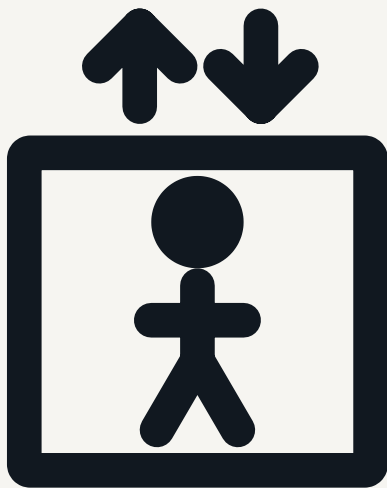


Transport pictograms

Symbols and current state.

Meanings, facilities and observations
in a proposed sign model.

One object. Three different facts.



OBJECT

Lift

OPERATING STATE

Unavailable

ONWARD ACCESS

Unknown

Constructed example / unvalidated pilot

Constructed example - passenger validation pending.

OTI pictogram study distinguishes symbols, facilities and operational state

A lift can exist in a station, be unavailable today and form part of a connection whose onward accessibility is unknown. A single lift picture cannot express those three facts reliably on its own. Open Transit Information's pictogram study records those distinctions and the surrounding sign information.

The study, *Before the symbol*, recommends defining meanings, relationships and evidence before trying to choose one drawing for use worldwide. It distinguishes recognition of the depicted object from understanding an instruction and making the intended decision. A visually consistent family can help organise information, but consistency does not by itself demonstrate successful navigation.

The documentary work contains 40 catalogue records, divided into 16 bounded case analyses and 24 discovery leads that have not been analysed as pictogram evidence. It records 34 applications with separate identifiers for the system, intended meaning, documentary drawing and use. The depth of access varies: some cases include inspected manual or map pages, while others rely on official descriptions or announcements and retain material access limits.

An original pilot translates the findings into 24 defined concepts, two drawing profiles and nine structural candidates for further comparison. It preserves contextual labels and explicit meanings rather than presenting the drawings as universally understandable. A locally executable monograph connects the documentary cases, passenger tasks, comparisons and editable vector library.

The study proposes a shared information grammar that can accommodate established local conventions and prescribed forms. A mode, a facility, an instruction, a direction and an operational observation are different kinds of information. The proposal records their relationships separately from their visual treatment.

This is a completed local documentary study and experimental design pilot. No passenger experiment or physical navigation trial has established comprehension or selected a winning OTI pictogram family. The material is prepared for further research and does not justify replacing existing operational signs.

The same-looking mark may answer a different question

The comparative cases reveal a recurring source of error: illustrations that appear suitable for visual comparison may not communicate the same thing in use. A station identity, a generic transport mode, a facility and an action should not be treated as interchangeable simply because each is drawn in a small square.

Tokyo Metro's passenger guidance combines line identity, direction, platform number, arrows and facility information in a journey towards the train. The guidance documents an assembly of related information. Correctly naming one component does not establish that a person can find the right platform or understand which direction an arrow applies to.

Transport for London's historical pictogram guidance distinguishes selected print and sign applications and identifies some handed variants. The study reads that as evidence for application-specific rules, rather than an assumption that every drawing can be mirrored or resized under one universal rule. The date and scope of the inspected guidance remain part of the record; a historical manual is not automatically a statement about every current installation.

The documentary treatment of Ciudad de México's Metro identifies place images, names and codes as station identity. That is a different task from recognising a generic toilet or lift. The study retains the documented historical rationale without turning it into a new measured claim about recognition by today's passengers. The access depth of the source is also recorded.

Rights affect the comparisons that can be made openly. The pilot retains four unchanged SBB baseline drawings, with the exact source revision, licence and provenance. Other operators' material remains a documentary reference where reuse was not established or was conditional. Being able to see an icon online is not sufficient grounds to incorporate it into an adaptable OTI collection.

One comparison is deliberately unsuitable as an effectiveness test: an OTI ticket-machine drawing beside SBB's generic tickets. Both concern ticketing, but purchasing from a machine and representing tickets are different meanings. The monograph uses that mismatch to explain why a side-by-side arrangement can lead to an invalid conclusion.

The comparative result favours carefully defined, contextual questions. Which meaning is being tested? What does the label supply? Which local conventions does the reader already know? What action would count as success? Without those answers, a preference for one drawing says little about its usefulness in a transport journey.

