Tube Map Central

Newsletter

Number 101, June 2025

The years slip away so easily. My last communication was back in December 2022, when I sent out a call for papers for the special issue of *The Cartographic Journal* which marked the 90th anniversary of Henry Beck's first published diagram of the London Underground. Since then, this is my first Tube Map Central newsletter. The problem hasn't been too little news, it has been too much. With more news always on the horizon, it was never quite the right time to gather everything together and send an update. As you will see, I have a good reason to make space now, with a Kickstarter campaign just launched.

Book News

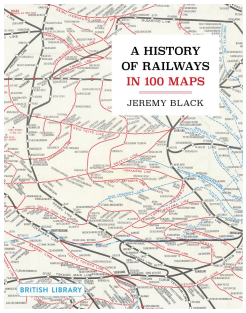
First, time to catch up with all the books that are essential for the transit map enthusiast's library. I keep a full list on the writing section of my web pages and these are all the additions since Newsletter 100.



- *Berlin subway: Contemporary history in route maps from 1902 to today,* by Uwe Poppel, published 2017 by GVE-Verlag, ISBN 3892184881. This one slipped by. It is a most-welcome update to a book published in 2002. English and German text.



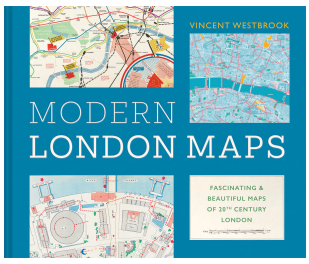
- *Bird's-eye view collection by Hatsusaburo Yoshida,* by the Shobunsha Map Editorial Department, published 2021 by Shobunsha Publications, ISBN 4398147530. A beautiful compilation of dozens of panoramic railway maps by a well-known Japanese artist. Several maps fold out to quadruple the book width. Text is in Japanese but that doesn't matter!



- *A History of railways in 100 maps,* by Jeremy Black, published 2024 by British Library Books, ISBN 0712355018. A survey of the development of railways worldwide, as told through their maps. Perhaps lacking in visual exuberance.



- *Iconic transit maps: The world's best designs,* by Mark Ovenden, published 2024 by Prestel Verlag, ISBN 3791380254. Mark's latest compilation takes an in-depth look at the networks with strong cartographic traditions, with input from many of the designers who are responsible for them. Unusually, for Mark, this map book is published in portrait format!



- *Modern London maps,* by Vincent Westbrook, published 2024 by Batsford, ISBN 1849949392. A nice selection of maps in general, and with good coverage of transport in London.



- *L'histoire du Métro Parisien Racontée par ses Plans (2d edition),* by Mark Ovenden, Julian Pepinster & Pascal Pontremoli, published 2025 by La Vie du Rail, ISBN 2370621375. An updated text, in French, with coverage of the attempts at mapping the developing *Grand Paris network*.

September 2023: UX Design Course Completed

People have suggested that I am effectively studying User Experience design and, out of interest, in December 2022, I enrolled on an online course run by the *UX Design Institute*. It filled plenty of gaps in my knowledge but the focus on qualitative research methods was so traumatising that I wrote two web articles discussing the limitations of these techniques (also on my LinkedIn page).

