

GOING PLACES

Art meets efficiency in Paris' transport revolution



Anyone who has experienced a Paris transport strike might laugh at the idea that the French capital has become a pioneer of urban mobility. But just walk down a Paris street and take stock of everything from the Autolib' stations to the new interactive bus shelters, and you'll see that something is in motion.

'We have a new relationship to getting around,' says Christophe Najdovski, Paris' deputy mayor in charge of transport. 'Over the course of a day, you might use public transport, drive a shared car, take your own bicycle or a shared one, walk or hire a taxi. We're in the era of multimodality.' Indeed, 'multimodality' seems to be the word on everybody's lips. Yo Kaminagai, head of design at RATP (the public transport operator), exclaims, 'France is in love with its transport systems.'

Much of the focus, and a lot of the money, is going on the Paris metro, which is getting a major overhaul. One of the world's oldest subway networks, it was conceived so that a station is never more than 400m away – though the original plans largely neglected the suburbs. By 2030, the network will see extensions of some existing lines, upgrades of ageing systems and the renovation of all 273 stations. Furthermore, upwards of €25bn of funds is earmarked for four more driverless (and strike-proof) lines and 72 new stations. With its

DESIGNER MARC AUREL AND HIS 'OSMOSE' PROTOTYPE BUS SHELTER, OPPOSITE THE GARE DE LYON, WHICH FEATURES A WOODEN FLOOR AND CERAMIC SEATS

white-tiled walls and blue-and-white station names, the Parisian metro has an instantly recognisable look. RATP could simply do an update, 'but I don't think that's what the public wants', says Kaminagai. 'The metro has always been a place for innovation.'

The trick is to find a contemporary look for future stations without diluting the character of the older ones. Three different architectural teams – Richez Associés, Marc Mimram and RATP's own in-house architects – are developing designs for new stations, while the designer Patrick Jouin has been asked to come up with creative guidelines for a line 11 extension. The German artist Tobias Rehberger (W*171) has designed an entrance in coloured metal triangles for a new station on line 14, while Marc Aurel's studio is developing a general design for metro entrances, with ideas such as bringing the ceramic theme up to street level.

Aurel already works with RATP, and designed the stations for the T6 tram line. After decades of decline, the French have rediscovered the tramway's charms, while giving it a typically Gallic twist. Recently, the Lieu du Design centre in Paris hosted an exhibition called 'Tramway, a French School', curated by Kaminagai. He explains, 'The French model is not >>



THE NEW METRO ENTRANCE AT PONT CARDINET, DESIGNED BY THE GERMAN ARTIST TOBIAS REHBERGER, TAKES ITS INSPIRATION FROM HECTOR GUIMARD'S ART NOUVEAU ORIGINALS AND FEATURES MULTICOLOURED METAL PANELS

just about transport, but street planning, too.' Najdovski agrees: 'Tramways are a way to redesign the urban fabric between neighbourhoods.'

Parisians are also getting 2,000 new bus shelters, free. It was the French company JCDecaux that first came up with the idea of providing cities with street furniture in return for the right to advertise on it, and the company recently renewed its contract to build and run Paris' bus shelters for the next 15 years. Albert Asséraf, an executive vice president for JCDecaux, says, 'Design is essential. If we're going to occupy public space, we had better make it beautiful.'

Given a choice of four designs for the shelters, the city selected one by Marc Aurel. It is streamlined, with a roof shaped like a leaf, in reference to the art nouveau style of Hector Guimard and to the landscaping of Paris streets. 'I liked the idea of a bus shelter that has sprouted up between the trees,' he says. The modular shelters adapt to different contexts. Some are open at the back or offer additional seating outside, so people can rest whether or not they're waiting for a bus, while a new 'stop requested' function indicates to bus drivers that a passenger wants to board. Around 100 shelters will feature digital touch screens that provide local information; another 150 will come with green roofs or solar panels; and all will have USB sockets to recharge mobile phones.

Two other experimental shelters took this concept even further. In 2012, RATP installed a pilot project called 'Osmose', also designed by Aurel. Across the street from the Gare de Lyon, it is 85 sq m, bigger than many Paris apartments, with a wooden floor and ceramic benches. Over the past couple of years, it has hosted multiple services, from a book-lending programme to a parcel drop-off, a bike rental, even a café. Aurel says the prototype cost €300,000, making it too expensive to install citywide. However, he and Kaminagai envision a business model of the future

whereby mixed-use stations would be financed by fees from service providers, such as a post office or a café.

Not far away, at the Place de la Bastille, JCDecaux tried out another experimental bus shelter from 2012 to 2013, part of a city-led project to test 'intelligent' street furniture. A digital screen dispensed information, from transport options to the address of the nearest Chanel store, and served tourists in numerous languages. It was designed by Patrick Jouin, who also designed the stations for the Vélib' bicycle-sharing programme, launched in Paris in 2007 and since emulated in cities around the world. Again, JCDecaux runs the scheme in return for the right to advertise on public space.

In 2011, the city introduced the electric car-sharing programme Autolib'. It is run and co-financed by a private company, Bolloré, so that (like Vélib') the cost to users is low. The city pays to install the charging points (private owners of electric cars can also plug into them), yet recovers its investment, since Bolloré pays a user fee. For Bolloré, it's a chance to showcase its electric Bluecar and lithium polymer battery, and with around 65,000 subscribers, the zippy little aluminium-coloured vehicle has become part of the Paris street scene.

For the last three months of 2014, a handful of specially fitted-out Autolib's hit the streets as part of an operation called Customoi. Nine artists, architects and designers won a national contest to customise the cars and did so in materials from hair extensions to artificial turf. One car changes colour in response to the temperature, while designer Franck Magné's project, 'Révélation', turned an Autolib' into a mirror that reflects the streetscape as it moves. 'I found it interesting to reinforce the link between the car and the city,' he says, 'and also that the car continually looks different, depending on where it is.'

And perhaps that's the real French revolution in urban transport – the idea that a publicly shared, small electric car could be as hip an object as a Maserati. ✱

TOBIAS REHBERGER

FRANKFURT-BASED OP-ARTIST TOBIAS REHBERGER HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED TO DESIGN THE ENTRANCE TO THE NEW PONT CARDINET METRO STATION, DUE TO OPEN IN 2017. HIS PREVIOUS WORK INCLUDES BARS, RESTAURANTS AND A DAZZLE-PAINTED BOAT MOORED IN LONDON ON THE RIVER THAMES

MARC AUREL

AN ALUMNUS OF ARCHITECT JEAN-MICHEL WILMOTTE, MARC AUREL SET UP HIS OWN URBAN DESIGN STUDIO IN 1995, AND HAS SINCE DEVELOPED LIGHTING FOR THE CITIES OF LYON AND MARSEILLE, AS WELL AS THE 'OSMOSE' BUS SHELTER FOR RATP, WHICH HAS HOSTED A LIBRARY AND A TEMPORARY CAFÉ. 'THAT'S ONE OF THE THINGS PEOPLE LIKED BEST,' HE SAYS

PATRICK JOUIN

ONE OF THE BIG NAMES OF CONTEMPORARY FRENCH DESIGN, PATRICK JOUIN HAS WORKED ON EVERYTHING FROM LUXURY HOTELS TO BUS SHELTERS. OF HIS PLACE DE LA BASTILLE PROTOTYPE, HE SAYS, 'WE WANTED TO THINK ABOUT THE INTERNET OF OBJECTS. YOU HAVE TO IMAGINE THE ENTIRE CITY COVERED WITH THESE INTERCONNECTED SHELTERS. IT CONNECTS THE CITY AND THE CITIZEN'