

Standardize Signage and Wayfinding Across Transit Systems

Dear UITP North America Community,

Like many of you, I welcomed 2025 knowing that any challenge could be a chance to explore a new opportunity. As I reflected on this time of renewal, I knew I wanted to dedicate this space to one of my favorite topics: wayfinding.

This ubiquitous concept plays a huge role in improving ease of use and convenience for transit customers. With the amount of information, we attempt to convey at a transit stop or station, it is no surprise to find conflicting messages, unclear directions, outdated information, and sign clutter. Simplifying and standardizing wayfinding signage can transform a customer journey and contribute to a better experience on transit overall.

Currently, each transit agency develops its own symbols and wayfinding signage. This lack of uniformity can be particularly challenging for visitors, non-native-language speakers, and people with disabilities, who may struggle to navigate an environment that lacks clear, predictable communication.

As we have all learned within our own systems, consistent and concise signage makes transit easier to identify and understand how to use. Although standardizing wayfinding systems may seem like a far-fetched notion, it is not without precedent.

The U.S. Federal Highway Administration ensures that road signs across the country adhere to a consistent set of rules, making it easy for drivers to understand directions, warnings, and other essential information, no matter where they are in the country. In Europe, the United Kingdom's National Rail system, comprised of multiple passenger rail operating companies, has standardized wayfinding among all participating rail lines for consistency of the customer experience. Also, the San Francisco Bay Area's Metropolitan Transportation Commission is working on a "Mapping and Wayfinding" project to standardize transit system signage across its many member agencies.

Customers do not care about our bureaucratic need to convey our respective agency identities. Rather, multiple operators in the same region should consider how best to create a uniform wayfinding communication system to ensure ease of use across multiple operators and eliminate confusion for our customers.

By creating a unified approach to wayfinding, cities and transit agencies could make transit simpler, more efficient, and less stressful for everyone. As public transportation continues to evolve, standardizing signage can create a more welcoming environment for all passengers, fostering greater confidence in using public transportation and helping us achieve our broader sustainability and quality of life goals.

Best regards,
Nadine S. Lee
Chair, UITP North America |
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