# Summary

The author was contracted to conduct an overview of the state of wayfinding and signage at Pickering GO station, with recommendations for obvious improvements.

Deficiencies are numerous but not very serious; incorrect signage is not likely, for example, to endanger safety. Improvements recommended centre around clarifying how to get from one place to another; added attention to accessibility; and greater graphical standardization.

# General principles

The goal is to improve GO Transit train-station wayfinding by making signage clearer and more consistent. The result will not only keep people from getting lost, it will look actively planned and deliberate. If everything looks like it works together, passengers will trust the system.

# Definition

Wayfinding is a system that gets you where you're going and keeps you from getting lost. Wayfinding usually involves *signage* (whether perceptible visually or by touch), but it can also include printed collateral (like a "How to Use GO Transit" booklet) and audible announcements.

# Clientele

Three categories of GO Transit train passenger are apparent:

1. First-time
2. Infrequent
3. Regular

The categories overlap slightly: A regular GO passenger who takes a trip to a new station may know the originating station well, but will, in effect, be a first-time visitor to the destination station.

At present, signage assumes that users are regular passengers. That's certainly fair most of the time, and that clientele will typically ignore any permanent sign; they already know where they're going.

The effect of improved, revamped signage will probably be small for this group, though we can certainly expect that they'll find the new signs an improvement.

GO stands to gain most from wayfinding improvements with the infrequent passenger. An infrequent passenger who never gets lost is more likely to use the service more often. Good wayfinding may turn an infrequent rider into a frequent one. A wayfinding system that looks cohesive and modern may leave an impression of "This isn't your parents' GO Transit."

First-time users are the passenger category that benefits most from good wayfinding. By definition, they don't know where anything is; they're the group that needs the most help.

# Accessibility

Accessibility in signage systems generally means accessibility for blind and visually-impaired people. Despite the impression given by the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (including Braille and raised-lettering signage in elevators and indoor rooms), the only system that really works for a person with little or no vision is one that uses speech. So-called talking signs exist (indeed, Talking Signs™ is a trademark of Talking

Signs, Inc.) and they would likely work reasonably well for the frequent-user clientele in larger GO stations. But talking signs are expensive and require a careful implementation that is beyond the scope of this report.

Braille and raised-lettering signs are of interest to sighted people because they can see the signs on the wall, walk right over, and inspect them. The intended audience, being blind, does not know where to begin inspecting the wall to find a tactually-readable sign; the audience does not know if such signs are even there in the first place. Tactually-perceptible signage is, however, useful at fixed and known points (like immediately inside and to the right of every entrance, or at an emergency communication system).

In general, though, accessibility serves users with significant functional vision, which may include a colour deficiency like red–green colourblindness. Accessible signage, in this model, involves the following criteria:

- Visible signs with words and numbers big enough to read at a given distance.
- Consistent type usage in a typeface whose letter and number shapes are not easy to confuse.
- Colours that can be discerned under adverse conditions and/or in the presence of a colour deficiency.

This report does not explore accessibility issues in great detail, but it's useful to have an introduction to these basic concepts.

# Limitations

Apart from the limitations mentioned above, this report must be read with the following caveats:

- Information is based on a single inspection of a single GO station on a single day. Not all findings are transferable to other stations. Limited supplementary plans, diagrams, and photographs were provided by GO Transit.
- The inspection did not involve architect- or engineer-level detail; for example, no photographs or measurements were taken.
- No user evaluation went into the preparation of this report. The author has not polled GO passengers in the three clientele categories for their experiences and opinions.
- This report does not examine all the details involved in redesigning an entire signage system. It does, however, recommend improvements to specific sign varieties.

# Methods

The author and GO Transit's Russell McGorman carried out an inspection of the Pickering GO station on April 30, 2002 from approximately 1500 to 1700 hours. Parking areas, entrances and exits, inside facilities, tracks, and accessibility features were examined.

# Findings

Below are the findings of this initial evaluation of wayfinding in GO train stations.

## Signage in general

- GO station signage generally uses the Helvetica (Swiss 721) font.
- Type is usually black on a white ground, though black/yellow and white/red signs are also found (along with a very few black/orange).
- There is an effort to standardize as many signs as possible onto uniformly-sized squares, which are often grouped together in twos, threes, or fours.
- Rounded corners are the norm.
- The GO logotype is used in its corporate colour (green).

## Parking

The Pickering GO station, located at the intersection of Bayly St. and Liverpool Rd., features two parking areas, the Main and East lots. A walkway connects the East lot to the station lot, while the Main lot is adjacent to the station building.