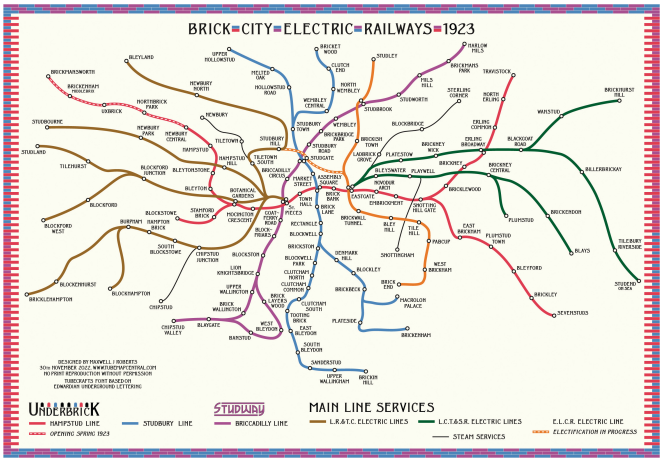


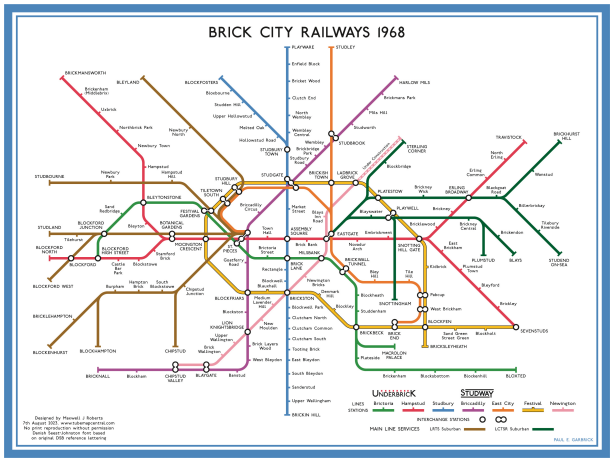
- Quantitative versus qualitative user research. Part 1: Swings and roundabouts.
- Quantitative versus qualitative user research. Part 2: The paradox of affinity diagrams.

September 2023: Map Design I, Brick City Railways Maps Completed

Some of you may have noticed that I have been taking an interest in Lego in the last few years – see my December 2020 Newsletter. It is a fascinating way of schematising three-dimensional real life and I have exhibited my buildings at several shows. My Edwardian Underground station is a firm favourite and, like the real thing, it needed a map to go on the wall. I started with the actual map stickers that have appeared in various Lego sets over the years and, assisted with a large collection of terrible Lego-related puns, started to create a suitable imaginary network. The world-building got a little bit out of control and the result was a sequence of fifteen fictitious maps in the style of London Underground designs from Edwardian times to the 1970s. A selection of these can be viewed on my website.

