

BIGGEST WI-FI ZONE IN UK

Britain's biggest wi-fi zone has gone live in the West End. The public can now benefit from blanket internet coverage over much of London's West End and by this time next year the zone is set to be the biggest in Europe. The wifi zone covers all of Soho and the streets around Oxford Street, Leicester Square, Strand and parts of Whitehall.

People can now use a wifi-enabled laptop, mobile phone or PDA to go online without registering, through a paid-for BT service anywhere in the zone excluding parks and indoors. Users can also log on to Westminster council's website for free to access a host of service information. Cinema, theatre and event listings as well as maps and other visitor information will be available from early 2008 at www.westminster.gov.uk

The network is running through a network of discrete transmitters mounted on street lamps. Westminster council Deputy Leader, Councillor Colin Barrow, said: "This is a groundbreaking project. Westminster is proud to lead the pack in rolling out this technology in an innovative way. We are excited about the improvements this will bring for Westminster and the opportunities it will create for businesses and personal use.

"Much of the network has already been up and running, but now we are making it available to the public. People can now walk through the streets getting continuous internet coverage, rather than being anchored to a coffee shop or other wifi spot."

Westminster is the largest project of its kind in the UK. BT is working on smaller-scale projects in Newcastle, Liverpool, and Birmingham and other major cities in the UK. BT's Director of Wireless Broadband Dave Hughes said: "Westminster's growth as a 'Wireless City' really is trailblazing. This partnership, set in one of the busiest and iconic parts of the capital, is literally transforming life for those who visit, live and work here. Our innovative showcase event will provide the perfect opportunity for people to see and experience what the technology can do for them."

CAUGHT SHORT IN WESTMINSTER? USE SATLAV!

In a new scheme launched by Westminster City Council you can now find the nearest loo by texting TOILET to 80097 to locate your nearest public toilet. No guarantees that there will be anywhere nearby to park, an important factor for taxi drivers, but the scheme is set to alleviate some of the problems the public at large have when they need a loo. Alan Bradley, the council member for street environment, said: "We've all been caught short out and about. But in Westminster you don't have to be any more. Every year 10,000 gallons of urine is at risk of ending up in the city's streets and alleyways through irresponsible and anti-social behaviour. We've launched this innovative new service so that you can locate your nearest public convenience in Westminster 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

The scheme works on the same principle as satnav systems and is known as SatLav, covering 8.5 square miles of central London. Although this is probably the first such text based system in the UK, many cities in the USA offer a similar service. When users text the service it will cost 25p and they will get a reply outlining the nearest facilities and their opening times. These will include 40 council-run and leased toilets, most of which are free, plus others run by the Greater London Authority, Underground and department stores.



CAB GUIDES CONGRATULATED

Graham Woodhouse, Course co-ordinator for the Cab Guide Course run by The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers, has congratulated those who have just passed the latest course. Graham says: "27 successful students from the latest Cab Guide Course successfully completed this 8 week course, and showed in both the written & practical guiding exams, that they had what it takes to show this great city of ours off. Congratulations to Steve Francis; John O'Sullivan; John Lynch; Nick Mortimore; Paul Wright; Jason Fleming; Graham Greenglass; Harry Harris; Rob Sheridan; Christopher Havis; Daniel Mace; Carlos Da Costa; Mark V Dell; Adrian Rouse; John Fells; Gordon Klimcke; Kevin M Bird; Frank Chapman; Jacqueline Hill; Anton Haynes; Robert Johnston; Steve Luton; Michael Milcoy, John F Sheen, Jim Aherne; Victor Gale & Trevor Scales. I wish them luck, and say thank you to them all for making those 8 weeks so enjoyable."

This latest course was different from previous courses as students got out of the classroom and went on 4 weekend walks. Graham Woodhouse continued saying: "This is to get drivers actually looking up at the things their learning about, and to get a better feeling about what they are talking about. I feel this has definitely enhanced the course, and the feed-back from the students certainly reflected that".

The next course is planned to start on the 25th February 2008, so if your interested please contact Graham on 07968-791117 or e-mail him at info@cabguide.com ; but be quick as due to the interest in this course there will be a cut-off date for applications.

OLD TAXIS TAKEN OFF THE ROAD IN IRELAND

Over in Ireland, the Taxi Regulator has announced that taxis which are more than nine years old are to be outlawed. The proposals are due to come into effect for existing taxis and hackney vehicles from the beginning of 2012. All drivers looking for taxi or hackney licences from the start of 2009 will have to adhere to the new rule.

The new vehicle standards will also require cars to have a luggage capacity of at least 420 litres and small cars will be no longer permitted as taxis or hackneys by the Regulator. The Regulator announced a new category of wheelchair accessible hackney cars and said goods vehicles converted to wheelchair accessible vehicles will no longer be permitted. Limousines will require an engineer's report prior to licensing and further consultation with the industry regarding categories of limousines and age limit is needed, Commissioner for Taxi Regulation Kathleen Doyle said. "The primary aim of the new standards is to improve the quality of service, comfort and safety for all passengers and drivers. Generally speaking, the existing SPSV fleet is of a high standard, however, it is essential that we ensure that everyone in the industry meets the same standards so that consumers can be confident of a consistent service nationwide.

"Currently, we have 25,019 vehicles on the road operating as SPSVs and there is a huge diversity in this fleet, with over 250 different models. Whilst we are not looking to put any particular vehicle off the road or direct drivers towards one particular vehicle, there are certain minimum conditions that must be met in terms of age, size, accessibility and other criteria. It is well known that more modern vehicles are safer and more environmentally friendly and that has played a role in the establishment of the new standards."

Of the 25,019 vehicles on the road operating as small public service vehicles (SPSVs) 17,485 are taxis, 1,464 wheelchair-accessible taxis, 4,759 hackneys and 1,311 Limousines.