

Rail Transit Identification and Neighbourhood Identity. Exploring the Potential for ‘Community-Supportive Transit’

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ABSTRACT *The preservation and promotion of neighbourhood identity is important in contemporary cities. Los Angeles, long known for its lack of both effective mass transit and, separately, local identity and cohesion among its neighbourhoods, is currently working to address each of these issues, yet little attention has been paid to the possibility that the two can be directly related. This paper investigates how rail transit line identification and station-naming decisions are not only important to community members but can have an impact on the neighbourhood identity. After introducing these ideas with the case of the identification of the Metro ‘Expo Line’ in LA, the paper turns to a comparison of naming logics for other local institutions and other major transit systems, arguing that cities could benefit from considering ‘community supportive’ transit design that promotes local identity in addition to more pragmatic wayfinding concerns.*

Like the dwelling, which may be typical of the way millions were sheltered, something as basic as a railroad or streetcar system changes the quality of everyday life in the urban landscape, while marking the terrain. (Dolores Hayden, 1995, p. 22)

Introduction

The Los Angeles Metro rail rapid transit system¹ has seen more than its share of obstacles since its inception in the 1980s, including funding shortages, local oppositions to subway construction, and an outright ban on tunnelling through certain parts of the city. Yet 2006 saw the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) at an impasse over something very different: a long-proposed, but newly-approved, light rail line needed a name and a colour. In keeping with the design logic of the existing Metro rail system (in which the new line would be the sixth), planners suggested that what had previously been referred to as the MidCity/Exposition Transit Project should be officially named the ‘Aqua Line’. However, despite that colour’s early adoption by some transit advocacy groups and the MTA’s support for its meeting myriad design criteria (“bright, pleasant and easy to produce”, “will work well on maps and other printed materials”) and other justifications (“works in both English and Spanish;

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and has no cultural sensitivities”), this seemingly innocuous colour choice was not perceived as such by everyone (LACMTA, 2006a). What seemed like a simple decision was complicated by concerns of the potentially powerful symbolism of the new line’s identification for neighbourhood identity.

In an official motion, MTA Board Member Bernard Parks, city councilman for the South LA district through which much of the line will run, wrote that the project had been known as the ‘Expo Line’ since its inception and that “a color designation is not necessary to create a stronger identity” (LACMTA, 2006b). Parks argued that “color has never been brought to the community for discussion” and that aqua (backed by the afore-mentioned transit groups, the City of Santa Monica and several other Westside communities, in part due to connotations with the Pacific Ocean) would not reflect the Southside communities (Uranga, 2006). Indeed, it should be noted that the first and only guaranteed segment of the new line will run from Downtown Los Angeles through several historic South LA neighbourhoods to the municipality of Culver City, but nowhere near the beach (see Figure 1). In a city with a complex history of spatial and racial inequality, it is not shocking that the affluent Westside apparently once again ‘having its way’ was met less than enthusiastically by Councilman Parks and his constituents. The councilman moved that the Board adopt ‘Expo Line’ as the official name and “indicate the ‘Expo Line’ on all maps and publications by the color rose” (LACMTA, 2006b). He advocated the name in honour of the street it will run along and the Exposition Park area he represents, and favoured use of the colour rose in recognition of the landmark Southside park’s famous rose gardens. Furthermore,

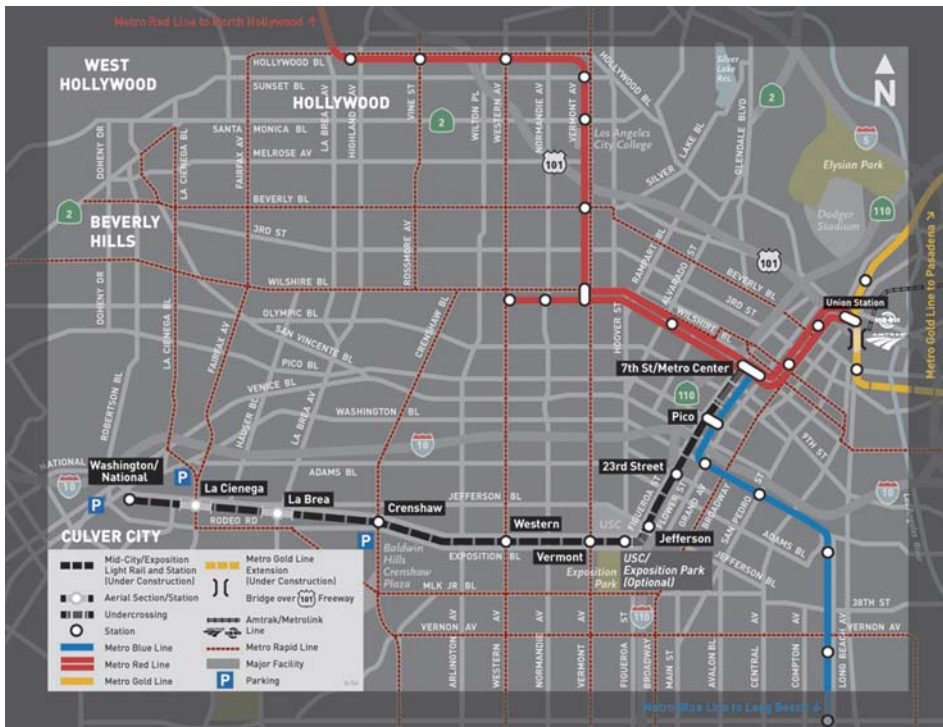


Figure 1. Proposed route of Mid-City/Exposition Transit Project and connections with existing lines. Source: image used courtesy of the Exposition Construction Authority.

Parks felt that “the poorer communities it runs through could gain economic benefits by having a rail line that brands their area” (Uranga, 2006).

