzburg, Germany. The basic workshop website is complete and includes the full scope and submission timetable. The portal for submissions opens on Thursday 9th April 2020, and we are happy to take questions about these at [submissions@schematicmapping.org](mailto:submissions@schematicmapping.org). Thanks to those who commented on the last logo, which is much improved.



## Map of the Month:

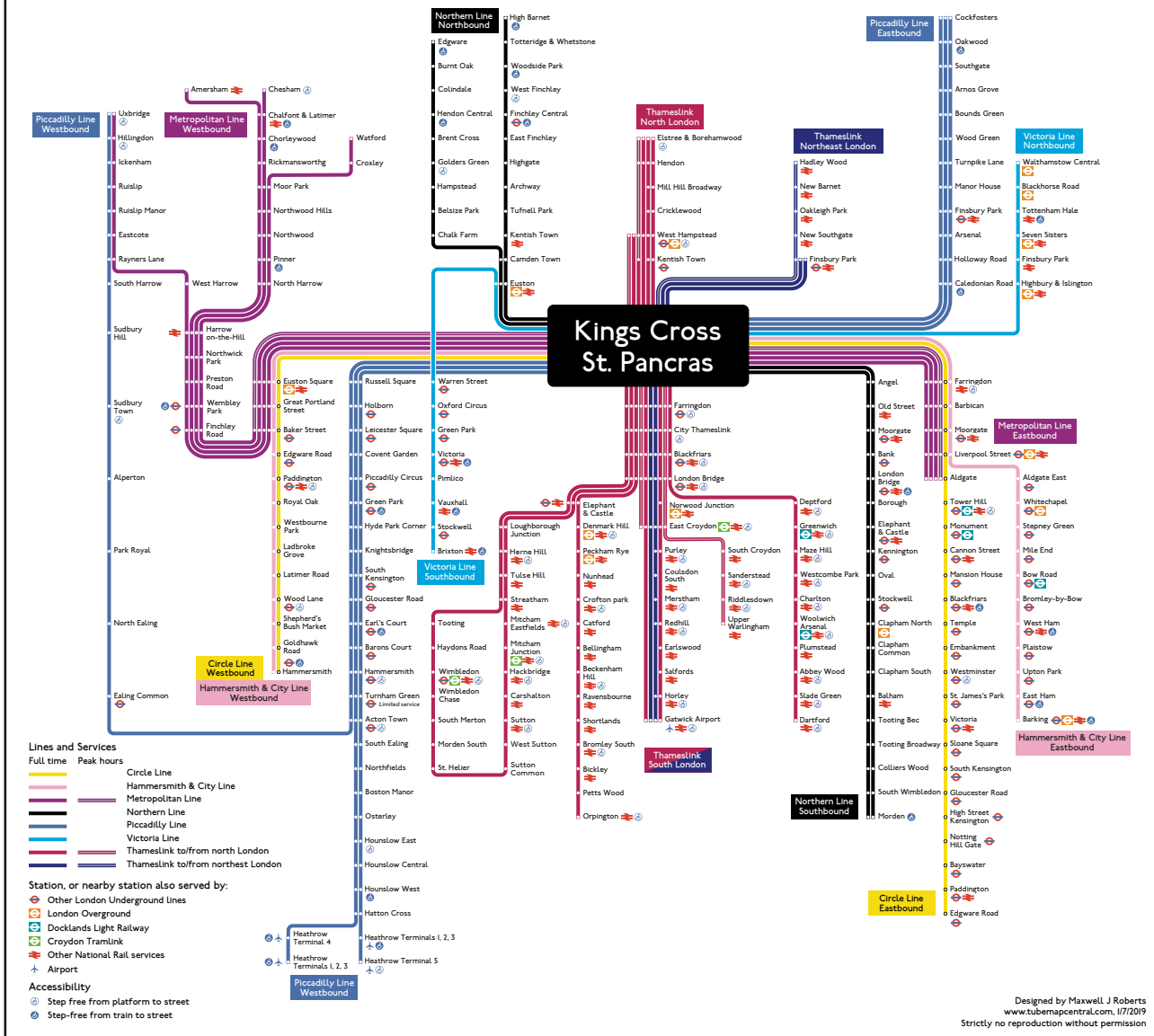
### Distorting topology and topography

Travelling recently in unfamiliar parts of London brought home to me just how dire information design has become for TfL buses. All resources seem to have been devoted to their nannyish journey planner that might well give perfectly reasonable routes if you type in the start and end points of a journey, but not only does relying on computers in this way inhibit learning about the city and its transport network, the system also imposes on people a limited way in which they can use public transport. Try getting a sensible answer to this question from a journey planner: *I am at X, I have finished my meeting early, where can I get to easily from here so that I can kill some time?* Or how about: *I live at Y, I don't know the area, what sorts of places will the local bus routes take me?* There will always be a need for maps, and transport operators should be catering properly for people's diversity, not assuming that because many needs can be satisfied in one way, there is no responsibility to address any others.

TfL does still create certain types of bus map, but the diagram that they produce for key Central London routes is actually misleading. Try to work out from this [awful design](#) how to get to the Barbican Centre from the West End! Your answer will be wrong. With not much help from this diagram, I chose a bus route that I knew went in roughly the right direction, but TfL information design simply cannot address questions such as: *I am sat on a 38 bus heading east, which stop is closest to the Barbican Centre?* The 'interactive' map couldn't cope with the reception, making it painfully slow and constantly redrawing. I could have found out what I needed in seconds with an old-fashioned paper map that named the bus stops.

[Spider maps](#) have been [dumbed down](#) too, which no doubt makes them easier to create and maintain. This finally brings me to Map of the Month, inspired by a chance [sighting on a blog](#) of something [really freaky](#). It looked like a map, with lots of bus routes neatly fanning out from Romford station, but taking a closer look, there were place names duplicated on far sides of the map; Upminster Station appeared in three completely different places. Topology and topography had been distorted, and the result wasn't a map at all, it was just a set of lists of bus route calling points visualised using schematic map imagery.

## Trains from Kings Cross St. Pancras: Underground and also Thameslink services with Oystercard availability



Apparently the Romford bus map has been trialed. I am amazed that anyone took it seriously enough to let it near users. Two simple thought experiments show that it is defective: (1) How can a user identify which buses go to Upminster Station – every bus route will need to be read to see whether Upminster Station pops up as an option, all the spatial cues have gone – and (2) how can a user identify which of the three options offers the most direct route to Upminster Station?

In the spirit of highlighting the absurdity of this map for people who don't know Romford, but might know the London Underground, and for some fun, I created an equivalent map for London rail services from Kings Cross St Pancras, using exactly the same design rules and principles. But don't show it to anyone who works for TfL, they might take it seriously and adopt it.

Apologies for the rant, but it is frustrating when an organisation which has a reputation for design excellence can get away with so many examples of bad implementation, although I do have a knack for extracting confusion and disorder from information systems that seem to work perfectly well for everyone else. Next month the newsletter will be much more lighthearted. To find out what is in store, subscribe at [www.tubemapcentral.com](http://www.tubemapcentral.com).