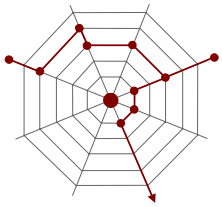


Romulus – Making the Most of Information

Although it is part of many people's daily lives, it is surely right to maintain a sense of wonderment about the power of the Internet and its related search technologies that summon information from around the globe onto our screens in seconds. There is a fable quality both in the magic of the system and in the way that the richness of information becomes a sea in which to drown, often resulting in confusion rather than enlightenment.

Creators of information systems these days need to bear these thoughts in mind if their system is going to be revealing and appreciated by its users. The Romulus system, developed for Transport for London by Minnerva and Nesstar is still new, so it remains to be seen whether it endures in the 'information jungle', but the system contains many attributes that give it every chance.

The purpose of Romulus is to manage, disseminate, and exploit the extensive and diverse sources of transport-related information that Transport for London (TfL) produces to support transport policies, infrastructure planning and so forth. The system is designed to support a largely professional user base that can extend beyond TfL to a wider community in London with interests in transport matters. These include researchers and planners in the London boroughs and the Greater London Authority, as well as specialist consultants and academics.

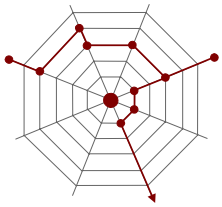
The core information content of Romulus is the information from major surveys that TfL undertakes, including surveys by London Underground and London Buses to establish and monitor people's travel patterns and preferences; but there is also much derived information in the form of reports and analyses, including those from complex transport modelling.

Romulus is built around the Nesstar software product of Nesstar Ltd, which has been combined with MapInfo's MapXtreme web-enabled GIS. These products in combination make for a potent system! The mapping capabilities of MapXtreme are an important means of making the data and its analyses readily understood and appreciated, but Nesstar allows the large survey datasets to be manipulated as well as viewed using a standard web-browser; this manipulation typically involves many dimensions of data, such as those relating to time periods, travel modes and purposes, and so on. These online analyses can then be viewed in the form of thematic maps and pie charts.

Such analyses are straightforward to undertake, but not everyone has the time or inclination to prepare their own analyses, so the system allows for various forms of prepared analyses to be stored that may be accessed directly.

Working with any data poses questions about their provenance and correct interpretation, so a strength of Romulus and the Nesstar system is the manner in which 'metadata' are integrated so that there is always supplementary information to describe the characteristics and qualities of the data being analysed.

A strong feature of the approach is the flexibility offered for publishing new data on Romulus. The actual policy for publishing information is a management decision, but the system supports both centralised and devolved approaches to publishing, and allows the relationship to change over time. Centralisation can assist with maintenance of standards and implementing editorial controls, but a devolved approach allows the generators of the data to see the system as part of their own domain of interest. This can be an important psychological factor that ensures both the relevance and the quality of the information that it provides, as inherent checks are made by the people who most understand the information.