Councilman Parks, also a former police chief and mayoral candidate, has been a strong voice for his working class, predominantly Black and Latino district, and his motion struck a chord, spawning widespread controversy amongst neighbourhood groups as well as in the online transportation advocacy community. A review of these websites suggests more antipathy than support for Parks’ motion (and more distaste for the debate in general than anything else), but many people do see the logic in his argument. Some concur that the minority neighbourhoods deserve a greater say in the matter, while others favour the name ‘Expo Line’ in order to encourage the renaming of other lines to reflect their routes and destinations as well. Meanwhile, behind the scenes politicking at the MTA failed to resolve the issue. After months of avoiding it, an August 2006 vote of the Board settled upon ‘Expo Line’ for the name, but revealed that neither side had secured the support to designate rose or aqua as the line’s colour. Resigned to a political impasse, planners announced that maps would simply reflect the proposed route as a dotted black line.

The importance of the debate about transit identification in Los Angeles is not only its exposure of spatially-based class, race and inter-neighbourhood tensions, its demonstration of the trite side of local politics, or even the somewhat remarkable fact that it is still at an impasse today. This conflict highlights another issue: the relationship between urban transit and local community identity, in a city and region infamous for its lack of both. With efforts to build local and civic identity increasingly common across Los Angeles just as it embarks on a mass transit building boom (recently manifest in the passage of a ballot measure expected to raise some \$40 billion for transit), the city is at a critical space and time for understanding this relationship. Doing so will be to the advantage of the transit systems and residents of Los Angeles and beyond, by clarifying whether design decisions can encourage both transit use and neighbourhood identity.

This paper begins with a review of research on the challenges to community identity and attachment in contemporary cities, and the ways that urban planning and design decisions have been used to promote both local identity and civic cohesion. It extends this logic to examine whether such trends are visible in the identification of rail transit lines and stations in the contexts of different cities and wayfinding systems. Ultimately, the study asks whether it is possible that something as simple as the name of a station could have important effects on the identity (both locally and externally) of the community area in which it is located, for the benefit of community members and other transit users alike. With LA as a referent, the consideration of related precedents in identification and public use design and a brief comparative analysis of rapid transit systems in influential predecessors such as Boston, New York, Chicago and London reveals how neighbourhood social and spatial identity can influence transit identification *and* how transit identification decisions may, in turn, impact socio-spatial identity. The study suggests that greater consciousness of local identity among planners in the identification of transit system components can help build public support and strengthen community identity and place attachment. In other words, the goal of transit design should not only be a transit-supportive community, but *community-supportive transit*.

Community Identity and Urban Design

A great many people, from city governments and tourists to business owners and residents themselves, value the individual character and identity of unique urban neighbourhoods. The same can be said of the cognitive coherence of these neighbourhoods as part of the wider metropolis. Locational identity is crucial to everything from effective navigation of the urban environment (Carr, 1973) to the formation of personal identity (Walmsley, 1988) and political mobilization (Harvey, 1993), and of course marketing, commerce and investment (see Erickson & Roberts, 1997). Yet the social cohesion of local communities, both internally and in the context of their wider cities, is challenged by the new spatial logics of post-industrial and globalizing economies. Reich (1991) has shown how local forms of social solidarity are easily relegated by global processes, while Sassen (1991), Castells (1996) and others describe the growing gap between areas that become primary nodes of power, entertainment or lifestyle, and those that are left abandoned or disconnected. Brown *et al.* (2003) have found that place attachment declines along with urban deterioration, while Zukin (1993) argues that local authenticity is challenged by global market forces. Urban communities face the cultural challenges of migration, minoritization and gentrification, and may also be directly assaulted by development or simply lost to the massive 'space of flows' that is the global megacity (Castells, 1996).

The danger then, particularly for disadvantaged communities in highly 'globalized' cities, is that as "the 'urban realm' becomes nonspatial" in terms of economic functions, "spatially defined neighbourhoods become more and more irrelevant to the functioning of the mainstream economy" (Van Kempen & Marcuse, 1997, p. 286). Of course, care must be taken not to overstate these phenomena—certainly the 'space of places' remains for authentic urban communities even as others become hyper-commodified (Castells, 1996). The point here is simply that the preservation and promotion of neighbourhood identity and metropolitan cohesion are important goals of community members and local governments alike. This section demonstrates that urban design decisions can be (and have been) used to do so.

A striking example of municipal efforts to reinforce local identity through urban design is the London Plan of 2004, which calls for the use of urban planning and design to "Promote London's polycentric development and a stronger role for town centres" by "strengthening their sense of identity" and building local cultural identity through development wherever possible (Greater London Authority, 2004, p. 7). Similarly, Seattle's Comprehensive Plan seeks to "Capitalize on opportunities for promoting community identity" and emphasizes planning and design to support "the uniqueness of different places within the city" (City of Seattle, 2005, p. 10.4). The revitalization literature of smaller neighbouring Auburn, Washington, also argues that "Urban design and form can contribute to building upon neighbourhood identification and attachment and in turn strengthen the development of the neighbourhood itself" (City of Auburn, 2002).

Specifically, many city governments consider the naming of local facilities such as branch libraries or parks as important media for promoting community identity. According to the chairman of the Boston Public Library Board of Trustees, "Re-naming any branch library is a weighty decision because a branch is such a vital part of a neighborhood's identity" (Boston Public Library, 2003). Planning policy of the city of Portland, Oregon (2006, p. 1) states that "Parks are integral to

a community's identity" and favours "Geographic or names based upon distinguishing characteristics" that "emphasize community identity". The city also requires that "First priority in naming Community buildings and facilities shall be given to geographical location that identifies the community it serves" (City of Portland, 2006, p. 2). Post Offices can also be considered important in strengthening identity, as demonstrated by Princeville, North Carolina's efforts to get its own zip code: "A Post Office would assist the community in its efforts to grow and maintain its unique identity" argued the area's congressman (Butterfield, 2005). In Queens, New York, Representative Gary Ackerman has made a name for himself by championing neighbourhood identity through the Postal Service. In 1998, he convinced them "to recognize each Queens community by their respective Zip code" and most recently fought to have the post office in the borough's Holliswood section renamed to reflect the community it serves. As one community board member explained, "We are very proud of our community ... The name Station D did not accurately reflect our glamour or style" (quoted in Ackerman, 2005).