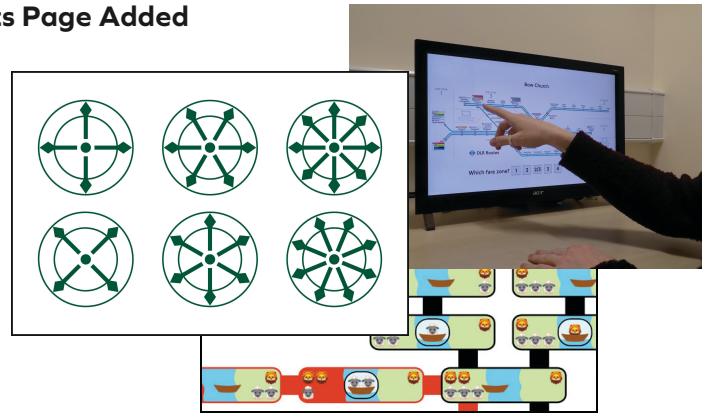




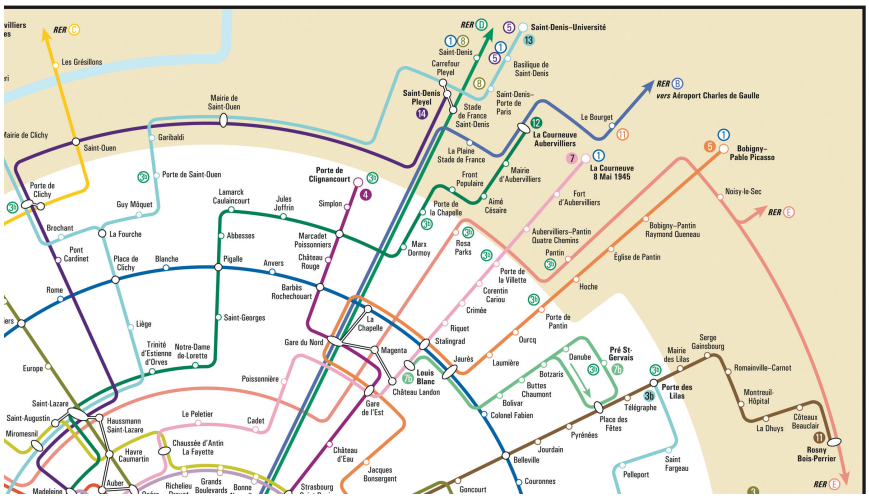


February 2024: Web Pages News I, Projects Page Added

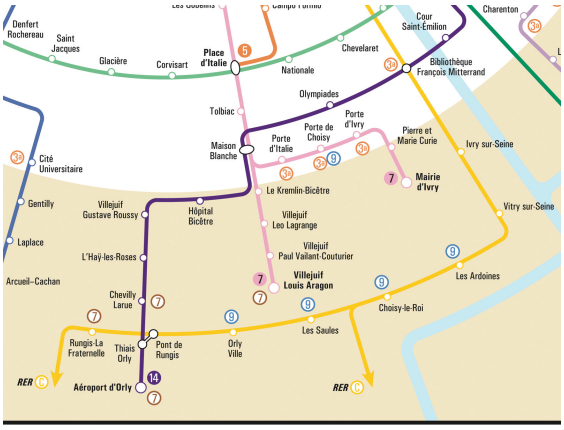
It has been too long since I last updated my CV and, as part of this, I have added a *Projects page* to my web site to create an online portfolio. This gathers together my work on design, research and teaching to give a visual overview of the highlights.



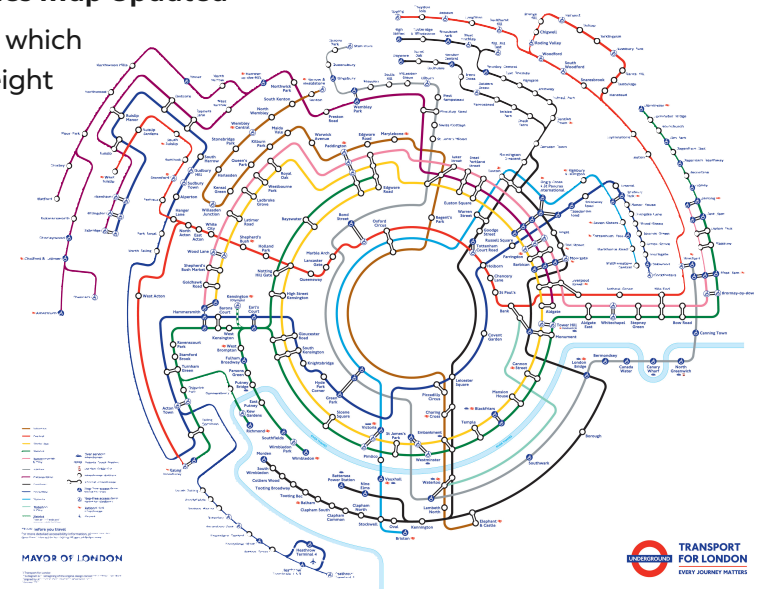
***June 2024:* Map Design II, Paris Circles Map Updated**



In May 2024, I received a surprise email from the *Palais de la Découverte* – the Paris Science Museum – asking for permission to display my Paris Metro concentric circles map in their forthcoming exhibition on mathematics. This was an exciting opportunity but it meant that I needed to update the design. The new destinations for Metro Lines 13, 14 and RER Line E have not only transformed parts of Paris, their extensions into the suburbs also meant that other RER Lines needed to be included to put these additions into context. The map will be on display from late 2025/2026 when renovations are complete and the museum moves back to its traditional site. I updated both concentric circles and my concentric ellipses maps and gave a choice as to which to display, it will be interesting to see what they pick.