The two parking lots are far apart and can't be reached by the same entrance (in a car, at least – you can walk from one to another via the station building and pedestrian path). Frequent commuters probably already know there are two separate lots. Infrequent commuters will probably not have that knowledge, nor will first-time commuters.

The fact that two lots are available is relevant because one lot may be full or nearly so. Without knowing another parking lot is a few seconds' drive away, prospective passenger may give up on their plans to take the GO train that day.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Post a new sign near immediately inside either parking lot explaining how to find the other lot.

## Roadway signage

Signs on light standards along Bayly St. show the GO logo and point to a MAIN LOT. The GO logo is technically a logo*type* since it uses letters as its building blocks. But, being dark (or "chiaroscuro") and graphical, the logo may not be noticed alongside plain black text. The GO logo works well on a letterhead, where it dominates the page and is emblematic. But the logo is hard to read at a distance when in motion. On the roadway signs, the GO logo is not the *most* noticeable feature of the signs; it is *least* noticeable because it looks nothing like wording on a sign.

It's possible to drive right past the roadway signs, which are small (and probably have to stay that size due to regulations). But even if you notice them, what you are apt to notice is the words MAIN LOT. If you're expecting to see the words PICKERING GO, you may overshoot the target.

As a general wayfinding principle, it's best not to skip levels of information. Start from the general and work toward the specific. If you're driving to the Pickering GO, the first level you're looking for is the GO station itself; once you've found that, the next level of interest may be parking. Your first destination is the GO station; parking is a secondary destination. The current sign attempts to identify the parking lot instead of the station, but even then it may tend to be overlooked.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**: If legally permitted, change the roadway signage to read PICKERING GO in plain text with no logo.

## Entry signage

Signage at the Sandy Beach Rd. entrance faces only two of the three road directions (north/south) at this *T* intersection and stands at a shorter height than a typical car. As such, the sign is easily blocked by any car (e.g., a line of cars queueing up to leave or enter the parking lot during rush hour) and is essentially invisible to the service road intersecting Sandy Beach Rd. Neither problem is all that significant, but they are easily solved.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**: Replace the Sandy Beach Rd. sign with an elevated sign in a triangular or V shape.

## No-parking signs

Dozens of posts line the passageways among the parking spots in both lots. They hold standard no-parking signs (a *P* in a red circle bar dexter, meaning a line from upper left to lower right) that face out from the allowed parking spaces. The idea is to dissuade people from parking in the mini-roadways that run inside the lot.

Under the standard circle-*P* are left and right arrows. The intent is to say "Don't park on either side of this sign." But it's easy to misread the signs to mean "Don't park to the left or right." Yet you can see plenty of cars parked to the left and right of the sign, although *behind* it.

There's an easy solution, one that uses plain text (always a good idea) and/or some customized arrows. Adding the words IN FRONT OF SIGN below the circle-*P* is an easy fix.

Meanwhile, note that left- and right-pointing arrows suggest an unspecified, possibly unlimited distance. But *near*-left- and *near*-right-pointing arrows mean something close by.

A *near-left-pointing arrow* points down and to the left (rotated 45° counterclockwise from pointing straight left). A *near-right-pointing arrow* points down and

to the right (rotated 45° clockwise from pointing straight right). We can use these to mean "don't park right around here."

**RECOMMENDATION 4**: Either change the arrows on the no-parking signs to point near left and near right, add the words IN FRONT OF SIGN, or both.

## Pedestrian walkway

At one corner of the East parking lot is a pedestrian walkway to the station building. You pretty much have to know it's there already. Unless you happen to have parked near that corner, it's almost completely invisible. Indeed, since the East lot is *L*-shaped, if you're in the wrong leg of the *L* you won't see the walkway at all.

(In fairness, the path does climb a slight grade, and there are light standards and a Bell phone right nearby, but none of those details is really noticeable at a distance when seen over the roofs of a parking lot full of SUVs.)

If you don't know the walkway is there, you may have to ask other people in the lot – if there are any (parked cars are empty almost all the time) and if they'll talk to you – how to get to the station entrance. Or you may just give up on your GO trip altogether.

**RECOMMENDATION 5**: Line the outer fences with very large signs reading THIS WAY along with an arrow. Some light standards may also carry signs saying the same thing. All signs must be illuminated.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**: At the walkway itself, erect a large, high-mounted illuminated sign reading ENTRANCE. An off-the-shelf metal riser or truss (of the sort used to hold up lights and speakers at concerts) would suffice here. (A stable structure is needed due to the high winds at the location.)