Neighbourhood Identity and Civic Cohesion in Los Angeles

The strengthening of community identity through public use design is also of great importance to communities in Los Angeles, which, like those in many global cities, face precisely the challenges that Castells, Zukin and others have described. Already a famously 'fragmented metropolis' (Fulton, 1993), LA is also a place where "globalization has had a far greater impact on the landscape" than many other American cities (Abu-Lughod, 1999, p. 408). As in other sprawling urban regions from Beijing to New York, many local communities across the metropolitan area are undefined, contested and amorphous. Yet these processes do not preclude neighbourhood identity in Los Angeles. London, the sprawling, convoluted cultural mash-up that has felt the brunt of every phase of 'globalization' from the Roman Empire to hyper-finance, is nearly defined by its countless neighbourhoods. If rarely manifest to the outside observer, according to a report by the Southern California Studies Center (2003, p. 27), "Neighborhood identity is strong in many parts of metropolitan L.A., providing a basis for community organizing and participation". Indeed, Nicolaidis (2004) finds that the "politics of the neighborhood" have long been important for working class Angelenos. Today, the bolstering of community identity and empowerment as well as wider city pride are official concerns of the City of Los Angeles, which has created programmes for just this purpose.

Beginning in 1994, the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative worked to foster neighbourhood identity through the built environment with the creation of banners, murals, information kiosks, decorative cross-walks, trash cans, street lights and other streetscaping, and even six 'community entry monuments' (see LANI, 2003). The city was also closely involved with community-oriented transit planning in the mid-1990s (US FTA, 1996, p. 32). Partly in response to several (unsuccessful) attempts by various parts of the city to secede, Los Angeles created the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment in 1999, which has led to the formation of nearly 90 'neighbourhood councils', each defining their own spatial and political identities through local elections. Finally, and most relevant to the issue of transit identification, the LA Department of Transportation created its 'Neighborhood Identification Signs' initiative (see Figure 2). The popular signs,

which must be approved by the City Council but can be requested by neighbourhood groups, are intended to “strike a balance among the unique character of the community, the unity of the City and the dignity of the message”, helping people identify distinct communities while at the same time connecting them with the rest of Los Angeles (LADOT, 2007).

In 2004, LA City Council member Tom LaBonge proudly announced that ‘Toluca Woods’ would become “the newest official neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles” with the unveiling of new street signs. As the councilman said in his press release:

It’s always a significant day when a community achieves its long held goal to unify and identify with a particular area they call home ... Toluca Woods is much loved by its residents, and *the placement of these signs solidifies this association* and affection. (quoted in LaBonge, 2004, emphasis added).

In the words of one local activist, although for “people who’ve lived here, it’s always been Toluca Woods. Now, others who pass through will know it too” (quoted in LaBonge, 2004). By this logic, it can be seen how such public proclamation of neighbourhood identity might also be accomplished through the community-supportive naming of transit lines and stations that thousands of people will, too, pass through.

A Theory of Community-Supportive Transit

There are several reasons why rapid transit design has the potential to be an ideal medium through which to promote neighbourhood identity in conjunction with civic unity. It is known that transit riders tend to have more positive feelings about urban neighbourhoods in general than non-riders (Schwanen & Mokhtarian, 2005), making them an ideal audience to promote the identity of distinct neighbourhoods; they are more likely than automobile users to actually stop, visit and incorporate different areas into their understanding of and identification with the city. Tourists regularly depend on mass transit (even in Los Angeles) to get



Figure 2. ‘Neighborhood Identification Sign’ in central LA. Source: photo by Joshua Van Blankenship.

around cities and form mental maps of their layouts. And as mentioned above, if initiatives such as LA's Neighborhood Identification Signs are explicitly intended to increase neighbourhood identity while simultaneously promoting a common civic pride, rail transit identification seems another obvious medium for doing the same. Line and station names provide unique identities; the connectivity of the system provides unity.

However, urban transit planning is an understandably applied and practical science. Even at the level of physical station design, although attention to accessibility, attractiveness and other 'human-oriented' features is commonplace, major recent articles pay little attention to the unique relationship of transit to specific cultural contexts. Those who do consider more qualitative, locally-specific outcomes as important objectives of transit planning (Vuchic, 1999, 2005; Boarnet & Crane, 2001; Bruun, 2007; Cedar, 2007) tend to ignore issues of community identity beyond basic functional or aesthetic gestures. Authors focused specifically on rail stations, such as Edwards (1997), Ross (2000) and Haywood (2005), have contributed to our understanding of the importance of locally-specific design components and the potential for stations to meaningfully relate to communities (see also Haywood, 2008 for a recent review), but still largely avoid the less tangible realm of social identity and organization. Similarly, Podobnik (2002) describes the ability of transit centres to promote 'community sociability' and Brown & Werner (2008) have shown promising evidence that place attachment (as well as neighbourhood satisfaction) increases with transit use, but neither pay attention to the impact of identification or other neighbourhood-specific design. Certainly transit systems' potential to be positive agents of social cohesion and community identity has not been widely acknowledged.

Perhaps the closest examples of such considerations in transportation planning are found in the realm of ridership promotion and 'community-sensitive' transit. In *Planning, Developing and Implementing Community-Sensitive Transit* (1996), researchers at the Federal Transit Administration examine the impacts of transit-oriented development and demand-based services and design amenities on transit ridership and local quality of life. In particular, they describe the Livable Communities Initiative, which is "demonstrating ways to improve the link between transit and communities" (US FTA, 1996, p. 3) through urban design, land use and customer services, illustrating how simple the improvements can be to make. Crucially, all 16 of the demonstration projects presented in the study directly involve local communities in decision making.

