



Wayfinding Reading Station

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Fall 2009

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Background & task

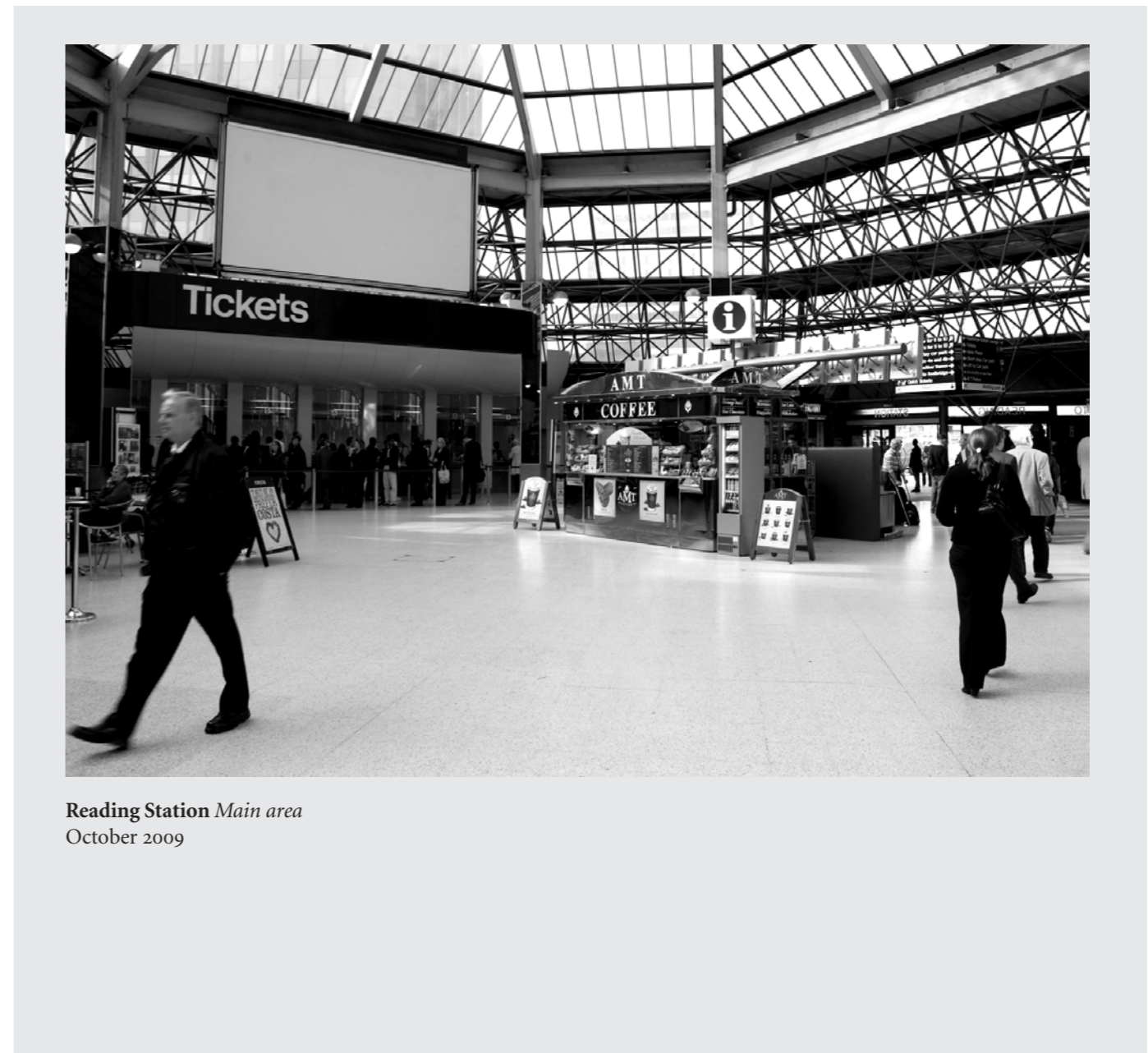
A clear and accessible wayfinding system is essential in order to help people find their way to and from Reading Station in a timely manner.

Background

Reading Station is a key location in Reading. It is a major transportation hub connecting people to other parts of the country and to the town of Reading. Its importance is purely functional: to facilitate the movement of people and goods from one place to the next.

Task

The task was to document and evaluate the current wayfinding system and environment. To discover what works and what doesn't, to consider and explore different approaches, and to design and implement a new wayfinding solution that addresses the problems of the existing system and the built environment.



Reading Station Main area
October 2009

DISCOVERY

- 3 Mental maps
- 4 User journeys
- 7 Analysis

The discovery phase was used to collect information about the environment in order to understand how Reading Station is accessed, where people need to go, and how they get there.

