

# 2026 Wayfinding Guidelines



## **Customer Experience Strategic Initiatives**

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
July 2026 – RAC Update

# Purpose

## It's time for an update

A lot of work has occurred since we last met and milestones have been achieved.

[January Presentation to the RAC](#)



# Agenda

1. **Why** we're doing this work
2. **How** we're doing this work
3. **What** it looks like
4. **How** it works
5. **Where/when** will we all get to see it in the real world?



# A few words from Sarah Meyer

← **Exit C** L'Enfant Plaza  
Spy Museum **Y G** DCA Huntington  
Branch Av **Y G** Mt Vernon Sq  
Greenbelt **Exit A B** Nat'l Mall  
The Wharf →

← **O S B** New Carrollton  
Downtown Largo **O S B** IAD Vienna, Ashburn  
Franconia-Springfield →

L'Enfant Plaza **Y G**

← **Exit A B** Nat'l Mall, VRE  
The Wharf **O S B** **Exit C** L'Enfant Plaza  
Spy Museum →

L'Enfant Plaza **O S B**

← **Exit B** **Exit A C** →

Elevator ↓ **Y G** DCA Branch Av  
Huntington **O S B** IAD

**O S B** ↑

Track 2

**Y G** DCA Huntington  
Branch Av



**Y G** DCA Huntington  
Branch Av

Two levels down  
**O S B** IAD

→ **Exit B** The Wharf  
Metro Offices **O S B**

**MM**

L'Enfant Plaza **Y G O S B**

Entrance **B**  
Elevator on 7 St  
across from  
Entrance A

# Current challenges to solve (the “Why?”)

# Small service changes can cost tens of millions

e.g. Largo Town Center to Downtown Largo

The estimated ROM cost to implement this change systemwide... **\$19 million**

To this day our system still contains signs that say “**Largo Town Center**”



# Confused customers abound

A 2026 analysis indicates that infrequent riders experience longer total trip times and more missed transfers because they don't take optimal paths within a station.

[- MIT Transit Media Lab analysis of WMATA rider data, March 2026](#)

**A 2023 study revealed that 3 in 5 customers (62%)** believe that Metro needs to do more to help customers find their way.

In the 12 months prior:

**2 in 5 (39%)** took the wrong exit at least once

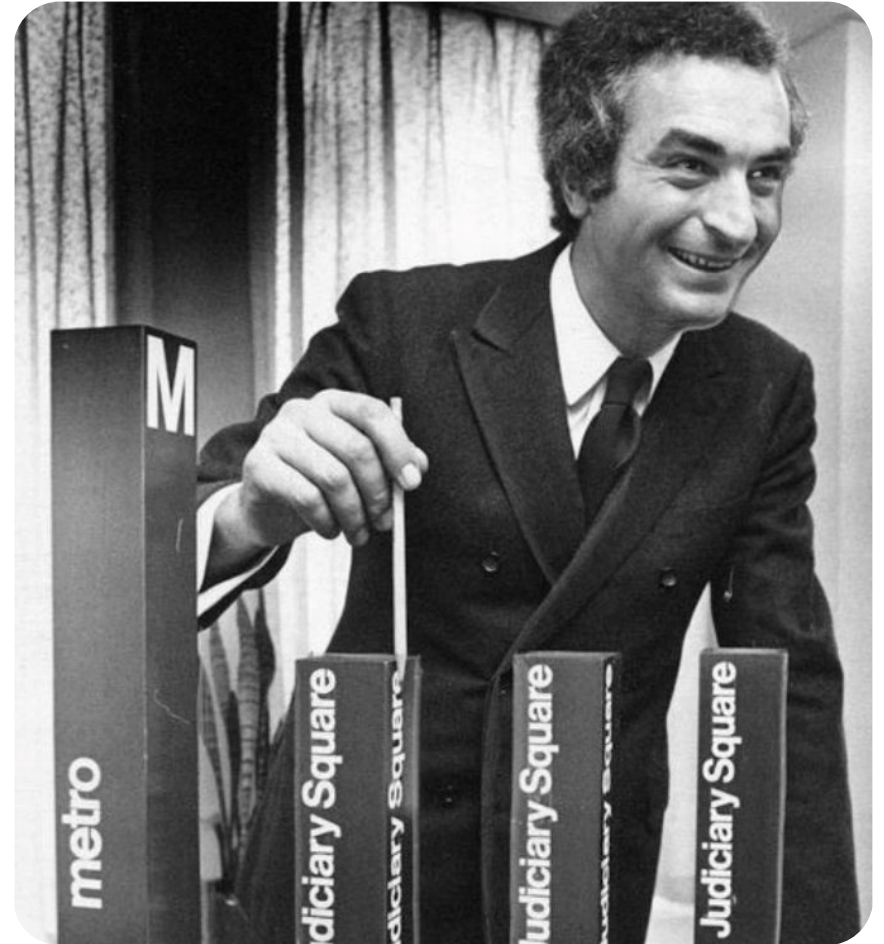
**3 in 10 (29%)** went to the wrong platform