According to an "Assessment of Community Planning for Mass Transit" conducted by the congressional Office of Technology Assessment in 1976, public opposition to transit projects is too often only expressed once major planning decisions have been made and construction is underway (US Congress, 1976, p. 29). Today however, "Current technologies permit implementation of more innovative, efficient, and demand-responsive transit services" (FTA, 1996, p. 3). Noting that transit projects can affect the "sense of neighbourhood" and the "character and nature of communities" in which they are built, the FTA requires public outreach (US FTA, 2006), and transit authorities have been moving toward the trend for increasing local involvement in the planning process. The Seattle area's Sound Transit authority did just this in naming the stations for its new light rail system; public and institutional input was taken into account together with established conventions, resulting in names that "reflect city neighbourhood names when appropriate" – so far all but two stations (Sound Transit, 2005).

Another recent case from the Los Angeles MTA provides a valuable example of the role of citizens in creating more community-supportive transit. In the 1990s, as planning proceeded on the Metro Gold Line, one portion running through the historic neighbourhood of Highland Park came under opposition from the local community. According to Fred Glick (2004), they felt their concerns had not been addressed and declared that the MTA could not roll through the neighbourhood without taking community input into consideration. Subsequent community demands that the final project be “neighbourhood compatible” did not just concern issues of noise, safety and inconvenience, but required that the line “adds value and preserves the character of the community” (Glick, 2004, p. 272). Their lobbying resulted in a station design character reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts era that defines the district and even changing a station name from ‘Avenue 57’ to ‘Highland Park’. The result is that “[a] ‘sense of place’ has been maintained by enhancing the community with a built transitway that appears to have reduced vandalism and given the community a desire to maintain these facilities” (Glick, 2004, p. 274). The MTA completed the line with little further protest, and the station has become a local landmark such that “residents are taking new pride in their neighborhood” (Glick, 2004, p. 275). By involving local residents, the MTA did more than just foster a more transit-supportive community—they created more community-supportive transit.

Of course, local interests must be raised above the needs of the greater ridership and larger public objectives, and even local interests may vary greatly along culture and class lines. While community participation and the promotion of positive local identity are empowering and largely socially beneficial (particularly in lower-income or otherwise marginalized areas), it is not right to have the demands of any vocal few overwhelm the effectiveness of the system. Indeed, user wayfinding and system-wide coherence cannot be ignored in any discussion of transit design. The priority in wayfinding design is the effective communication to a user (tourist or local alike) how they might get from point A to point B, something largely accomplished by cohesion between the design and the user’s learned experience, expectations, and knowledge about where they are going in the real world (see Stern & Portugali, 1999). The clear cognition and identification of routes and destinations are important ‘choice factors’ that help individuals navigate (Bovy & Stern, 1990, p. 228). These basic calculations of wayfinding usability inform all public transit systems, including the identification of lines and stations. While necessarily particular to the individual user, it is reasonable to suggest that the use of street names or intersections in network signage might support wayfinding better than neighbourhoods. For example, in an early study of freeway signage, Webb (1959) found that cross streets function as landmarks for motorists—certainly a familiar calculation to Angelenos. With local bus routes too, anything other than cross streets and the occasional public landmark would be absurd. But the unique nature of rail transit provides different opportunities for design that supports wayfinding and community identity simultaneously.

Because of the relatively greater space between stops and the regional scale of most rail rapid transit systems, neighbourhoods and landmarks can be just as effective reference points. Street-based station names can even inhibit wayfinding where they are not well known or give unhelpful allusions to what might or might not be found. The confusing cases of some stations in the Los Angeles area cited below are good examples. In some cities—London, Tokyo, Paris and to some degree

even Los Angeles—metro systems rarely run in straight lines or intersect cross streets in a cognitively obvious pattern. More to the point, neighbourhood identity is itself important for urban wayfinding at this scale. The use of place names is one of the oldest methods of directional signing, although this only works for well-known places (Webb, 1959). Carr (1973) and others similarly suggest that orientation is easiest where points or districts have clear and distinctive identity. If the proper identification of a stop (and, by implication, what is to be found there) impacts route choice, either not knowing about or having a wrong impression of an area can introduce what Bovy & Stern (1990, pp. 58–60) refer to as personal constraints into wayfinding. Promoting the understanding of individual neighbourhoods and landmarks and how they fit together in a cogent urban whole is thus beneficial for effective wayfinding in the system. So if the identification used can help *promote* the identity of the place, neighbourhood-based naming can be beneficial from a wayfinding perspective as well.

The same can be said of the role of associative colours and names in line identification. Gibson (2009, p. 87) notes that “Colors can help people identify, navigate through, and even connect emotionally to a place”. Boston’s subway lines have meaningful colour names, reflecting historical (the Orange Line originally ran down Orange Street), physical (the Green Line along the city’s ‘Emerald Necklace’ of park land, the Blue Line under the harbor to the beach) and institutional (the Red Line first ran to Harvard) associations. Even more prominently, systems with lines named for locations, such as those in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Dallas, Salt Lake City, San Jose and San Francisco (as well as Tokyo and some of the London Underground), can contribute to geographic identity in their regions while aiding user wayfinding. A more holistic conception of wayfinding design might thus include the potential benefits of identity promotion for practical as well as cultural reasons. It should be possible to find an ideal name for any given station that promotes both usability and neighbourhood identity.

The actual measurement of any given neighbourhood’s identity is another question entirely, but one to which considerable attention has been paid even if it cannot be discussed at length here. For example, Hunter’s (1974) classic study of ‘the persistence and change’ of local communities in Chicago presents one clear survey method. More recent efforts from Chisholm & Cohen (2005–) and even the *Los Angeles Times* (see Pool, 2009) suggest ways to measure neighbourhood identity using web technology. Of course, merchants, rentiers and real estate interests may have very different priorities in neighbourhood branding than long-time residents, renters or other groups, and identities and boundaries will always be somewhat contentious. But even the Los Angeles MTA already includes some neighbourhood names on its maps, as in Figure 3, suggesting that appropriate community-supportive names could in most cases be found.

The next section looks at station names in particular, and the different naming logics of several major transit systems. By focusing on specific transit systems and specific neighbourhoods, it is possible to begin to see what patterns exist in the naming of stations in relation to urban social context, and what link, if any, exists between station identification and neighbourhood identity. It can be seen historically whether pre-existing community identity has influenced naming and other design decisions, and it will be examined to what extent these design decisions have actually influenced community identity.