See also "Emergency phones" below.

Proviso: These plans may need some fine-tuning, especially for visually-impaired users. A handrail, or at least a ground-level path marker (like a curb or raised yellow tile), may be necessary along the walkway all the way to the station entrance. While visually-impaired people would probably not *drive* to Pickering GO, they could certainly be driven *to* the station and/or be dropped off. Presumably their drivers would let them off at the walkway entrance. We need to make sure that visually-impaired persons can find their way to the station door unaided.

## Emergency phones

The emergency callbox, attached to a free-standing post, and the Bell payphone are both easy to miss. The callbox is located on the pedestrian walkway a few metres in from the entrance and faces the walkway. The payphone sits closer to the entrance, but off to the side. There's a small sign, standard for Bell payphones, on the light standard by the walkway entrance.

These are probably not enough from a safety standpoint, especially given the size of the East lot. Signage also needs to be more noticeable.

The callbox is probably more useful in an emergency given that it connects to a human being more or less on site rather than a far-off emergency dispatcher. But outside of staffed hours, the payphone is obviously necessary; many people will not even notice the callbox, won't know how to use it, or won't trust that it will work and will always simply dial 911 on the payphone instead. It seems that a combination of a telephone and a callbox is necessary.

**RECOMMENDATION 7**: Add several more payphone/callbox combinations throughout both parking lots. Use high, illuminated signage reading EMERGENCY PHONES. Add similar signage at the walkway entrance (exact wording to be determined).

## Signage consistency

Near the walkway entrance, it's possible to find four different styles of sign (considering shape, typefaces, icon and text usage, and colours) attached to a light standard. All face in slightly different directions.

The signs look uncoordinated. None of them sends the message "we really mean it." Far from communicating a hierarchy of importance, all signs seem equally unimportant. Quite probably, most people walk right by them – even infrequent and first-time riders. One reason is positioning: It's convenient to attach the signs to the light standard, but it is off to the side and away from the walkway.

Along with inside signage (discussed later), these sign collections must be standardized, edited down to essential information, and reinstalled with consistent, clearly intentional placement. Recommendations would require further study.

## Disabled parking

Disabled parking locations are not clear. Disabled parking spaces in the East lot are something of a non-starter because the whole point of disabled parking is to reduce walking distance from parking spot to entrance. But first-time or infrequent users of Pickering station may park in the East lot, not know any other lot is available, and resign themselves to a punishing hike to the station door.

It is better to warn people immediately that no disabled parking is available in the East lot, directing them to the Main lot instead.

In the Main lot, anyone with a disabled-parking permit will immediately look for designated parking spots near the entrance. The spots could still use more prominent signage. Words are preferable to wheelchair logos for this level of explanation; words are bigger, easier to read (black on white, typically), and unambiguous.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**: Add warning signs inside the entrance to the East lot explaining the lack of disabled parking. In the Main lot, increase the prominence of disabled-parking signage.

## Designated parking

Other designated parking spots – e.g., for monthly passholders – have signs stating which ID numbers correspond to which positions but are not adequately signed otherwise. Nearly all passholders can be presumed to be frequent users of the station; they already know where to go to park their cars. The issue becomes explaining why non-passholders cannot park in those locations.

**RECOMMENDATION 9**: Add PASSHOLDER PARKING ONLY signs.

Note that the disabled and passholder parking spaces can use similar signs that look like they form a visually-unified system. A nondisabled driver without a pass who circles the parking lot looking for a space will notice PASSHOLDER PARKING ONLY and DISABLED PARKING signs and will know to avoid the entire combined area.

## Parking-lot size

Either parking lot is big enough to get lost in. Although frequent commuters might never do so (they may have de facto regular parking spots), some people may forget where they parked their cars.

Parking lots are deceptively simple: You find a spot, park, and get on with your tasks. But with every section looking like every other section, finding your particular beige or grey car among a sea of other beige and grey cars, with nearer vehicles blocking the view of those farther away, is actually quite difficult at times.

This is not the sort of thing drivers are apt to complain about. People are not in a rush to admit they were stumped by a simple parking lot. Even if the fault is not theirs (and generally, when people get lost, it's due to the wayfinding system), people will muddle through until they find their cars. It never occurs to them that the problem might be the parking lot and not themselves.

There are no particularly easy or elegant ways to solve the problem. Naming parts of the lot NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, and WEST will not work particularly well when one of the parking lots is named the East lot already. It may be simplest to divide each lot into at most four areas – AREA M1 through AREA M4 and AREA E1 through AREA E4 – with appropriate signage. Implementation requires some care because the section signage has

to be high enough to be seen over parked cars but not so high that it seems to have the same importance as, say, signs leading you to an entrance.