**1 in 4 (23%)** boarded a train headed the wrong way

[Jan/Feb 2023 Survey conducted by Metro](#)

# High variability across 98 stations

- The system has grown
- Architecture has evolved over decades
- Hardware variability has proliferated
- Graphic design solutions have occurred piecemeal



# Methodology (the “How?”)

# Project goals

## 1. Reduce maintenance costs

Robust, adaptable designs lower the need for, and cost of replacement when service changes

## 2. Improve customer experience

Seamless trips reduce frustration, increase repeat ridership, drive referrals, limit negative social media, and lead to achieving increased revenue goals.



# Project scope

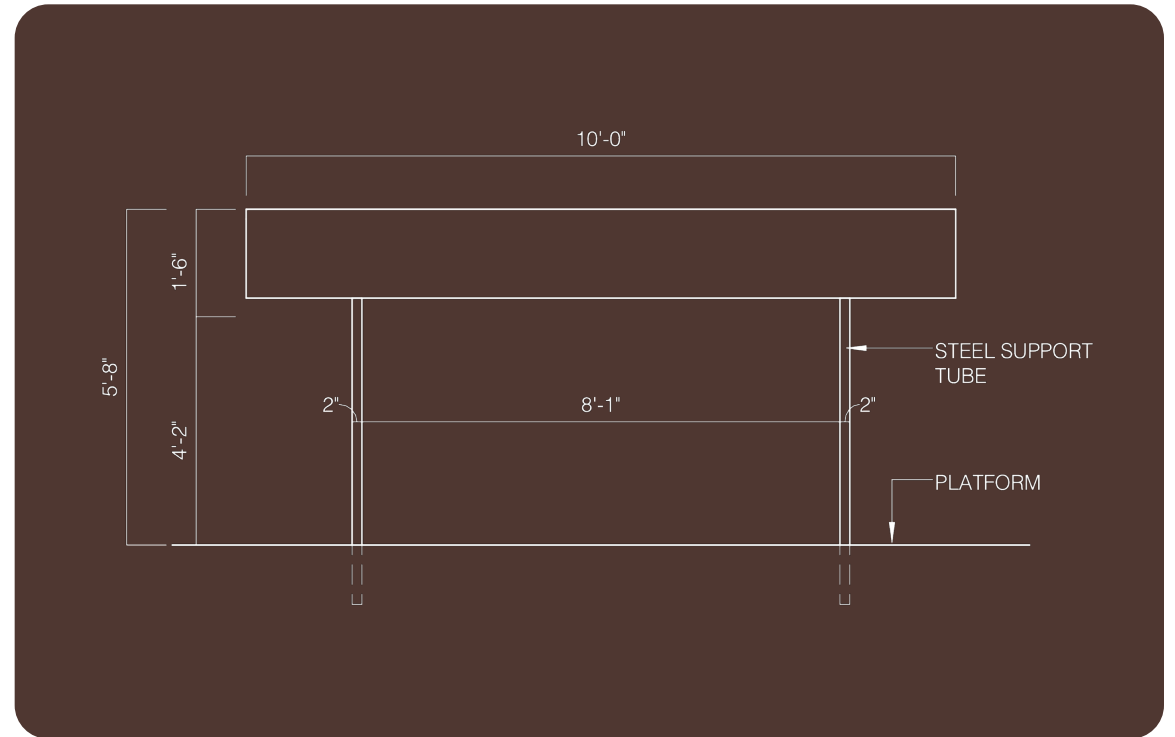
## In Scope: Graphic system

We created a refreshed library of symbols, icons, and typography to build individual sign images to guide customers through Metro stations.



## Out of Scope: Hardware system

We did **not** propose wholesale changes to Metro's physical sign hardware. The new graphic system will be applied to existing hardware, with minor as-needed augmentations. We leave material choice to the experts.