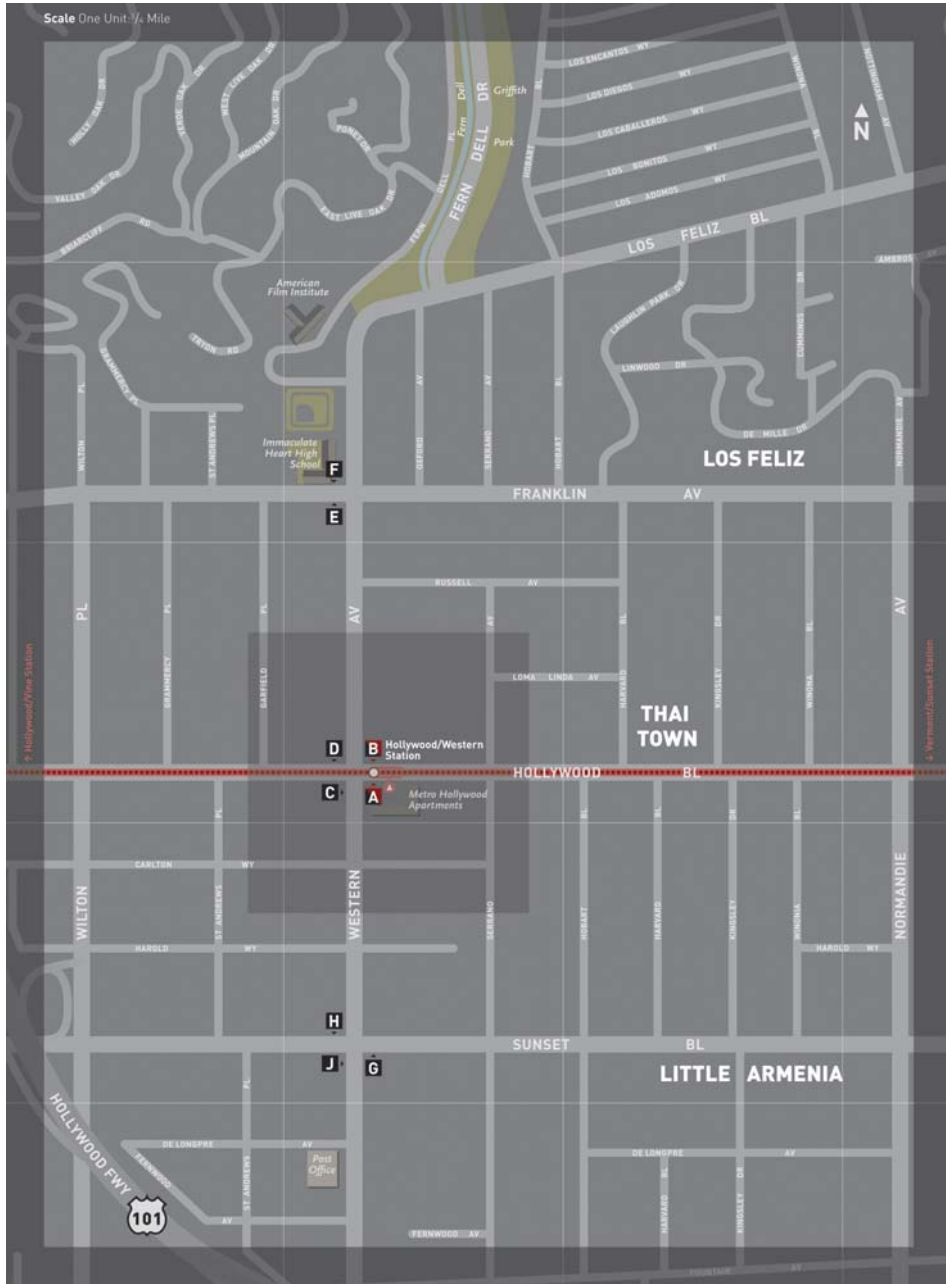


Figure 3. Neighbourhood ‘connections’ map for area surrounding Metro Hollywood/Western Red Line station. *Source:* image used courtesy of the Los Angeles County MTA.

Station Identification and Local Identity in New York, Chicago and London

Just as the New York City Subway’s alpha-numeric line names are not meaningfully tied to the areas they serve, neither do the vast majority of the system’s stations work to promote neighbourhood identity (beyond the degree to which some areas’ identities are already associated with main streets). Of the

Subway's 468 stations, almost all are named for streets, including—due to the city's numerical grid—multiple stations with the same names on different lines. The most common exceptions are stations with 'double names' that still include a street: 32 stations are double-named for streets and landmarks, such as '14th St-Union Square' or 'Woodhaven Bl-Queens Mall'; 21 stations, often at the terminus of a line, are double-named to include neighbourhoods, such as 'Jamaica-179th St' and 'Long Island City-Court Sq'. Finally, 15 are named solely for landmarks ('Borough Hall', 'Pelham Bay Park') and just two are named solely for neighbourhoods, both of which are termini for lines ('Brighton Beach' and 'Woodlawn').

New York City Transit has a clear pattern of naming trains by numbers and letters and stations for streets. Of course, without an alternate-universe study in which the entire system is renamed from day one, it is impossible to say whether more 'meaningful' or community-supportive identification decisions would have any impact on neighbourhood identity in New York. Suffice it to say few neighbourhoods in any borough are suffering pronounced identity crises, and again, some are as strongly associated with major streets as any other name (e.g. Wall Street, Park Avenue). The existing naming logic works; as described above, practical wayfinding considerations must not be sacrificed for the sake of a stubborn promotion of neighbourhood identity. But there are nonetheless examples in which stations named for areas could be beneficial. Renaming the '3rd Av-138th St' station for Mott Haven, for example, could potentially help define a neighbourhood struggling with the twin forces of an historically negative reputation *and* new gentrification (including political and real estate pressure to brand the South Bronx area as 'SoBro').