This issue requires further study.

# Building exterior

The outside faces of the station building are considered here.

## Entrances

Entrances on the east and west faces of the station building are not adequately signed at present. It is difficult to mistake the west-side entrance/exit for one of the retail concession stands, for example, but unambiguous ENTRANCE signs are missing. At present, signs read GO TICKET SALES (using the GO logotype, which tends to be overlooked) and are located over a bench, not the doorway.

Again, the first-level destination is the entrance; buying a ticket sits at a lower conceptual level. A sign reading TICKET SALES does not mean you can actually get into the building.

**RECOMMENDATION 10**: Add large, unambiguous ENTRANCE signs to the east and west faces of the station building.

## Door signs

Signs listing prohibitions (smoking, cycling, skating and skateboarding, pets) are located at hand level rather than eye level. A vertical layout might be more noticeable.

Some doors have Pull or Push signs with 3D perspective arrows, which are probably unnecessary.

The security-camera (CCTV) pictograph may or may not need to be replaced. This is one area where a quick passenger survey could determine whether or not to replace the pictograph. (Show passengers a mixture of unrelated icons, two of which refers to security cameras, and ask which one means “security camera.” Whichever design gets the higher number of first positive responses is probably better.)

Outside doors sometimes tell us that debit and credit cards are permitted. On an outside door, payment methods are irrelevant. You cannot pay the door. Signage telling passengers that GO Transit “welcomes” debit and credit cards belongs wherever one may actually use those cards, which tends to limit itself to staffed farebooths.

Ashtrays are too high for a wheelchair user.

**RECOMMENDATION 11**: Use vertical signs, mounted at eye level, for prohibitions. Remove perspective arrows on Push and Pull signs. Examine appropriateness of security-camera icon. Eliminate payment-methods signs everywhere but the places those methods may be used.

## Paratransit stop

A small, ambiguous sign sits on a post outside the east door of the station. It shows a pictograph of loading or unloading a person in a wheelchair. Frequent users may know this already, but it is not clear if this is the only permitted stop where wheelchair users may be dropped off or picked up or if it applies to Ajax Pickering Transit Authority Special Services paratransit only.

**RECOMMENDATION 12**: Clarify the purpose of the paratransit stop.

## Station hours and rules

The existing station-hours sign shows no obvious problems but should probably be on the opposite wall so a driver could see it without getting out of a car. In that case, it could stand to be bigger.

Signs like these might be redesigned later as part of a standardization scheme.

## Arrows

Concepts like "straight ahead" and "right through this door" are difficult to communicate using nothing but an arrow. A down-pointing arrow obviously means "down" or "downstairs," and only with some thought or puzzlement could it be understood to mean "straight ahead." (It's easier to make that conceptual leap outside, for example, if there is no possible "down" direction to go.)

The entire Pickering station uses 3D shaded arrows in vanishing perspective to suggest "straight ahead" or "right through this door." There is no expert consensus on how to solve the problem, at least if it is believed the only way to solve it is with an arrow. For ambiguous cases like these, it is better to write out the destination: The words STRAIGHT AHEAD and THIS DOOR mean what they say.

We find 3D perspective arrows pointing left (e.g., near the East lot walkway), which is even more confusing: Does it mean "ahead and to the left"?

Also, certain visually-impaired people either will be confused by the apparent blur of the 3D shading or will be unable to differentiate a 3D perspective arrow from any other arrow pointing in the same direction.

Though the ultimate decision would wait until a new standardized sign system were developed, it makes sense to replace the 3D perspective arrows with plain text.

## Exception notices

"Exception notices" – warnings of exceptional circumstances, like unusual closings or, as in the case of Pickering, ongoing construction – require a treatment that makes the signs stand out from others while still obviously being part of the same system. It could be a simple matter of changing the headline style for exception notices (reverse type, for example). Exception notices have to be in predictable locations *unless* they refer to a specific feature or service (e.g., washroom out of order).

**RECOMMENDATION 13**: Locate exception notices relating to the whole station in the same spot – outside under the signs for station hours and rules, for example. Locate exception notices covering a specific feature or service near what they refer to.

## Kiss 'n' Ride

There's an effort underway to institute TTC-style Kiss 'n' Ride locations – specific spots where drivers can drop off and pick up GO passengers quickly. These are not adequately signed; at Pickering, the Kiss 'n' Ride location partly conflicts with the paratransit stop.