# Approach

## Design for resilience and consistency

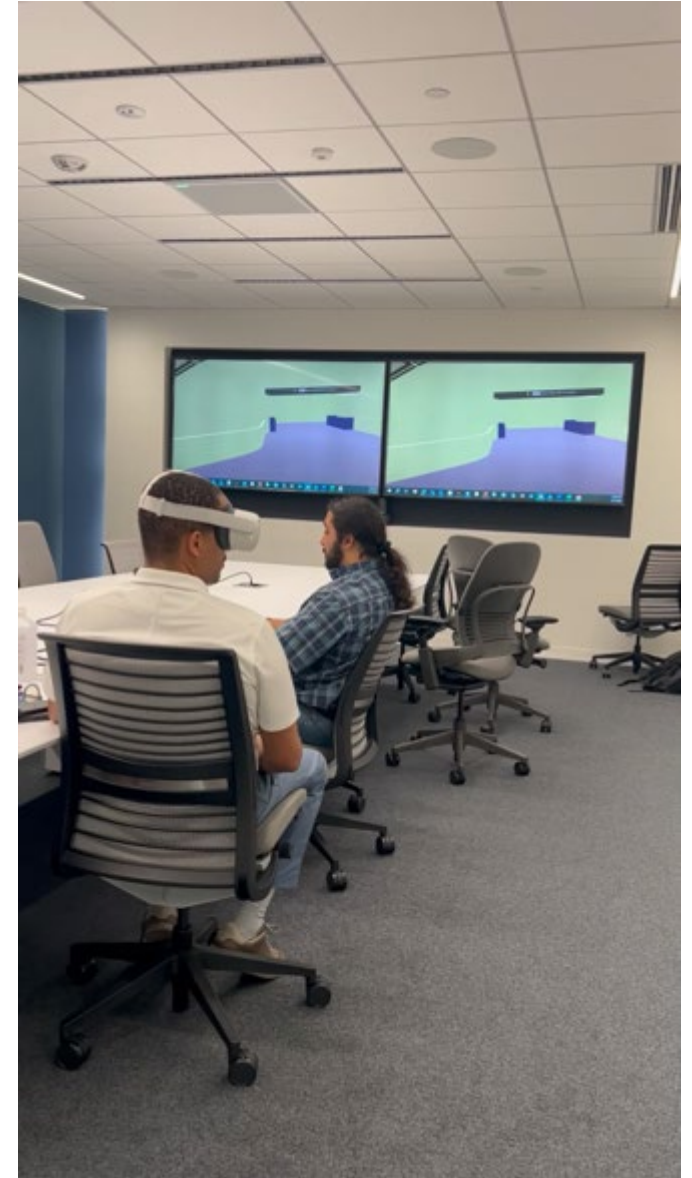
- Split the graphic system from hardware for a flexible and resilient solution
- Build modular graphics that plug together for consistency
- Use the concept of circulation routes, decision points and progressive disclosure to reduce the amount of signage across the board.

[Transit Wayfinding as Operations: Evidence and Systems for Mass Events](#)

# How we test and collect good data

- **Surveys:** Specific issues. Large samples. Sentiment
- **Paper Tests:** In station. Internal review
- **Virtual Reality:** Task-based, high-fidelity and quick
- **Stress tests:** Confirm flexibility and resilience
- **Pilots:** Performance-based observational testing

**Our navigable Virtual Reality model saved time and resources compared to legacy methods**



# Measuring success across domains

## Primary focus

- Performance
- Accessibility

## Secondary

Maintenance

## Tertiary

Sentiment



# What does it look like?

← **Exit C** L'Enfant Plaza  
Spy Museum DCA Huntington Branch Av Mt Vernon Sq Greenbelt **Exit A B** Nat'l Mall The Wharf →

← New Carrollton Downtown Largo IAD Vienna, Ashburn Franconia-Springfield →

**L'Enfant Plaza**

← **Exit A B** Nat'l Mall, VRE The Wharf **Exit C** L'Enfant Plaza Spy Museum →

**L'Enfant Plaza**

← **Exit B** **Exit A C** →

**Elevator** ↓ DCA Branch Av Huntington IAD

↑

Track 2

DCA Huntington Branch Av

DCA Huntington Branch Av

Two levels down

IAD

→ **Exit B** The Wharf Metro Offices

**MM**

L'Enfant Plaza

Entrance **B**

Elevator on 7 St across from Entrance A

# How does it work?

# Features to reduce maintenance costs of signs

A few small design changes eliminate the need for replacement when service changes.