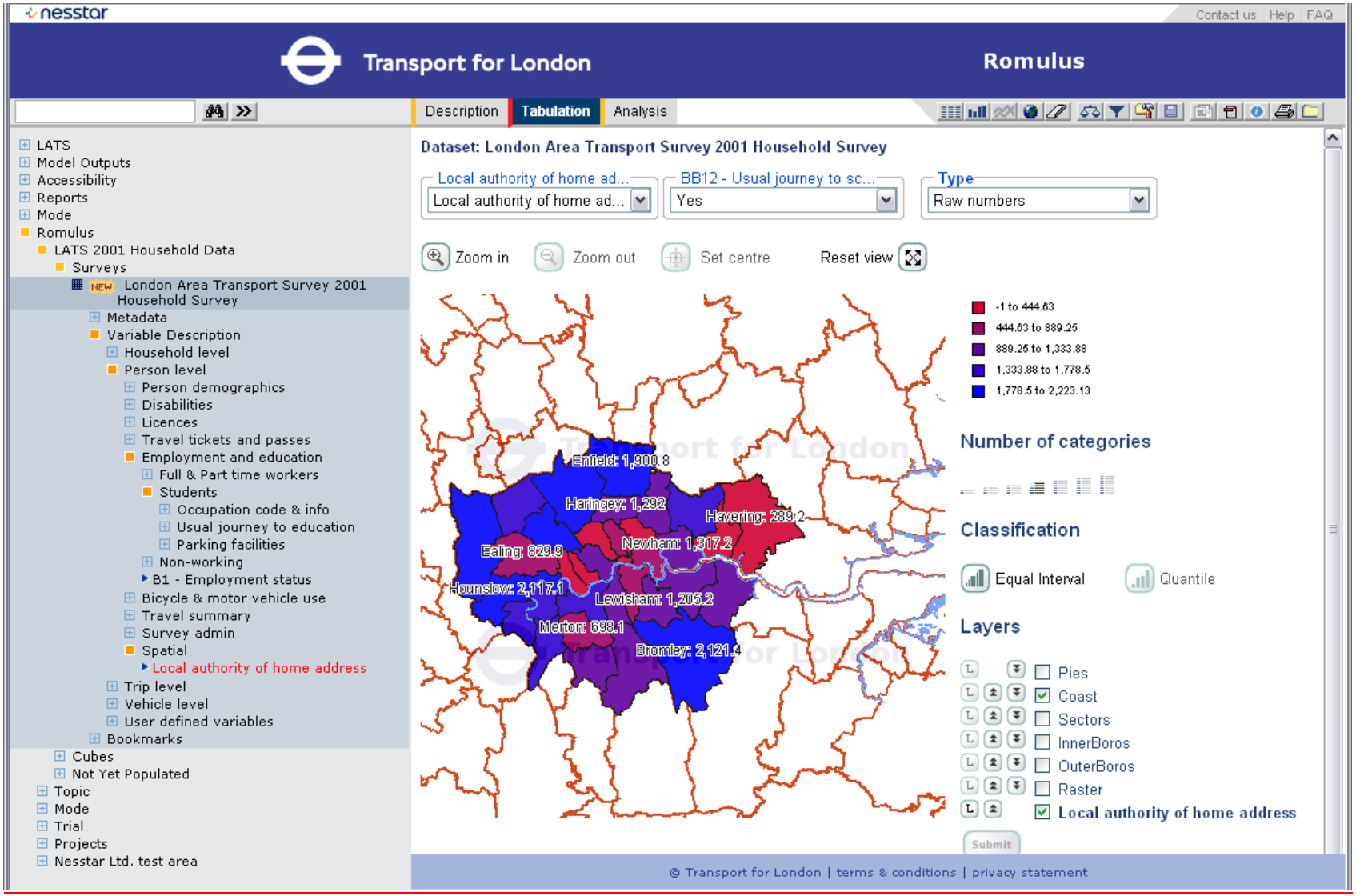
Publishing is undertaken with the Nesstar Publisher software that allows information to be published from local computers over the web in a straightforward manner.

Disseminating information to a wider audience can imply a need for caution, as the interpretation and use of information is open to abuse, whether intentional or not. The provision of a flexible information security policy is an important element in encouraging the publishing of information, as the accessibility can be limited to restricted groups of accredited users, as required. This approach allows Romulus to be used both by teams working on confidential projects and for connecting with a much wider public; this could include the general public, though many of the contents are too technical to be of general interest. Nevertheless, Romulus is an important tool in allowing TfL to meet its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act.

The primary use of Romulus is to disseminate information, and it provides a flexible infrastructure that can be used to support a wide range of applications that require information to be shared. This includes library and archive functions, support for consultation exercises, as well as transport research. It is worth noting that data can be downloaded in convenient forms such as Excel spreadsheets.

The Romulus project has been developed within the Transport Planning and Policy division of Transport for London who are administering the system.

