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NEW MINICAB "RANK" SERVICE

The first marshalled mini-cab service has begun in the West End. Launched with the aim of preventing people taking illegal mini-cabs. The new scheme has been set up by Heart of London Business Alliance with West1 Minicabs, in partnership with Westminster Council and the Metropolitan police. It allows revellers to book minicabs through the London Information Centre ticket booth in Leicester Square from where their West1 MiniCabs marshal will take them to an allocated vehicle, on the Original Tours bus stand in Whitcomb Street at the junction with Coventry Street. Sarah Porter, chief executive of the Heart of London Business Alliance, which represents businesses in and around Leicester Square, said: "We are trying to do everything we can to make travelling home from a night out in London's West End as easy and safe as possible." Martin Low, director of transportation at Westminster, said: "This is about safer travel at night. The scheme allows people to book their minicab in Leicester Square knowing they will be escorted by trained, uniformed staff to a safe, licensed minicab, which will be able to stop in Whitcomb Street between 9pm and 4am when the bus stop and stand are not operating. The minicabs are using this location as a collection point for pre-ordered trips. They will not be allowed to ply for hire as taxis."

"Sadly we do have problems with unlicensed minicabs".

SATELLITE OFFICE USED FOR BOOKINGS

The council's City Guardians and officers from BTP will be handing out Oyster card holders and goody bags promoting the campaign. The service is running from 10pm to 4am every night of the week. Passengers book and pay for their journey at the satellite booking office at the London Information Centre in Leicester Square and are then escorted by a West1 marshal to a pick-up point in Whitcomb Street. This office has been licensed by the PCO as a private hire operating centre.

DOUBLE BED VISUAL REMINDER

A comfy, cosy double bed has been put in Leicester Square as a visual reminder to revellers as to "where they should end up at the end of the night out" says a Westminster press release. Undoubtedly there will be a number of jokes about the double entendre of this! The "Some things you only do when you're drunk" campaign to encourage people to think in advance about how they will get home and includes promoting several free phone and text numbers for licensed cabs and train, tube and bus timetables. Councillor Daniel Astaire, cabinet member for community protection, said: "We want people to enjoy themselves over the Christmas period but we also want them to be safe. Too many people head out for parties with no consideration about how they will get home at the end of the night. Coupled with the effects of too much alcohol this can put people in difficult and sometimes dangerous situations and yet a few simple precautions will mean Christmas partygoers can have fun and stay safe."

British Transport Police Inspector Kate Shaw said: "After a few drinks at the office party people are not as alert as they otherwise would be and this can put them in a vulnerable position. A good night out has a good ending and by checking your last train times and saving travel numbers in your phone you can make sure it all goes according to plan."

SEX RELATED OFFENCES ARE DOWN

Westminster Council say: "Reports of cab-related sexual offences are down 44 per cent since 2002 and the proportion of women using illegal cabs to get home late at night has fallen from 19 per cent in 2003 to three per cent in 2008, a total of 104 cab-related sexual attacks were still reported in 2007." It is not clear what number of cab related offences are minicab related, illegal or otherwise. *(It is not clear what number of cab related offences is minicab related, illegal or otherwise. Once again the public needs to be aware of the difference between a minicab and a taxi. The words "cab-related" are misleading).*

TOUTING

The PCO has issued new PCO Notices, reminding both private hire operators and ph drivers that private hire journeys must always be booked with a licensed PHV operator at a licensed operating centre. If an operator does not follow these guidelines, they may be committing an offence. In addition, the driver of a private hire vehicle may be committing the offence of plying for hire or touting. PHV operators, or their representatives, must not approach anyone in the street or any other public place to offer private hire services.



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