America's second oldest transit system is Chicago's iconic 'L', operated by the Chicago Transit Authority. Its eight lines (all identified by colour since 1993, with different branches named by destination) cover 106 miles and serve 144 stations. Like New York (and many other systems), most stations are named for streets and intersections, leading to multiple stations of the same name on different lines and even on different branches of the same line—a real potential hindrance to user wayfinding. Exceptions include 'Skokie' and 'Forest Park', two stations named for suburban towns where lines terminate, and nine stations named for landmarks, such as 'Merch Mart' or 'Illinois Medical District'. There are also three stations named for neighbourhoods, although two are double-named with streets.

Chicago is famously a 'city of neighbourhoods'. With communities that are not only culturally but officially well-defined (thanks to the 77 Community Areas established by Burgess and his students at the University of Chicago), it is perhaps an ideal city for neighbourhood-based station names. Yet only three stations today have neighbourhood identities in their names. Interestingly, all three of these, and most of those named for towns or landmarks as well, were either opened or renamed relatively recently (all but three of 15 since the 1950s, several in the past 15 years), possibly a sign of a small trend toward more descriptive names. Among these is one of the best examples of community-supportive transit identification: the recent renaming of one of the oldest stops in the 116-year old 'L' system to build identity for a Southside neighbourhood. Due in large part to community activism, the station that opened as '35th Street' in 1892 and had been known as 'Tech-35th' (because of the nearby Illinois Institute of Technology) since 1949, was renamed '35th-Bronzeville-IIT' in 1996 (see Figure 4). Neighbourhood groups worked to advocate for this name change as part of the 'Rebuilding Bronzeville

through Collaborative Action' programme (Southside Partnership, 1999) and the renaming is considered a major accomplishment by the Southside Partnership IIT, and other supporters. The question remains, however, whether the Bronzeville station—or indeed any neighbourhood-based station name—has had any effect on the identity of the area in which they were built. To look for evidence of what is probably a gradual process, we can turn to the oldest subway system in the world, London's venerable Tube.

First opened in 1863, the London Underground has 274 stations on the 12 lines that make up its 253 miles of track.² These lines are named with much less uniformity than the alpha-numeric or colour-based logics of later systems, and, perhaps not surprisingly, the stations' names are similarly non-standardized. That said, a majority of Underground stations (164) are named for neighbourhoods, districts or towns. Sixty-three stations are named for parks, monuments, large housing estates, mainline train stations or other landmarks, and 45 are named for streets (the remaining exceptional case will be discussed below).

The preference for place-based naming is also evident in the evolution of this system. As discussed by Cyril M. Harris (2006), many underground stations have been renamed over the years and, although changes have occurred for many reasons and to varying extents, after simple re-branding (e.g. from 'Harrow' to 'Harrow-on-the-Hill') the most frequent type of change has been from a street-based name to place-based name: 'Gillespie Road' is now 'Arsenal' and even the venerable 'Tower Hill' was originally opened as 'Mark Lane'. According to Harris, of the 47 or more stations that have been renamed, only four were changed to a street-based name from a different type. This pattern is echoed in the Tube's planning history also described by Harris, who lists what names were *considered* for stations before their completion. These data reveal that more than twice as many stations considered for street-based names ultimately opened with neighbourhood identification than vice versa. Had more planners followed initial street-based name suggestions, the Tube station for Leicester Square, the heart of tourist London, would have been named Cranbourn Street (Harris, 2006, p. 44).

Overall, a clear (if not entirely committed) trend can be seen in the London Underground for station names based upon neighbourhood identity. However, in a city with so many historic neighbourhoods, not to mention the lack of anything approaching an American-style street grid, Transport for London's station naming



Figure 4. CTA '35-Bronzeville-IIT' Green Line station, on 35th Street near the Illinois Institute of Technology in the Bronzeville area of Chicago's South Side. *Source:* photo by the author.

logic probably stems from tradition and practical wayfinding strategies as much as ‘community-supportive’ planning. The prevalence of neighbourhood-based names implies that they are considered useful and effective and could probably work in other cities as well, but not necessarily that they have any *impact* on neighbourhood identity. Neighbourhood-based station names in London are actually less revealing of such relationships, because the vast majority are built in districts or suburban towns with defined spatial identities dating back hundreds if not thousands of years. What we can look to now, however, are communities whose identities have formed or coalesced *after* the naming of their local station. The London Underground provides such examples as well.

First, and perhaps most common, are the several Tube stations named after notable historic public houses, which seem to in turn have given name to their surrounding neighbourhoods. For example, Swiss Cottage is now a trendy, wealthy neighbourhood in northwest London, but the first use of the name was an early 19th century pub called the Swiss Tavern, renamed the Swiss Cottage. According to Harris (2006, p. 66): “When the railway was extended in 1868 to this part of north-west London, the name was taken for the station, and *later for the district*” (my emphasis). Although it would be inaccurate to say the neighbourhood is *named for* the Tube station, it is fair to say that to whatever extent there is a neighbourhood called Swiss Cottage here, it is as much inspired by the station as any pre-existing neighbourhood identity. Probably the single best example of a station name influencing the identity of its neighbourhood is the case of ‘Queensbury’ Tube station in northwest London. When chosen in 1934, the name did not refer to any pre-existing area, but was invented by analogy to the nearby station called (and located in) ‘Kingsbury’, one stop to the north. Today however, Queensbury is considered a locality—a neighbourhood clearly given identity by the naming of its local transit station.

What is so compelling about the influence of transit names on neighbourhood identity in London is that exceptional names are not exceptional examples. Even a station named purely for a cross street can exert wider influence on the locality in which it is built. For example, ‘Old Street’ is the name of a station in central London, located under the busy traffic circle at City Road and Old Street, just north of the City. As a stop on the north-south Northern Line (at this point running along underneath City Road), the junction with Old Street provides a logical station location and an obvious name. Yet today, as the most convenient station to the popular nightlife area east of the station on Old Street, Curtain Road, Rivington Street and others, the name of the station has become partly synonymous with the larger area. People are heard to say they are “going out in Old Street”, meaning the whole area, not the Tube station or the street. This type of connection is imaginable in other cities where certain streets provide neighbourhood identity, from the Magnificent Mile to the Miracle Mile.