***July 2024:* Map Design III, London Circles Map Updated**

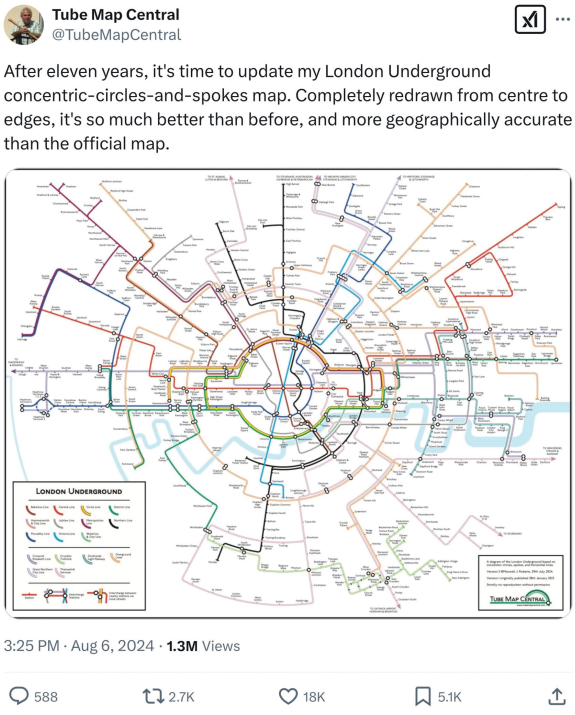


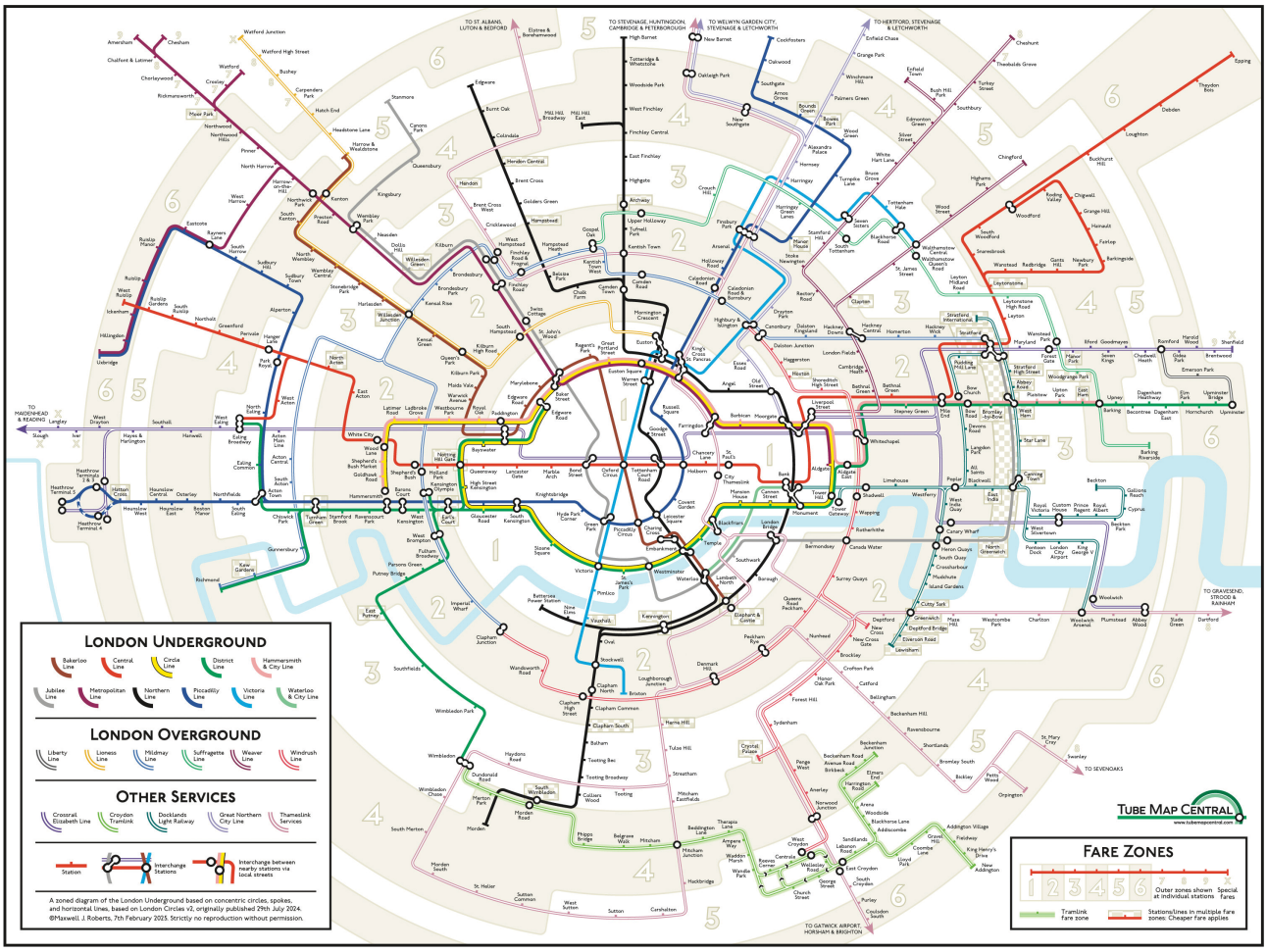
And so we reach the big event of 2024, which pushed back writing this newsletter by eight months. It began, innocently enough, in February when *Transport for London* issued a London Underground map based on concentric circles and spokes. This was intended as a gimmick to advertise a mobile phone brand. Of course, I had created a map using these design rules back in January 2013 – my first ever viral design – but TfL neglected to acknowledge this. I received a lot of emails that day. Many people were concerned that my intellectual property had been violated. On balance, I decided that this had not taken place because I could not identify any configurations on the TfL map that could be said to be derived from my own 2013 version. I discuss these issues in my book, *Tube Map Travels*.

