

Northern Rail Station Exit Posters

took responsibility for managing all stages of the survey, production and rollout programme. The client put his faith in our ability to fulfil the total requirement and was happy to let go and wait for the results. Such an approach saves everyone time and money: fewer specifications, fewer meetings – just professional recognition that the contractor should know how to do it right, because they have been doing it in many places for over 30 years, always with positive end-user endorsement.

Taking over a railway franchise provides many challenges. When Northern Rail took on the huge task of running a completely new franchise they were keen to provide their passengers with much more than just high quality train services. They wanted to provide help in all aspects of the journey. Many railway operators tended to see their obligation as fulfilled once passengers had arrived at the destination station. Northern Rail, however, wanted to help provide their passengers with onward travel assistance beyond the station as an added benefit. They appointed FWT to help them deliver this objective.



Pete Myers, Head of Service Quality Northern Rail:

It is far more than just maps:

Northern Rail were committed as part of our franchise agreement to provide certain information at all of our 471 railway stations, the only simple way to do this was to provide a map of the vicinity and mark on it the attraction and facilities that are available locally.

I looked at several ways of doing this from the free maps surrounded by advertisements, to bespoke maps produced specifically for the purpose. Wanting to provide genuinely useful information this latter option seemed to be the only real choice.

In my enquiries, it quickly became obvious that FWT offered a unique product. Not only were their maps simple to read, but more importantly they could be adjusted to meet any reasonable requirements.

The price was good too, especially when you consider what you get for your money. We've all seen the much enlarged 'A-Zs' that so many suppliers provide; or simple reproductions of Google maps that are neither clear nor professional when printed out. With

FWT, we got a clear map with a scale that meant people could work out how long it would take them to walk to their destination, and we could put the information on it that was useful to our customers.

In addition to this, FWT designed our route map (a tube map design) no mean feat when you consider the complexity of our network and the number of stations that we call at. This map, much altered since, as stations and routes come and go, forms the basis of many of our publications and is displayed on all of our stations; both customers and stakeholders alike find it simple to use and easy to understand.

The business is great to deal with too, with countless alterations and updates being put through without a word of protest. Niche it may be, but the provision of accurate mapping is still vital (even in these days of GPS) and FWT are simply very good at doing this, it is always rewarding when you deal with professionals and dealing with FWT was very rewarding indeed.

THE CLIENT'S THOUGHTS

Northern Rail had won a large franchise, which was a combination of two previous ones. At our first meeting they said they were dissatisfied with the station exit maps they had inherited.

These maps were fairly typical around the UK (where they existed at all). They were lifted from a street atlas and given plenty of local advertising for company, but crucially they had no street index. Maps such as these are not useless, in the literal sense, but they are of marginal use, unless you happen to spot the place you are looking for on them. Much eye searching can be required and evidence indicates most people give up after about eight seconds if they are not making progress. Northern Rail agreed and were keen to replace these 'tokenist' maps as they genuinely wanted something more functional for their passengers.

That said, they were not in a position to implement a 'Rolls Royce' solution and indeed we agreed with them that the real issue was to provide a good quality product in replacement for the far from adequate one in place at that time. They also needed to display useful customer information, some of which was local and some generic. What they wanted from FWT was a solution, taking into account they already had poster cases in place and most stations would need to contain the map with the other factual content. They named these 'UIPs' – Useful Information Posters.

