With the exception of Eglinton Station, 11 of the 12 stations of the original Yonge Subway line have been renovated extensively. Some stations retained the original typefaces but with tighter tracking and subtle differences in weight, while other stations were renovated so poorly there is no longer a sense of simplicity seen with the 1954 designs in terms of typographical harmony.

Queen Station, for example, used Helvetica (LT Std 75 Bold) in such an irresponsible manner; it is repulsively inconsistent with all the other stations, and due to the renovators preserving the original glass tile trim, the font weight itself looks botched and unsuitable.

The intention of using Helvetica and Univers is unknown, however with the usage of the latter on the design of the Spadina Subway in 1978, it may have been an internal decision to try and assimilate subsequent renovations of existing stations in the aging Yonge and University lines. The TTC avoided the usage of the Toronto Subway font on new subway stations for over two decades.

The Sheppard Subway in 2002 saw the return of the Toronto Subway typeface as it is used for the names of the stations posted on platform level. Helvetica became the primary typeface for all TTC wayfinding signages and informational material system-wide.

The specially-designed Toronto Subway YONGE SUBWAY typeface graced the walls of the 12 stations, complementing them with wayfinding signs that embodied the spirit of modernism and progress. During the early 1980s, the stations were renovated, 6 of which had the typeface replaced with a brutal mix of Helvetica and Univers. Only Eglinton retains the splendor and elegance of its original architecture.

As the city grew, wayfinding signs evolved to accommodate expansion. With these examples of surface route signage, one can see how the usage of type is based on legibility or otherwise. Eglinton Station became the northern suburban terminus of the subway, with access to surface routes serving the outer regions within the then Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. As the bus routes divided into various branches, signs had to be bigger and more explanatory, which in turn have better legibility in all conditions.

By the 1970s and early 1980s, the signs were changed with the route number and the face based on Univers or Helvetica with lowercase letters and acceptable tracking. Not until the late 1970s are pictograms used.

The latest revisions are composed with Helvetica (now the standard typeface used on TTC informational material) apparently to improve readability on signs containing route divisions and branches.

Signages - 1954

NORTHBOUND
Both the Toronto Subway and Franklin Gothic (Speculative) typefaces are used for signages in all levels of each station. The Northbound sign on Franklin Gothic was used in Queen Station.

WAY OUT ROYAL YORK
These signs are from the Union Station mezzanine level pre-renovation. (Based on historical photographs from the Toronto Archives)

EGLINTON WEST
Eglinton West 32
32A To Renforth
32B To Airport Corporate Centre
In 1964, wayfinding designer Paul Arthur designed what was to be signs suitable for a majority of riders including illiterates, children, and people with moderate visual impairments with the usage of pictograms and legible type. Gill Sans was chosen by Arthur for all typographical components of the subway system; it is classy, quite legible to the designer’s opinion, and faithful to the old subway typeface.

St. George Station was used for the prototype designs, which in the end the TTC quietly abandoned and left bits of the components all over the station. The usage of Gill Sans is unnecessary considering the geometrical similarities to the Futura-based Toronto Subway font, which is legible as well as elegant and classy on its own without further improvement or scrutiny. The pictograms would have been good enough.

The Bloor-Danforth Subway offers a historical presentation of modernist values for passengers of the system; despite how banal the stations look, one has to appreciate the philosophy of geometric forms as once thought to be the ideal. The Toronto Subway typeface is used from the mezzanine and ticketing levels to platform level; from the 1970s onwards, newer signs based on Helvetica and Univers were installed on high traffic stations to supplement the older signs for legibility and better navigation.

The architectural design of all 29 stations were based on Museum and St. George stations on the University line. The stations stood the test of time, with the tiles and the typefaces left unchanged (the stations did have some minor modifications to wayfinding signs and accessibility). The stations had a more spartan, utilitarian look compared to the 1954 Yonge Subway stations.
The architectural design of all 29 stations stood the test of time, with the tiles and the typefaces left unchanged (the stations did have some minor additions to wayfinding signs and accessibility). The stations had a more spartan, utilitarian look compared to the 1954 Yonge Subway stations.

Some stations feature the new standard issue signs that look similar to New York City’s subway system. Signs appear throughout the subway system.

The 2002 renovation of Sheppard station brought on cosmetic changes as Sheppard became the western terminus for the Sheppard Subway line. It was renamed Sheppard-Yonge, and new wayfinding signs based on Helvetica were installed overhead on the platform level.