At least in London then, there is evidence of rapid transit station identification impacting neighbourhood identity. Of course, this does not mean that community-based identification and design is a one-size-fits-all planning decision, nor that street-based identification is unimportant to urban transit systems; what wayfinding priorities work for one city may not work for another. London has become a city where Tube stations are often the primary point of reference for describing a location, while New Yorkers more often speak in terms of cross streets. While the location of Warren Street (the street) might be unknown to the majority of greater London without the presence of the ‘Warren Street’

station, 119th and Second is an intersection instantly imaginable to any New Yorker regardless of whether she has ever been there and even though there is no station particularly close by, simply because of the grid. And at the same time, there are of course many neighbourhoods that are very well known without having transit stations named in their honour; London's Soho and New York's SoHo come to mind. Furthermore, the identity-inspiring nature of transit stations can have adverse effects if done haphazardly. Bostonian Patrick Kennedy (2005) relates the humorously frustrating story of how his neighbourhood, "Mission Hill, a neighborhood of Roxbury—itsself a neighborhood of Boston", has been effectively renamed 'Roxbury Xing' by the Post Office even though no such neighbourhood exists. The only explanation: "the zip code 02120 equals 'Roxbury Crossing'—the name of a T stop down the road".

Finally, it is important to emphasize again that neighbourhood-based naming also has its physical limitations. In the densest areas of any city, where multiple transit lines may come together and stations even on a single line may be spaced quite closely, it would not do to have a dozen stations named 'Central Business District'. Landmark-based names can better facilitate wayfinding in this situation—as Los Angeles has already found with the 'Union Station', 'Pershing Square' and 'Civic Center' stations downtown—or of course street names. Even London, which has a clear predominance of neighbourhood- and landmark-inspired station names, has many stops named for streets in its densest areas. Cities like New York probably have more stations than the number of available or reasonable neighbourhood or landmark names. Finally, there are examples in many cities where stations named for streets still meaningfully identify an area (London's aforementioned 'Old Street', a foreseeable 'Rodeo Drive' station in Los Angeles) or are synonymous with larger communities (such as Chicago's Oak Park). It would be silly to rigorously enforce a policy when it goes against common sense or ease of use.

Nonetheless, the potential for community-supportive transit design may have useful implications for Los Angeles, which in some ways has more in common spatially with London than New York or Chicago, particularly in terms of transit considerations. Despite differences between the two cities, both Los Angeles and London's greater metropolitan areas are sprawling, polycentric regions of widely varying built environments and mixed levels of density (if all to greater extremes in LA). Los Angeles County is 4061 square miles, comparable to the urbanized 'London Commuter Belt' that is at least partially served by the Tube. The London Underground, with four lines longer than 40 miles from end to end and service to areas as far as 30 miles from the city centre, is closer in scale to what would ultimately be required of a more encompassing rapid transit system in Los Angeles. (By comparison, the five boroughs served by the New York City Subway have a combined area of less than 500 square miles, and the Chicago 'L' serves an area approximately 26 miles long from north to south at its longest distance.) With all of this in mind, a final step is to analyze the LA Metro system to clarify what naming patterns already exist and gain a sense for how the experiences of its predecessors could be applied.

Community Supportive Transit for Los Angeles?

The 79-mile long Los Angeles Metro rail system is made up of five lines, with the 10-mile Expo Line currently under construction. All lines are named after colours,

although without further resolution the 'Expo Line' designation would be a lone exception. While earlier lines (Red, Blue, Green) were simply obvious first colour choices, the MTA does include 'connotation or associations of the color' among the factors taken into account when suggesting a line colour (LACMTA, 2006a). Indeed, the newest Metro line prior to the Expo Line controversy also went through several proposals (including the Rose Line, in deference to Pasadena's famous parade and Rose Bowl stadium) before being named the Gold Line, ostensibly in part because of the route's proximity to historic California foothills (Glick, 2004). The argument of Parks and his constituents was that a rose-coloured Expo Line would likewise promote the identity of a number of historically underserved and under-recognized parts of South LA.

In terms of station identification, there is a much more heterogeneous dispersal of naming logics. Of the 62 stations that currently make up the rail system and the 17 more under various stages of construction, the majority (55) are named after streets (although several, such as 'Compton' and 'El Segundo', also accurately reflect places), but nearly one-third (24) are named after neighbourhoods or landmarks. Furthermore, while most street-based names are on the oldest three lines, more than half of the newer Gold Line stations are named after neighbourhoods or landmarks. The extension of that line, opened in late 2009, has five such stations and only two named after streets, again suggesting something of a trend towards community-based names (although early plans for the Expo Line use mostly street-based names). Certainly the presence of many neighbourhood-based stations throughout the city shows it is considered a good option either when obvious ('Universal City', 'Little Tokyo/Arts District') or demanded ('Highland Park'). There are still other cases where community-supportive names could bolster local identity and facilitate wayfinding.

The Metro has so far avoided having two stations of the same name by using slight naming differences (e.g. 'Wilshire/Vermont' shared by the Red and Purple Lines, 'Vermont' on the Green Line), but street names can actually be even more confusing than this. As in other cities, many streets (and street-based station names) in LA are also names of towns in the region that are not necessarily anywhere nearby. While in Chicago nobody would think a 'Milwaukee' station was in Milwaukee, on a multi-city system in a tourist-heavy metropolis, the location of 'Anaheim' station in Long Beach, 'Long Beach' station in Lynwood, 'San Pedro' station in Downtown LA, and even 'Hollywood/Western' a very long walk from the Walk of Fame, can all lead to real confusion among riders.

