## Dynamics of the Richmond Hill Transit Center Embedded in Space

Richmond Hill Transit Center is a dynamic station focused on servicing the essential movement of people. Our project looks at mapping this movement within the immediate area of the terminal, noting where different activities take place and the infrastructure design that allows these practices to happen, as well as a defined surrounding region. Here, we used 3 maps to display the overlapping data we have collected through various points of observation, mapping and social media analysis. The analysis of the space and its translation into mapping helps us explore the question of how effective the space's services and design are at promoting comfort and significance for its users, how local businesses are affected by this space, and how well this space integrates multiple modes of transportation.

While creating our first two maps, we depicted hot spots for congregating, infrastructure provisions, and common pathways for movement. This answers our research questions pertaining to the ways in which the terminal is used, how accessible it is through its design, and how significant it is as a space. Our observations of the immediate area, being users of it for a long time, aided in the creation of our first two maps. The first is focused on the layout and design of the terminal itself to help readers understand where certain features and service access are. The platforms for each bus stop, both the YRT/Viva buses and the GO buses, are labeled in blue, the heated and enclosed shelters highlighted in red polygons, the zone used for pick up and drop off by car in light blue, the maps in yellow, and the bike lock/cycling infrastructure in green. This map is more descriptive in nature, but we can analyze the provision and use of certain infrastructure and what it promotes. For example, enclosed shelters suggest a priority of comfort for users. The pick-up/drop-off designated space suggests a priority of serving car-centricity, while the existence of the bike lock on the premises encourages or attends to the needs of cyclists. The

The second map was created through exploration and background knowledge of the immediate area. We defined the immediate area as walkable distances to destinations that would most likely be visited or used before or after arrival at the terminal. The Langstaff GO station is a transit terminal that can be accessed over the pedestrian bridge and down a fenced off path from the Home Depot parking lot. The two transit terminals use each other as an extension of themselves for those that require it for travel. There are 3 parking lots used by those that take transit, whether it be to cut through to get to other destinations, such as to the movie theater, or to park their cars. There is a small greenspace on the other side of the bus driveway to the west that is often enjoyed by users to smoke or sit in a more ecologically immersive space. The theater front is also highlighted since the theater is accessible via transit and brings in users who do not use cars. People often socialize or linger here before or after a movie.

Although these maps are more descriptive by nature, we included a few behaviors that we observed to happen more often. Doing this work had us reflect on the types of activity that occurs here and what that says about the immediate area. For example, standing or talking to transit workers at the platforms suggests a more active and engaged setting; sitting in the shelters may indicate comfort seeking; smoking or sitting in the greenspace, since it is not directly tied to a specific waiting platform, may tell you about people's desire to connect with greenery and tranquil spaces; and parking or walking through the parking lot may speak to how autocentricity is embedded in space and how this affects the paths and safety of pedestrians, respectively.

To further analyze and understand the significant space, we used a secondary method of research to view this space through the eyes of other users over time. An analysis of the social media content generated around the site uncovered that the terminal was being used to take scenic photos of the sunrise and sunset. Richmond Hill Centre transit hub was primarily designed as a functional space to get populations from one point to another. The prevalence of these scenic images, however, conflicts with that narrative and leads to an alternative perspective of analysis. Our third map depicts numerous spots in and around the terminal from where people have taken scenic photos to post on their Instagram. This tells us that the population group that takes these photos may overlap with the group that uses the terminal in the traditional way that we originally imagined. The popularization of social media platforms, such as Instagram, has democratized the process of sharing one's life experiences (Toscano 2017) and encourages individuals to seek out beauty in unexpected places, celebrating the mundane and overlooked. Richmond Hill Centre Transit Terminal, one such mundane site, can now act as a canvas for visitors to imprint their creativity and personality. The act of using an unassuming corner of the transit terminal for an Instagram post or a story is a deliberate choice on the part of the person and is a means of redefining the space's narrative.

In conclusion, mapping tools can not only be used for describing, analyzing, and navigating the features of space, but also provide a means of displaying visitor's engagement with a utilitarian space in a form of self-expression and storytelling, reimagining it as a place of beauty and significance. The contrast between a place designed for practical use and the artistic touch of Instagram users is striking and thought-provoking and highlights the profound impact of social media on the perception of public spaces. This nuanced tool of tying in social media analysis will give researchers a new perspective on the space, one that is recorded throughout time, in ways we may not have thought of, and through lenses we may not even reach.

## Link to Maps https://arcg.is/0jCS5v0

Bibliography

Toscano, Patrizia. 2017. "Instagram-City: New Media, and the Social Perception of Public Spaces." Visual Anthropology 30 (3): 275–86. <u>https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2017.1296313</u>.