For further information contact Miles Logie, Minnerva (mlogie@minnerva.co.uk) or Transport for London at romulusadmin@tfl.gov.uk.


nesstar
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Transport for London
Romulus
Description
Tabulation
Analysis
LATS
Model Outputs
Accessibility
Reports
Mode
Romulus
LATS 2001 Household Data
Surveys
NEW London Area Transport Survey 2001 Household Survey
Metadata
Variable Description
Household level
Person level
Person demographics
Disabilities
Licences
Travel tickets and passes
Employment and education
Full & Part time workers
Students
Occupation code & info
Usual journey to education
Parking facilities
Non-working
B1 - Employment status
Bicycle & motor vehicle use
Travel summary
Survey admin
Spatial
Local authority of home address
Trip level
Vehicle level
User defined variables
Bookmarks
Cubes
Not Yet Populated
Topic
Mode
Trial
Projects
Nesstar Ltd. test area
Dataset: London Area Transport Survey 2001 Household Survey
Local authority of home ad...
Local authority of home ad...
BB12 - Usual journey to sc...
Yes
Type
Raw numbers
Zoom in
Zoom out
Set centre
Reset view
Enfield: 1,900.8
Haringey: 1,292
Havering: 289.2
Newham: 1,317.2
Ealing: 829.9
Hounslow: 2,117.1
Lewisham: 1,205.2
Merton: 698.1
Bromley: 2,121.4
-1 to 444.63
444.63 to 889.25
889.25 to 1,333.88
1,333.88 to 1,778.5
1,778.5 to 2,223.13
Number of categories