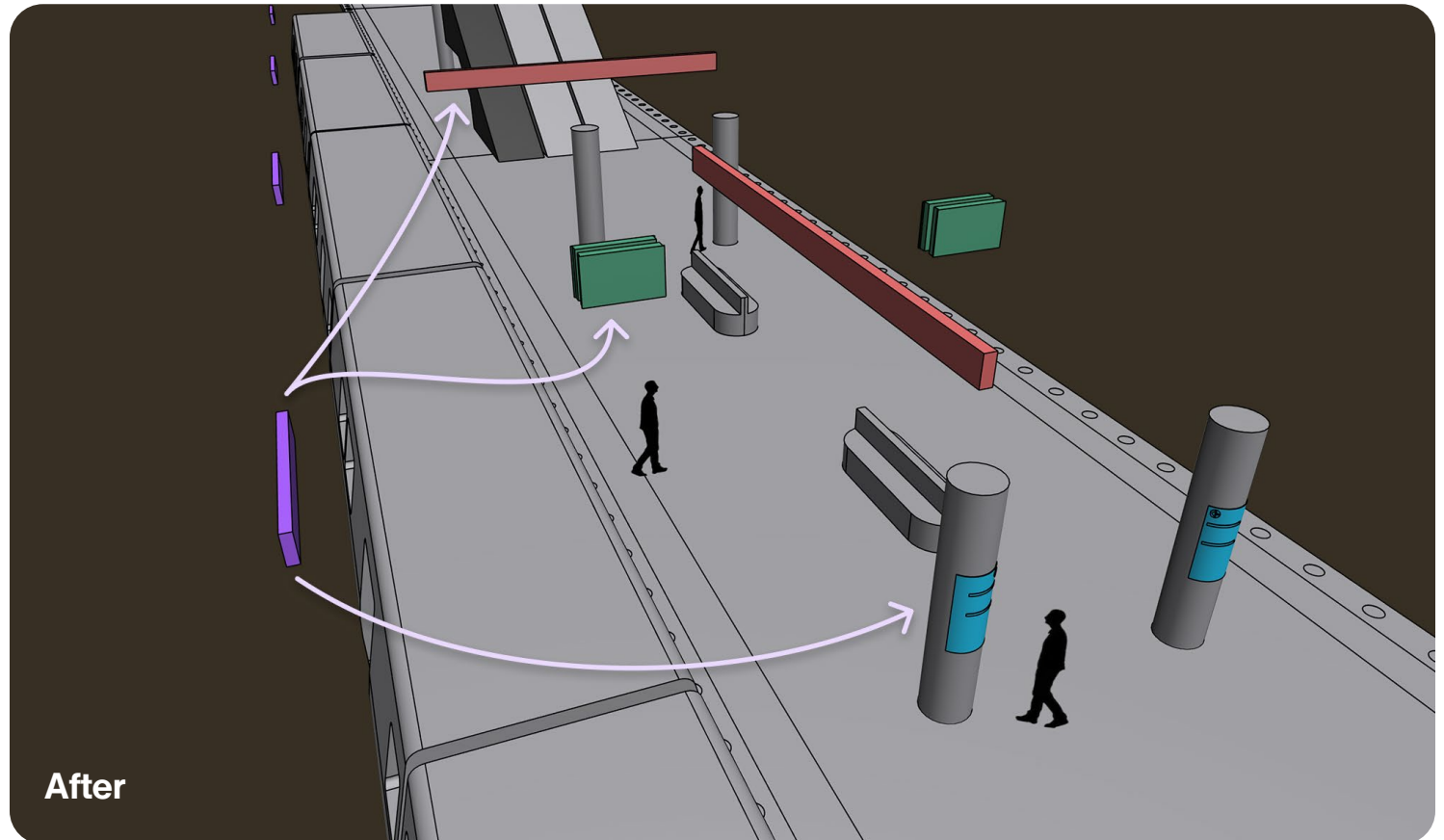
# Service info on platforms

Move termini and other passenger info to more approachable signs

## How this reduces costs:

- Signs with variable service information can now be updated regularly without track rights

↓ Cost to change



# Track signs

## Remove service information from track signs at non-transfer stations

### How this reduces costs:

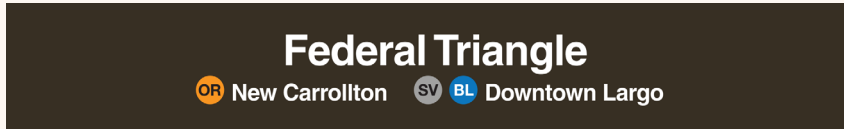
- Track signs, which require track rights to maintain, no longer need to be updated after routine service changes
- Station name changes only affect track signs at individual stations, instead of entire lines

↓ Cost of change

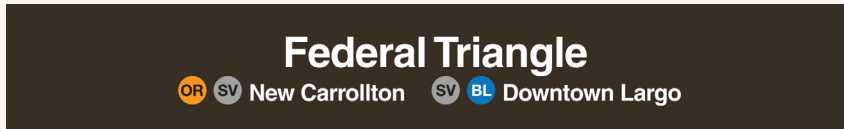
Before



2021  
Silver Line Phase II

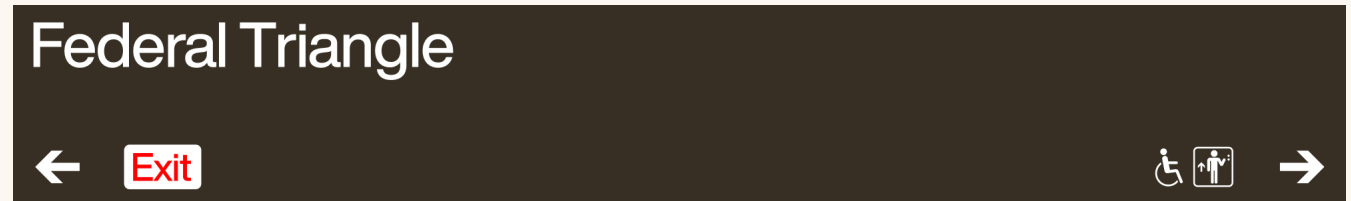


2022  
Terminal station  
name change to  
Downtown Largo



2023  
Silver line  
alternating  
destinations

After



# Rail disc groups

## Group interlined rail discs and termini in consistent blocks

### How this reduces costs:

- Service adjustments, such as those in 2025 on the Yellow and Silver lines, would no longer necessitate thousands of signs be updated to reflect new color/destination pairs