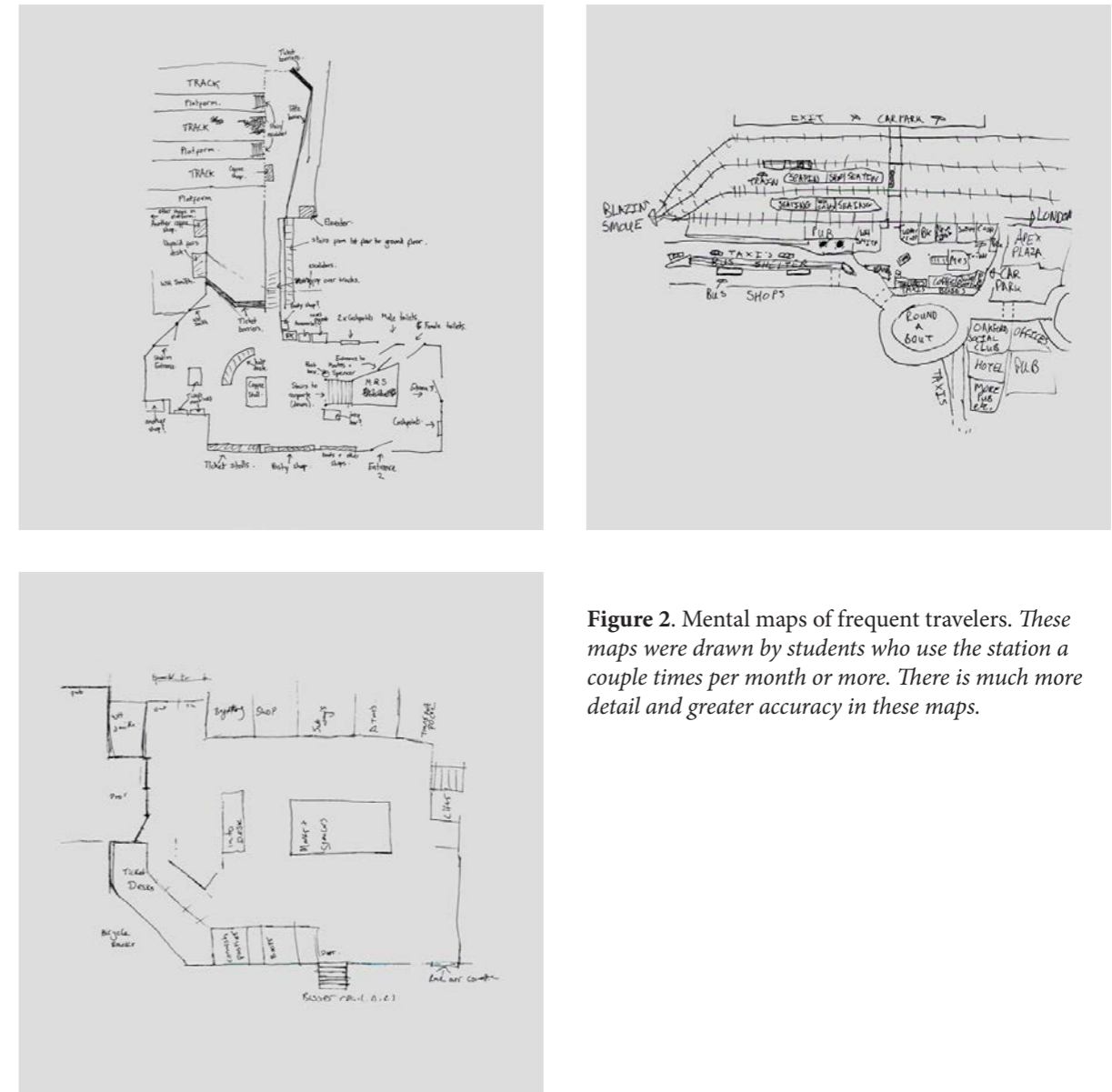
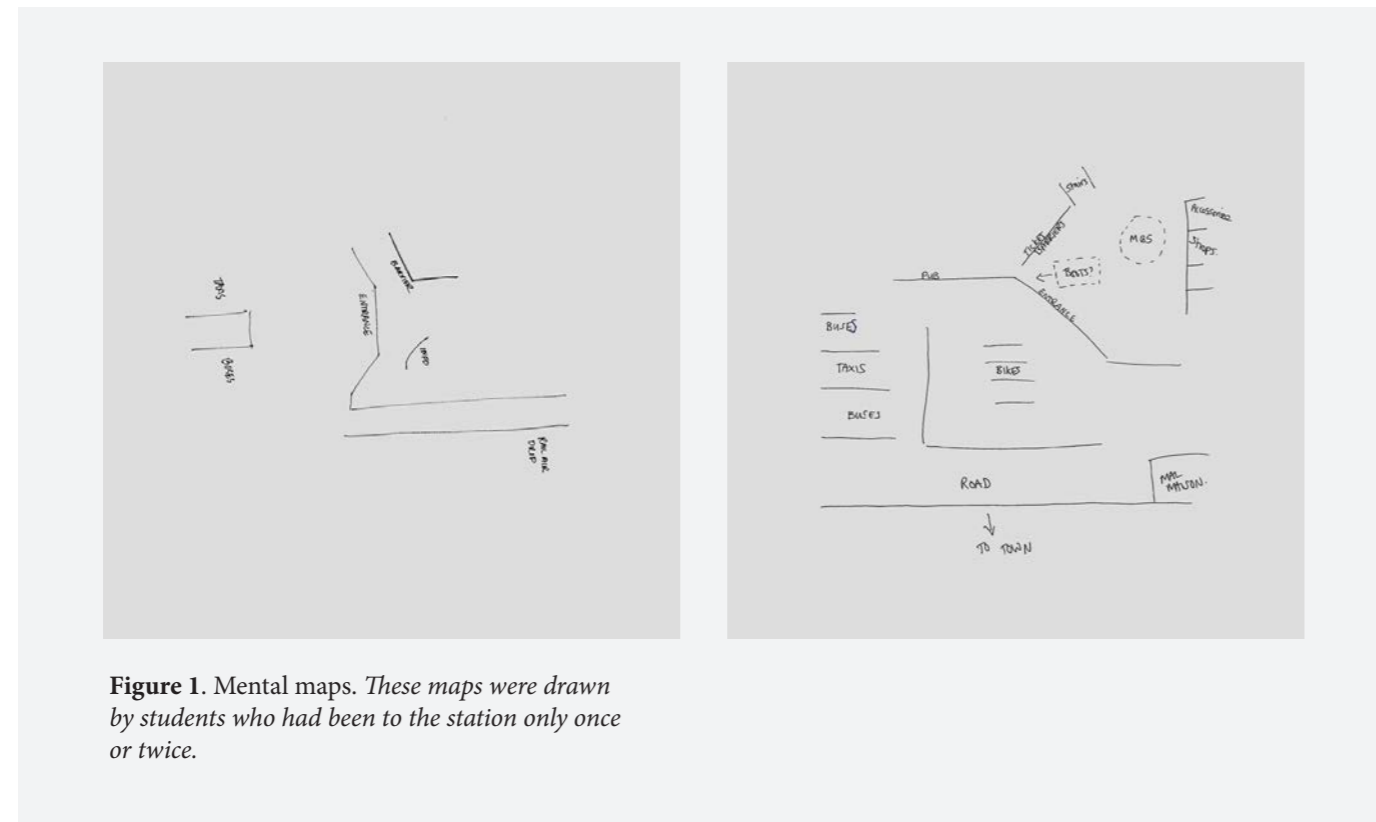
Mental maps, documenting the existing conditions with photography, and user journeys helped to expose the weaknesses and problems of the current wayfinding system.

DISCOVERY

Mental maps

Mental maps were collected from five postgraduate students attending the University of Reading. They each had different levels of familiarity with the station. Those who were less familiar had a more difficult time connecting the different parts of the station. The boundaries between areas were not clear, there were gaps in their maps, and the locations they sketched in were not always in the right place (**Figure 1**). Those who were more familiar with the station had an excellent understanding of its layout. Their maps had the most detail and they were able to accurately place the different shops, ATMs, and even where post boxes are located within the station (**Figure 2**).

Mental maps helped to identify the parts of the station that were easily remembered as well as those that weren't. Almost everyone recalled the main entrance, buses and taxis, information desk, and Rail Air entrance; but only one map described the north drop.



DISCOVERY

User journey



Kate
student

Arrival Rail Air
Departure Taxi

Overview

Kate is attending the University of Reading for a year. She has arrived from Heathrow via the Rail Air Bus and is at the drop on the South side of Reading Station. She needs to find transportation to the University — either a bus or taxi.

Goals

Get from the Station to the University of Reading.

North

Legend
----- Path traveled
① Decision point
● Major decision point (lacking information)

1
Arrival at the Rail Air drop
Kate is looking for a sign pointing her to information, buses, or taxis but **she doesn't easily see where she needs to go**. She doesn't want the trains, tickets, shops or the Rail Air Lounge, so **she asks for directions**.

2
Ramp to the Main Entrance
As directed, she follows the ramp and heads toward the main entrance. She looks around for information pertaining to either buses or taxis, but finds none. She heads into the station.

3
Enters the Station
She continues to look for information about her options for transportation, but still doesn't find any. **The station is extremely crowded** and she becomes **overwhelmed and unsure of where to go**. There isn't a spot where she can stop and figure things out, so she heads back outside.

4
Departure from taxi rank
Unsure of what to do she heads back outside where she notices the taxis across the road and speaks with a driver.

DISCOVERY

User journey



Paul
business man

Arrival Train
Departure Car

Overview

Paul is arriving at Reading Station via train. He is attending a conference in Reading and will be picked up by a colleague at the North Drop.

Goals

Get from Platform 2 to the North Drop.

North

Legend
----- Path traveled
● Photo location
● Major decision point (lacking information)

1 Arrives at platform 2
There aren't any signs for the North Entrance/Drop, so following the signs that say "way out" he heads toward the main station area to get directions. (The barrier of advertisements and the signs form an edge that guides him to the walkway leading into the main station area.)

2 Enters the main station area
But he still doesn't see any signs that point to the North Drop. Unsure of which direction to head in, he asks an official for directions.

3 Heads up the escalators and follows the walkway over the tracks
He's not really sure that he's heading in the right direction, but he doesn't see any alternative routes, so he continues. Still no signs for the North Drop.

4 Arrives at the North Entrance/Drop
Arriving at the North Drop, he feels abandoned and unsure that he's in the right place. It's completely unmarked and seems to be entirely removed from the rest of the station. His only reassurance is the car park — which his colleague told him he would see.

DISCOVERY

User journey



Pat
hiker

Arrival Train
Departure Train

Overview

Pat is only passing through the station on his way to explore wilder parts of the country. He's arrived via train at platform 2 and needs to find platform 9, where he is departing from.

Goals

Get from platform 2 to catch his connecting train at platform 9.

North

1

2

3

4

Legend

- Path traveled
- 1 Photo location
- 2 Major decision point (confusion)
- 3 Major decision point

1

Arrival at platform 2

Getting off the train at platform 2, Pat begins to look for signs to platform 9. He spots a sign, and even though **he had to stop to read through the information on the sign**, he was able to see the direction he needed to go to get to platform 9.

2

Heads down the subway

Pat follows the signs through the subway for platform 9. **The signs in the subway are large and easy to read.** They immediately reassure him of his direction.