Classification
Equal Interval
Quantile
Layers
Pies
Coast
Sectors
InnerBoros
OuterBoros
Raster
Local authority of home address
Submit
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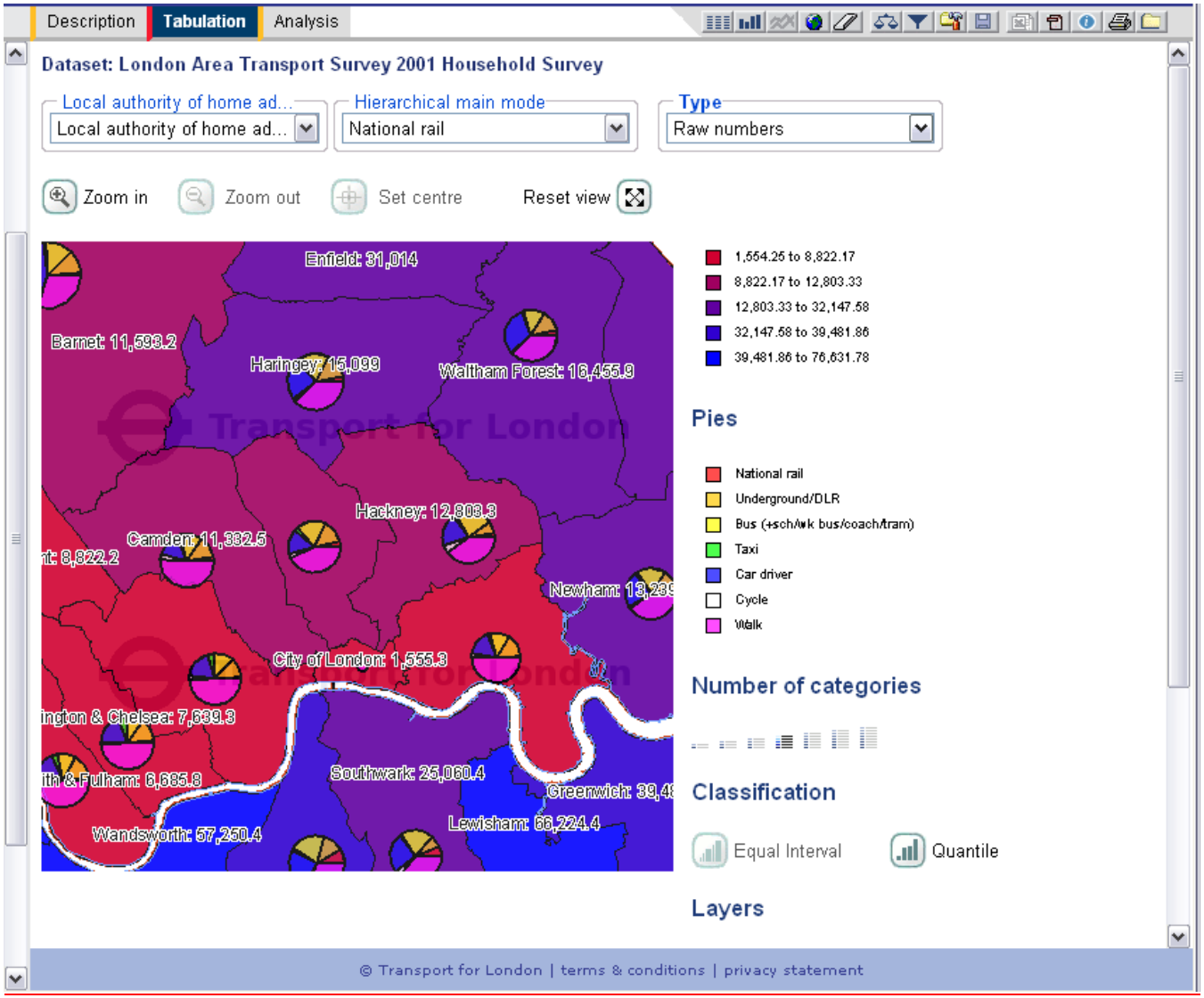
Description
Tabulation
Analysis
Dataset: London Area Transport Survey 2001 Household Survey
Local authority of home ad...
Local authority of home ad...
Hierarchical main mode
National rail
Type
Raw numbers
Zoom in
Zoom out
Set centre
Reset view
Enfield: 31,014
Barnet: 11,693.2
Haringey: 15,099
Waltham Forest: 16,455.9
Hackney: 12,803.3
Camden: 11,382.5
Newham: 13,23
City of London: 1,555.3
Southwark: 25,060.4
Greenwich: 39,4
Lewisham: 66,224.4
Wandsworth: 57,250.4
1,554.25 to 8,822.17
8,822.17 to 12,803.33
12,803.33 to 32,147.58
32,147.58 to 39,481.86
39,481.86 to 76,631.78
Pies
National rail
Underground/DLR
Bus (+sch/wk bus/coach/tram)
Taxi
Car driver
Cycle
Walk
Number of categories
Classification
Equal Interval
Quantile
Layers
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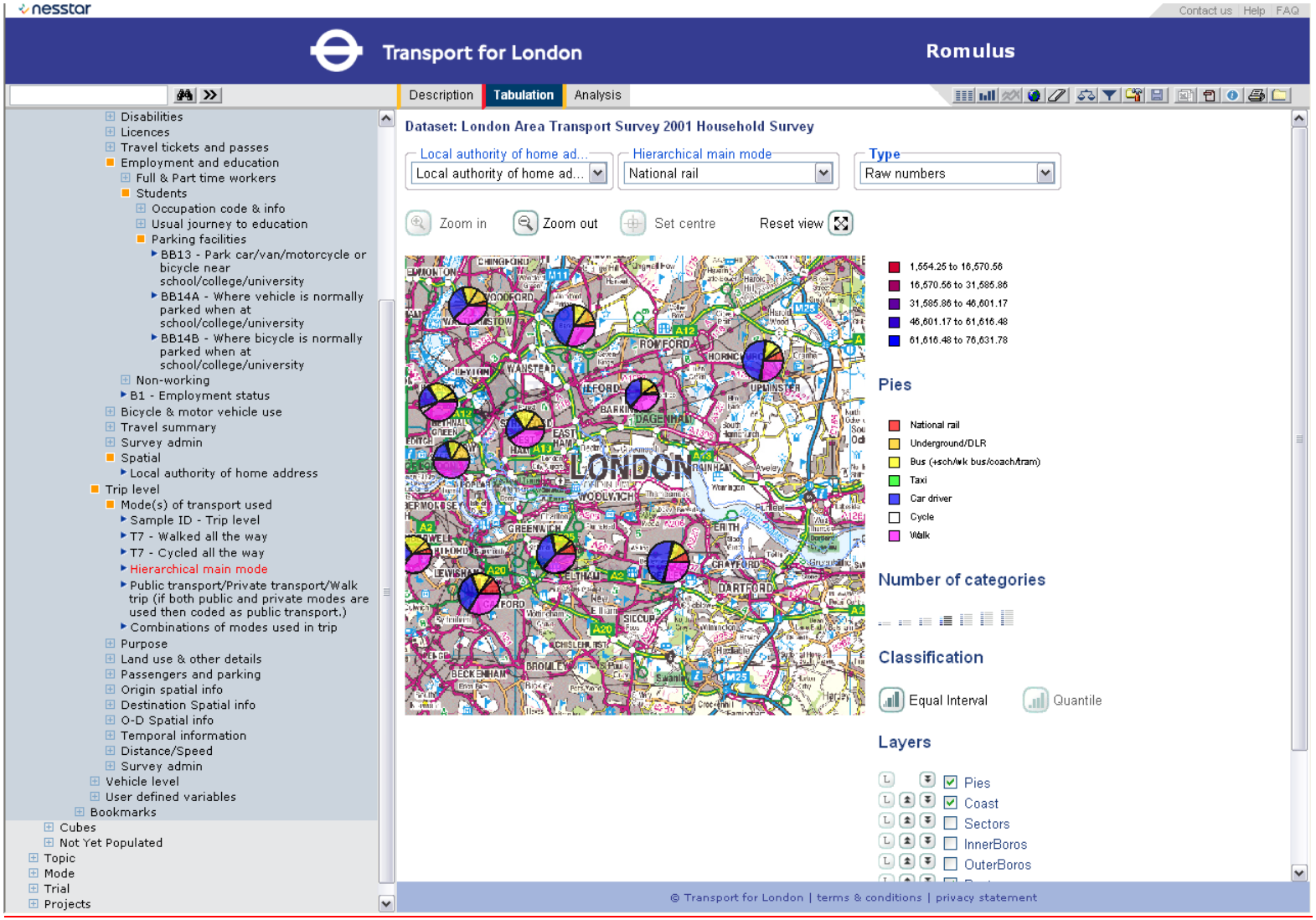
nesstar
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Transport for London
Romulus
Description
Tabulation
Analysis
Disabilities
Licences
Travel tickets and passes
Employment and education
Full & Part time workers
Students
Occupation code & info
Usual journey to education
Parking facilities