Before



After

↓ Frequency of change

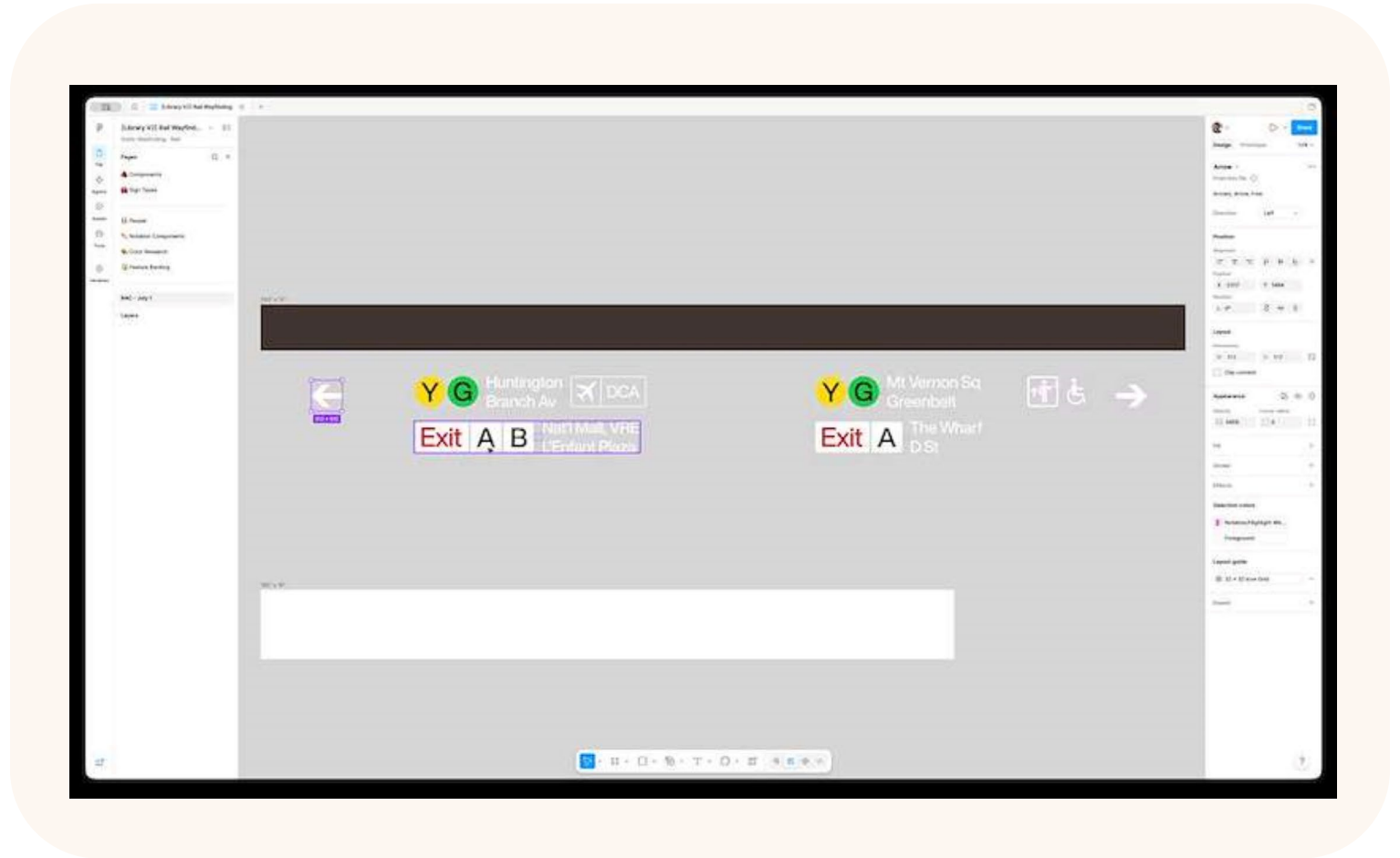
# Modular graphics system

Signs are built from a kit of parts

How this reduces costs:

- Sign production and update speed

↑ Consistency  
↑ Flexibility  
↑ Production time



# Features to improve customer experience (CX)

A happy customer is more likely to ride again, refer a friend, and post something positive on social media.