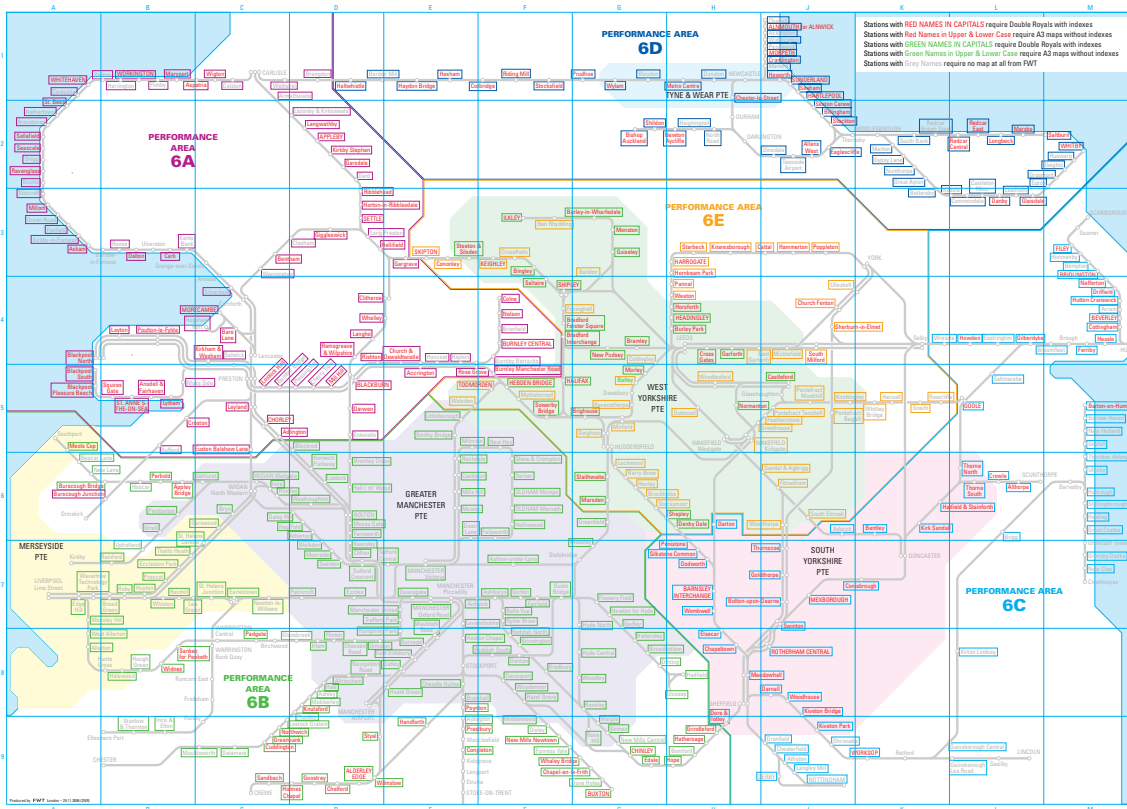
Wisely, they also knew that some of the larger stations would need larger scale maps and the more rural ones could easily be served by smaller ones. They asked us, 'how would we deal with this?'

The answer was first to identify the two types and Northern Rail helpfully supplied us with a breakdown of stations, by ticket sales and journeys made. However, these maps were for people ending their journey at each station, and not commencing them. The needs of these two types of passenger are quite different and ticket sales actually told us the opposite of what we needed to know.

We have said it many times: there is no substitute for local knowledge and the client's insight into likely usage could certainly start with ticket sales data, as this would be a good first level filter of likely usage.

Working with Northern Rail we identified different levels of station patronage and categorized them according to user need when exiting. The ticket sales data was examined, along with other relevant factors – some stations generate far more journeys than others, but some are high-use destinations that do not necessarily generate high volume ticket sales. Clearly, Bradford would need treating differently from Sellafield for example.

A diagram was produced to differentiate the PTE and other hierarchical areas and the type of map required for each station. We used this for survey planning purposes. This also formed the basic geometry for the network map Northern Rail still uses for its public facing publicity.



THE DECISION

The proposal agreed was to create onward travel posters for over 200 stations. The larger stations would receive a Double Royal poster including a map with a catchment covering the sort of distance people would reasonably walk. The smaller stations had similar catchments but drawn at a smaller scale.

Existing source mapping from the likes of Ordnance Survey would not include the level of detail deemed useful to railway passengers emerging from a station. We agreed with the client the sort of features likely to be wanted: taxi ranks, post offices, police stations, telephone boxes, bus stops. This level of detail would not be found on existing mapping.

The client wanted the information included to be as up-to-date and correct as possible and, though some of these features could be derived from other sources, it was agreed that the most robust way to gather these facts was by site visits.

We examined Northern Rail's territory, which was unusually large, covering most of England from the north midlands up to the Scottish border. Uniquely, their trains passed through five PTEs, some of which produced onward travel posters and some who did not. This introduced further complexities in that Northern Rail managed many the stations they served, but by no means all of them.

THE METHOD

A roll-out programme was agreed and the job divided into six management areas, with a logical progression round the country. In order to bring things together as seamlessly as possible, and to avoid duplication of effort, we chose to start drawing the maps before any site surveys were done. There was good reason for this.