3

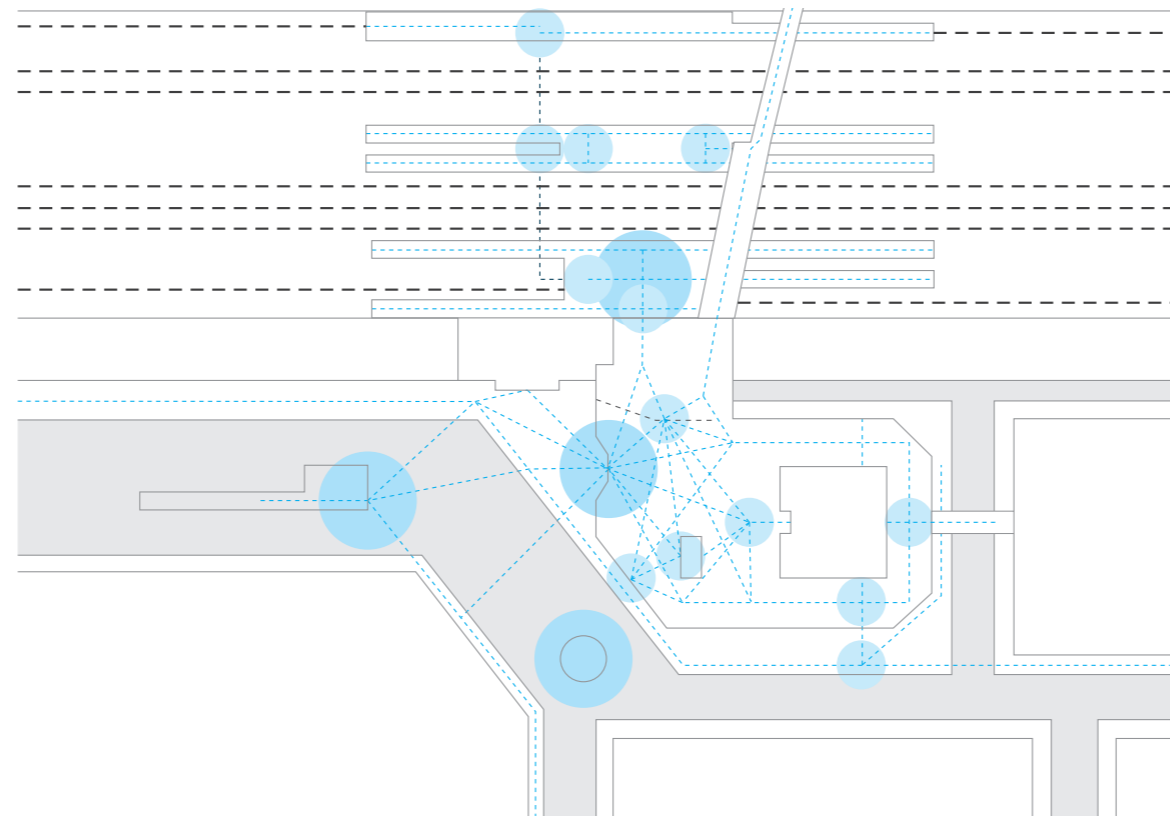
Follows the sign and takes the stairs up to platform 9

4

Waits at platform 9 for his departing train

Analysis

In his book *Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch discusses edges, landmarks, paths, nodes, and districts as elements that influence our ability to identify with and remember a place.



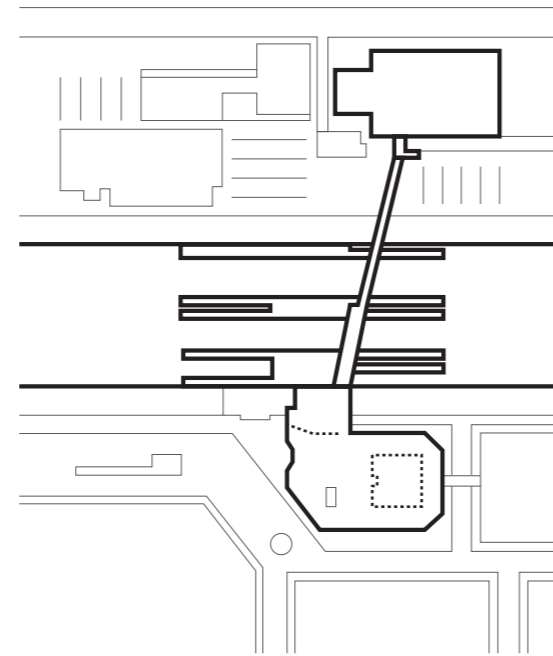
Using Lynch's method to evaluate a place helps us understand how the existing features influence how a space is used, where people can go and where they can't go, and how different areas are accessed and related to each other.

From my visual analysis of paths & nodes at Reading Station, describing where people go and major decision points.

Analysis

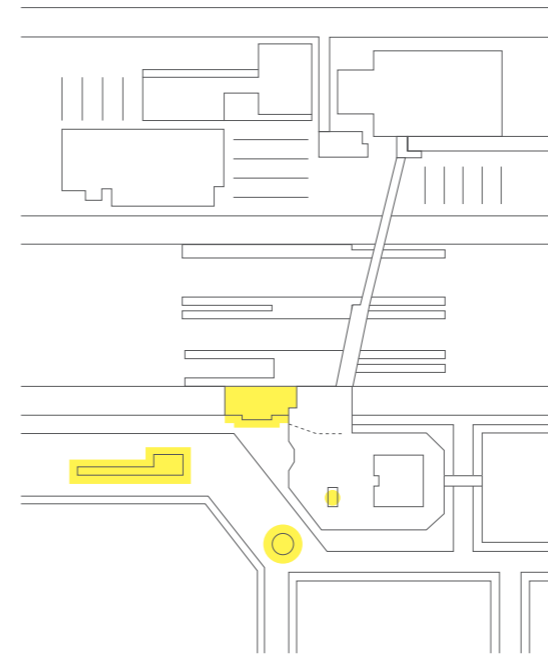
Identifying edges, landmarks, paths & nodes

These are the elements that guide us through a place and help us identify with it.



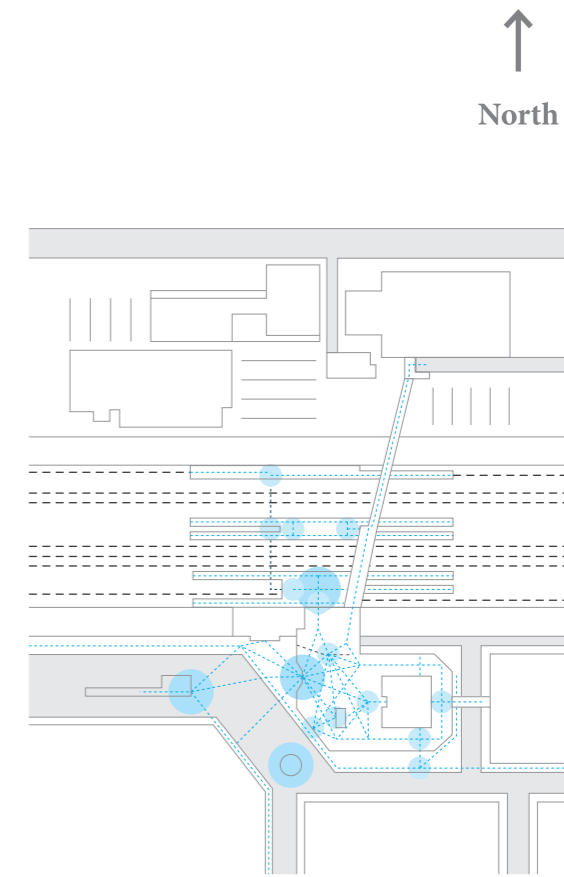
Edges

- Exterior walls (structural)
- Interior walls and divides *e.g., along the escalators and stairs, Marks & Spencer, etc.*
- Ticket barriers *soft edge/seam; allowing movement, but restricted*
- Buildings
- Rail and platform edges



Landmarks

- Bus and taxi rank
- Three Guineas* pub
- Ticket barrier
- Information desk
- Round about



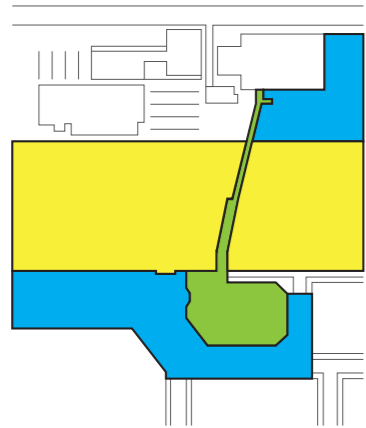
Paths & Nodes

- Major node
- Minor node
- Automobile pathway
- Train pathway
- Pedestrian pathway