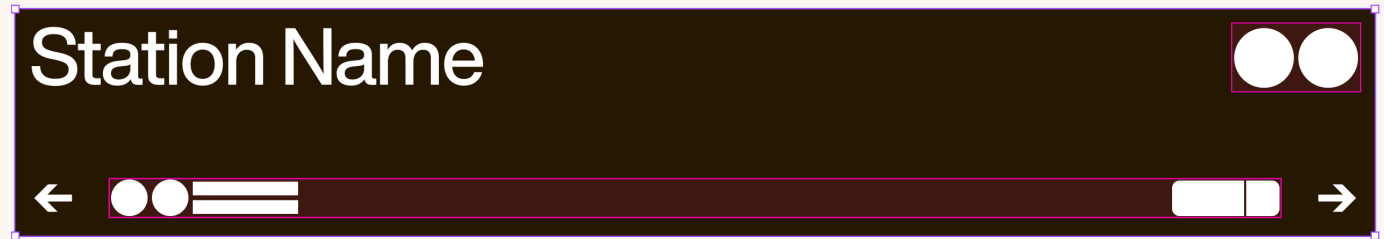
# Modular graphics system

Signs are made from a kit of parts

## How this improves CX:

- Standard sizes from 3–6” allow for consistent ADA compliance regardless of sign type or message.
- Information is always presented in the same ways across the system.
- Overall perception of ease and quality go up with consistency.