03 / RESEARCH NOTE

Meaning, drawing and current state stay separate

The original proposal separates a concept from its visual form and from an individual object in the world. Lift is a concept; a particular lift drawing is a visual realisation; the lift beside a named entrance is a specific facility. Changing that facility's availability should update an observation, not invent a new pictogram or silently change the meaning of the concept.

Each proposed concept has a definition, contextual English label, permitted applications, exclusions and relationships. The experimental assembly record adds a reference to a specific facility or connection, direction, existence, availability, route continuity and the source, time, validity and scope of the information. Its delivered examples are synthetic. Unknown remains explicit. A technically valid record cannot guarantee that the underlying observation is true, but it can make its origin and limits visible.

Under the proposed model, missing information remains unknown and temporary unavailability does not change a lift's recorded existence. A facility's presence does not certify a continuous usable route. Likewise, two lines crossing on a map do not create a passenger interchange without an actual connection and its relevant conditions.

The visual library contains 48 profile drawings for the 24 concepts. Its sign and compact profiles adjust the construction and level of detail for different applications. The nine structural candidate files explore interchange, assistance and ticket validation, including three baseline variants identical to library masters. The alternatives change objects or relationships, rather than only visual styling, and remain hypotheses. A call point, a staffed counter and a broad assistance service may require different meanings before they can be compared fairly.

Labels remain part of the pilot. Direction, facility, destination, code and any qualifier must stay visibly associated with the right subject. A disruption badge should not accidentally describe a neighbouring service, and an arrow that means walking ahead should not be confused with moving to another level. Reading direction also needs specific review rather than an automatic reversal of every component.

The proposal does not redesign safety or prescribed accessibility forms. It keeps those as a separate reference and standards dependency. Its original drawings support research into ordinary transport information; they are not a substitute for the forms and assembly rules required in an actual operational context.

Local checks and proposed evaluation

The completed local work checks that the research material is internally coherent and usable for inspection. The editable masters, exported SVGs and semantic records are linked. Raster checks exposed clipping around the lift arrows at small sizes; the drawing was corrected and rendered again. That establishes a production correction, rather than evidence that the revised mark is understood under low vision or brief exposure.

The monograph lets a reader filter the atlas, inspect cases, compare selected drawings and explore passenger tasks. Its essential narrative and sources remain available as static reading. A geometric calculator illustrates the relationship between artwork height and viewing distance. The calculation describes visual angle; it does not predict recognition, prescribe a minimum sign size or replace testing with actual materials, lighting and movement.

The report records internal integrity, rendering, browser and independent package-rebuild checks. Those results concern the delivered prototype. No participant, expert-panel, calibrated physical legibility or field-navigation result is claimed. The response template is empty, and planned sessions do not count as recruited people.

The next stage begins with a specialist review of meanings and critical confusions. Candidate drawings that communicate different services must be relabelled or removed before a fair comparison. The planned evaluation asks people what a message means and what they would do before giving them its intended name. It separates spontaneous comprehension, performance after explanation, retention and visual preference.

The proposed tasks include mistakes that a recognition percentage could conceal: treating stairs as a step-free route, unknown equipment as available, a geometric crossing as a transfer, or ticket purchase as validation. Results would need their own per-concept, per-context denominators and uncertainty. A high pooled score could not erase a consequential wrong action in one application.

Appropriate research arrangements, native-language review, access needs, applicable standards and physical conditions remain to be settled before collecting responses or recommending operational use. Current local and text-based baselines can perform as well as a new family; the study does not presume that an original OTI drawing must win.

Notes for editors

Study and evidence

Before the symbol: world transport pictograms and an open information grammar is the living report for OTI-BD-005, research edition 0.1.0, prepared on 23 October 2026. It contains the corpus, individual source depths, semantic proposal, production results and prospective evaluation programme.

The 40-record catalogue comprises 16 bounded documentary analyses and 24 unanalysed leads. It is not a complete audit of 40 sign programmes. Original drawings have not been tested with passengers; no universal comprehension, certification or operational adoption is established.

Selected primary references

- [Tokyo Metro: Before Getting on the Subway.](#)
- [TfL: Pictogram standard, Issue 4, January 2009.](#)
- [SBB Design Systems: pictogram source and licence.](#)
- [STC Metro: iconography and its historical account.](#)

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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