

Are Straight Lines Now A Taboo?

Jonathan Farrow Nottingham, United Kingdom jonathan.farrow@outlook.com

Transport for London's (TfL) decision to add Thameslink to the Tube Map from January 2021 appeared to be a winning move by the organisation. However, its implementation, in my opinion, has been suboptimal and now resembles a poorly thought out attempt at fully integrating the line into the existing map (latest version January 2022). With my redesign, I have attempted to keep true to the map's design philosophy and maximise the amount of straight routing, where practical.

A. Thameslink

Previously being a resident of Tooting, Thameslink was my route of choice for both commuting to West London and heading into Central and I always regarded it as the best means of cross-London travel. TfL decided to re-add the central part of the Thameslink network to the Tube Map in 2021. The route seems to have been poorly added into the previous map's revision, without any substantial redesign, resulting in a snaking line across the map, twinned with absurdly large interchange symbols severely affecting its aesthetics. In my design, I have attempted to iron out the unnecessary kinks by effectively redesigning the entire map to integrate the Thameslink routes, while retaining the map's objective. Special attention should be given to the areas around King's Cross, Farringdon, and London Bridge. The entire southeast section of the network has also undergone extensive refinement to ensure the lines remain as straight as possible to reduce jarring and unnecessary kinks.

B. Overground

First included in the Tube Map in 2008, although in that time it has continued to bend unaesthetically to connect with the existing Underground network. In my design, both the north eastern and southern sections have been amended to remain as straight as possible. Note the routings in the Walthamstow and Clapham Junction areas. Thameslink and the Overground meet at Denmark Hill (South London) and the large interchange symbol on TfL's map shows how not redesigning large parts of the map to accommodate a new line can result in having to take such drastic measures. Furthermore, line routing and station location on the official map at South Tottenham is incorrect. While schematic design is not always geographically accurate, I feel it is beneficial to the map's users to illustrate where stations are in relation to one another. Another example of erroneous station location can be seen at Deptford on Thameslink, shown to the west of New Cross on TfL's map, when in reality, it is to the east, close to Deptford Bridge station; something which is shown accurately in my design.

C. Elizabeth Line (Crossrail)

The jewel in the crown of TfL (once it fully opens). This new cross-London route will reduce travel times and be fully accessible to persons of reduced mobility. While there has yet to be an official design of the Tube Map with the central section of the Elizabeth Line included, a 'network map' can be found on the Crossrail website. This draft shows some suboptimal design to incorporate the new line to the map, most notably large interchange icons and bending of the line. My design attempts to give this new line prominence as the most optimal route for passengers, especially for the central section between Paddington and Whitechapel. The 'double stations' at both Farringdon & Barbican and Moorgate & Liverpool Street add extra complexity to the design which I feel I have optimised well while adhering to my design specifications.

D. Northern Line Extension (NLE)

Opening in Autumn 2021, the Northern Line Extension added two additional stations to the west of Kennington. TfL's official map with the recent (January 2022) closure of the Bank Branch has resulted in quite a cramped layout, due to restrictions with zonal shading. Again, there has been no redesign to accommodate the new route, and there is some questionable siting of the Riverboat Services symbol for Vauxhall. Routing of the NLE is south of Vauxhall station, and this is shown correctly in my design. Ideally, lines should not cross zones that they are not subject to; e.g. a journey from Stockwell to Vauxhall is not subject to Zone 1 fares. This has prompted the appearance of a Zone 1 'peninsula' for the NLE stations with the Victoria Line passing between Zones 1 and 2. TfL's solution seems rather clumsy with a large connector at Kennington, making it appear as two stations, when in reality, the interchange is merely cross-platform.

E. Step-Free Access (SFA) Symbol Usage

While showing step-free access (SFA) is hugely important, I feel TfL's map does this in a somewhat clumsy way with the use of the SFA symbol 'blob'. At first glance to a non-regular user, it appears to indicate all SFA stations are interchanges. In my design, I have reserved the use of the SFA symbol in the centre of an interchange symbol for interchange stations only. For non-interchange stations, the symbol resides in-line with the station label. Furthermore, as the entirety of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) is stepfree from street to train, the colour of the SFA symbol has been matched to the DLR line. I have also opted for a modern 'accessibility' emoji icon, rather than a traditional 'disability' icon to add to the modern aesthetic.

F. Dagger Symbol

Another aspect that was previously featured in official maps is the dagger symbol (†). This allows caveats to be added to stations, such as limited access or reduced opening hours in a box located in the top right, without map users having to look elsewhere for this information, notably online.

G. Conclusion

To conclude, I must confirm I am not a graphical designer, I simply take an interest in London's transport as a whole. I have tried to resolve the issues that I find with the official map while attempting to retain the standards originated by Beck in the 1930s. This has mainly consisted of using straight routing as much as possible and reducing the use of large interchange connectors. I do hope TfL see my design and try to incorporate some of the design ideas into any future redesigns.