Model Reflections

SFO Airport Departures Level

Physical Model

Your thought process that led you to select this model (i.e., what is your rationale for using this model?).

My thought process was to map out the whole system of how lanes operate and the added merges that are available to and from the outer lanes. There is a clear entrance and exit to each terminal that cars can take so they don't have to take solely the inner lanes to drive through each terminal. I wanted to visualize a map to spot how cars enter the area and can traverse through it to reach a destination in different ways, on top of adding a route that came from my interviewee's experience who missed the turn-in for Terminal 3 and had to go all the way back around.

1-3 insights about what the model revealed to you (i.e., what it allows you to see).

The first insight I gained was visualizing the most direct route somebody could take to reach their destination of Terminal 3. It would start in the outer lanes and stay driving until reaching the entrance point of Terminal 3, then entering it and pulling over to the curb. This is the ideal route that SFO Airport has designed for a driver.

The second insight that was revealed is how many bus stops there actually are on not just the outer lanes, but the inner lanes as well. Not only that, but when buses and shuttles are in place, it creates a view blockage since they are much taller than the signs. There is about one bus size of distance between the bus stop and sign. The driver has to rely on the overhead and building signs to get through places, but neither point you towards the entrance or exit. You just must be on the lookout for it when driving.

The third insight is the signage itself to enter this area is a small blue sign that says to move forward to the right attached to a merge lanes yellow sign. Not only is the sign barely visible when a bus is in front, but it forces the driver to merge with oncoming traffic from Terminal 2, where they have to create an X shape with lanes in order to get to Terminal 3, slowing down the amount of cars that can enter when busy.

Summary thoughts on the value of the model.

I think this is one of the most helpful models possible because it lays out the entire system in front of me so I can visually see how cars could drive through. Mapping out each bus station and spotting how the shuttles and buses on the outer lanes could impact the cars is another topic I'd like to explore now. The other topic is spotting the merging section into Terminal 3 because that is the most direct way to get there, yet it's only one lane that everyone must drive through. Otherwise, they would drive through Terminal 2's inner lane and have to do the same process just in the previous terminal. If I were to do another field study, I would study these two specific areas to watch traffic in the outer lanes and experience how drivers go through the merging section, despite drivers trying to leave the previous terminal simultaneously.

Sequence Model

Your thought process that led you to select this model (i.e., what is your rationale for using this model?).

I chose this model because I wanted a model that would showcase what the average passenger goes through when going through the SFO Airport and it seemed the most fitting. It was a debate between a driver's POV and a passenger's POV, but the physical model felt better suited for the driver to represent while the passenger has to experience walking into the airport as well. This would showcase what the full process would be like going through the departures level. I also wanted it to represent someone who is travelling back home from SF so they don't have muscle memory developed.

1-3 insights about what the model revealed to you (i.e., what it allows you to see).

The first insight I gained from the development of the sequence model was studying the signs just outside the departures level on the Airport Access Rd. It shows both Departures and Arrivals as options following the same path until one splits upwards and one splits down. When the sign for terminals comes up it only lists the airlines for Terminal 1 on the Departures ramp, but interestingly, it shows the airlines for all terminals on the Arrivals ramp. Anyone coming in for the first time would have to research beforehand which terminal has which airlines. This requires an extra step for passengers to know where to find their flights.

The second insight I learned from this model was forcing myself to learn from a passenger's perspective how easily they could miss details. This model was the original model that led me to realize how small the signs were and how they could be missed by a bus. On top of that, I learned that the Terminal 3 building does not have a Terminal 3 sign on it, in contrast to both Terminal 2 and 1 where both have a sign on the building to easily spot it above all the cars.

The third insight I learned was the experience of the passenger after getting out of the car, which is something I hadn't considered up until this point. The passenger in this scenario is searching for the Premier check in at Terminal 3. Certain overhead door signs have "Premier Access" on them while others have just an airline or nothing on it except the numbers. Even the doors do not mention "Premier Access." There is a skybridge and a sign on the outer lane where the shuttles are that mention economy is doors 8-13. The user can deduce it that way.

Summary thoughts on the value of the model.

A sequence model like this is very helpful to encapsulate a new understanding of the situation as a whole, as it forces you to live out just before and after the area. It also guided me to look at the details of the departures level to understand what could be potential breaking points. Discovering triggers and intents for when passengers need information from something, especially in rapid succession to find terminal entrances, is important to know what needs to be a smooth experience first and foremost. As a whole, it also highlights all the hesitation points that could make the area congested in traffic and for a passenger to wander around aimlessly temporarily.

Identity Model

Your thought process that led you to select this model (i.e., what is your rationale for using this model?).

My thought process for this one was trickier because I wanted a model that could highlight the work side of the traffic control system to use real evidence from my interviews. Since I had so many direct quotes, I estimated that it was a clear path to build up how a traffic control POV views the departures area when in such a busy environment. It seemed as if it might open up faults in the system itself as someone who experiences it on a deeper level to control it. It reveals their emotional attitudes and plans for confronting the work environment while giving light to their desires and what they expect.

1-3 insights about what the model revealed to you (i.e., what it allows you to see).

The first insight I gained from the identity model was the clear ability to map out how a perspective of this system and realize how many external factors could impact the feeling that drivers get when entering this system. One of the "I am" statements I gathered was being understanding of rideshare employees who don't get paid a lot of money and cannot afford to leisurely take passengers. Taken from a direct quote, she had mentioned that an Uber had hit one of their mobile units, but she shrugged it off knowing they don't get paid. It's not an excuse for this type of reckless behavior, but that impacts how people are affected, and that effects other drivers on the road.

The second insight I gained was a broader understanding of their apprehensive nature to the near future and knowing that technology advancing means changes in the system that could negatively impact the roles of traffic control workers. She was only nervous when thinking about Waymo cars being able to enter the departures level, which leads to a worse set of problems in the future. Since she mentioned in the interview how the departures level layout changes because barriers and cones are placed at different times for direct traffic, it made me zoom into the structural layout of the area and wonder if there could be a more permanent solution so automatic cars like this wouldn't have to rely on heavy changes to layout and would in turn, cause less damage in the future while clearing up present day confusions for drivers when navigating this area.

The third insight I gained was when I started filling out the "Give Me" sections for solution-finding and I ended up diving deeper into how these attitudes and feelings could be negated or promoted. I recognized several issues were related directly to driver actions and the lack of respect for traffic control workers or the heightened entitlement for denying their authority in traffic. There were tons of overlap in solutions for better signage to guide drivers in a more intuitive way through the system and that could reduce the agitation that some drivers face when the system itself is already perceived as annoying or hard to deal with in busy hours.

Summary thoughts on the value of the model.

Out of all three, I believe this was the most detailed model because all quotes were directly taken from the interviewee and matched with attitude or perspective. Since the interview was more about the system itself and only gathering hints from when they would speak on behalf of their work dealing with people, it felt partially like persona building to fully flesh out what they would plan for in a day and what they liked within their work environment. Since it revolves around traffic, it drops down to how the system is structured, how knowledgeable the drivers are with rules, and the emotional state or personality of the people in the system. Only one of those can be regulated ethically and it's to provide a more intuitive system, which I had immediately thought towards a roundabout that removes the need for traffic lights, which this system was trying to mimick. Knowing there is missing information and odd signage placement throughout the departures level, plus an "X" shaped entrance and exit for terminals, it leaves room for improvement to help make spotting the rules or turns easier on drivers.