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London Underground

The London Underground system is the oldest and one of the largest in the world and is the main mode of transport in London. The first line, Metropolitan, opened on January 10, 1863 and ran between Farringdon and Paddington. Straight away, it was immensely popular and other lines soon followed (Wikipedia). The planning of the Underground was a very difficult task which in the 1909 was left to Frank Pick. He was in charge of planning new routes, improving old one and also publicity and design. The logo which is used and widespread today was his creation. Advertising is key to a successful transportation system and the symbol still attracts many to the Underground. “It was the impact of Pick's vision that led to London transport being synonymous with good design and even with London itself” (Transportation Museum).

In the 1920s, central London became too congested, so houses were built in the suburbs and of course along with this came the expansion of the Underground. The homes in the area were even advertised as “Metro-Land” (Transportation Museum). People who moved to the country could easily commute to the city with the Underground, and Pick was able to advertise it so well that people would not only use the transportation system to commute but also use it in their leisure time as well to go amuse themselves in the city. This marketing scheme worked very well and the underground bustled with people (Design Museum).

Of course as time progressed and the demand grew the Underground system expanded and new stations and lines were added and some were also removed. Currently, there are 275 stations and 12 lines with over 253 miles of tubing. Around three million people each day ride the Tube (Wikipedia). The popularity to ride the Underground to the city is a combination of circumstances. Traffic in London is unbearable, sometimes moving just 3 miles an hour, gas prices are high, parking prices are high, and it costs 8 pounds to drive through zone 1 during working hours, with an 80 pound penalty if one does not pay. The congestion charge system, started in 2003, is patrolled by 800 cameras throughout the city (Carlile).

The money made from the congestion charges is used to improve the public transportation system, and the city is always trying to make the tube to better serve London, such as the current construction of the Piccadilly line to Heathrow terminal 5. Since it is such a huge system there are always lines and stations which are not working for various reasons. When this happens, the transportation finds a substitute way to transport passengers either by bus or train (TFL).

The Underground is a fast and, comparatively, inexpensive way to travel to the center of London. People who live in Buckinghamshire, a suburb 30 miles from the heart of London, can park their car at their nearest station and comfortably commute each day on the tube. The vast majority of London workers (90%) get to work each day on the Underground. It is also convenient for travel out of London. To get to the major train stations and airports the tube can be used. It goes straight to Heathrow and is much cheaper than the Heathrow express or if one was to take the car. Trains are available from King's Cross, Victoria, and Liverpool stations with connections to the other four

airports. The tube also has an excellent track record of being safe looking at injuries caused by equipment such as escalators (TFL).

Of course there are down sides to the system as well. Constant interruptions make for frequent delays and people can often be stuck somewhere usually for a short time 10-20 minutes but lines can be down for a whole day. Since the Underground was built so long ago, before air conditioning, there is still no way to install it so in the summertime it is very hot and uncomfortable. To add to the discomfort is the extremely high number of people riding the Tube. Therefore, there are frequently long lines and lots of heavy pedestrian traffic. The stations are also rarely handicap accessible, only the newest line, Jubilee, is totally accessible. The transportation authority wants people to be comfortable and is always open to suggestion (TFL).

Another downfall of the system is that trains do not run 24 hours a day but take a four hour break during the night. This is because the Underground needs to have safety inspections and engineering work done during the night. It cannot keep running because it works on a two track system, unlike newer cities which have four tracks. Therefore, it would be impossible to get any work done without shutting the whole system down. The Tube generally opens at 5:15-6:00AM and the last trains leave the suburbs at midnight. The frequency of the trains to leave the station varies from a minute or so in center London to 20-40 minutes in the outskirts. The wait period for trains also depends on the time of day (TFL).

The Underground system in London helps the city to be green because without it, the city could not exist. It would not be physically possible for all the people who work there to commute with their cars, because London is already very congested as it is.

Therefore, the tube in a way keeps the city running. Stations are conveniently located at all of the major destination spots, and in center London the distances between stations are walkable, making the city very accessible. The Underground enhances mobility because people can travel across the city and into the country faster than with any other form of transportation. It increases economic opportunity for the people and the city because it allows people to commute conveniently and quickly and allows the businesses in the city to have workers. Also, The Underground boosts community livability because it improves the environment by lessening road traffic along with noise, and lifts the social quality because people can meet and interact with each other in the Tube.

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