For an onward travel map to function to provide its best value, every street would need showing, including cut-through paths etc, understandably omitted from the kind of A-Z maps owing to the smaller scale; these are really aimed at motorists. One of the principle failings of most maps provided at station exists is the lack of a street index. Users trying to find a particular street name have to search the whole map until their eye falls on the right one. A street index obviates this and makes the whole product far easier, quicker and less frustrating to use.

As such we drew all the maps at the most appropriate scale for their purpose and included all relevant detail we could source in house. After the first area batch was drawn, we site surveyed them. The surveyor was charged with two main tasks: establish the locations of the specific features noted above (taxi ranks, bus stops etc); check the newly drawn maps for errors.

By the time the surveyors' results were available, the second batch of maps had been drawn and were ready for checking. A handover and exchange of results between the two groups of people took place and both could then progress their next batch.

DELIVERY

This procedure took six months to work through all regional batches, and the resulting posters were fed through to the client in the same way. This had the added benefit to them of having a manageable posting programme that trailed about one month behind us until completion.

During the lead up to the first batch being delivered, we aided the client with advice on purchase and installation of poster cases where necessary.

The programme included equipping many stations in the three of the PTE areas, though one other was not required as they already had similar posters. As we approached the delivery of the fifth batch, the fifth PTE asked, via Northern Rail, asked if we could include about 30 of its stations. This fell in neatly with our surveyors completing their work.

FITNESS FOR PURPOSE

As such, in excess of 200 stations were equipped, though, as noted above, not all received a formulaic poster. In particular, we didn't want to simply place the relevant station in the middle of the map and leave it at that. Many of Northern Rail's stations are in very rural areas and some are detached from the built-up areas they serve. As such, all map catchments were calculated to give the most useful coverage for the same cost.

One station in particular (Alnmouth) serves a very small community. However, Alnwick is the real target area and this is a few miles away. As always, with usability uppermost in our minds, we produced two map areas within one poster (see page 7) and linked the two with a message about the distance. Only one road joined the two towns. This enabled passengers alighting at Alnmouth to still find their way easily to Alnwick.

SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION

The overall job was divided into seven regional roll-out areas and took eight months to complete as synchronized drawing and survey periods. The client was extremely pleased with the result and we have updated maps as necessary since then.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING SCALE

To many people, scale is simply about enlarging or reducing an image. While this is a fundamental aspect of it, there is much more to it. Graphic communication of this sort is about optimizing legibility and usability. If you haven't agonized over the finer points of detail in a map, diagram, or any graphic

communicative device, then you haven't understood usability.

It is difficult to portray the effects of scale when viewing the examples, as they are seen here in the following pages, out of context. Nevertheless, we hope they provide a basic insight.

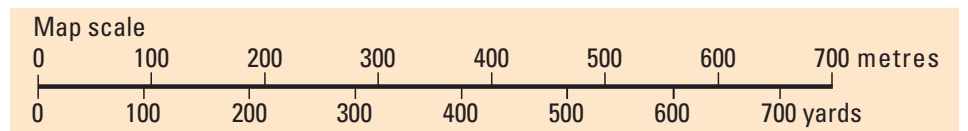
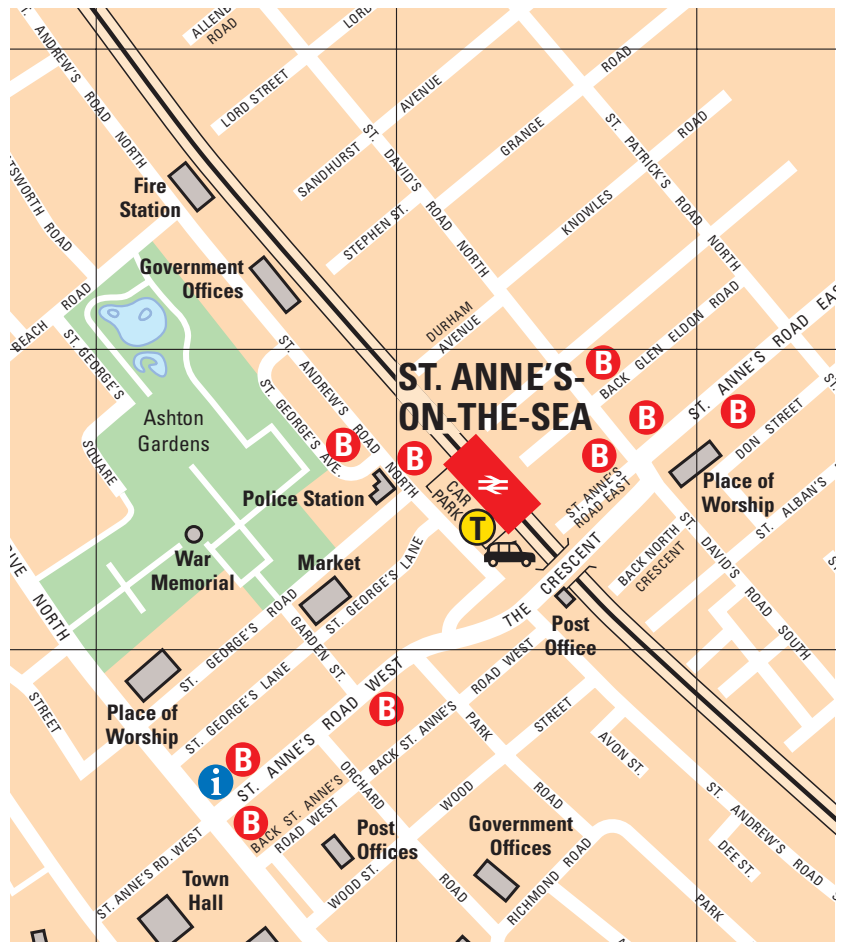
COMPARISON OF THE TWO MAP SCALES