Analysis

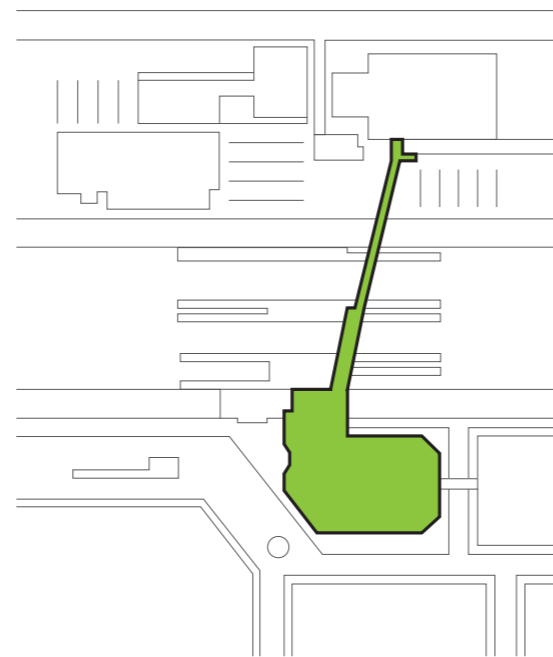
Establishing districts



Districts overview

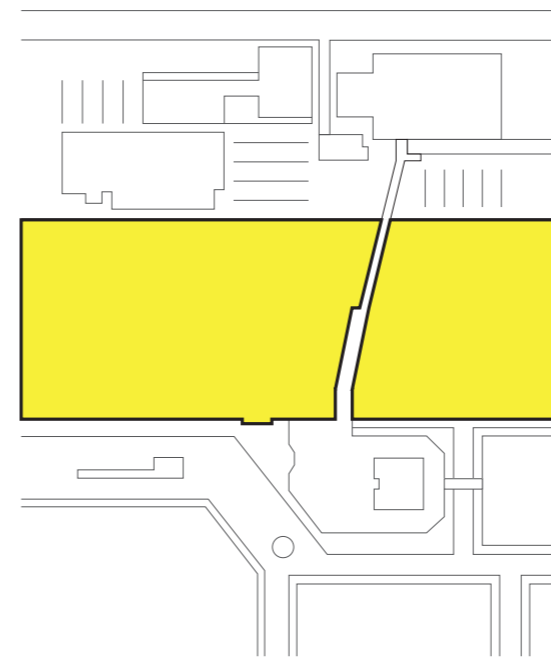
Districts were established based on the primary function of the space within them.

This was done in an effort to add clarity to the environment by identifying where different areas start and stop, and to consider how signs and visual cues would help guide people from one area to another.



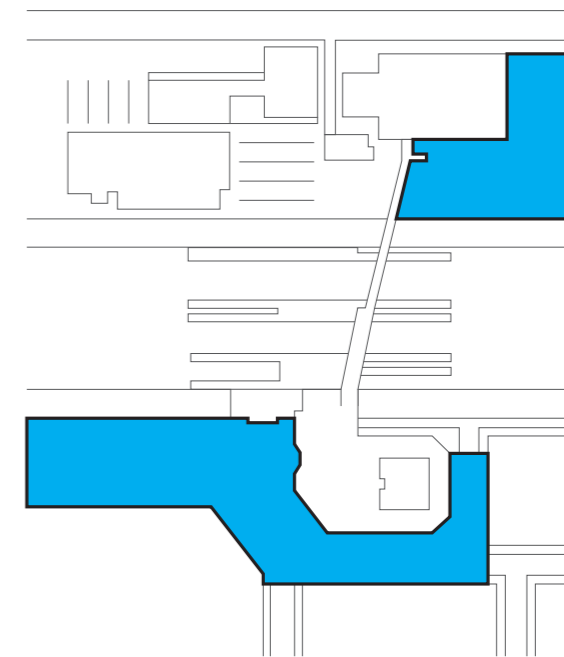
Main station area

The central area of the station where tickets, information, toilets, and shops can be found. This area provides access to everything that directly supports travel to and from the station, and connects directly to the *Rail Area* and the *Transition Areas*.



Rail area

This is the space that is directly related to rail travel. It includes the platforms, tracks, and underground walkways (which only provide access to the platforms).



Transition area

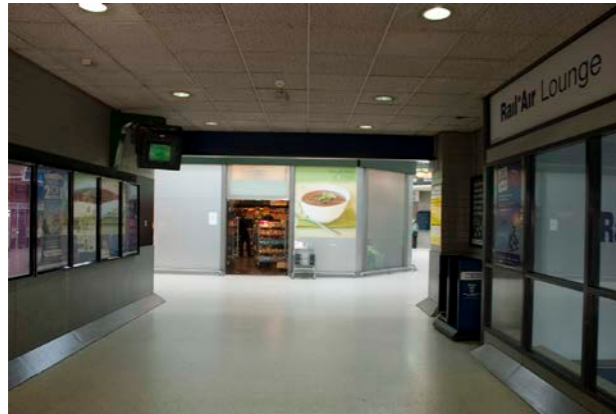
This is the area immediately surrounding the station. It's the interface to the Town Center and other outlying areas. It provides access to the *Main Station Area* and to transportation by car, bus, taxi or Rail Air via the North, South, West, and East drops.

There are many problems at the station that contribute to a poor mental image and prevent people from connecting with the space. One of the major problems is the main area is very open, and **the signs are not clearly organized within the space. They are all shapes and sizes and they hang on several different axis, facing many different directions.**

The information on the signs is difficult to access. Directions are often overstated (there might be three arrows to indicate the same direction of travel), the messages aren't always clear or consistent, and the pictograms and arrows block the type in making it difficult to read.



Reading Station *Confusion on platform 4*
October 2009



No directional or locational signs.



Overstating directions, conflicting information (saying platform 4 is ahead and indicating that platform 4 is here), weak sense of place (platform 4 is the lightest typography on the sign, it doesn't state or confirm that a traveler is where he needs to be).



Overstating directions and blocking typography in between arrows and icons making it difficult to read.



Poor alignment of information. Two different directions listed closely in the same panel.



Different alignments for information sharing the same direction.



Signs in places and along axis that aren't in the direction of travel making them impossible to spot.

TRANSFORMING

- 13 Sign catalogue
- 14 Sketching & design iterations
- 17 Establishing a design direction

The transforming phase was all about applying the information collected in the discovery phase by exploring different ways of improving the imageability of the existing environment. This involved thinking about the placement of signs and how they would function to increase the legibility of the space.

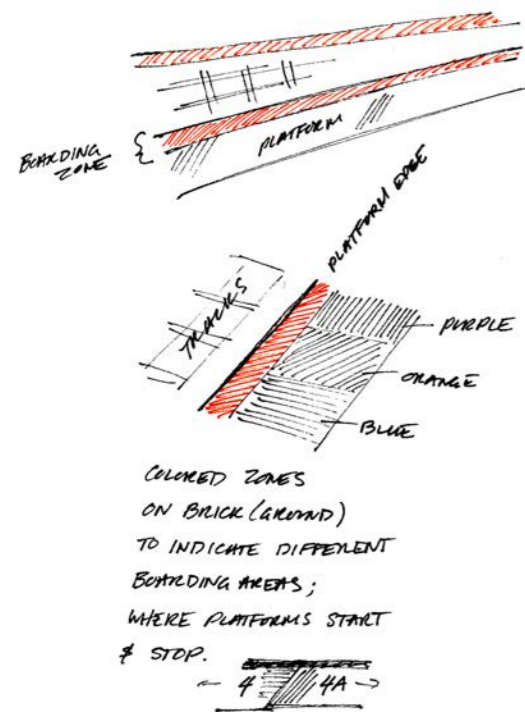
The selection of colors, typefaces, and imagery was an important part of this process and was essential in defining a stronger mental image and creating a sense of place.

This map shows proposed sign locations for the Station. The locations were chosen by studying the space in and around the station, thinking about decision points, major nodes, and pathways. Many of the signs are placed at major nodes and key decision points — where information is required to provide direction or reassurance of one’s direction.

