Logistical Urbanism: New Public Freightscape

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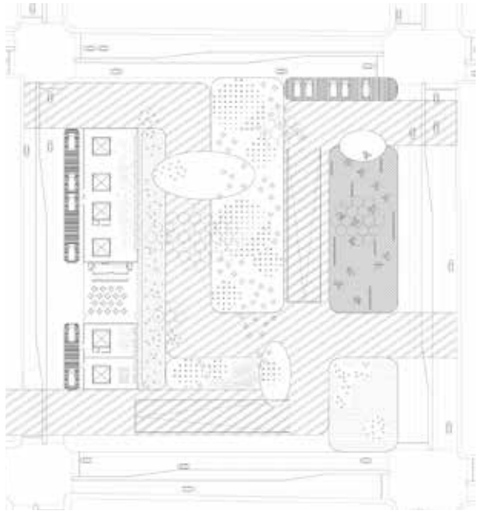
Since the 1970s the city has become host to new time-space systems called logistics that handle the distribution of goods, people and information across local, regional and global territories. Logistical systems allow us to order a book online and have it delivered to our door the next day. They allow us to place a package in a drop box in New York at 10pm knowing it will be delivered downtown Los Angeles by 8am the next morning. Logistics allows us to browse and purchase airline tickets and hotel rooms online and allows for the scheduling and reservation of those flights as well as most of our other transportation needs. Logistics makes sure we can load up our car with groceries twenty four hours a day and if we are too lazy or busy to go to a big box store, logistics will facilitate their speedy delivery directly to our home. Logistics allows us to have fresh food from anywhere in the world; lamb from New Zealand; sushi from Japan or lobsters from Nova Scotia.

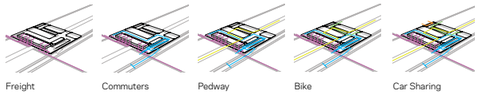
Despite offering convenience, one of the primary implications of logistical systems is the increase of freight flow on our highways and inner cities. (Expecting delivery of everything from shoes to lobster has its consequences). Design research into new freight systems is not only a pragmatic exercise to solve congestion but more importantly can be deployed to speculate on the larger spatial opportunities that exist in distribution networks and new urban economies. For example, projecting logistics as a cultural as well as instrumental space in the city.

The Chicago Tunnel System (1890) is a vacant 60-mile network 40 feet under the ground that was built to connect the city's major freight stations and ease the delivery of freight and mail in, out and around the downtown area of the city in the early 20th century. A design proposal for a new freight network in Chicago restores the tunnel system as a dedicated urban freight conduit and expands it to connect to the sorting centers of the major freight delivery systems (FedEx, UPS and DHL) for the uninterrupted flow of goods beneath the city streets. A series of freight stations spaced at ½-mile intervals and accessible to the tunnel act as public pick-up and drop-off locations for the collection and distribution of packages coupled with other public services. The largest node in the network located in the Loop, Chicago's CBD is developed as a prototype for the system.

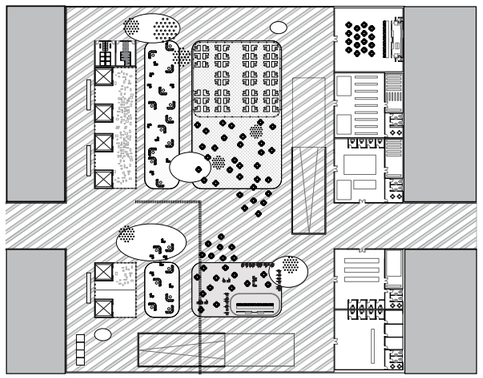
The station comprises three levels. At 40 feet below grade the tunnel widens for a landing zone where packages are collected and shuttled up to pick up slots that are arranged in a long wall type structure that rests on the West side of site's upper level. The "slot wall" is set back from the site boundary to form a public park on the east side, while a service zone on the west side allows urban freight cabs to move packages to commercial offices and buildings within the ½-mile of the facility. The lower level includes a remote airline check in, storefronts for the freight networks, a bar, restaurant, café and a work-space where users can rent desks by the day. Here also a large glass wall separates the public from the package-processing zone and its mechanics and conveyors render legible to consumers the complex reality of our consumer driven lifestyles, while new collective atmospheres are produced through graphics and color in the interior and exterior landscapes. The promise of the project is that logistics can catalyze new social collectives that amplify activity, in other words that logistics is a form of urbanism in and of itself.