BB13 - Park car/van/motorcycle or bicycle near school/college/university
BB14A - Where vehicle is normally parked when at school/college/university
BB14B - Where bicycle is normally parked when at school/college/university
Non-working
B1 - Employment status
Bicycle & motor vehicle use
Travel summary
Survey admin
Spatial
Local authority of home address
Trip level
Mode(s) of transport used
Sample ID - Trip level
T7 - Walked all the way
T7 - Cycled all the way
Hierarchical main mode
Public transport/Private transport/Walk trip (if both public and private modes are used then coded as public transport.)
Combinations of modes used in trip
Purpose
Land use & other details
Passengers and parking
Origin spatial info
Destination Spatial info
O-D Spatial info
Temporal information
Distance/Speed
Survey admin
Vehicle level
User defined variables
Bookmarks
Cubes
Not Yet Populated
Topic
Mode
Trial
Projects
Dataset: London Area Transport Survey 2001 Household Survey
Local authority of home ad...
Local authority of home ad...
Hierarchical main mode
National rail
Type
Raw numbers
Zoom in
Zoom out
Set centre
Reset view
LONDON
1,554.25 to 16,570.56
16,570.56 to 31,585.86
31,585.86 to 46,601.17
46,601.17 to 61,616.48
61,616.48 to 76,631.78
Pies
National rail
Underground/DLR
Bus (+sch/wk bus/coach/tram)
Taxi
Car driver
Cycle
Walk
Number of categories
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