Rather than make a fuss, I decided that the best thing to do would be to go back to my 2013 design and bring it up to date: I was no longer happy with my attempt. The many instances of topographical distortion were no longer acceptable to me and I had not adhered to the design

rules meticulously. I therefore resolved to create a new map that would be topographically accurate: better than both official TfL designs; their circles map (not difficult) *and* their standard pocket map based on Henry Beck's rules (also not difficult).

I released the map on X (Twitter) at the end of July and, thanks to a re-post by Mark Ovenden, the internet went crazy, generating over 20,000 'likes'. I was deluged with interview requests for television and radio. Poster orders flooded in and there were so many that I decided to purchase a new large-format printer to fulfill them. It was a mad fortnight and it took a month to recover and catch up with all the orders. Once I had breathing space, I successfully added fare zones to the map, as requested by many people. The next step is mentioned later in this newsletter.





***August 2024:* Web Pages News II, Web Articles Added**

I added two articles to my web pages. One gives a history of circles maps, the other discusses my motivations, design decisions, and evaluations of my London 2013 and 2024 versions.

- Searching for shape: Circles on transit maps through time.
- Round in circles and back again: Updating my London Underground concentric circles map.

***September 2024:* Map Research I, *The Cartographic Journal* Special Issue;**

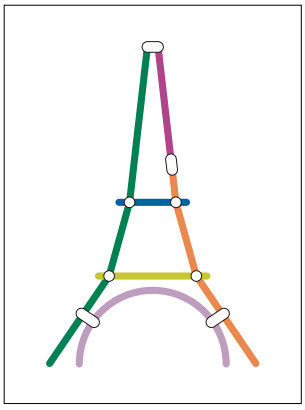
In parallel with circles map mayhem subsiding, the special issue of *The Cartographic Journal* – marking the 90th anniversary of the of Henry Beck's first published diagram of the London Underground –finally went to press. There is a nice editorial by a panel of researchers discussing the significance of the design, and nine excellent refereed papers discussing research inspired by Beck's work. Perspectives range from history to critiques of existing designs, through to usability testing and to automated generation. *The link to the journal will take you to the abstracts and the open access papers. For the other papers, email me and I will send copies.* My own paper can also be downloaded here. This discusses methods of evaluating map effectiveness and has a detailed critique of trusting informal expert judgement.