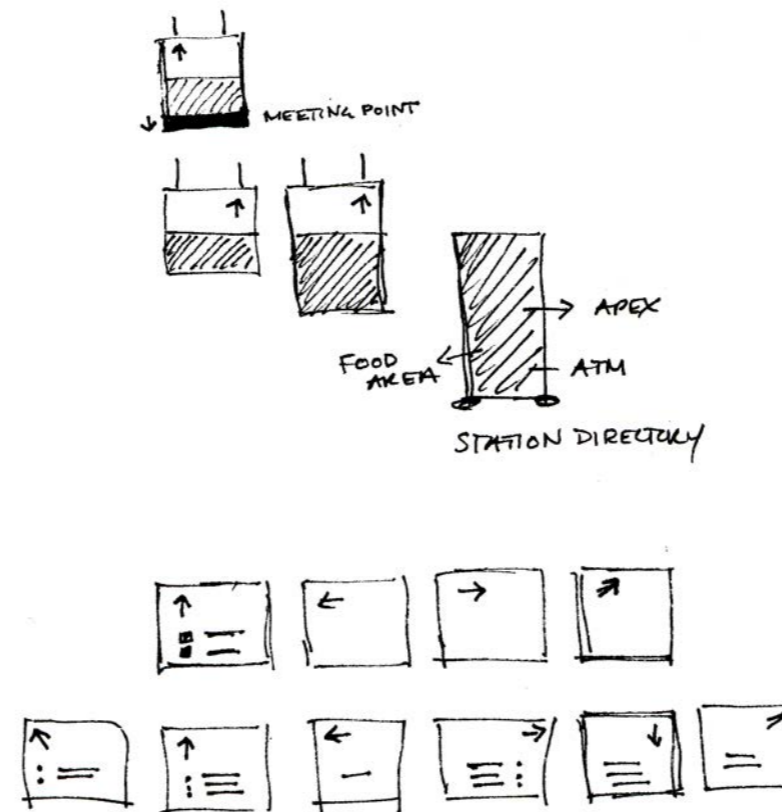
	Transition area	Main area	Rail area
<i>Identification & directional</i>	Buildings Main Entrances Rail Air Buses and Taxis Parking	Information Tickets Trains Rail Air Escalators Lifts Stairs Cafes Shops Toilets	Platforms Escalators Lifts Stairs Customer Lounge Trolley Point Cafes Shops Toilets
<i>Regulatory</i>		Exits Fire	Platform Edges Boarding Zones Exits



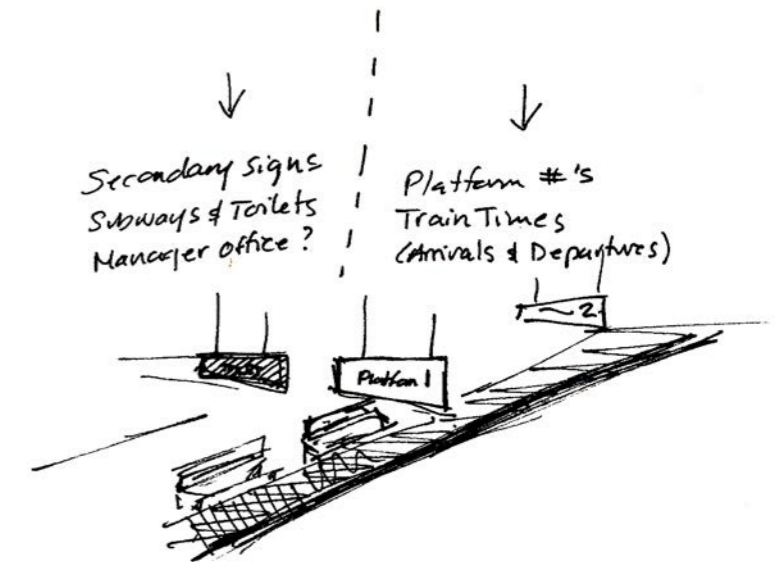
Early sketches explored making alterations to the physical environment, how to structure the information on the panels, and the positioning of signs within the built environment as ways of adding legibility to the existing space.



Thinking about ways to modify the physical environment to add meaning to the space.



Linking arrows, icons, and type; thinking about the hierarchy of information on the sign panels.

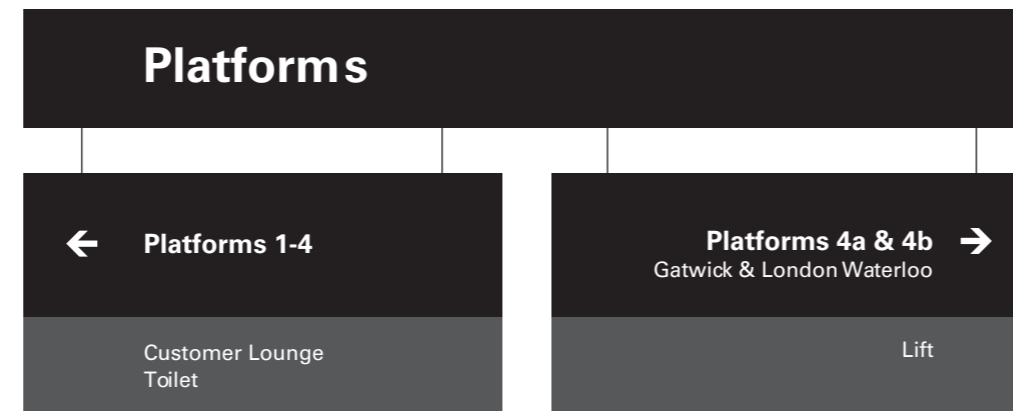
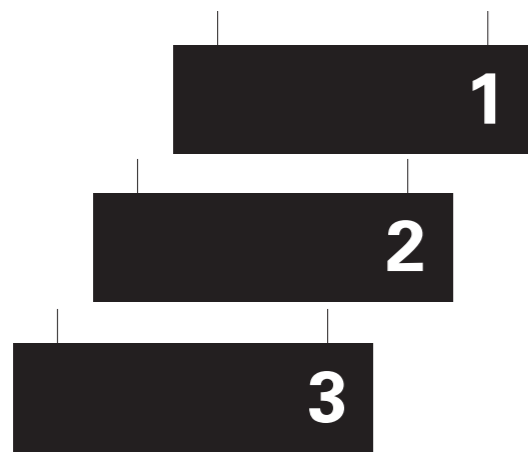


Considering how different axis might be used to organize and structure different levels or kinds of information.

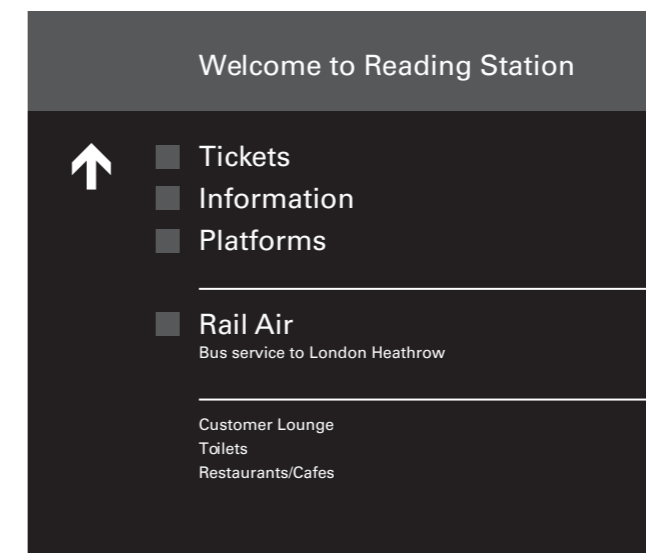
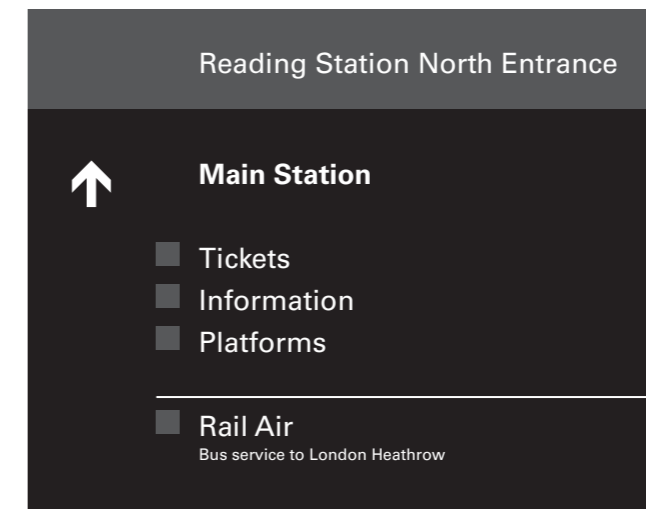
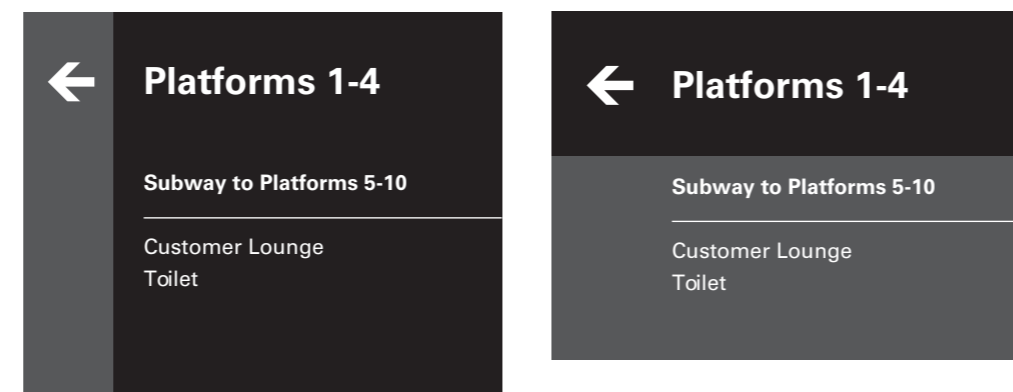
Sketching & design iterations

