



We must have 24-hour Tube to boost London, says major new report



Late running: report says trains need to run until at least 3am

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Jonathan Pryn, Consumer Business Editor



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London transport bosses today came under intense pressure to launch round-the-clock Tube services in a major new report on the future of the West End.

Trains need to run from central London until at least 3am — and preferably later — on Friday and Saturday nights to help the huge crowds in areas such as Leicester Square and Soho get home.

The recommendation came in the long-awaited report from the West End Commission, set up by Westminster council in the wake of the bitter row over proposed car parking charges.

It concluded: "Underground last trains leave too early (between midnight and 1am) for many evening economy workers as well as many visitors... the potential positive impact of later running services should not be under-estimated."

The east-west Crossrail line, to be completed in 2019, and the modernised north-south Thameslink Overground route must also provide a 24-hour service to make central London properly accessible day and night, the report said.

Sir Howard Bernstein, the chairman of the 12-strong commission, told the Standard it was vital that London matched global competitors such as New York, where the subway runs through the night, and Paris, where Metro services already operate until 2am at the weekend.

He said: "We have to look at how maintenance regimes can be changed over time to ensure this becomes reality. Other cities do it, they seem to get it right. I'm not saying there aren't challenges to be overcome but the ambition needs to be established."

Transport for London has already said that it will run more modern lines such as the Victoria and the Jubilee until 2am from 2015.

Today London's most senior transport boss, Sir Peter Hendy went further and pledged to engage in "really meaningful discussion" about the possibility of even later opening on some services. He said: "We do need a few hours a night for maintenance. But I'm not saying we couldn't do it. I'm saying it's really sensible to look at it in the context of the strategic future of the West End."

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Currently the last train out of Leicester Square on the Piccadilly line departs at 12.35am and the final service from Oxford Circus on the Central line is on its way at 12.33am.

West End business leaders welcomed the proposal and said the end of the 12.30am shutdown would bring huge gains for the later night economy.

Simon Thomas, owner of the Hippodrome Casino in Leicester Square and a member of the West End Commission said: "It would be great if Transport for London got themselves organised so they can run through the night on Friday and Saturday — the maintenance could be condensed on the other nights. We need transport infrastructure that does what the city needs not just what is practical for Transport for London."

He said the casino had up to 2,000 customers and 150 staff on the premises between midnight and 6am "who need to get home safely".

There was also strong support for the proposal from Philippa Roe, leader of Westminster council, who said: "At the weekend it is now difficult to walk down the streets of the West End at 2am because they are so packed. Anything that makes it easier for people to disperse and get home we are 100 per cent behind."

The 72-page report was launched by Sir Howard at the Prince of Wales theatre in the heart of the West End. Other proposals include setting up a "politburo" of senior West End figures to help shape policies on key issues such as transport; a unified marketing strategy for Britain's most visited district and a big increase in "traffic free" days for Oxford Street and Regent Street to boost retailers.

But Sir Howard made it clear that the commission did not favour a return to evening and weekend parking charges in the West End, the issue that triggered the row that led to the resignation of Ms Roe's predecessor Colin Barrow.

Your say: 'Not doing this would be silly'

Maria Ferrari, 24, administrative assistant from Eltham: "I use the Tube a lot, especially when I come into town in the evenings. Getting home is always a problem. I have to take two buses and often I don't feel safe... If the late-night Tubes were policed properly, then I think it is a brilliant idea."

Bevan Adams, 26, website owner from South Woodford: "Yes! It would be wonderful to have the Tube running through the night. I have found myself stranded literally thousands of times. I would definitely be willing to pay more for the journey at night."

Jessica Agbasi, 22, advertising consultant from Streatham: "A Tube service through the night would make everything so much easier. It just makes sense to just keep the service running. It's a brilliant idea — I think not doing this would be silly."

Alexander McCutcheon, 25, brand specialist from Covent Garden: I tend to take buses in the day, because it is more scenic. I don't like the Tube, so this doesn't really change my life. I suppose for people living further out in London this would make a big difference."

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