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**London finally gets its night tube – but is there a dark side to 24/7 transport?**

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# THE CONVERSATION

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## London finally gets its night tube – but is there a dark side to 24/7 transport?

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After months of delays and industrial action, London's long-awaited "night tube" is finally a reality. This will be music to the ears of punters who want to party on beyond one o'clock in the morning, and night-time workers who want to get home quicker after their shifts.

Successive London mayors have been trying to deliver a 24-hour tube service for a couple of reasons. For one thing, it will make the city even more attractive to international investors and visitors. Non-stop mass public transport will place London in an exclusive group of cities with 24/7 metro services, including New York, Chicago, Melbourne and Copenhagen, and help it continue to compete in a post-Brexit environment.

The second reason is that a 24-hour service would allow the city's night-time economy to prosper. A recent study estimated that the night tube would give London a £360m boost over the next 30 years. In particular, clubs, bars, theatres and restaurants stand to make solid financial gains.

### The bright side

Those who already have to move around at night will experience immediate benefits. The tube is faster than taking the bus, walking and cycling, and much cheaper than taxis and Ubers.

Keeping the London Underground running around the clock is expected to cut anywhere between 20 minutes and an hour off night-time commutes, as well as providing a cheap form of transport for

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people on low incomes who travel in the early hours of the morning.

It also means that more drivers will be able to leave their cars at home: less emissions, less pollution, less noise and fewer traffic accidents are to be expected.

Transport for London expects that nearly 180,000 trips will be made on the night tube between 00:30 and 06:00. This is good news for night-time businesses: they will have more clients and earn more money.

It is also going to benefit all sorts of companies that run night shifts. They will have a larger pool of potential employees to choose from, as the night tube enables more people to travel quickly to and from work during unsociable hours. This will smooth the way to help global businesses implement flexible working hours, which will help them to operate more effectively on a 24/7 basis.

### **Not so bright**

Unfortunately not everything is bright in the cities that never rest. If the night time economy grows, it follows that there will be more people working and commuting at night. This might be good for business, but there is evidence to suggest that working night shifts can have significant negative impacts on the health and well-being of employees and their families.

What's more, the quality of life of people living nearby tube stations, clubs and bars is likely to fall – as is already being seen in some central areas of London, such as Soho. Many Londoners won't enjoy being exposed to London's hectic streets during the day, only to come home to the noise of a bustling night life in their neighbourhood. And there are several other documented drawbacks to the night-time economy; from damages inflicted on town centres, to growing power centred in the hands of large chain pub companies.



A bit grim. Stròlic Furlàn - Davide Gabino/flickr, CC BY-ND

Property prices in areas served by the night tube are likely to change. Some will see their values decreasing because of exposure to noise and other nuisances. But the majority of houses will see their values increase even more. The long-term consequences of this are increased gentrification and more debt.

Roughly 90,000 of the 180,000 night tube journeys are expected to come from people switching over from other night-time transport services – including the night bus, taxis, car sharing schemes, private hire vehicles and night parking services – so these will inevitably lose some clients. But these alternative services are also likely to benefit from the anticipated boost to the night economy.

In the long term, a 24/7 tube service might prompt more people to move out to the edges of the Greater London area. As people realise that travelling to London is becoming easier and can be done at any time of the day, the appeal of cheaper accommodation outside the inner city rings will increase.

## Striking a balance

Whether or not the night tube is a good thing depends on what you value. Investing in the night economy and facilitating it by means of better transport services means greater revenues, a more competitive city and more night-time fun for those who want it, and can afford it. But it also means that many could see their quality of life diminishing.

There are a few general principles, which could help London to make the most out of its night tube. The first is to co-ordinate the time and fares of different transport modes, including regional train, bus, cycle schemes, taxis and even airport services. This will improve the overall efficiency of all transport systems, taking the strain off service providers and making logistics easier for travellers.

Next, decisions about transport and urban land use must balance the need for movement with the importance of sustainability and high-quality of urban spaces. This will ensure that the city stays functional and liveable for decades to come.

It's also important to keep thinking about transport on a human level. This goes beyond measuring the impact of changes to the system in terms of time savings and efficiency. It also requires city planners to think about what possibilities different transport systems offer, to meet different passengers' needs. It also means considering how various types of transport can affect local communities.

So, is the night tube a good thing? It's up to you, really.



Transport

Cities

Economy

Nightlife

Clubbing