Wayfinding Harmonization Project

Project Overview

As the transit network in the Greater Golden Horseshoe continues to grow and expand, transit wayfinding will play an even more crucial role in helping people get around.

One of the priority actions in The Regional Transportation Plan, includes "consistent wayfinding across all modes" (Priority Action 3.3)

To address the need, Metrolinx is working with all GTHA transit agencies towards the goal of harmonized wayfinding through the Regional Transit Wayfinding Harmonization project. The goal of the initiative is to improve the consistency of wayfinding across the region to make it better and easier for our customers to take transit. Together, we have developed a set of wayfinding guidelines; a common approach for presenting transit information across the region including consistent signage at stations, naming conventions and mapping.

Some of this work was tested through a wayfinding pilot at Pickering GO, Hamilton GO, the Finch GO Bus Terminal and the four UP Express stations in 2018-2019. Customer feedback during that pilot informed the wayfinding standards.

Why Are We Creating Regional Wayfinding Standards?

A Priority Action in the Regional Transportation Plan, our commitment to design excellence is delivering a better, more comfortable and seamless customer experience. Clear and consistent wayfinding tools are an important part of that commitment.

What Is Wayfinding?

Wayfinding tools can refer to any information that helps you find your way. In a transit environment, tools that help this process can include maps, signs and graphics that help customers navigate the transit network.

Why Does It Matter?

Effective wayfinding tools simplify space and travel for customers. We are developing wayfinding tools to make the regional transit network easier to use.

What Is The Benefit?

Connected and coordinated wayfinding information simplifies the network, entices more people to take transit and enjoy a great customer experience.

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How Are The New Wayfinding Tools Different?

The key difference is the use of a common approach to placement, sign types and graphic design for all transit information, regardless of operator.

As part of this project, international best practice pointed to the need for a single symbol to identify the transit network. The concept of a Network Identifier was tested during the wayfinding pilot to demonstrate how one symbol can represent a whole network, and show points of access to that network. This idea is already used by major transit networks around the world.

We tested the concept of an identifier at our stations during the Wayfinding Pilot (2018-2019) as well through customer focus groups. The final design was informed by feedback from customers, residents and other stakeholders engaged during the Regional Transit Wayfinding Harmonization Project.

How Did We Get Here?

Transit wayfinding tools throughout the region have historically been designed by each operator using their own wayfinding conventions. As the region expanded, this has led to the overlap of wayfinding systems creating inconsistencies in signage, graphics, terminology, maps and other elements. These inconsistencies create barriers to mobility, make it difficult to plan trips, and are particularly confusing for visitors and occasional customers.

With the help of wayfinding experts, Metrolinx and our transit partners started a complete review and redesign for wayfinding in 2014 through The Regional Transit Wayfinding Harmonization Project. The amount of existing information across the region's operators, together with the complexity of designing common standards that could work everywhere, required in-depth research, assessment, testing and discussion.

Phase 1

During the first phase, we researched what information is currently provided to customers and what they need when travelling around the region. This highlighted the current challenge of understanding how to plan a journey that requires transfers between different transit operator services, especially for new or unfamiliar users. Together, we agreed that wayfinding tools must help 'to encourage and enable transit use by creating an inclusive, excellent customer experience for all types of travellers.' This aim was translated into guiding principles and concepts for a common standard for planning and designing wayfinding.

Phase 2

During the second phase, we brought these concepts into a full set of working standards through detailed evaluation of the region's existing systems, international best practice, public surveys, and work with accessibility advisors. A team of wayfinding design specialists then developed customer-focused standards that we tested at Pickering GO, Hamilton GO, Finch GO Bus Terminal, and UP Express Stations. Feedback from customers and transit operators informed the final designs.

What's Next?

New wayfinding design standards and guidelines were produced in 2019, and will be applied on all new Metrolinx projects. Our municipal transit partners are encouraged to use the new standards, especially on parts of the system that are particularly difficult for customers to navigate, such as multi-modal and multi-operator interchanges.

About The Design
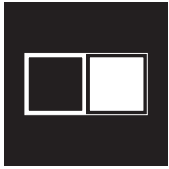
COLOUR

A bold black and white palette offers optimum contrast, while providing a neutral backdrop for colour coding and operator brand colours.

PICTOGRAMS

International standard pictograms are used in most situations. New pictograms have also been designed using the same style for specific applications. Pictograms are designed to be easily read whether on signs or on maps. Pictograms are supported by text in most cases to improve understanding and the designs representing vehicles are simplified to make them "future proof".

TYPEFACE

Clearview ADA has been chosen as the typeface for the standards. Clearview ADA has been tested against other typefaces used in transit and recommended by the CNIB.
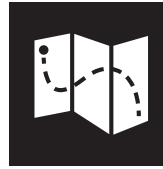
SIGN PLANNING

In addition to design specification, the standard includes detailed planning guidelines to help ensure consistency in where signs are placed and what they say. The guidelines explain how information can be delivered effectively and how to provide the right information at the right time. These guidelines inform how complex information should be placed along a journey, making the steps you take when using transit intuitive and easy to understand.

