Trip Report
International Programs Research: Observation of the world underground—Trip in London, New York, Washington and Boston
Zhang Zhang

From June 6th to July 6th, I traveled in both subways and subway museums in London, New York, Washington and Boston. I was there be able to understand the role that art and design played in the long history within the development of subway. Therefore, I explored the difference between public art and art in museum. It is also an amazing experience to see the relationship among citizens, public spaces and public art.

London (6/6/09—6/21/09)
1. Art and Design of Underground in London

The London Underground is a rapid transit system serving a large part of Greater London and neighboring areas of Essex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire in the UK. The first section of the system is opened in 1863, thus was the first underground railway system in the world. It is usually referred to as the Tube deriving from the shape of the system’s deep-bore tunnels. The stations I traveled around include almost all the main stations of nine lines from Zone 1 to Zone 3 in London. The impressing stations that I have visited are Picadilly Line(from Gloucester Road Station to King’s Cross Station), District Line(Tower Hill Station), Circle Line(Baker Street)(1.1),Victoria Line(Victoria Station)(1.2), Bakerloo Line(Charing Cross Station)(1.3). The design of navigation system of the stations are very similar to the France, follows the concept of civilized utilitarian design. (1.4-1.6) All the station logos are a red circle with a blue bar on the middle and each one has the names of the station on it. The route illustrations are very easy to follow which only showing the stations from present one to the end of each direction. The tube map, with its schematic non-geographical layout and color-coded lines, is considered a design classic, and many other transport maps worldwide have been influenced by it. The navigation system can be seen that great effort has made on satisfying the needs of three groups of people, which are passengers, operator and community. Also, I found that lots of platform spaces are referencing above-ground locations. Many stations feature unique interior designs to help passenger identification. Often these have themes of local significance. Tiling at Baker Street incorporates repetitions of Sherlock Holmes’s silhouette(1.7). Tottenham Court Road features semi-abstract mosaics by Eduardo Paolozzi representing the local music industry at Denmark Street. Northern line platforms at Charing Cross feature murals by David Gentleman of the construction of Charing Cross itself. Last but not least, I found the balance of design concept of the Tube between functions of transport and aesthetics. I paid most attention to the Jubilee line, especially the extension part of this line, which was newly completed in 1999, designed by Roland Paolletti. (1.8-1.9)The jubilee line extension inaugurates a new phase in London’s ongoing attempts to relate aesthetics to practicalities. It includes the thought of how Londoners
recognize and reflect on their city. Through the trip underground, I got the chance to know how the interior decoration evolutionally absorbed in the architecture and how the design concept shifted from “fitness for purpose”, said by Frank Pick, the one who first change the face of the tube with his design management, to privilege the architectural component in the design. Westminster station should be my favorite. As the mark of the start of the extension, it almost changed my early thought of the design of station. It is essentially a deep box, faced with rough concrete and held open by giant steel and concrete structures. Do those escalators really lead to the surface? Does this describe the inner psychological world of the Members of Parliament who work above? Like the questions Jeremy Melvin asked, the design of Westminster station connects the relationship between architecture, aesthetics, citizens and the city.

Photos of London Undergrond

1.1 Baker Station of Circle Line
1.2 Charing Cross of Bakerloo Line
1.3 Victoria Station of Victoria Line
1.4 Navigation System_The Rout Map
2. Traffic Museums of London

During my trip in London, I also visited the Traffic Museum of London. In the museum, its design gallery shows how the underground design culture was developed across the company’s entire range, from vehicles and architecture to graphic design and publicity. Before I arrived, the exhibition called “The Art of Posters: A Century of Design” was shown in the museum. In this way, London Underground became a leading patron of modern art, commissioning posters from both established artists and talented newcomers. London Transport Museum holds a unique archive of more than 5000 posters and works of art covering a century of graphic design. There’s a specific hall for exhibit the history of the art and design of the Tube. (2.1-2.5) In the museum, I found not only the history about the Tube, but also the history of the extension of the city. The museum shows the role that underground played during the history of city development, from purely advertising to decoration, and then to the building of relationship between passenger and the city. Right during the date I visited the Museum, there’s a show particularly about subways in 5 big cities, which includes Shanghai, Tokyo, New York, Paris and London. (2.6) Although the show was only stand at the representation of the city life in the area of the subways, it is a good tendency to find the subtle connection between public space and people who live in the metropolitan. More digital and multimedia forms of art are shown in the museum, which indicate the future development direction of the art and design of Underground in London. It also gave me the idea of where the public art might go forward in the future.

In the Museum store and also other souvenir stores, it is interesting to find that the tube map and other products of the Tube have become hot customer goods as the symbol of London. The most interesting thing is to see how the London Underground took advantage the art and design of the Tube and turned it to be one part of its creative industry and made benefits from marketing.

During my visit in the museum, I had the chance to talk with the staff Ms. Warhurst , who’s working in the archives where I found lots of materials, which are not access to visitors, telling the history evolution of the underground. When talking with her, she not only showed me the broad collection of books telling the role that art and design played in the history of the Tube, but also let I start to think about the influence that canceled class brought to the revolution of traffic and the city culture which I’ve rarely considered before.