***October 2024:* Map Exhibition, The Map House**

To round off the year, I was invited by *The Map House* at Knightsbridge to display my London Circles map at their exhibition *Mapping the Tube: 1863-2023* which ran from October to December 2024. A big thanks to Charlie *et al.* for the invitation: The staff at The Map House were perfect hosts throughout. For a detailed walkthrough of the exhibition, along with historical commentary, see this video from Jago Hazzard.





April 2025:* Map Research II, *Fourth Schematic Mapping Workshop

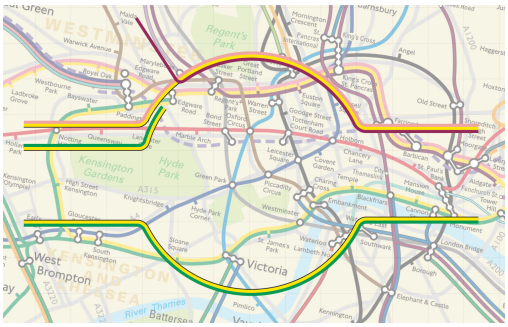
On the 10th/11th April around 30 researchers gathered at the *École des Ingénieurs de la Ville de Paris* for a multidisciplinary workshop on research into schematic maps. Topics included the results of usability testing, history of schematic mapping, and computer automation of schematisation. Lively discussions included whether maps even had a future. All papers and presentations from this workshop (and the three previous ones) can be downloaded from the workshop website. It is hoped to hold the fifth workshop in 2028: discussions are currently underway as to its location. I presented two papers. One detailed the use of a journey choice methodology to investigate the usability of concentric circles maps. The other gave a broader overview of the usability research lessons learnt from such designs, twelve years on from the release of my first London map in January 2013.

- Using forced-journey choice methodology to investigate the usability of octolinear versus concentric circles transit maps.
- Round in Circles and Back Again: Concentric Circles Maps Twelve Years On.

For me, one of the highlights of the workshop was an attempt by Martin Nöllenburg to coax ChatGPT into producing output resembling a coherent map of the Paris Metro. I am a staunch sceptic of claims that, somehow, the statistical extrapolation methodology of current systems will yield *Artificial Wisdom.* If the intention is entertainment, such systems excel, but the statistical soup that results should not be relied on if accuracy is the goal. My favourite error, *Gare d'Austeparnasse* sums up the fundamental problem nicely. Statistical confluences are not, and can never be, a proxy for conceptual understanding. This is another topic for which I wrote a web article (also on my LinkedIn page).



- Artificial Intelligence: The harder you try to define it the more you understand it.



***June 2025:* Map Design IV, Kickstarter Project Launch**

If you have got this far, you will definitely be interested in my project on Kickstarter. My London Circles 2024 map shows all the railways on the current Underground map, but this comprises only two-thirds of London's suburban network. Many people have wanted a comprehensive design and I have a window this summer to create an *all-London's-railways concentric circles and spokes map*. Backers can donate a small amount or pre-order posters. If enough people are interested, I will commence work in August 2025 with a target completion mid September. *If you want to see the project completed, do help me out with publicity. Comment on my posts on LinkedIn and X and share them with like-minded people to get the information out there.*

In the Media, on the web

There are too many newspaper articles to report here. If you try an internet search for Max Roberts circles map you will find plenty to read! Instead, here is a selection of online videos from the last eighteen months.

- *The journey of London's iconic tube map as it marks the 90th anniversary since it was adopted*. The Michael Portillo Show, GB News, January 2023. A discussion of the current state of the official Underground map, my own conventional reworking made an appearance.
- *Why Henry Beck's 1933 London tube map was a resounding success*. IIID conversations, 4th January 2024. A thirty minute presentation to information designers and a lively Q&A.
- *London's famous Tube map gets an eye-catching circular redesign*. ITV News, 15th August 2024. *A recorded TV interview, unfortunately my other TV appearances are no longer online.*

Afterword

Apologies again for the long gap in communication and thanks to everyone for their continuing support and patience. There are more map-related pieces of news in the pipeline and I will try not to leave it for two-and-a-half years before my next newsletter.

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