



Where does the Mexico City Metro fit in the global hierarchy of urban rail systems? It rarely features as a 'Chapter 1' type system – these positions reserved, in the main, for the legacy systems of Europe, North America and Japan. And yet in both scale and depth (history) it has pedigree. Opened in September 1969 (3 weeks before the Beijing Subway opened) the Mexico system precedes many famed systems such as BART, Shanghai, or Hong Kong. At 200km it is also a lengthy system, second only to New York in the Americas, and currently the 18th longest in the world. But beyond these facts, it is the systems' personality that makes it special. The Mexico City Metro has no pretence, no elements of chic....it is an 'I am what I am' type Metro and is utterly charming as a result.

The **Metro** has 12 lines and has 200.9 revenue km with 195 stations, 80 of which are at grade or elevated. Services runs from 0500-0000 and have 2 to 5min headways. Station entrances are accompanied by totem with logo and station pictogram (Bellas Artes has a traditional Paris style entrance) and on entering the station, you immediately encounter the systems' distinctive characteristics - the famed pictograms as individual station identifiers, huge passenger numbers and the pneumatic traction of the narrow orange trains (mainly 9-car sets) (Line A/12 have 6-car sets and use traditional steel rail lines). Stations are a little down at heel and tatty but are full of buzz with passengers, small shops and constant noise and activity. **Tickets** are bought from the *Taquilla* and come in paper form, costing just 5 Pesos (€0.22) as a flat fare (exit via open turnstile). Pre-Paid *Tarjetas* are also available (10 Pesos charge) and these can be topped up (Line 12 uses the *Tarjetas* only – you can't use the paper tickets on that line). The *Taquillas* often have queues so its best to buy a supply of tickets/credit to avoid long waits. This is a very inexpensive system!

Wayfinding is simple with directional signs to the line and terminal stations and large '*Correspondencia*' signs at transfer stations, but there are no subtleties of faded-out strip maps to show the past and remaining stations on the line – it is important to know the terminus name for your direction of travel. And so it is best to print off a map of the system to take with you (there is no hard-copy information available), and although the lovely hybrid geographic/schematic map is plentiful as a wall poster at entrance levels, they are in shorter supply on the crowded platforms. Once you know where you are going it is very simple to use and the signage is fine. **Transfer** stations are many, and whilst some are quite tightly structured for efficient connectivity, others involve significant distances along long corridors and walkways (e.g. La Raza/Pantitlán/Santa Anita/Atlalilco). These can get very crowded at peak times but it all adds to the enjoyment of the system. Much of

the access and transfer involves walking. Escalators exist but stairs seem to be the main mechanism to change levels and to transfer.

In the main, most underground stations have side platforms, whilst grade stations tend to be island platforms and elevated stations have side platforms, but there is a mix of types across all alignments. Platforms also have barriers to segregate the women/children section (normally first two carriages). There are no station announcements or RTI (not needed with such intense headways) and the platforms are quite basic with dull lighting and minimal advertising. **Trains** speed in and break rapidly - doors open and then close quickly but there is an orderliness to things. Once on the train, the journeys often involve rapid acceleration and rapid breaking - it is all very jerky and hectic. There are no announcements on trains (except Line 12 which has Spanish/English announcements - and has an altogether more modern feel) and the in-car line map with pictograms is often your only guide to where you are on the line as platform station names are sometimes not easily visible from the train if busy. The train interiors continue the grubby feel but they are full of atmosphere with multitudes of people, tradesmen selling food and accessories (except Line 12), buskers and lots of animated conversation.

The **stations** in the centre are more closely spaced but the system covers the entire city well and outside of the centre often runs in medians or is elevated (60% of the system is grade/above ground) so it provides some great views of the city and its life. It is out here where I feel some of the more **interesting stations** are: La Raza (Line 3 & 5, needs a good 10mins transfer walk), and its educational science corridor (*túnel de la ciencia*); San Lázaro with its fantastic Felix Candela designed roof (Line 1) and its large atrium and the 'through-building' elevated rail line (a la Príncipe Pío) (Line B); Pantitlán for its different station buildings and levels/lines; and Zapata (Line 12) for its imagery of the famed revolutionary. Additionally, Pino Suárez has some interesting artifacts and Mixcoac has a worthwhile Metro Museum on the Line 12 mezzanine level (free entry). But there are many interesting stations across the entire system.

Mexico City is no different from other systems in Latin America in that government and tourist information, blogs and even local people highlight the **security** risks of using metro systems. Perhaps I am lucky but I have never experienced any such issues or felt remotely threatened in this part of the world – normal precautions apply, as they would anywhere. And so, although using the system may give you aching feet and leave you uncomfortably hot, the Mexico City Metro will show you this great city efficiently, cheaply and without affectation. Once you are familiar with the system (which happens quickly) then you become part of its fabric as it wraps its overloaded, underfunded arms around you – it is truly intoxicating and most definitely up there with the best.

Ciudad de Mexico also has a suburban rail line in the north and a light rail service in the south but these are operated by different companies and require new tickets. The **Suburbano** operates from Buenavista station and heads 25.6km north to Cuautitlán (7 stations total). You have to purchase a *Tarjeta* for 15 Pesos and then add credit (7.50 Pesos as far as Tlalnepanta and 11.00 Pesos beyond). Buenavista is a modern building with a huge lobby area of automated machines, ticket offices and barriers before you arrive at the four single line platforms. Passengers alight from one side before boarding passengers are allowed on trains from the opposite side. Services have 10min base headways and use 4-car CAF 447 stock, as commonly seen on Renfe Cercanías services. The line is very busy and smart, adding some interest to the overall rail offer of Mexico City. Finally, the **Tren Ligero** runs from the southern terminus of Line 2 at Tasqueña, down to the lake area of Xochimilco. Services operate from 0500 to 0000 and have 10min base headways, although additional '*servicios especiales*' appear to run to boost capacity on the northern section. This line opened in 1986 following a previous tram alignment, and runs in the median of Calzada de Tlalplan and Avenida Acueducto for 13km on rather worn rail infrastructure. The 18 stations have been recently

modernised and are smart, with ticket machine/barrier at one end of the island platform with modern information boards and seating. The stations are protected from the road by smart glass panelling. Estadio Azteca has two island platforms and an elevated walkway to the barriers and stadium. The single articulated Bombardier TE-90/95 stock is very busy, especially at Tasqueña, where a smart little station is attached to the south entrance of the Metro station. Again, a different ticket *STE tarjeta* is required (10 Pesos) with the flat fare of 3 Pesos. Although slow, this is a lovely little service and is very popular.

Craig Moore, February 2018