Four new stations were built to extend the subway northward to the suburbs. The architectural style of the tiles, typefaces were left intact, and newer signs based on Helvetica were added. Unlike the 1954 Yonge stations, the station titles and wayfinding signs, despite the different architectural style of the tiles. Sheppard station was renovated extensively but unlike the 1954 Yonge stations, the typefaces were left intact, and newer signs based on Helvetica were added.

Spadina Subway 1978
Univers by Adrian Frutiger

Adrian Frutiger’s Univers (1957) became the primary typeface for the Spadina Subway. Its clear, objective forms make Univers a suitable font for distance and lengthened reading at any condition. Spadina is unique on its own where the International Style is combined with the free spirited motifs of the 1970s. Dupont Station, for example, is so organic and free flowing yet orderly and organized due to the usage of Univers. Gone is the wholly utilitarian nature that is seen on other parts of the system. It would set the standard for future subway stations.

The Spadina Subway was architecturally unique on its own; for the first time, artwork became an integral part of its overall design. The main typeface used was strictly Univers, though Helvetica has found its way through some of the signs. There is little or no evidence of usage of the Toronto Subway font, presumably to keep a consistent 1970s contemporary style throughout the line.
The Typographical Timeline of the Toronto Transit Commission Subway System

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  http://www.joeclark.org/ttc.html

1980-85 KIPLING/KENNEDY EXTENSION SCARBOROUGH RT

The subway went deeper into Etobicoke and Scarborough with the Kipling/Kennedy extensions; both stations used mostly Univers and later Helvetica for signs. The Scarborough Rapid Transit (RT), which opened in 1985, began to use Helvetica for station names and some signs. A progression towards the use of Helvetica is emerging for future rapid transit expansions in the city.

1987-96 NORTH YORK CENTRE & DOWNSVIEW STATIONS

North York Centre Station was built on existing subway tunnels between Sheppard and Finch stations in 1987, while Downsview extended the Spadina Subway further north. Similar to the Scaborough RT, North York Centre uses Helvetica for its station name and Univers for all signs. Downsview Station uses Helvetica exclusively, a significant departure from the rest of the Spadina Subway.

2002 SHEPARD SUBWAY

The Sheppard Subway is the 21st century counterpart of the Spadina Subway with cues from the past - the Toronto Subway face gave the 1954 Yonge expansion a practicality that simplyinvites passengers to create a connection between them and the artwork.}

The 5 stations of the Sheppard Subway emphasized art work on tiles installed almost everywhere except the walls next to the train tracks, presumably to save on maintenance costs. These illustrations show how on track level, passengers are greeted with the station name on concrete.

The Sheppard Subway takes into context the impact of transit to the communities it serves as well as radical ideas in expressing creativity in a communal manner as public transit becomes effective public space. Unlike the Spadina Subway, Sheppard invites passengers to create a connection between them and the artwork.

One must visit Leslie Station to appreciate the kind of typography that no machine can replicate - the human hand and its handwritten typeface. Ampersand by Mich Lexier consists of 3,400 different handwriting samples, each of which have been reproduced in a quantity of five to create the 17,000 tiles that cover the walls of Leslie Station. The handwritten samples were collected during the spring of 1997 from across Toronto. The title Ampersand takes its name from the "and" symbol linking the names of the street intersection where the subway is located, "Sheppard & Leslie."

As we have seen in this timeline, each typeface has given an extended personality that makes each set of stations unique. The Toronto Subway face gave the 1954 Yonge Subway modernist practicality that simply ties to the one purpose of these spaces as subway stations and terminals. Through handwriting, human personalities are put into public space where one can’t help but speculate when looking at each and every tile the writer’s gender, age, or occupation. Passengers are usually isolated from each other when commuting, but when one waits for the train and looks at the tiles it is as if they’re part of a crowd.

At the same time, when one compares the cut faces on glass tiles at Eglinton Station to the 3,400 handwritten tiles at Leslie Station, one realizes the significance of how the latter creates the human spirit through handwritten type as opposed to mass produced geometric type.

The variations are immense, and with the tiles installed everywhere, the stations become more humanistic than utilitarian. Every tile speaks to the passenger in its own unique way, instead of Helvetica or Univers speaking to them in a monotone fashion. Wayfinding signages are set in Helvetica, but the tiles overpower it.