PRODUCT DESIGN

Physical sign products are designed to be durable and straightforward to implement and maintain. Key design elements include the use of anodized aluminum bases to protect against snow and salt, toughened glass for clarity and durability, and off-the-shelf poster cases that are simple to construct and easily updated.

ACCESSIBILITY

Metrolinx's Accessibility Advisory Committee was consulted for their views on inclusive design and system accessibility. The Committee's advice guided design work in several areas including the clarity of graphics, colour contrast, viewing heights, the use of tactile surfaces and Braille.

Network Identifier – A Symbol For A Connected Network

Around the world, transit systems like ours that are made up of different modes, operators and areas, are often identified by easily recognizable symbols that may, or may not, be related to the operator's corporate brand. These symbols, when applied consistently, help make the transit network more predictable and, by extension, easier to understand and navigate.

The network identifier is part of a better customer experience. It links our transit network together across our region. It tells customers "this is where you access transit." As transit service expands and increases, customers will make even more trips across municipal boundaries, including transfers to and from different modes and operators.

The idea of using a symbol for the GGH transit network came from the research and consultation phase of the Regional Transit Wayfinding Harmonization project. The studies revealed that recognizing how to access the network, when all services are described by the identity of local operators, is a central challenge to wayfinding especially for new and unfamiliar transit users. We heard similar feedback during consultation on the Regional Transportation Plan.

International examples:

Concept Design

Metrolinx worked with wayfinding design experts to select the most appropriate symbol using five guiding principles:
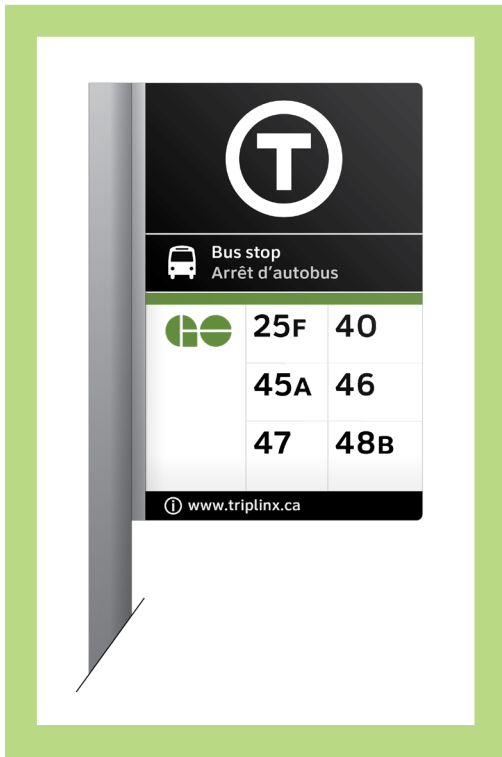
1. **Identify transit**
   Unfamiliar and new transit users should be able to intuitively associate the symbol with the public transit network.

2. **Be inclusive**
   The symbol needs to be as legible as possible. It needs to be memorable, simple and useable at different sizes without loss of clarity.

3. **Be mode neutral**
   It should represent all public transportation and not indicate any one type (or mode) of transportation over another.

4. **Be brand neutral**
   It should not represent a specific transit system or operator. It should instead symbolize the coordination and connection of transit services across the region.

5. **Be timeless**
   It should not go out of date and should be able to be adapted to new needs in the future.

Over 150 unique symbols were explored, including letters, abstract symbols, illustrations and the use of existing operator logos.

In order to select a symbol to test as part of our Wayfinding Pilot (2018-2019), Metrolinx engaged our 36-member Resident's Reference Panel to select a concept design. An abstract symbol was selected by the Panel, with a chevron design coming out on top. Letters were felt to be too anonymous and potentially confusing in their meaning, particularly to those who were not especially fluent in English or French. The chevron design was felt to convey the concepts of movement and interchange in a way that was easy to understand.

Metrolinx tested the concept of an identifier at our stations during the Wayfinding Pilot (2018-2019) as well through customer focus groups. As part of the focus groups, attendees were asked what they thought the chevron symbol represented. While most were close to identifying the meaning of the symbol (e.g. 'coming and going', 'both directions,' 'east and west'), it was challenging for some to understand the symbol as meaning simply 'transit.' Focus group attendees felt they would need other information to appear with the symbol for it to be fully understood.

In response to focus group feedback, a more literal symbol (the 'T') was suggested as an alternative. An online survey was conducted with participation from 1,300 people from across the country. 81 per cent of respondents agreed the 'T' will help people recognize transit availability, whereas only 35 per cent of respondents felt the chevrons would do the same. Based on this response, the 'T' was selected as the network identifier symbol in Wayfinding Standard and will be gradually implemented throughout the region.

Customers will start to see the T beginning with new GO bus signs in January 2020.

After that, the T will be rolled out at stations and stops across the network and throughout the Crosstown LRT.