*Photos of Transportation Museum of London*

![Photos of Transportation Museum of London](image)

**2.1 The cases showing on the tiles used in ST Paul’s Station Before**
2.2 The cases showing on the tiles used in Baker Station Before (left)  
2.3 The Simulated Carriage During 60’s (right)  
2.3 The Logo of the Underground  
2.4 The Poster of Underground  
2.5 The Evolution of The VI Design of the Underground  
2.6
3. Other Museums
I also go to some other famous museums in London, which are The Great Britain Museum, Tate Museum, Design Museum and V&A. The show, which called “Super contemporary” (3.1-3.2), was on when I visited Design Museum. It is the show that revealed one of the consequences of environmentally conscious design is an increased move by designers to think public not just domestic. Super Contemporary has tackled this head-on by commissioning 15 of London’s leading creativeness to design something that improves life in the city, inspired by the city. The most impressive thing is that all the 15 commissions are supplemented by a collection of maps showing how various creative communities are spread across the capital. It is the show about the relationship between the developing of the city and the track of living of citizens.

*Photos of “Super Contemporary” Show in Design Museum*

3.1

3.2
East Coast of US (6/25/09—7/6/09)

4. Art and Design of Subway in New York City, Washington and Boston

After my trip in London, I departed to NYC immediately. It is very important to compare the difference of subways in two western countries with totally different cultures. In New York City, subway architectures and systems are under the common culture and subway art, as the public art of the city on surface, is a particular way to look through the city culture. The New York City Subway is a rapid transit system owned by the City of New York and leased to the New York City Transit Authority, a subsidiary agency of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and also known as MTA New York City Transit. I chose route 6 (which is the main route going through Manhattan) as the target object of observation. Instead of naming its routes (in London, which are called lines) by the names of the main stations, "Routes" are distinguished by a letter or a number. Not only route 6, but almost all the stations I saw in NYC don't have a unit symbol of the station. (4.1-4.4) The subways were designed in different ways, correlated with the features of locations. Just like the design of the station name, the interior decoration of the stations in NYC are more various than what in London. (4.5-4.6) Two kinds of forms of the decoration can be found in the subway. One is the station name made of mosaics decorated on the wall of the platform. Another one is art works made of different artists on the wall or around the platform. MTA art for transit was created when the subway system was beginning to reverse years of decline through an ambitious capital improvement program. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's network is, in many ways, the world's largest art museum, featuring works in mosaic, terra cotta, bronze, glass, and mixed media sculpture. Most form of art I saw on route 6 is mosaic and it is the art form that I feel so much fit to the NYC. Not like the utilitarian design of the London underground, the art in the NYC play a role only for decoration, reflecting the variety of the city. Regarding the field of design, however, it seems that NYC subway still haven't find a way of presentation its complicated system and always made trouble for passengers to use. Not only me, but also some other passengers I talked with who just arrived here felt confusing of finding directions under the subway station.

I also found that, although the arts for transit's work continues to flourish in today's environment, as the use of mass transit continues to grow, some stations are lack of rehabilitation, which already cost artists' attention.

*Photos of Subways in NYC*

4.1 The 33rd St. Station of Route 6  
4.2 The Entrance of the 33rd St. Station
4.3 The Platform of the 59th St. Station  

4.4 The Route Map Inside the Carriage

4.5 The Navigation System of Subway in Wall ST Station

4.6a,b, The Inside Decoration of Borough Hall Station
5. The subway in other cities
The subway systems are much simple in Washington DC and Boston, which makes it less comparable with the former two rapid transport systems. Nevertheless, it is still worth of visiting. The subway in DC, which was called Metro there, is more like a work of architecture. Art works, such as posters, can’t be found in the station. Opening since 1976, the Metro network has grown to include five lines, 86 stations, and 106.3 miles (171.1 km) of track. Almost all the metro stations are built with arch proof, which also express modernity through technical achievement in the scale of its engineering rather than pictorial representation or decorative finishes. The navigation system is also very clear and easy to follow. The fonts and the logo of the platforms are well designed. The design of metro stations in DC raised a new thought of how to place aesthetics without traditional forms of art and use the architecture itself instead. (5.1-5.2)

Photos of Metros in Washington DC

![5.1](image1)

![5.2](image2)

The metro in Boston is even less decorated. As the transportation system which has a long history, the metro stations and platforms are simple and rarely decorated. The Green Line is the most famous line of the system. It is the oldest line of Boston’s subway, which is known locally as the 'T'. The station is still easy decorated. The only special thing is may be the illustration of the history about the station.

6. Transit Museums in NYC
I visited he New York Transit Museum, which was housed in a historic 1936 IND subway station in Brooklyn Heights. The museum is one of the city’s leading cultural institutions is the largest museum in the United States devoted to urban public transportation history, providing visitors with an overview of the magnitude and complexity of New York City’s rapid transit system. The exhibition used historical photographs, diagrams, cartoons,
period maps, and newspaper clippings to illustrate major issues and events that influenced the development of the largest transportation network in North America. (6.1-6.4)

*Photos of New York Transit Museum*

6.1

6.2

6.3

6.4

6.5