A qualitative evaluation of a proposed metro map for Melbourne’s underground system.

William Cartwright

Abstract
When cities develop a rail network – above or under ground – this is usually accompanied by the publication of a metro map. The map is an essential adjunct, produced and provided to commuters to facilitate informed use of the system.

It is generally agreed that the exemplar metro map is that of the London Underground, designed by Harry Beck, in 1931. Beck’s design principles have been copied, modified and adopted by numerous public transport bodies, when producing maps of their own system. His map is regarded as a design classic, and used as the lodestone when judging the effectiveness of other metromaps.

Recently, Public Transport Victoria (PTV) developed a new design for a metromap for the rail system for Melbourne, Australia. This design is greatly based on Beck’s design ideas. As part of the press release, PTV sought passenger feedback on its proposed new design. It is refreshing to see that an organisation like Public Transport Victoria has taken the initiative to implement a new design, and to seek public feedback on this design. However, is this new design effective, or just ‘more of the same’? Is the map no different, and perhaps no better, than previous maps of the Melbourne metropolitan rail system, or a great improvement on what was previously published? Are we just going around in circles?

This paper provides the results of an evaluation of this proposal for a new map for the Melbourne metropolitan rail system. It begins by providing a brief history of metropolitan rail maps in Melbourne, to provide a background to what now exists. Then it looks at this recent proposal and outlines the basis for evaluation, which is built around the design principles of Beck’s London map. Finally, it provides the results from the evaluation, reports on conclusions from this evaluation and makes recommendations about how the proposed map might be improved.