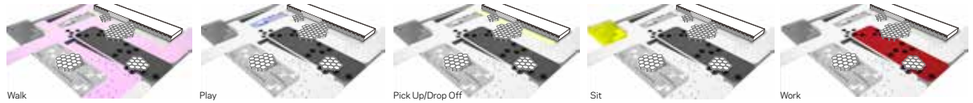
Station Prototype: Upper Level Plan



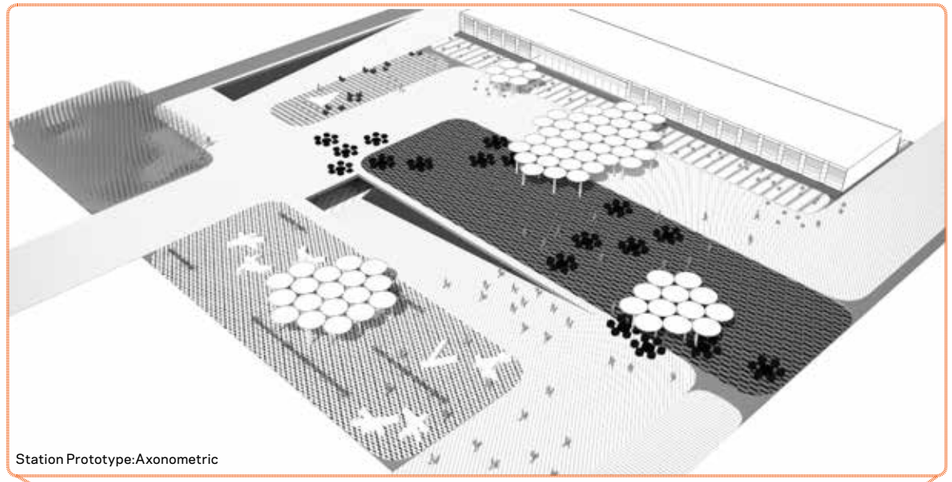
Station Prototype: Flows



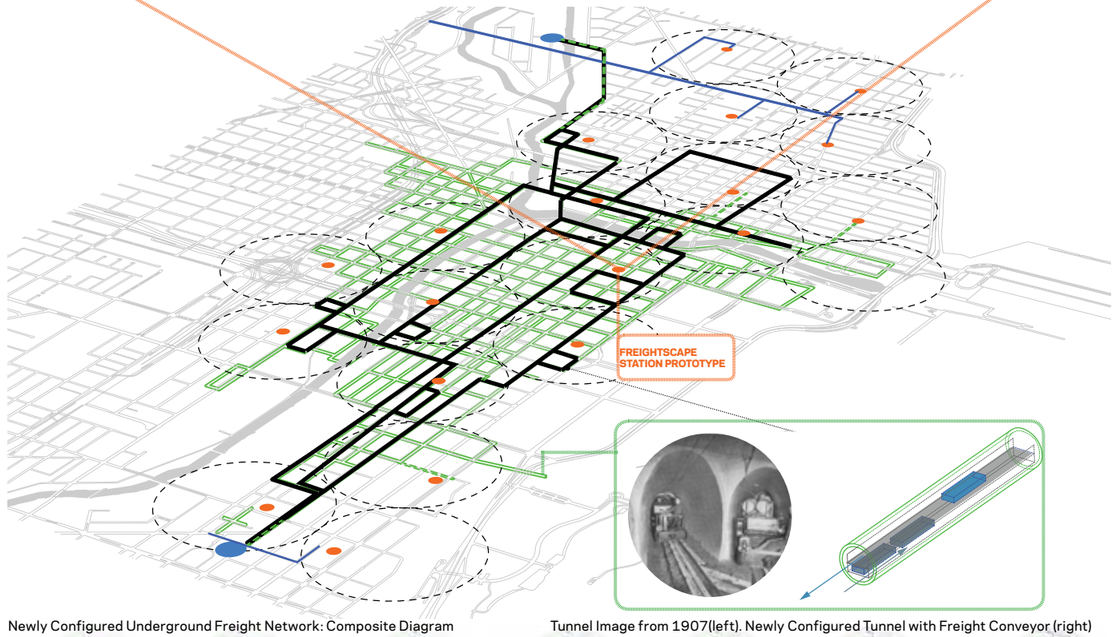
Station Prototype: Lower Level Plan



Station Prototype: Atmospheres



Station Prototype:Axonometric



Newly Configured Underground Freight Network: Composite Diagram

Tunnel Image from 1907(left). Newly Configured Tunnel with Freight Conveyor (right)

Newly Configured Underground Freight Network: Sequence Diagrams