thinking about hierarchy and informative distinctions

These early digital comps explore the hierarchy of information by dividing the messages into parts that are directly related to travel to and from the station and the parts that support it.

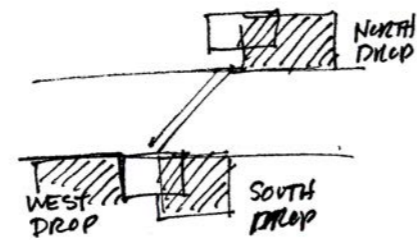


Distinguishing travel information from information related to facilities and services.

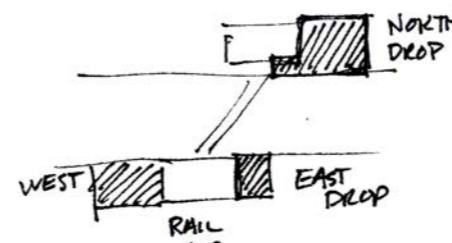


Sketching & design iterations

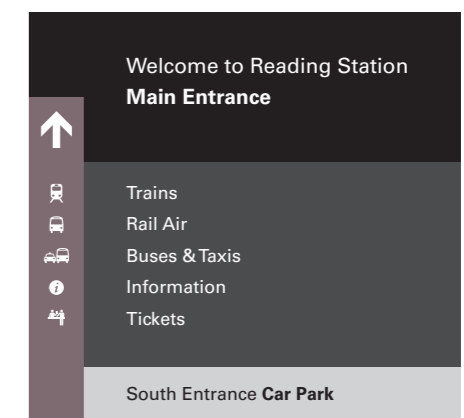
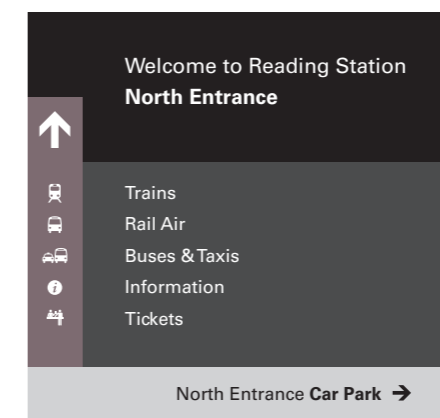
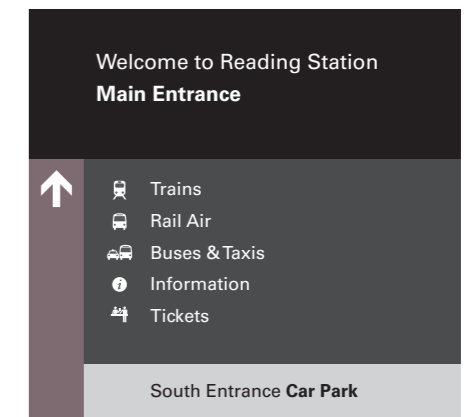
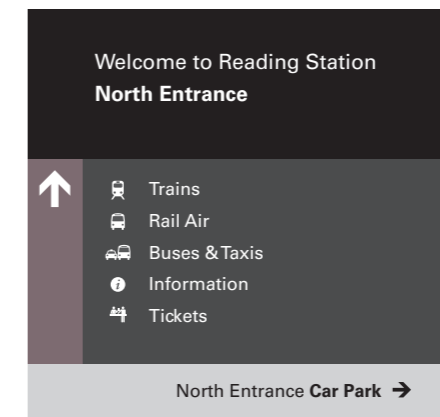
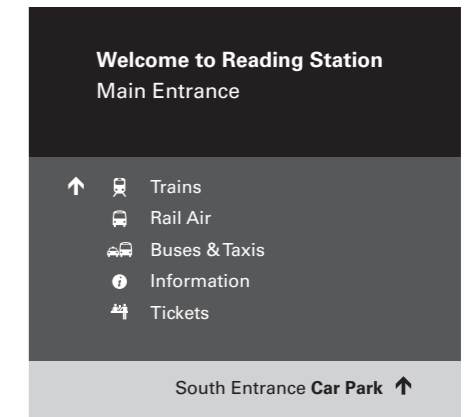
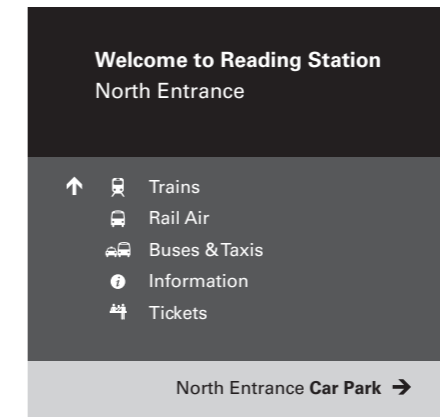
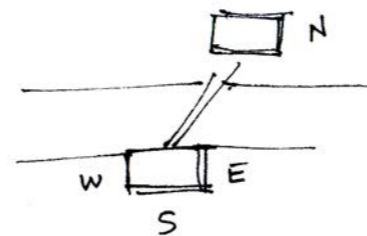
These sketches worked with renaming the entrances around the station to add clarity to the environment. In the existing environment, the building entrances are poorly identified and can be difficult to find. The entrance on the east side of the station isn't even considered an entrance and it's difficult to connect the north drop to the rest of the station since it's so far removed from the main station area.



The existing naming scheme blends the south and the east drops into one, leaving out the entrance from the car park on the east side of the station.



Revised naming by geographic location. This emphasizes all four entrances to the station and makes each one distinguishable and easier to locate.



Entrance sign variations. The entrances are described by their geographic location, with the west entrance named as the main entrance. Consistent sign presentation at all the entrances would help bring together the parts of the station so that they are understood as part of a whole.

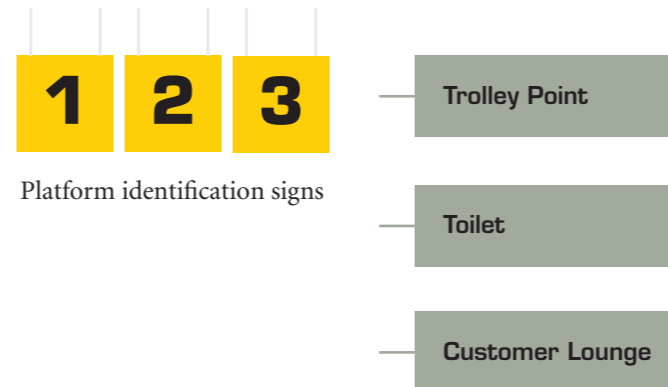
Establishing a design direction



View: facing East, entering the station.

