Corporate Cartography

How the sausage gets made

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Who am I?

- Maintainer of OpenStreetMap Carto, osm2pgsql and other map rendering software
- Worked on Mapquest, CartoDB, Wikimedia, and many other styles
- OSMF board member
- The opinions here do not represent my past or future employers
- This talk is based on experiences and stories of many people, not just my own

What happens in OpenStreetMap Carto

- Multiple cartographers working independently
- Multiple changes a week
- People work on what they want to
- A strong focus on getting it right everywhere
- Meaningful code & cartography review
- Automatic tests
- Volunteers

Elsewhere?

- A single or few developers, not cartographers
- Work comes in infrequent batches
- Features worked on are centrally managed
- It needs to work in business important areas, and edge cases don't matter
- Inadequate review systems
- No tests
- Paid

What does a typical corporate team look like?

- Three to six developers
- One project manager, responsible for multiple teams
- One manager, responsible for a division
- Software developers, not cartographers
- Work gets assigned from a backlog by the project manager
- Developers don't choose what features to work on
- There's always work, so working on one task means not working on others

Cartography is not a priority

- Most organizations don't have anyone dedicated to cartographers
- Map style improvements are less important than new features that make money
- People working on it are not experts

What about OSM?

Developers aren't OSM experts

- Subtleties of OSM tagging will be missed
- Pages and pages of wiki documentation won't be read
- Complicated relation schemas won't be processed

How can you help?

- Don't invent new tags when a sub-tag will work
- The right way to tag something can't be redefined once it's in widespread use
- If a relation can't be handled like a multipolygon/boundary or route relation, it won't be rendered
- Develop general purpose styles

How can my company do it right?

Understand what you want

- Maps are used for different purposes
- Know why you're using them, what content you expect to go with them, and what experience with maps you want
- Know how close to the OSM data you want to be

Devote ongoing resources to cartography and maps

- Leaving your style untouched for a year has it bit-rot, and your skills
- Keep track of improvements you want, so you know what to do

Bring in experts

- It can be cheaper to bring a cartographer with OSM experience
- Several companies offer OSM cartography help
- Some just provide cartography, some implement it too
- Look at hiring contributors to existing styles as consultants