

December 8, 2013

RE: MetroViz

The paper and the video were enough for me to understand the major points, which was good. A live demo would've definitely helped, however. (The video's resolution was a bit too low for me to make out important details.) Here are some other thoughts.

1. The video is sufficiently detailed, but somewhat rushed.

It has a little bit of everything, framed with a general-to-specific feel, which helps. I had to keep pausing it, though, because there was a lot to go over and little time to really *stare* at the interface, absorb any explanation. A stronger narrative might help. Maybe slow the pace a bit for key points (especially if they involve small visual components).

2. The paper is a good start, but still needs work.

Content-wise, it makes sense. I still have questions, though. There's little justification for "why visualize this data?", for example. There's no mention of existing bus apps (e.g. OneBusAway) or route maps (e.g. the DC Metro map). I'd also like more insight into the whys and hows: why use a literal map instead of an abstract one, why use circles for bus stops; how much data do you prune, how can you tell if the data is erroneous; and so on.

Organization-wise, it's a bit clunky. Suggestions: move the data description before the interface description (so I know what adherence is before you start talking about how you visualize it), and try to avoid bleeding information between sections (so I don't have to jump back to the interface description to find what changes you made based on the usability study).

That aside, there are a variety of typos and minor grammatical hiccups: pay particular attention to subject-verb agreement and sudden tense changes. There's also a curious habit of dropping "the" before phrases like "route view does X Y Z".

3. The interface makes sense. Generally.

Most of the views do, anyways. I'm still puzzling through the trip view (how you decide the number of squares per cell, mostly), though that might clear itself up with a live demo.

My biggest concern here: labels. The stacked bar charts¹ don't tell you what they depict;

¹ As an aside: the bars seem to overflow. See the end of the video (around 4:25). A separate quibble: the columns for the two charts don't align.

the calendar view doesn't label data units or months (which makes finding specific days really tedious, I imagine). Adding them wouldn't be too bad, I think.

My other nitpick: color. Why highlight in red, when red also means "lots of people"? (Why use red for "lots of people", also?) I'd change it to something else that doesn't conflict with any other color encoding, if possible.

Overall, it's mostly polish. Which is a pretty good state to be in, if you ask me. I have other nitpicks, if you're curious (and think you have time to fix them); if so, feel free to email me.

Sincerely,

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