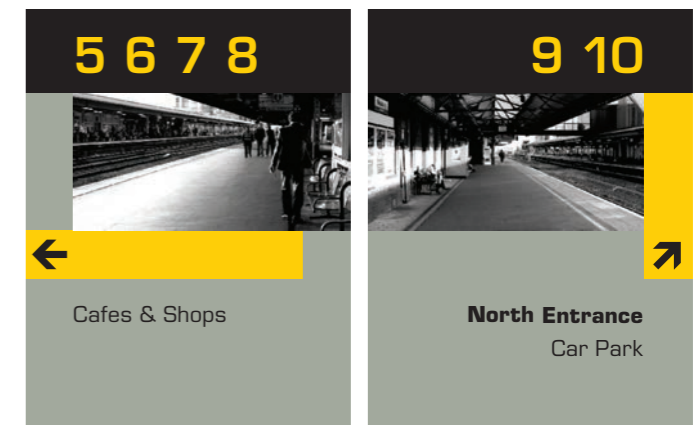
View: facing north, approaching the platform area.

View: facing south, near platform 2.



Platform identification signs

This design direction uses a neutral sign panel to support the bright yellow that's used to tie together information about direction and location. Black and white photography is considered to romanticize rail travel and give travelers a way to connect with the environment.



View: facing north, at the top of the escalators in the walkway.

MAKING

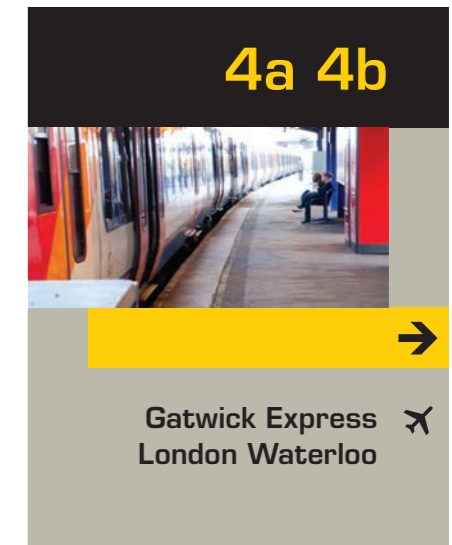
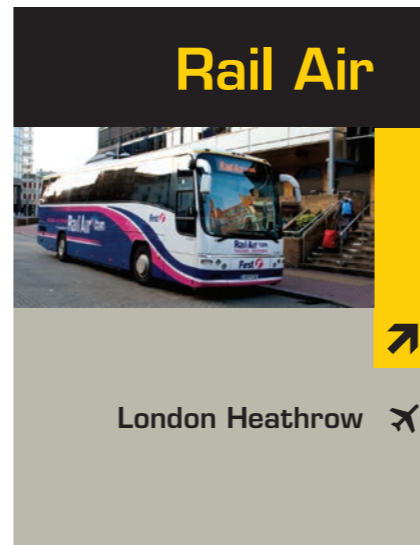
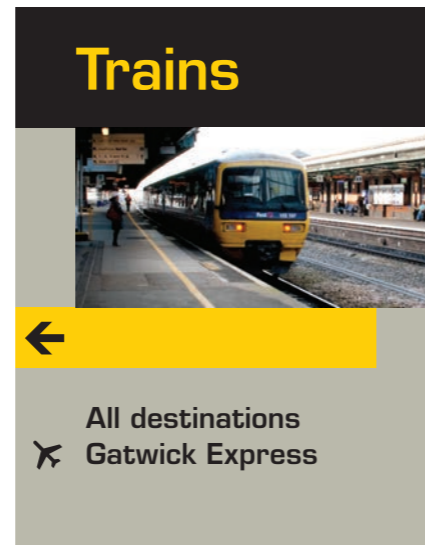
- 19 Sign design
- 20 Photography & colors
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- 22 Specifications
- 23 Sign system

In the final solution, it's the arrangement of color, typography, simple geometric shapes, and photography that work together to create a sense of place and communicate direction.

MAKING

Sign design

The layout of the sign content is tied to the colors, which divide message into its essential parts: destination, direction, and supporting or additional information.



i Information

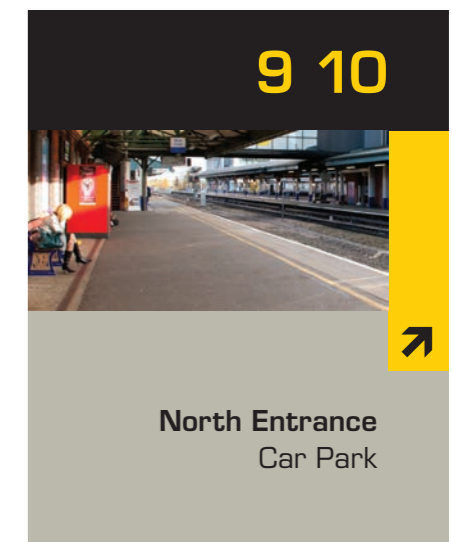
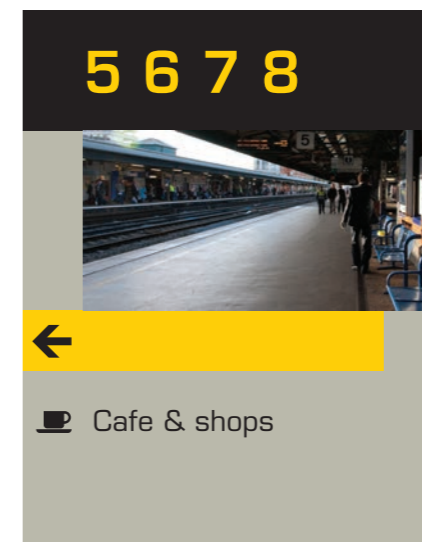
👤 Tickets

1 2 3

Toilets 🚻

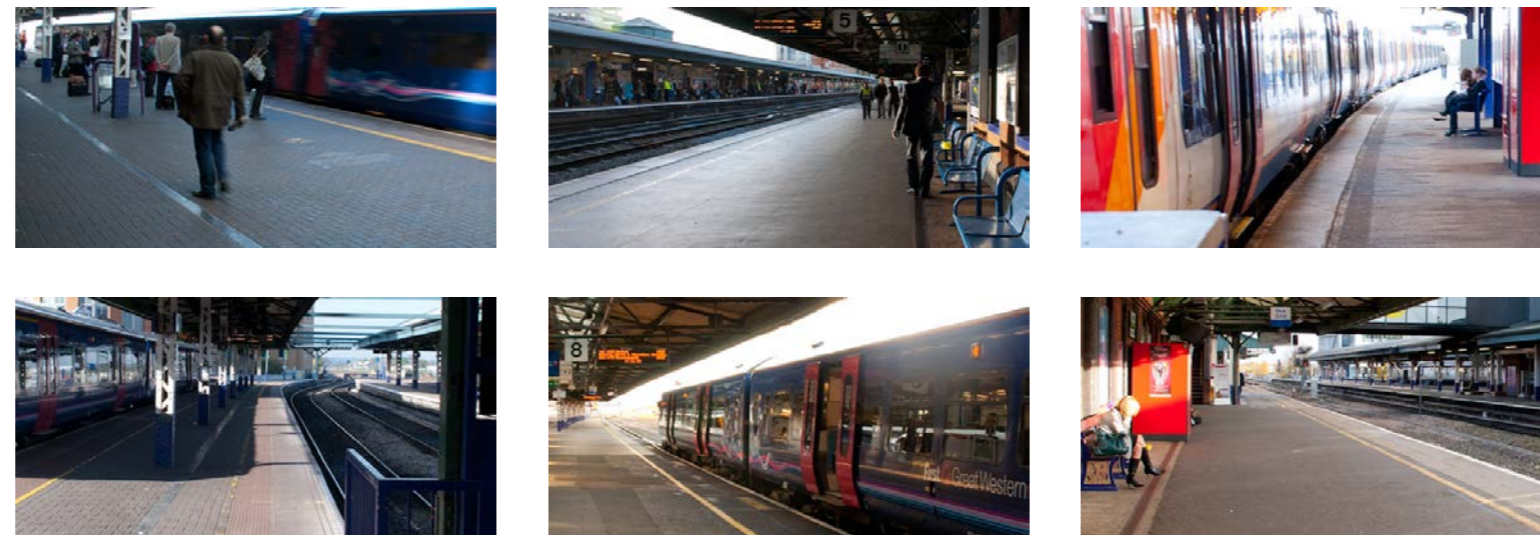
Signs that mark a location are reversed to black type on a yellow background.

Supporting signs are the same warm neutral tone as the main signs with black type and icons.



Photography & colors

The final design makes use of full color photography and a simple color pallet. This combination of color and imagery is used to create a sense of place and a design that is intriguing as well as functional.



