



Fundamentals

Know your audience

When producing maps for the public, such as a bus system map or a specific route map, it is beneficial to moderately distort the map rather than displaying exact geographic reality. People understand maps with moderate levels of geographic distortion better than highly detailed maps because the distortion minimizes the number of things they have to absorb, so long as key geographic features are retained and labelled. When producing maps for an audience of planners or technical experts, distortion is not likely to be needed.

Visually prioritize transit

Transit lines should be bold, bright, and sit at the top of the visual hierarchy. People appreciate background detail but they want to see transit lines above all else.

Provide reasonable background detail

- Include some level of geographic background detail such as bodies of water, green spaces, and major roads. People benefit from these contextual elements but are often irritated by additional contextual elements such as minor roads, building footprints, and activity centers.
- Label all major background features. People do not like to guess as to what they're viewing.

Getting the right balance of visual content is key

A standard bus map should include bus lines, major streets, and some natural features. Less or more visual information than this detracts from the overall clarity of the map.

Making the best use of specific design elements

Prioritize background features as follows:

Top priority

- major streets
- water features & green spaces
- directional arrows on bus lines

Mid-level priority

- street labels
- points-of-interest

Low priority

- local streets
- buildings
- activity areas
- administrative boundaries
- topography

Fonts

- Use sans serif fonts to the greatest extent possible
- Use Gotham X Narrow font for dominant map labels unless adhering to a predetermined font scheme
- Use Gotham X Narrow or Bahnschrift fonts for secondary map labels unless adhering to a predetermined font scheme

Colors

- Use bright colors for bus lines that make them stand out. Avoid monochromatic or faded colors.
- Use a white background or, as an alternative, a light grey background.
- Use a light blue for water. Avoid white or non-blue colors.

Lines

- Thicker lines are preferred to thin lines.
- When offsetting lines where bus routes overlap, offset lines slightly, but not excessively, such there is a narrow visible gap between lines.

Additional Features

- Include anything that isn't directly labelled on the map in a legend.
- Show distance and travel time on a scale bar. Show travel time of whichever mode of travel makes the most sense at a given scale or given a map's subject matter.
- Rotate a map away from true north if doing so aligns with common local understanding of an area's geographic orientation.