

FROM TOURIST GUIDES TO AIRLINE MAPS: BECK CONNECTIONS WORLDWIDE

by Maxwell J Roberts

A report of the LURS meeting at All Souls Club House on Tuesday 10 March 2020

The first part of this talk looked at tube maps in tourist guides specifically derived from Beck's own designs. The 1933 Beck diagram transformed the production of independent maps, with official artwork provided free of charge. Some original topographical designs still appeared from publishers who rejected the diagrammatic concept. There were also strange impersonations, often for technological reasons. The full colour diagram required two runs through a printing press, and many publications did not use so many colours.

The first example showed Henry Beck's second 1933 design embellished with directions to the British Industries Fair sites. In contrast, a 1937 coronation guide by Millers Mutual featured the central area in three colours. A 1934 German monochrome version of the official design was compared with their 1938 three colour version which also curved the Hammersmith branch. These represented the earliest domestic and international breaches of copyright that our speaker knew, although he was open to learning otherwise from members.

The 1948 Henry Beck design included New Works lines under construction and those to be electrified. It compared with the Travel Association Guide of the same year, showing only the central area in three colours and a 90 degree corner at Monument. The 1951 Henry Beck design introduced a yellow Circle line. A Jehovah's Witnesses 1951 Wembley Stadium three colour guide showed only lines linking to the West End.

The Foldex Miniplan monochrome 1951 map appeared standard, but in 1957 they colourised some lines and added the Circle Line. By the 1970s the Victoria Line had been clumsily added in a unique colour, other lines also appearing in unfamiliar colours, but still claiming to be "by permission of London Transport". The TfL archive includes correspondence about the line diagram, and an official complaint concerning this last map stated that current artwork was available free. A robust response from the publisher showed little regard for the official product, but its own 1976 version used a revised colour scheme which resulted in the Victoria Line becoming light blue. The layout was credited to Paul E. Garbutt!

The 1954 Henry Beck design became rectangular, but Falk reproduced this with the Metropolitan Line in black, and line terminal names squeezed into the left and right margins. A 1971 version had also clumsily added the Victoria Line, and again resulted in correspondence about breach of copyright.

Beck maps remained the basis of unofficial diagrams for many years, as seen in the 1985 Frommers Guide with a poor addition of the Victoria Line, and the absence of the Jubilee Line. The 1989 Vista Guide showed the central area based on an update of Beck's first design, and this was further developed in the 1992 Benson map, probably the last outing of that design since it led to a tightening of copyright enforcement by LT.

As an aside, two unique underground diagrams were presented. The 1951 Festival Gardens leaflet showed the south at the top of its map, with the central area beneath the Thames lower on the page. A selection of stations was shown using three colours for the five lines included. In the 1950s, Falk used an original four-colour system diagram which appeared bound by no presentation rules around curves and angles, although in our speaker's view they would have been better following the official product.

The second part of the talk centred on airline maps¹, which seemed to outnumber railway maps. Since they are used for marketing rather than journey planning, there is freedom for cartographers to ignore usability. However, the Beck connection is strong from the influence of his initial 1933 underground diagram.

The first map seen, from 1919, showed a service following the coastline from Toulouse to Casablanca. The First World War had pushed small wood/fabric aircraft to the point of passenger viability, although there were long, arduous journeys with many refuelling stops. Journeys may have been slow and unsafe, but competing sea routes were much slower and similarly uncertain. Services with airmail, and government subsidies encouraged the commencement of commercial operators, and the decade saw

1 A selection from 'Airline Maps' by Mark Ovenden and Maxwell Roberts (Mark Ovenden was scheduled to jointly present this meeting, but unfortunately had to cancel.)

predecessors of British Airways, PanAm, Air France, Qantas and KLM. Promotions shown featured simple maps embellished with illustrations, and also pictorial maps.

Ten years on and metal aircraft had developed with improved range and speed. This was the beginning of profitable routes with the McDonnell Douglas DC-3 cutting the need for subsidies. Air travel was for the wealthy, with expensive luxury as vast global empires formed. This was the period of sumptuous Art Deco, with posters featuring fantastical geoscapes, but also following transit map design as seen in a 1937 Sabena network diagram. The Imperial Airways diagram of 1935 features H.C. Beck's credit at its foot, whilst the 1936 and 1937 Imperial posters, which feature both geographic and diagrammatic route maps, also show his influence. Timetable route diagrams from 1937 to 1939 use a similar style based upon Beck's diagram, but his involvement is not shown. James Gardner's famous 1938 poster of a scene with globe includes a crumpled route diagram of a different style

PanAm's 1936 route diagram from their timetable appears similar to the 1935 Imperial Airways diagram, but perhaps they independently developed the concept. After World War II, larger pressurised aircraft flew higher, further and faster, making air travel more widely available. Colourful brash magazine adverts featured surrealist graphic distortions of the world. From 1958 we entered the jet era which doubled speed, with non-stop Atlantic crossings. Air services replaced ocean liners and long-distance rail services. This included our speaker's favourite map from Delta in 1960 showing their jet routes across the USA, with each State represented in bright colours. It also included a BOAC 1966 diagram of world services, which were so extensive that no coastlines or countries were considered necessary.

From 1968 the jumbo Boeing 747 trumped the speed of Concorde, with steady demand growth despite a temporary oil crisis. Aeroflot had a route diagram showing destinations from Moscow, and even interchange symbols reminiscent of Beck. The final 20 years of the century brought no technological changes, but the start of deregulation led to the loss of many famous airline names. Computer graphics came into their own, and Swissair had route diagrams of both European and Worldwide services which appeared very similar. In the new century low-cost airlines conquered almost all, with publicity lacking the style and excitement of earlier times. Air Mauritius had a 'hub and spoke' diagram in 2018 appearing to show that they linked the world. Icelandair in 2018 apparently linked America to Europe.

In the question and answer session, an audience member advised that the Beck credited Imperial Airways diagram had not been found in airline archives, and perhaps was a post-war design exercise for his students. There was no doubt that his original 1933 concept was influential, and may have been adopted by airlines.

John Hawkins