

Transport typography

Typeface comparisons.

Tasks, application conditions
and original research subsets.



Original glyph



Outline / same glyph

Passage Research A

Research font subset - passenger validation pending.

OTI typography study records tasks, font revisions and comparison conditions

Finding the right platform, distinguishing a route code and reading a departure board are different tasks. A specimen at one size does not establish performance in each application. Open Transit Information's new transport-typography study starts with the passenger's decision and asks what evidence is needed before choosing, adapting or developing a font for that application.

Its recommendation is to unify application rules, evidence and coordinated resources for different writing systems before pursuing a single worldwide alphabet. The proposed record connects the authorised name, language, script, medium, exact font revision, actual dimensions, source, permitted use and relevant tests. A family name alone cannot specify how information will perform in a crowded map, a printed sign or an illuminated display.

The completed documentary work contains a discovery catalogue of 44 systems, 12 analytical dossiers and 38 annotated source records. Ten dossiers identify a documented family or style within a stated application; the family names in the Taipei and MyCiTi cases remain unresolved. Those unknowns are retained rather than filled with guesses. This is a structured purposive documentary review, rather than a systematic review or representative world survey. The catalogue is not a census of 44 verified typeface identities, and its geographic and script coverage is uneven.

The study also develops original, buildable font subsets and a local monograph. These make design questions tangible: how should similar characters differ, what happens when a name must fit a limited width, and how should a comparison hold size constant? The resulting specimens support inspection and further testing. They do not show that an original OTI face outperforms an established open family.

Public Sans remains the interface typeface. The original fonts appear as labelled research specimens, alongside defined baseline profiles. They are not a rebrand, a replacement for operator identities or a change to the project's map defaults.

The delivery is complete as documentary research, technical font production and a local prototype. No participant observations or field trial establish an improvement in passenger recognition, reading or navigation.

Familiar names conceal versions, media and layout decisions

The international cases show why a list of well-known transport fonts is insufficient. The same identity can develop across generations, and a design decision for one medium may need a different drawing or application rule elsewhere.

The London case distinguishes the history of Johnston from the later Johnston 100 revision and its specified corporate uses. Monotype's account explains a design response to contemporary communication, while TfL's guidance associates weights and sizes with applications. These sources document development and requirements; they do not provide a passenger comparison that ranks the family across every task or writing system.

RATP's Parisine work demonstrates another distinction. The report separates the signage account from a later project for three specialised bus-display variants. A matrix has a fixed cell structure that affects counters, diagonals and marks. A printed sign master is therefore not automatically an appropriate matrix master. The project history supports examining medium-specific versions without proving a universal legibility advantage.

Network Rail's inspected Rail Alphabet 2 wayfinding manual identifies a sign-specific cut, rather than treating similarly named alphabets as interchangeable files. A launch announcement records an introduction or intention; it cannot establish which revision is installed at every station today.

PostAuto's 2024 announcement describes a new screen typeface alongside changes to information placement, times, connections and clock presentation, with regional exceptions. Any improvement observed after such a redesign could come from several features together. That account does not isolate an effect of the typeface.

The multilingual cases add another limit to shorthand labels. A procurement record for Chinese artwork can identify a style and a verification requirement without supplying a complete inventory of installed Latin and Chinese font versions. A documented weight change does not necessarily identify the underlying family. The study keeps the claim at the level actually supported by the source.

These examples lead to a common research principle: record the task, medium, version and layout beside the font name. Preserve historical and application differences before comparing outcomes. A design account records its stated rationale; passenger effectiveness requires separate tests.

Original fonts make the questions inspectable

The original programme explores three directions. Passage Research A has Regular and Semibold builds and is selected for deeper engineering. Passage Research B changes width and the construction of lowercase a. Passage Matrix Research is a separate five-by-seven cell experiment. The provisional names and research status remain visible in the files.

A and B encode 273 code points in each build; Matrix encodes 39. These counts describe exact subsets, not complete language support. The delivered material includes four static font builds, each supplied as TTF and WOFF2, with editable construction sources and UFO masters and their own recorded terms. Selecting A for further work is a design-development decision based on inspectability, task fit and the next test, rather than an empirical victory.

