RESEARCH SUMMARY

Title   Walking Maps

Objective   To explore natural usage of two versions of paper walking maps – the current version showing bus stop points without letters, and an alternative version with bus stop point letters – to provide feedback on the pros and cons of both in context.

Date   17/07/2012   **Agency**   2CV

Methodology   50 intercepts in the Piccadilly area, including a spread of tourists, visitors and Londoners. Introducing one version of the map and observing usage in-situ, short interviews to understand usage further, then finally introducing the other version of the map and exploring the impact of the bus stop points with/without letters (the order the maps were shown was rotated across the sample).

Abstract

Research is required to understand how the inclusion of bus stop point letters on walking maps impacts navigation. Users of the map do not naturally use bus stops, in situ or on the paper map, to navigate. The bus stop points with and without letters are recessive and do not feature on the information hierarchy; highlighted by only one in 50 people intercepted noticing the difference between the two versions. When prompted to consider the pros and cons of each version, the majority of users prefer the version without bus stop point letters; the consistent use of the roundel (familiar to many, including non-Londoners) is clearer and less confusing.

Key findings

Key factors affecting map usage include familiarity with the area, location, journey purpose and distance to destination. However, everyone immediately looks for what is most familiar to them (mainly key landmarks, area names and Tube stations) and filters out less familiar information (e.g. road names, other buildings) unless/until required.

Bus stop points do not feature on this information hierarchy: they do not aid with navigation on either version of the map. The bus stop points play a recessive role; highlighted by how only one out of 50 people noticed the difference between the maps when shown.

Once the difference is pointed out to people, the map without the bus stop point letters is generally preferred for aesthetic reasons: familiar roundel; consistently used symbol– and therefore more instantly recognisable as a bus stop.

The bus stop point letters are post-rationalised by some as useful, but only for 'someone else' needing to find a specific bus stop, not for them/anyone navigating. Those who use the bus network rely on other means to find their bus stop and none could imagine using the map for this purpose.

The bus stop point letters can be confusing to visitors and tourists, who often do not recognise them as bus stops and think that the different letters mean different things, e.g. points of interest on the map. In the version with the bus stop point letters, leaving some bus stop points blank compounds confusion and can negatively impact on quality perceptions of the map, with people believing this must be a mistake.

Job number:12053