St. Anne's received one of the smaller maps described in this case study. The overall map was incorporated in a much bigger poster that had all sorts of other useful local information, whereas the Sunderland map on the next two pages had a complete poster all to itself, and with the benefit of a street index.

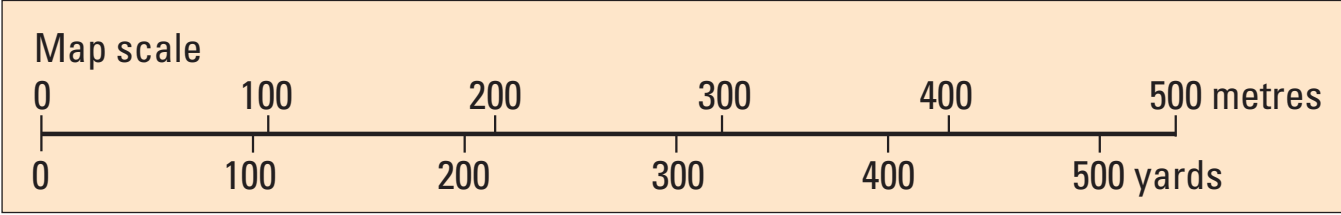
The St. Anne's example was one of the heavier coverage maps that did not have a street index; many of them were much lighter and finding one's street from a visual search was relatively quick.

See the scale bar at the foot of the page and compare it with the equivalent of the Sunderland map on the next page. Crucially, note that the typematter, though smaller on the smaller scale map, is not proportionally smaller than that on the larger one. Retaining legibility and usability depends on getting the correct visual balance. The user should of course be blissfully unaware of all this. Ensuring usability is the job of the map designer.

The complete map shown below is reproduce here at one-quarter size. To the right is the central section reproduced at full size, as is its scale bar.



This is the central section of the Sunderland map reproduced at full size, as is its scale bar. The complete poster is reproduced on the following page at one quarter size.



Alnmouth station: it is usually an unconsidered norm for maps such as these to have the station at their centre. This is perfectly reasonable in most circumstances, and this would be fine if the 'circumstances' were actually considered. However, at this particular station, the main catchment is a few miles away in Alnwick. Though some alighting passengers may be heading for Alnmouth, the majority will want Alnwick. As such we devised a simple solution that gave everyone what they were looking for.

Please note that this example is seen out of context here, where the maps are reproduced at 30 per cent scale relative to that at the station itself.

Welcome to ALNMOUTH FOR ALNWK station

This station is operated by **Northern Rail Ltd**, though in some cases other operators may use its facilities

A bus service runs from this station to Alnwick

- Ⓣ Public Telephone
- Ⓟ Nearby Bus Stops

Map scale for two main maps

0 200 400 600 800 1000 metres

0 200 400 600 800 1000 yards

Average walking speed is about 100 metres in a minute

Produced from Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 Landplan mapping for Northern Rail under contract by DMI Ltd, for the purpose of onward travel posters.

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