Many of these confusing street names are used in locations with less obvious neighbourhood-based alternatives, but community-supportive alternatives could still be found in most cases. In particular, the existence of stations named for Chinatown and Little Tokyo begs the question of why there are not at least 'Koreatown' or 'Thai Town' stops even with existing stations in the hearts of these iconic neighbourhoods. More challenging locations (e.g. the station named 'Vermont/Beverly' in a hard-to-define area vaguely near Koreatown, Wilshire Center, Rampart and Historic Filipino Town) could present the city with the opportunity to *give* greater identity to an anonymous section of the central city, as the London Underground effectively did with 'Queensbury'. Indeed, despite well-founded complaints that rail planning in LA has been oriented toward encouraging more affluent and non-transit dependent ridership at the expense of poorer bus riders (Wachs, 1996; Soja, 2000), many of the Metro's rail lines *do*

traverse transit-dependent low-income communities, so many stations are located in areas that could benefit greatly from the promotion of neighbourhood identity.

While actual community support for a name change, such as turning 'Hollywood/Western' into 'Thai Town', is impossible to gauge without further empirical study (not to mention the myriad cultural sensitivity issues inherent in using national identity in such a multi-ethnic part of the city), concern for station names has been regularly expressed among LA's active transit advocate community. On dozens of Los Angeles-based weblogs and the websites for organizations such as 'Friends for Expo' and 'California Transportation Corridors', concerned citizens debate subjects relating to the growth of the Metro, including line and station identification. In one 2004 posting, for example, a Norman Parada argued: "It would be a great shame if, in the case of the [Expo Line], we end up using such names ... consisting of names of intersections, as was done with the Red Line". He and others lament the missed opportunity to 'be creative' with subway stations (including uninspired stops such as 'Vermont/Beverly'), and passionately assert their own suggestions for station names as well as line colours and identification. Some even voice the possibility of giving new identity to areas that seem to lack it. As Erickson & Roberts (1997, p. 58) write: "Urban managers and designers can encourage and invigorate new forms of place-making, indeed the restless nature of modern capital compels them so to do".

Applications and Conclusions: Redefining Los Angeles

Today Los Angeles is on the verge of a mass transit building boom. In terms of larger trends it is already in the middle of one, having built its entire 119-mile, 94-station rail and dedicated transitway system in the past two decades, but the past few years have seen even greater potential. Since first becoming mayor in 2005 in an election in which mass transit was one of his key campaign issues, Antonio Villaraigosa was labelled 'the Subway Mayor' in an *LA Weekly* cover story and has continued to speak more vocally for building and improving the Metro than any Los Angeles leader in recent memory. Both the Gold Line light rail and the Orange and Silver Line bus transitways have opened within the past five years, with another full line to be completed by the end of the decade. Prohibitive congressional legislation, passed to prevent tunnelling through the city's Miracle Mile district, has been rolled back. In the face of worsening congestion, elitist resistance has largely given way to transit demand on the Westside, with even Beverly Hills announcing its official support for rail transit within its city limits (Guccione, 2006). The 2008 passage of a local sales tax measure aimed explicitly at expanding the Metro promises some \$40 billion for LA County transit. It is likely that a proposed Crenshaw Boulevard light rail line will become a reality, running through many Mid-City and South L.A. neighbourhoods that would benefit from local investment and identity promotion alike. The MTA is in a flurry of growth, public relations and re-branding, all under the watchful eye of a fully engaged public, countless local transit advocates, and newly empowered Neighborhood Councils.

Understanding how to encourage neighbourhood identity through rapid transit identification and public-use design could provide social, cultural and political benefits to civic leaders and community groups alike. Promotion of local identity not only empowers local populations, but can also foster economic growth (Erickson & Roberts, 1997). And it can have tangible results for transit

authorities as well. As the US FTA (1996) reported, simple 'inclusiveness' in the planning stages can lead to a more transit-supportive community, while a 1994 study by Cambridge Systematics found that an "aesthetically pleasing environment" is shown to produce a 4% increase in transit use as well (quoted in US FTA, 1996, p. 4). If design amenities that increase affection and physical connections between communities and transit sites can increase ridership, why should design decisions that increase psychological and cultural connectivity between transit and communities not do much the same?

Harnessing such possibilities is increasingly important as cities face the challenges of the global era, becoming home simultaneously to world financial or entertainment centres and spaces of utter disconnect. Los Angeles today is symptomatic of such processes. At the same time, LA is turning back in on itself and toward traditional urbanism as it matures, re-focusing on a burgeoning central city, experiencing increasing density across the region, and rebuilding a massive public transportation system. The city is representative of processes many major cities are facing, and what works and does not work concerning the dual issues of transportation and local identity could affect similar decisions in the making of cities elsewhere in the world. That these two issues can be connected, as this paper has shown, should be of interest to planners, urban theorists and community activists alike in rapidly developing urban regions. They should consider the possibility that an effective strategy of mass transit planning and design may not only foster a transit-supportive community, but also community-supportive transit. In Los Angeles now, the goal must be to make what could become one of the world's most important transit systems not only a success, but also an impetus for positive change. What better place to start than a little debate about identification, and the differing merits of aqua and rose.

Notes

1. This paper defines the L.A. Metro Rail system (henceforth simply the Metro) in accordance with the MTA's standard Rail System Map, including the 79-mile, 70-station subway and light rail system, but *not* the Orange Line 'fixed-guideway Metro Liner' service or other bus 'transitway lines'. Nor does it include the hundreds of regular Local, Rapid and Express buses, other municipal services, or the Metrolink commuter rail service. The exclusion of bus service is not to disregard the great importance of the system that is the real backbone of mass transit in LA and most cities. While there is much value in the exploration of community-supportive design in bus systems, this paper's focus is restricted to rail rapid transit which is, as argued below, particularly well-suited for the promotion of neighbourhood identity.
2. The entire urban rail transit system run by Transport for London also includes the Docklands Light Rail (38 stations), the Tramlink street tram service (39 stations), and London Overground commuter trains (55 stations). For the limited scope of this study, these three additional services are not considered among the data for London, although it should be noted that they follow much the same eclectic naming pattern for stations and stops.

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