Color selection for the sign system: black; a warm neutral tone; and a bright yellow.

The color pallet is simple: black, gray, and yellow. The black creates as a sturdy and powerful space to support the name of a place or the number of a platform. The brightness of the yellow focuses attention on the message and quickly connects us to the directional information. The neutral space supplies additional information for other locations or amenities. When you've arrived at a particular place, the color scheme is reversed and the message is displayed with black type on a yellow background to signal that you have arrived at a specific place.

Typography



For the typeface, I've chosen Eurostile: a sans-serif face with a large x-height to aid legibility from a distance. The letters have a modern, geometric shape and the crossbars sit low in the letterform, giving the face a very grounded feel.

Main Entrance

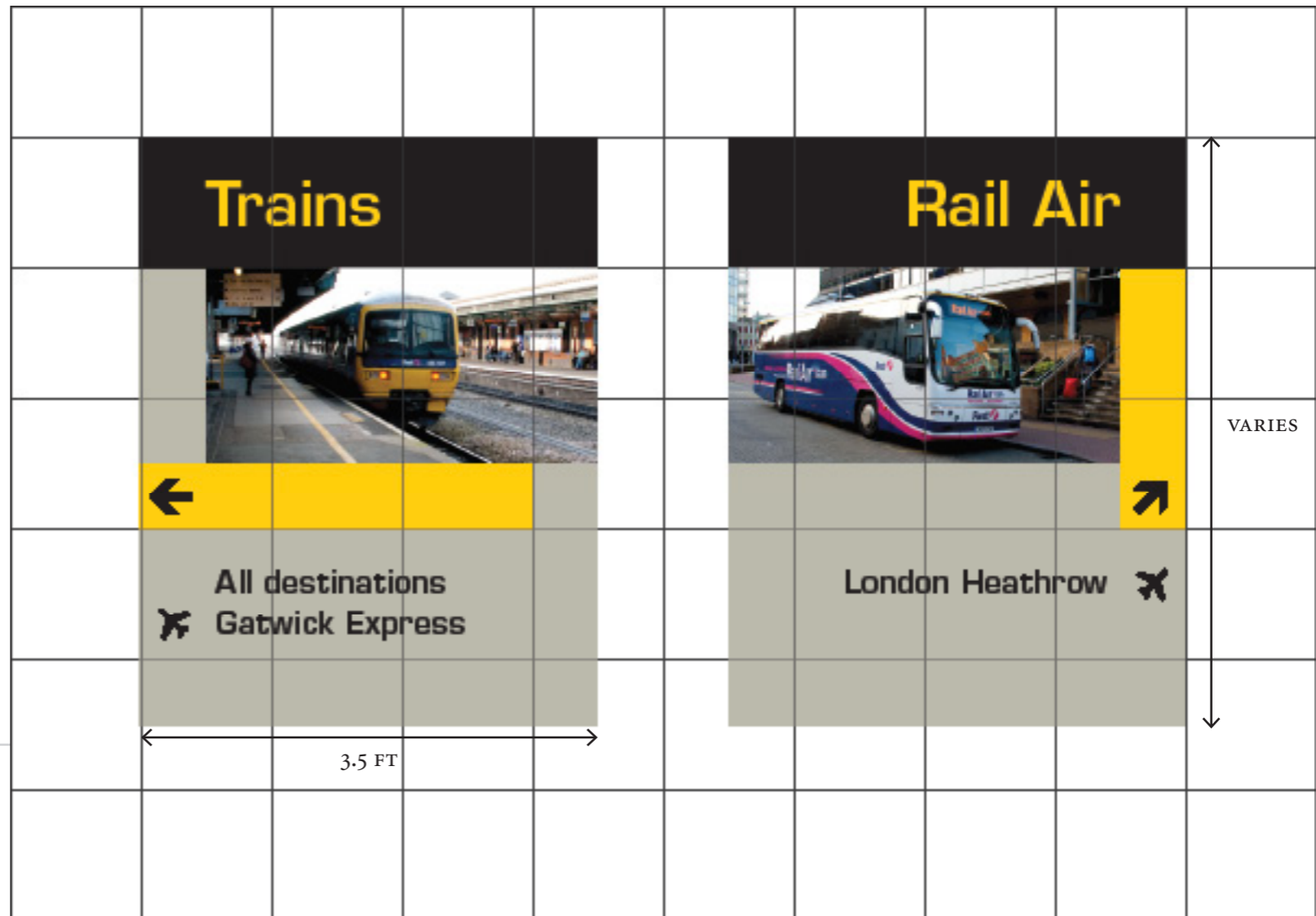
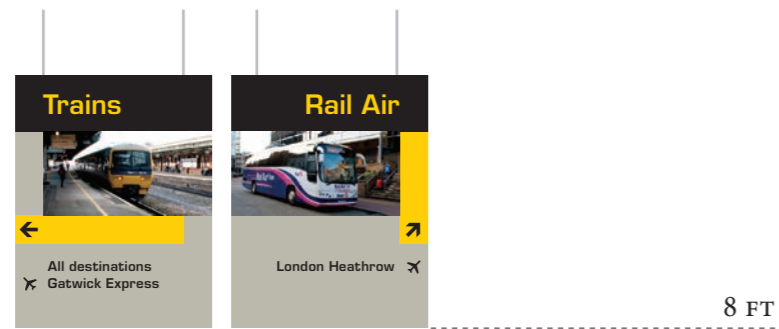
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Eurostile Demi 36pt

Passengers to Gatwick
and London Waterloo

Eurostile Medium 36pt

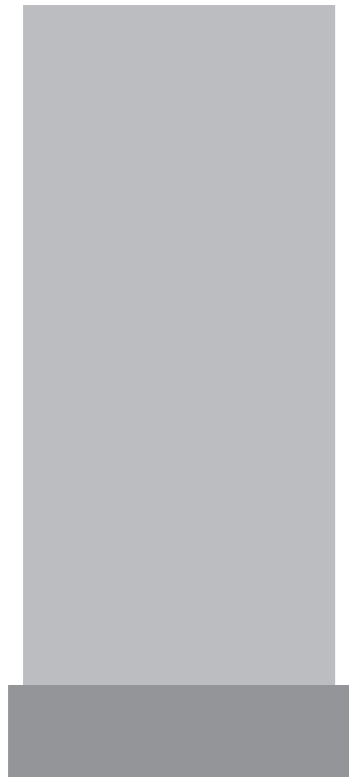
Specifications



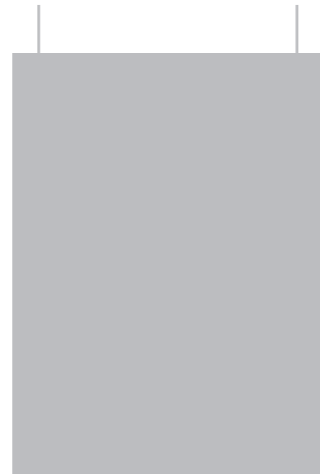
Signs suspended from the ceiling in the main foyer;
enamel coated composite panels.

Sign system

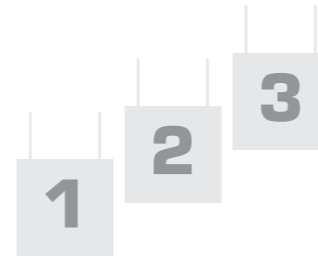
The final system would be extended to include information pylons as well as the standard ceiling and wall-mounted signs.



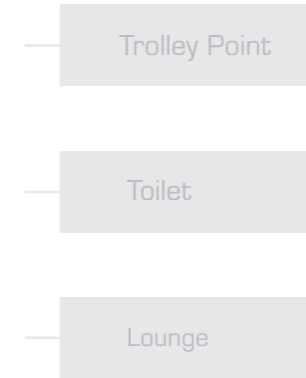
Pylon
Location: Information desk
Function: Orientation
Information: Map of the station, platform diagram, directory of shops, cafes, toilets, cash points, et cetera.



Ceiling-mounted Signs
Location: Throughout the station
Function: Direction
Information: Platform numbers, main entrances, car parks, transportation, arrows, photographs, and icons (to be designed!)



Ceiling-mounted Platform Signs
Location: Along the platforms
Function: Identification
Information: Platform number



Wall-mounted Signs
Location: Along the platforms and throughout the station
Function: Identification
Information: place (e.g., toilet, trolley point, etc)