OC Transpo App

Applying Gestalt's principles to improve Ottawa's official transit app.

Ottawa's public transit serves over 300,000 people daily and is the official mobile app to provide transit information. One of the most used areas of this app is the bus schedule for specific stops. Unfortunately, it needs more visual enhancements to create an intuitive experience for the user. In order to improve it, we first need to understand how visual stimuli are perceived and processed by one's brain. We can then orchestrate a visual interaction that works with our brains, not against them.

A fundamental theory behind our visual perception is Gestalt psychology, developed in the early 20th century by a group of German and Austrian psychologists. They explored how our mind interprets visual stimuli and found that our brains process whole shapes, patterns, and groups of similar elements to simplify complex images. Gestalt psychology breaks down into many core principles that can be incorporated practically into design. Among all principles, similarity, proximity, and continuity were selected to recommend a new interface for the bus schedule screen. Applying this knowledge to a digital interface can create a natural and obvious experience that excites the user.

Similarity identifies objects with similar visual characteristics as related elements. Applying a brighter colour and larger font to upcoming bus times helps group these times together. A lighter colour tone and smaller font for past bus times helps create a separate grouping. Proximity refers to the spacing between objects and creates a visual grouping of like items. Adding space between past bus times, the earliest bus, and upcoming bus times help users distinguish between them. Lastly, continuity helps draw the eyes of the viewer in an intended direction. This is incorporated to help users follow the order of bus times down a single column to create a sense of direction. The bus number, stop, and times are all in single columns to establish continuity for the entire screen and indicate scrolling.

School of
Industrial Design