There's also the issue of licensing the term Kiss 'n' Ride in the first place. The generic phrase Pick-Up & Drop-Off is easy to understand.

**RECOMMENDATION 14**: Clearly mark any Kiss 'n' Ride or Pick-Up & Drop-Off areas, possibly with continuous overhead signs and/or pavement markings. When such areas intentionally overlap with paratransit stops, list both features on the same single sign.

## Bike racks

Bike racks are unsigned. (They aren't located adjacent to the main building.) This may not be serious enough to fix. However, a sign over the racks is necessary.

**RECOMMENDATION 15**: Add a sign identifying the bike racks.

# Building interior

Once inside the building, a visitor's questions boil down to:

- When's the train?
- Where do I buy a ticket?
- Where's the track?
- Where can I wait?
- Where's the washroom?

Additional wrinkles: Add "I'm blind," "I can't climb stairs," or "I'm in a wheelchair" to each of those questions.

## One-stop signage

Most of the inside-signage problems discussed below can be solved by a single overhead sign hanging from approximately the middle of the ceiling listing:

- Tickets (with arrow pointing near right)
- Tracks (arrow pointing left; sign reading STRAIGHT AHEAD; indication of ramps vs. stairs)
- Exits (on obverse of sign; optionally add STRAIGHT AHEAD)

## Schedules

Because schedules change often, they're laser-printed and posted on the wall. That may be unavoidable, or at least it may be the cheapest display method, but it shows many problems.

- Schedules are hard to find. No large sign unambiguously reads SCHEDULES or even DEPARTURES.
- White paper recedes into the white display case and white walls.
- Typeface (Arial) does not match what is already in use in signage elsewhere (typically Helvetica or Swiss 721). ("They look similar" and "they match" are not the same thing.)
- Gridlines are not used anywhere else in GO signage, but they are used here. Exceptions like these tend to be ignored rather than noticed (Cf. the GO logotype).
- The sign title makes sense to train engineers and pretty much no one else: TRACK DEPARTURES FOR THE MORNING WESTBOUND RUSH HOUR, for example, is too long and confusing. (Are the *tracks* departing?)

Location of schedule signs will vary from station to station. It probably makes sense to keep them located on inside walls at Pickering; there isn't enough space just inside the door (where GTTA disclaimers and rules are posted), and it would disrupt foot traffic if several people lined up to read a schedule sign that close to the front door.

Appearance of schedule signs could be improved when typography is standardized across signs.

**RECOMMENDATION 16**: Use conspicuous signs reading SCHEDULE and an improved template to produce the schedule printouts.

Another option is to use electronic displays, but for a smaller station like Pickering that is probably excessive.

## Washrooms

The male and female washrooms have different signs. (Part of the female sign is even in two colours.) Unless health codes absolutely require it, there is no reason even to assign a gender to single-person washrooms with locking doors.

Washrooms throughout the GO system would seem to fall into these categories:

1. Male only
2. Female only
3. Unisex

To each of those categories, wheelchair-accessible and -inaccessible must be added. Ultimately, as part of a standardized sign system, six different reusable signs for GO washrooms would required.

## GTTA regulations

The posted GTTA regulations are obscurantist and do not leave the impression that GO is upfront and serious about its own regulations. The poster could be slightly more noticeable (it certainly needs its own small heading sign) and could benefit from actual graphic design for the body copy. The regulations should be actively designed *to be read*.

**RECOMMENDATION 17**: Redesign the GTTA regulations poster system-wide, and install header signs where possible.

## Ramps vs. stairs vs. elevators

GO station components must clearly indicate their wheelchair accessibility of lack of it. The Pickering station shows a bit of complexity given that the entrance to Tracks 1 and 2 is also the entrance to the ramp for Track 3. Exactly where the various elevators take you is unclear.

- The south elevator is signed for Tracks 1 and 2. It doesn't tell you how to get to Track 3.
- Tunnels are very prominent in the station. Some people will take the tunnel right away. But how do you reach Track 3 using the tunnels?
- If you can't climb stairs and think that the tunnel is your only option, what do you do? There is no indication of barrier-free alternatives.
- The sign indicating the ramp to Track 3 that is found through the exit door heading to Tracks 1 and 2 is itself very hard to find.

It may be more straightforward to show destinations (tracks) and the means of getting there (stairs, ramp, elevator).

**RECOMMENDATION 18**: As part of the standardization project, revamp all references to stairs, ramps, and elevators. Where an elevator or ramp can take passengers only to certain tracks, explain which *alternate* accessible features will take passengers to *other* tracks.