↑ Consistency  
↑ Flexibility  
↑ Production time



Exit Block

Exit

Exit A C Nat'l Mall

Exit B The Wharf  
Metro Offices

Service Block

Y G Mt Vernon Sq  
Greenbelt

R Glenmont

Accessibility Block



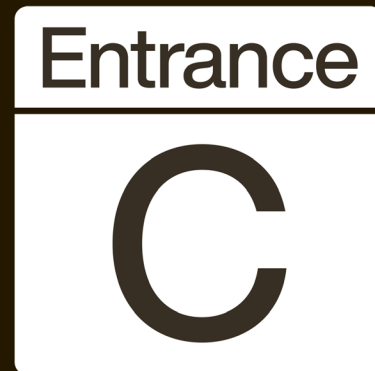
Helper Block



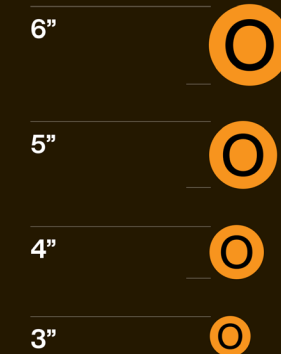
Arrow Block



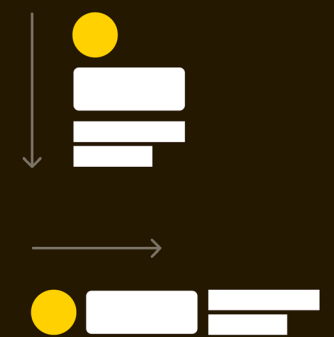
Landmark Block



Scales



Orientations



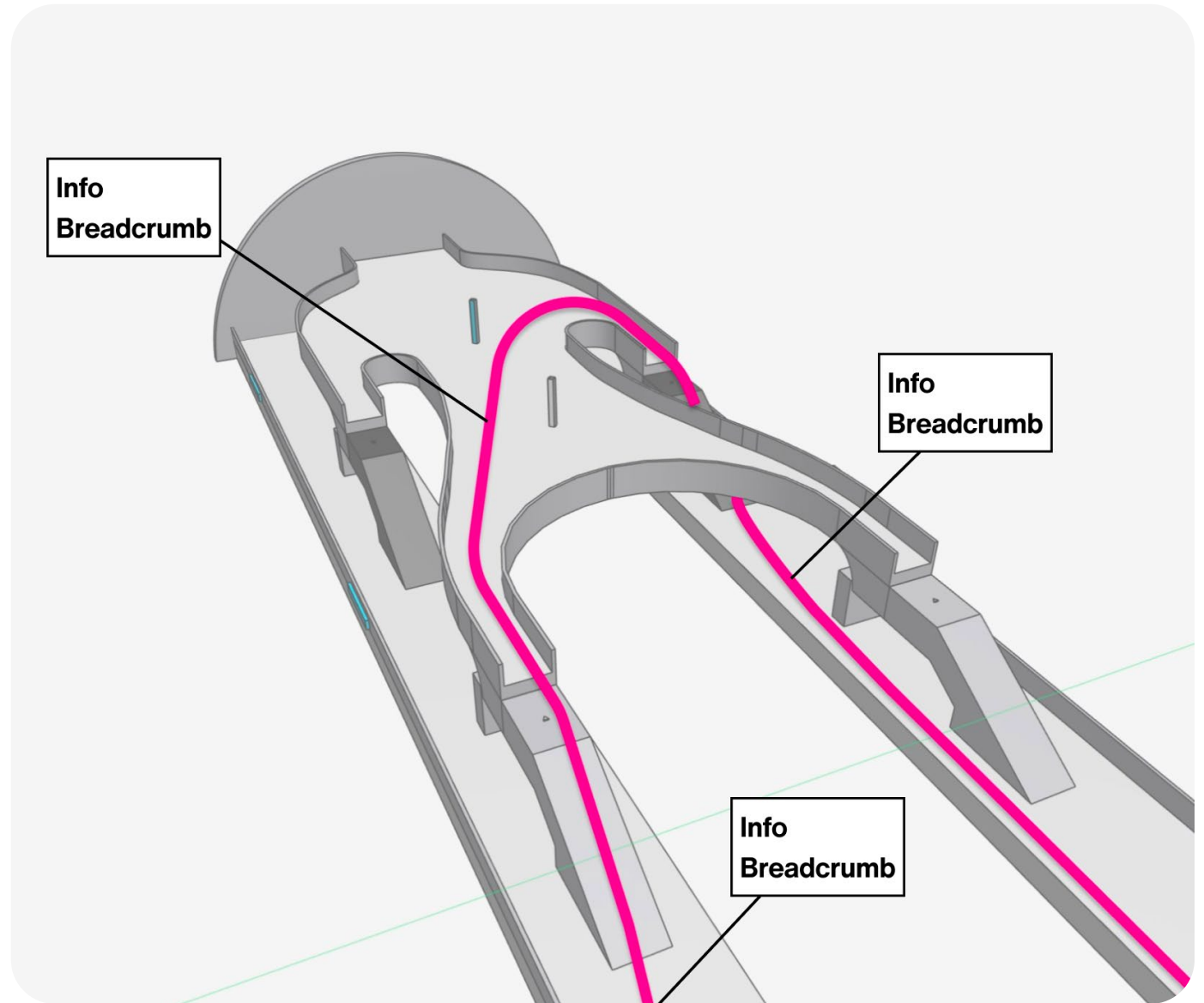
# Progressive Disclosure

**Journey-based plotting of information to show only what's needed when you need it.**

## How this improves CX:

- The more information presented, the longer it takes to read and the harder it has to work to get what it needs.
- Just the right amount of information leads to a feeling of ease and increases a customer's chances of a successful journey.

↓ Wrong platform  
↓ Wrong exit  
↓ Wrong direction



# Simplified layouts

Only show sign information that is needed at each location

## How this improves CX:

- Reduces cognitive load to comprehend sign
- Reduces overall visual clutter
- Assists customer in finding information needed for their goal

- ↓ Wrong train
- ↓ Wrong platform
- ↓ Wrong direction
- ↓ Wrong exit



Before



After

# Refined rail discs

## Update rail disc typography from Extra Bold to Medium

### How this improves CX:

- Medium allows for increase in font size and reduction in halation
- Medium weight more aligned with prior generation
- Interlined pairs no longer alternate type color between white and black

ca. 2001



2025



Before



After

↓ Wrong train

# Directional Helpers

**Add contextual cues  
to help customers  
understand their direction**

## How this improves CX:

- Helpers have a distinct graphic presentation making them identifiable in a hurry.
- Icons and words are flexible to allow for the most intuitive pairing at each station.



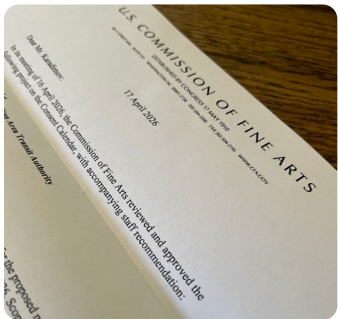
↓ Wrong direction

# Refreshed pylon

Update design for exterior pylons to feature rail discs rather than stripes

## How this improves CX:

- Rail discs are more legible than stripes, especially for color-blind customers
- Entrance identifiers reinforce exit name system
- Honors original design