The proposed character distinctions include crossbars on uppercase l, a foot on lowercase l and a differentiated figure 1. A slashed zero is another candidate for distinguishing a code from the letter O. Each feature has a possible cost: more ink, a local convention conflict or space lost in a narrow sign. Testing a meaningful route code is therefore different from admiring isolated characters.

The comparator explains what is being equalised. Equal nominal font size does not ensure equal visible letter height. Matching capital height can help with a Latin code comparison, while a fixed horizontal budget asks how much letter height fits in a real sign. Equalising one property changes another. No single setting supports an overall ranking of all typefaces.

Multilingual quality passes through several separate questions: are the required characters encoded, does the text shape correctly, are the regional forms and typographic treatment appropriate, and can fluent readers complete the intended task? Passing a file or shaping check does not answer all of them. The prototypes' limited coverage is explicit, and fallback text is not presented as a newly supported script.

The physical-distance laboratory makes a similarly narrow contribution. It calculates the visual angle of a letter from its height and viewing distance. That is geometry, rather than a promise of readable distance. Lighting, glare, movement, material, display rendering, language familiarity and crowding still need appropriate measurement and user tasks.

Executed font checks and proposed testing

The executed checks reload the compiled files, inspect encoding and metrics, compare selected shaping examples and rebuild from the editable UFO sources. In the recorded workstation environment, all four UFO rebuilds produced byte-identical TTFs. Selected character, mark-placement and format checks passed. Those results make the original material easier to reproduce and review; they do not make the subsets production-ready for every language or platform.

The engineering work exposed a descender outside the initial vertical metrics, which were expanded. The initially selected collection lacked the selected traditional-Chinese characters. Microsoft JhengHei was then used for the probe and produced no missing-glyph IDs for that sample; regional-form quality and fluent-reader performance remain unvalidated.

The local monograph combines an evidence atlas, case histories, controlled comparisons, script limits, a geometry laboratory and the original specimens. Its narrative uses the existing identity and Public Sans. The original research fonts are scoped to their examples, and essential reading has a linear route. Local browser findings were resolved before documentary delivery, including a narrow-screen heading issue.

The proposed next stage separates recognition of individual characters, fluent reading and successful navigation. It should control the actual task, wording, layout, physical letter height, exposure and medium. Familiarity, language and access needs also need explicit consideration. A preference control in a browser or a technically successful rendering is not a response from a recruited passenger.

Specialist type and script review comes before broader claims about language quality. Any participant programme requires appropriate research arrangements and reviewed materials. The supplied code generates planned stimuli and sample-size sensitivity calculations, while its analysis utility provides descriptive summaries only. Confirmatory mixed-model analysis remains a dependency before recruitment; no participant responses or measured effects were generated. Calibrated physical and field work remains a later stage.

Further work could continue the original direction, revise it or use an existing family. No passenger comparison has yet selected between those outcomes.

Notes for editors

Study and evidence

Transport typography and an open legibility system is the living report for OTI-BD-004, version 1.0, dated 23 October 2026. It includes the discovery catalogue, 12 dossiers, 38-source bibliography, original construction, executed technical evidence and prospective participant and field protocol.

Ten dossier family/style references are documented within stated applications. Taipei and MyCiTi remain unresolved. The original A/B subsets encode 273 code points; Matrix encodes 39. No participants were recruited and no passenger-effectiveness winner is established.

Selected primary references

- [Monotype: Introducing Johnston100.](#)
- [APCI: Parisine bus-display variants.](#)
- [Network Rail: Wayfinding Design Manual.](#)
- [PostAuto: 2024 onboard screen redesign.](#)

About Open Transit Information

Open Transit Information (OTI) is developing shared quality requirements, draft specifications, data conventions and experimental tools for transport information. Singularity Ingeniería currently maintains the project under a maintainer-led governance model.

The canonical website is opentransitinformation.org. The technical source is available at [opentransitinformation](#). Draft specifications, experimental software and complete product editions have separate release states. This study does not establish official-standard recognition, certification or endorsement by the organisations studied.

Preparation and reuse

Prepared with AI assistance against the dated study. Independent human editorial review remains pending. No public press contact is listed.

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