## Tunnel names

Tunnels at Pickering GO are designated as East and West. The distinction is meaningless to a passenger. It is apt to be misinterpreted as East*bound* and West*bound* tunnels.

Tunnels, moreover, are not a destination; tracks are.

**RECOMMENDATION 19**: Eliminate references to tunnels.

## Tunnel signage

There is a tendency to group signs in clusters of four equal-sized squares. The cluster approach is graphically simple and self-similar – square sign components grouped into a bigger square. But it limits the size of the legend on a sign and nullifies any hierarchy of meaning. Which is more important, a *3* with a railroad track below it, the white word *Exit* on red, a 3D perspective arrow pointing up and forward, or the front of a bus and the words "Connecting buses"? They're all equal-sized parts of a single sample sign in a Pickering tunnel.

Tunnels here are lengthy. You want to be sure you're walking in the right direction before you start down a tunnel, especially given that your only ways out of the tunnel involve a long walk or retracing your steps.

Ambiguity is an issue. You should know exactly what every sign refers to under the following three conditions. It's possible to use size and position to make relationships clear.

1. *Entering a tunnel* – Use standard size (which may be different from today's standard size after reconfiguration). Additionally, state where to go if your destination is somewhere that tunnel cannot take you.
2. *Walking through a tunnel* – Signs located at the *ends* of tunnels visible while walking *through* them can easily be two or three times larger than existing usage. Add large signs to the walls of a tunnel to reinforce the direction you're going.
3. *At tunnel intersections* (including elevators) – Those same double- and triple-sized signs still work here. Elevators require careful signage stating clearly (in words if necessary) where the elevator will and will not take you.

A bas-relief stone memorial plaque is mounted on a tunnel wall. The legend sign explaining its origin and purpose needs to be rewritten (the first sentence does not make sense) and normalized according to the specs of whatever new signage standard is decided on. The replacement sign does not necessarily have to be made of cut aluminum, as the present sign is.

**RECOMMENDATION 20**: Redesign tunnel signage according to the above guidelines.

## Memorial plaque

A bas-relief stone memorial plaque is mounted on a tunnel wall. The legend sign explaining its origin and purpose needs to be rewritten (the first sentence does not make sense) and normalized according to the specs of whatever new signage standard is decided on. The replacement sign does not necessarily have to be made of cut aluminum, as the present sign is.

## Safety signage

Frequently-seen signs reading "In compliance with safety and fire regulations, do not obstruct stairwells while waiting for trains" do not do the job.

- They attempt to fit a long sentence into a small square.
- The prohibition can be boiled down to "Do not block stairwells." (The legal justification for the prohibition – safety and fire regulations – is extraneous.)
- Using white-on-red type makes the signs look exceptional, meaning many people will ignore them.
- As a safety sign, it requires a higher visual importance.
- Most of the time, the signs are located at the top of a stairwell. By that time, you the passenger are no longer standing in the stairwell. There is no way you can obstruct the stairwell. The sign tells you not to do something you could not possibly do.

**RECOMMENDATION 21**: Replace these signs with simple alternatives reading "Do not block stairwells." Attach the signs to the walls of the stairwells themselves.

## Elevators

Elevators provide B.F. Skinner–style punishment for using them: Buttons all seem to buzz loudly, like an elevator alarm, as long as they are pressed.

Certain tunnel elevator signs make the false claim that you can actually reach Track 3 using them. In fact, in that example, the sign is merely misplaced, but at first glance it appears to apply to the elevator.

There are no directional signs once you leave an elevator. Where are you, exactly? Where do you go?

**RECOMMENDATION 22**: Rectify the buzzing problem. Relocate signs that make ambiguous claims about elevator destinations. Add directional signs outside elevator doorways.

Also, automatic doors, when provided, may sometimes need signage. Only one CAUTION: AUTOMATIC DOOR sign was found on site, for example; it may be the only case where a caution is required.

## Buses

Some signs leading to bus bays say simply "Buses" (perfectly clear), others "Connecting buses" (what does that mean?). If GO and municipal transit buses load at different places, that may need to be signed (but not in the Pickering case).

**RECOMMENDATION 23**: Standardize on the word "Buses" when only one bus bay exists. "GO buses" and "*Municipality name* buses" can be used in other cases.

# Track signage

At track level, the problem is chiefly a lack of signs.

## Waiting rooms

Waiting rooms on Tracks 1 and 2 have no real signs stating what they are. Some waiting rooms include an elevator, meaning they are a double destination (for someone who wants a waiting room or an elevator).