↓ Wrong station  
↓ Wrong entrance

↑ Legacy  
↑ Consistency



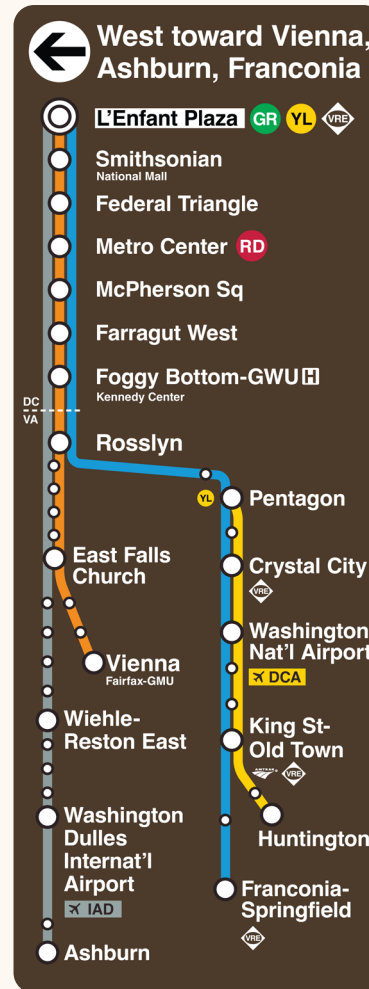
# Station Ahead Maps

Update the design for Station Ahead Maps to include every stop

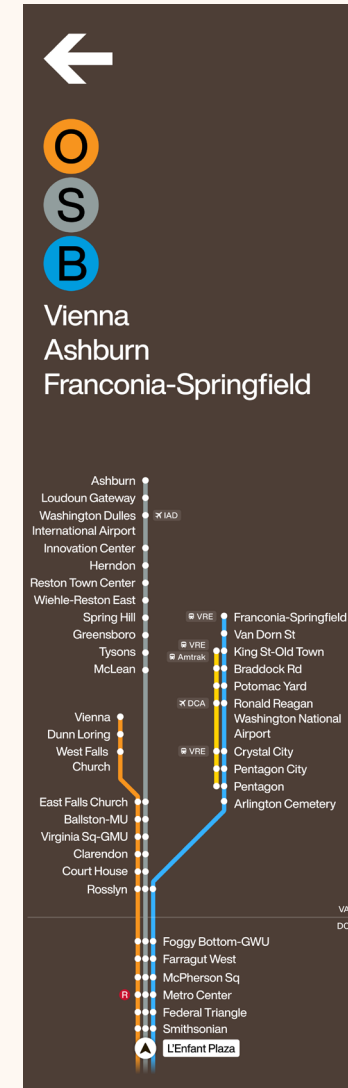
## How this improves CX:

- New design does not exclude any stops
- Stronger you are here indicator and “destination first” orientation - aligns with modern navigation design
- Font size adjusts based on station hardware and number of stops depicted to always maximize usability

- ↓ Wrong direction
- ↓ Wrong train



Before



After



Stockholm



Tokyo

# ADA tactile panel

## Update tactile panel to match ADA spec for separate visual and tactile characters

### How this improves CX:

- By making tactile panels “invisible,” overall cognitive load is decreased for sighted and low-vision customers
- Blind customers are not impacted

- ↓ Wrong train
- ↓ Wrong platform
- ↓ Wrong direction
- ↓ Wrong exit

2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design [703.5-Exception](#)



# Prominent Exits

Depict exit information using red type on a white field

## How this improves CX:

- By aligning with national standard exit signs, we are making the system safer in an emergency.
- It's high-contrast design allows customers looking for exit information to quickly locate it and ignore other information
- Points of interest are presented as a stacked list for enhanced scan-ability.

↓ Wrong exit



Exit to 7th St & Maryland Ave

Before



Exit B C The Wharf  
L'Enfant Plaza

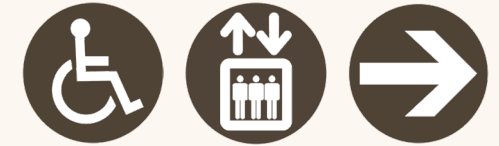
After

# Refreshed icons

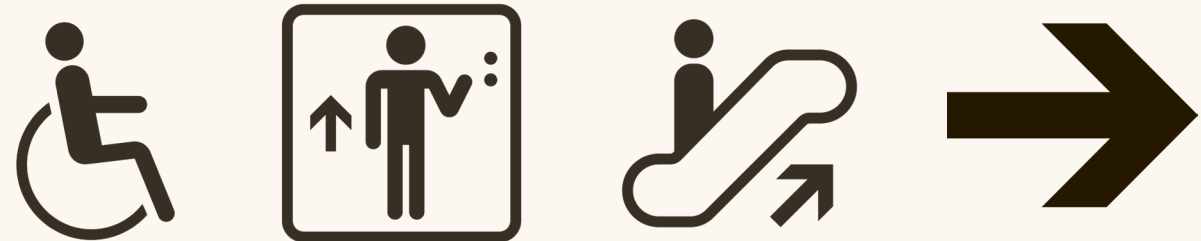
Build new icon library based on modern international standards

## How this improves CX:

- New icons are aligned with ISO standards which undergo rigorous legibility testing
- Icons appear against an even bgrd, reducing visual “noise”, making icons more recognizable
- Icon scales match across icon system
- Line weights match font weight



Before



After

↓ Wrong exit

# Feature summary

1. Move service info onto platforms
2. Group rail discs and termini
3. Build modular graphic system
4. Progressive disclosure of information
5. Simplified layouts
6. Refined rail discs
7. New directional helpers
8. Refreshed exterior pylons
9. Updated Station Ahead Maps
10. Updated tactile panels
11. Standout exits
12. Refreshed icons



# Where/when will we see it irl?

- SAMs Pilot presently live on the OSB platform
- Full Station L'Enfant October 2026

