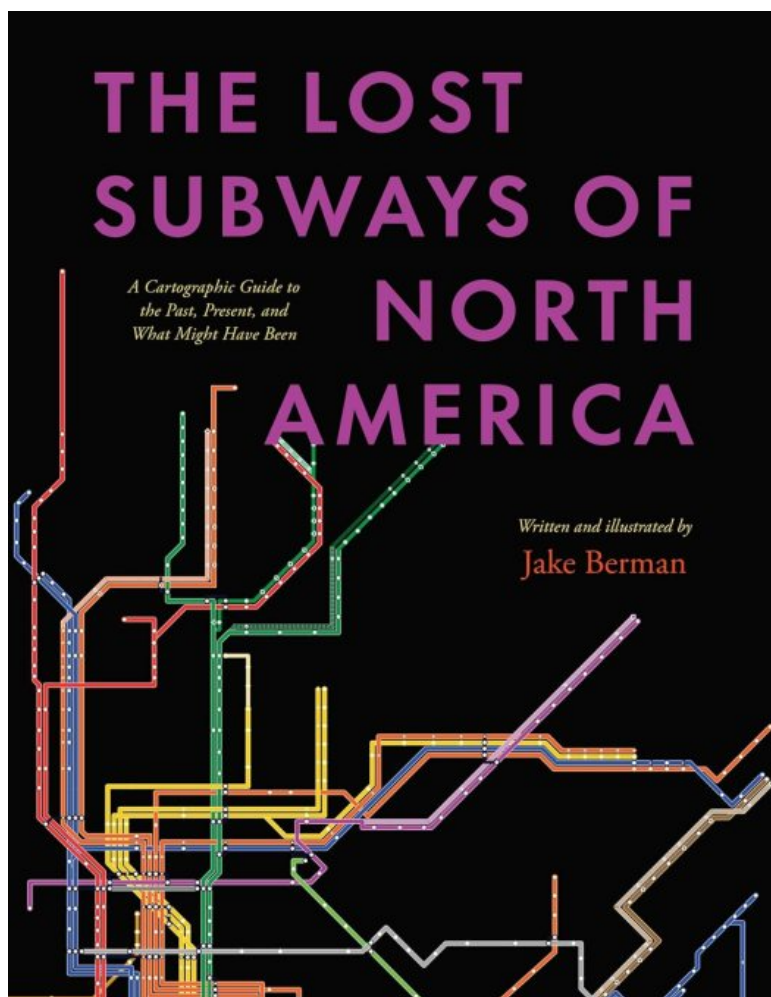




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Book review: The Lost Subways of North America: A Cartographic Guide to the Past, Present, and What Might Have Been.

reviewed by Martin Chandler



Berman, J. The Lost Subways of North America: A Cartographic Guide to the Past,



Present, and What Might Have Been. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023. 272 p. \$35.00. LC: 2023002893. ISBN: 0-226-82979-1

If you live in a moderate- to large-sized city and commute, you've likely wondered to yourself "Why isn't this better?" *The Lost Subways of North America* by Jake Berman has many answers. The wealth of information on the social, corporate, and political – always political – reasons the current urban transit networks exist as they do are presented alongside maps of the current system, and the various plans that were proposed. "What could have been," is offered, with a certain soupçon of "if only..."

Before getting to the overall content of the text, it's worth noting both the relevance and delight offered in the epigraph. To quote *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is both bold and joyful. That it directly relates to the Los Angeles public transit system discussed in chapter 9, and encapsulates a whole ideological shift in transit through the 1900s so succinctly, makes it an impeccable opener.

The book itself delves into the transit systems of many cities in Canada and the United States. As a Canadian, it is refreshing to see not just Toronto reach the pages, but Vancouver and Montréal as well. This isn't representative of everywhere in Canada – and a similar focus on the big cities in the U.S. (Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, etc) is present – but it does allow a broad swath of transit philosophy, politics, and system design to be discuss and shared. Mexico is not included, as Berman notes that the urban history of Mexico is radically different from that of its fellow North American countries.

The maps within are well-designed and engaging. In his introduction, Berman notes his method for the choices made in representing the various plans and options, and how deviances from modern geography might display – roads that have changed names, for instance, or that may no longer exist. The maps are also balanced with the text, each of equal importance and offering insight into the transit realities. As Berman himself states, "Gridlock was a choice," (p. 2) and one we didn't have to choose.

Some occasional political fudging does show up in the text, noticeable primarily in the Canadian sections. The suggestions of the provincial and federal political parties at municipal levels isn't quite accurate, though the individuals noted (Joe Pantalone, Rob Ford, and others) did run in those parties at provincial or federal levels. Montréal's Jean Drapeau is described as a member of the Québec Liberal Party,



when he instead ran federally as a member of the Bloc Populaire, and as mayor was a member of the Parti Civique de Montréal, a municipal party. Most of this comes down to ambiguity, though, and Québec politics are notably different from Canadian politics, which are notably different from American politics – the mistakes are understandable, and inconsequential to the broader thesis.

Ultimately, *The Lost Subways of North America* is a delightful book, offering some fine maps of the current, historical, and alternative futures possible in North American public transit. It will make a fine addition to any library collection. With luck, it may even inspire a council to return us from Oblivion.

Martin Chandler

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