**RECOMMENDATION 24:** Add signs saying "Waiting room" and/or "Elevator."

But see also "Elevators" above.

## Exit and elevator signs

Because of the narrow standoff between canopy or waiting room and track edge, signs at track level need to be narrow. The signs in question are perpendicular to the track. It may be necessary to limit these signs to information that is absolutely necessary, which really means exits and elevators.

Signs are generally adequate in this regard, with a couple of provisos:

- The icon used for elevators is rather nonstandard. It is too fancy and chiaroscuro to be understood at a distance. On the other hand, standard elevator pictographs aren't very easy to make out at a distance, either; the issue is that the icons currently used are even worse. Use the word "Elevator."
- Because of perspective, signs tend to block each other. At first glance, that would not seem very important; the fact that other Exit signs are hidden by an immediately-visible Exit sign means nothing, since you can still indeed exit the track from the door by the nearest Exit sign. But if not all exits get you to the same place, you might take the wrong exit by mistake and not end up where you want to go. Given the width constraints, we do not really have the space to use signs saying "Exit to" plus the ultimate destination. We can, however, clearly identify the doors, stairwells, and elevators, warning people where they do and do not lead. (Those warning signs would be parallel to the track and only visible once you follow the original Exit sign to the door it refers to.)
- We can allow Exit signs to block each other, but Elevator signs should be installed at staggered heights so that at least one such sign is always visible.
- Signs need to be breakaway to tolerate getting hit by snow-clearing equipment. Currently, signs are firmly attached to posts and walls. It may be better to *hinge* signs on the top edge and attach them semipermanently on the inside edge (e.g., with a plastic bracket). If a snowplow hits the sign, the plastic bracket breaks but the sign stays up. It will swing in the wind until repaired, but it's better than a missing sign.

**RECOMMENDATION 25:** Carry out the improvements mentioned above.

## Wheelchair loading

Wheelchair users need to wait on certain raised platforms in order to board a train. (Wheelchair users disembark from trains onto that same platform.)

The frequent passenger will of course know where to go. Such a passenger may have learned the lesson the hard way, by waiting somewhere *else* and missing a train. Infrequent and first-time passengers will not be aware of where to go.

**RECOMMENDATION 26**: Install high, visible signs reading "Wheelchair access to trains" at wheelchair waiting platforms. Give directional signage at exits of all nearby elevators.

## Between-track train destinations

Since it's very important to use the right track, it is helpful to reinforce the fact that you *are* on the right track. Do that by adding signs facing the track located either between the tracks (in the case of 1 and 2) or on the far side of the track (in the case of 3).

**RECOMMENDATION 27**: Add signs reading "Track 1," "Track 2," or "Track 3" visible to people standing on the respective tracks.

## Train-crew-only signage

Signs bearing single numbers up to 10 hang down from canopies. They instruct conductors and train crews where to stop trains with the respective number of cars.

The signs are, however, visible to all, meaning some people will look at them and wonder what they mean ("Should I be standing near 6 or 7?"). They should be slightly modified so that someone standing close by can see they are meant for train use only.

**RECOMMENDATION 28**: Add "Train use only" under the relevant numerical signage.

## Emergency communications

Emergency telephones are not easy to find. There seem to be no emergency callboxes. The small Bell signage is, as ever, more suited to corporate branding than wayfinding. Contracts may require it to be left in place.

There may not be any truly satisfactory way of indicating where the phone is. A case could be made that the problem would go away with more phones on the platforms – at least one near each end, plus an emergency callbox somewhere. Failing that, add a sign at the opposite end of the platform.

**RECOMMENDATION 29**: Add more phones and callboxes, or at least add a sign reading "Phone at other end of platform" to the platform end where the phone is not located.

Moreover, all phones (even in parking lots) are voice-only. A deaf or hard-of-hearing person might be unable to use them. Voice/TTY payphones exist and should be considered. (TTY usage is slower than a voice call, but not every reason for using a phone requires instant response – your car may simply not start and you need to call a tow truck. You could do that on a TTY payphone.)

## Track 3

Some issues specific to Track 3 are apparent.

- A sign reading "3" is blocked by a canopy. It can be removed.
- The accessible entrance to Track 3 near the end of a tunnel is unmarked. Add a sign.

**RECOMMENDATION 30**: Make the improvements noted above.

# POP and fare signage

Signage explaining how to buy and cancel tickets, and which areas are and are not fare-paid, is to a certain extent shoehorned into the same sign formats as every other sign function.

