

Preload SVG Sprites

You can't preload SVG sprites, but you can.

2026-04-11

TL;DR: Insert an invisible image referencing the sprite sheet to load on the top of the page.

The title is borrowed from [You can't preload SVG sprites \(but I want to\)](#).

So I ran into this problem for this specific blog setup: A lot of posts, a lot of SVG pages, the same set of glyphs used across all pages. Keeping a copy of all the glyphs in each page is a waste of bandwidth and hurts loading speed, so I pulled them out into a shared sprite sheet and referenced them like this:

```
<symbol id="a" ><use href="assets/glyphs.svg#g7q"/>
```

That works as intended, but problem comes: glyphs file is loaded only when the **first** page that references it is loaded. On a fresh visit, readers would stare at a blank page for some hundreds of milliseconds or longer, which is not great.

Name	Status	Type	Initiator	Size	Time	ses...
index.html	200	document	Other	4.9 kB	207 ms	
speculation	200	speculation...	Other	0.6 kB	175 ms	
site.cad8fa.css	200	stylesheet	index.html:36	1.8 kB	183 ms	
theme.2060e3.min.js	200	script	index.html:164	1.3 kB	187 ms	
clipboard.569420.min.js	200	script	index.html:166	1.2 kB	192 ms	
v8c78df7c7c0d484497ecb...	200	script	index.html:166	10.9 kB	182 ms	
page3.49a454.svg	200	document	theme.2060e3.min.js:1	7.9 kB	236 ms	
page2.49a454.svg	200	document	theme.2060e3.min.js:1	11.1 kB	220 ms	
page4.49a454.svg	200	document	theme.2060e3.min.js:1	8.8 kB	234 ms	
page1.49a454.svg	200	document	theme.2060e3.min.js:1	9.7 kB	239 ms	
page5.49a454.svg	200	document	theme.2060e3.min.js:1	3.4 kB	208 ms	
raw-copy.0801f4.json	200	fetch	clipboard.569420.min.js	2.0 kB	197 ms	
glyphs.42362b.svg	200	svg+xml	page5.49a454.svg:19	86.2 kB	288 ms	
rum	204	xhr	v8c78df7...:1	0.5 kB	167 ms	

Figure 1: deferred loading of the glyphs file

When you want to preload an asset, you use `<link rel="preload" ...>`, and that's exactly what I did next:

```
<link rel="preload" as="image" href="assets/glyphs.svg"/>
```

...and ended up with the file being downloaded **twice**.

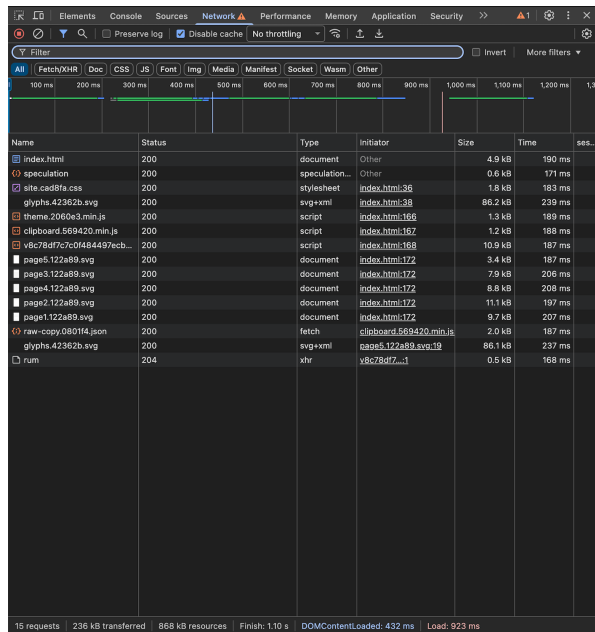


Figure 2: glyphs loaded twice, once by preload and once by the page

I'm not an expert in frontend stuff, so I asked the models, spent a hour tampering with `as="image"`, `as="fetch"` and `crossorigin` attributes, but nothing worked. Then I came across the article linked at the top and learned that this is a well-known limitation.

At that point I figured: If the browser only loads the sprite when it sees a reference to it, why don't I insert a small image to load it before the pages are loaded? So I added this line:

```
<svg aria-hidden="true" width="0" height="0"
style="position:absolute;opacity:0;pointer-events:none"><use href="./assets/
glyphs.svg#g1"></use></svg>
```

I should say it does work. Although the glyphs file is still not fully loaded (it is over 80 KiB!) until the pages has been loaded on the first visit, it still cuts the black screen time by three quarters. On subsequent visits to any page, it become instant.

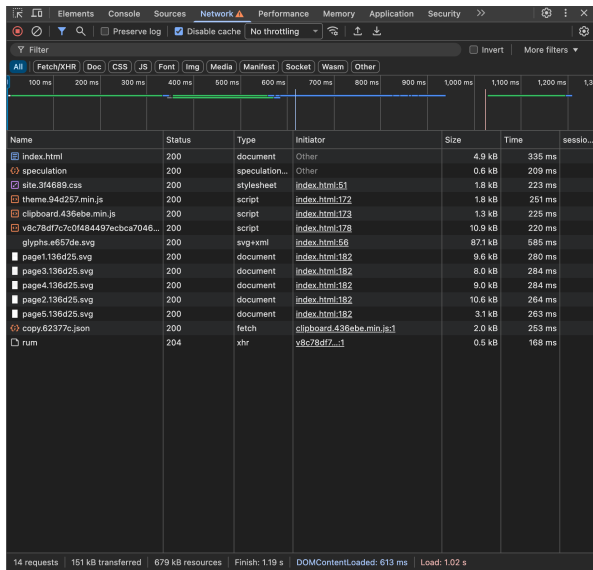


Figure 3: glyphs file is loaded before the pages are loaded

You can visit my blog to see the effect in action: [Blog](#)

And that is the end of the story.

Edited on 2026-06-25