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Latin lessons for Tyneside travellers

Travellers on Tyneside's metro system are being given impromptu language lessons every time they step on a train.

All the signs at Wallsend metro station - from 'mind the gap' to 'no smoking' have been translated into Latin - the language of the Romans who once lived in the area.

A map of Hadrian's Wall is based on the Tyneside metro

A map of nearby Hadrian's Wall, based on the tube system, has also been produced.

The project, by artist Michael Pinsky, is part of the Newcastle Gateshead bid for European Capital of Culture status in 2008.

While many passengers say they have no plans to start speaking in the ancient tongue, they say the signs are a welcome diversion while waiting for trains.

One woman told the BBC: "As long as they've got the English translations for people I dare say it will be alright."

'Foreign language'

Asked if she expected to pick up conversational Latin as a result of the installation, she was less convinced.

She said: "It might help - it might make me interested, wondering what it is, because if you come up and don't know what it is you're going to think 'well, what foreign language is that'?"

Others were hopeful that the smart new signs may encourage people to take more pride in the city.

One man said: "It brings the place up. It's better than having graffiti all over.

"It gives you something to look at when you're waiting for the late trains as well."

'A few beers'

There were also hopes that the scheme - and the City of Culture bid in general - would help boost the region's fortunes.

One resident said he was happy: "As long as it brings tourists and trade into the town."
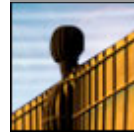
But he we also less optimistic about his chances of mastering Latin.

He said: "It's very poor, my Latin - it's alright when I've sat here and had a few beers."

Last outpost

Mr Pinsky told BBC News Online he wanted to find a link between the ancient site of Segedunum Roman Fort and the modern metro system.

The fort, which stands on the banks of the Tyne, was the last outpost of Hadrian's Wall and remains a Tyneside landmark.

Mr Pinsky said: "I thought it would be interesting to integrate the heritage into a contemporary theme - so that's the idea of having the bilingual signs."

Explaining the idea of basing a map of Hadrian's Wall on the metro system he said: "People taking a casual glance will think that it's a metro map, but when they take another glance they will see it's actually something quite different."