Improving POP and fare signage properly is a job unto itself, given that it encompasses environmental signage and how-to instructions on actual equipment. Still, some observations are possible.

- The yellow colour may be justified for warnings of fare-paid areas, but is misplaced when identifying a machine where you can buy a ticket. (At that point, you the passenger haven't done anything that merits a warning yet.)
- The order of operations on the "Guide to Easy GOing" signs attached to ticket machines are not exactly clear, implying there are three different ways to carry out either four or five steps (buy ticket, cancel ticket, board train, ride, exit).
- When machines that sell *and* cancel fares are located close together (or are one and the same piece of equipment), much more care needs to be taken to separate the functions. It may be necessary to reposition machines so that a left-to-right order is in place (buy tickets at machine on left, cancel at machine on right).
- The same applies to other case of mixed functions located together (like the beginning of a fare-paid zone and a ticket-cancelling machine).
- Warnings about POP rules are too wordy and are crammed into standard square signs. One variant appears to list only a TTY toll-free number as a contact point.
- The pictograph used to indicate a staffed farebooth is nonstandard and chiaroscuro. It may be better to use an actual word, like "Fares" or "Information."

The issue needs further study.

# Typeface choices

This project does not attempt to redesign GO Transit signage as a system. Still, a discussion of typeface choices is helpful.

Signage is unlike other forms of the written word. Function under adverse conditions is a necessity. Some of those adverse conditions are:

- It's nighttime.
- Lighting is poor (as in a tunnel).
- It's raining or snowing.
- You're in motion (driving your car in a parking lot; in an elevator; in a train).
- You have slightly or significantly impaired vision. (Even leaving your glasses at home or going without a contact lens for a day puts you in that category.)
- You have a learning disability like dyslexia; you misread character shapes.

It is not enough that any specific individual can read the sign; we are designing signage for populations, not individuals. An argument like "I can read it" or "It looks fine to me" tells us nothing about the functionality of a sign for the thousands of other people who will read the sign under many conditions.

Beware also of evaluating typefaces based on how "clean" or "simple" they look. Those are not per se the issue in functional signage, and those terms are almost never used by type experts in the first place; they aren't a true standard of comparison. (It also does not follow that sansserif fonts are always better than serif fonts because sansserifs are cleaner or simpler.)

The question is not "How does it look?" or "Do you like it?" but "How well does it work?" and "Can you read it?"

The fact that other transit installations may use a certain face does not mean it is appropriate for GO Transit's installations.

These are admittedly very tough criteria – perhaps surprisingly so – but it's necessary to state them in order to understand the task of typeface selection. Using these criteria, Helvetica (Swiss 721) leaves much to be desired.

- In general, Helvetica is not *actively chosen* for signage after due consideration and testing of alternatives. Helvetica is, in many cases, the first and only typeface that is ever considered. It is used by default.
- Helvetica has confusable character shapes, chiefly Il1 and OQ; some number and number/letter combinations (17; 568S); and punctuation (a comma is a period with a tail).
- Some character combinations run together, like *rn* (looks like *m*).
- It is almost perfectly regular and symmetrical (as Swiss Modernist design demands), meaning that letters like *b*, *p*, *d*, and *q* are rotated mirror-images of each other, increasing confusion problems for dyslexics.
- On backlit signs, enclosed areas in letters like *a*, *g*, and *o* (called "counters") tend to fill in because glowing light-on-dark type tends to expand or seep. (The same thing happens to all fonts. Helvetica doesn't correct for the phenomenon.)

Helvetica has a few limited advantages.

- *a*, *o*, and *g*, which are often confusable, are different enough.
- GO Transit already owns it. (Fonts are, however, cheap.)
- You can buy Letrasign or other quick-use typesetting materials in that typeface at low cost.

Given Helvetica's functional limitations, its use in a revamped wayfinding system cannot be supported in 2002. Too many alternatives are available with better performance characteristics. A replacement type selection will have to be developed for a full-fledged GO signage revamp.

Although not part of this document, the author is prepared to produce, on request, a few mock-ups using candidate replacement fonts as part of this same project. Reasonable turnaround time will be required. Font purchases, where necessary, would be billed at cost. These mock-ups would list pros and cons of each selection and offer recommendations.

# Conclusions

Wayfinding at Pickering GO needs reconsideration from the point of view of the passenger. Clearer destination markings; more attention to accessibility; and greater graphical standardization are required. The quantity of signs may be large (and would probably be reduced in a redesign), but the rehabilitation task is not all that difficult.