

PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN LONDON

As has been mentioned in publicity for the WG5 meeting, public transport in London is ludicrously expensive. A single journey on the underground in the central area costs £4 (ca \$8) while a bus journey costs £2. It is possible to buy a one-day travel card which permits unlimited travel on buses and underground in the central area for £6.60, or for £5.10 for travel after 09:30.

However participants at the WG5 meeting might find it advantageous to buy an 'Oyster Card'. This is a prepayment card which gives substantial discounts for travel and avoids the hassle of buying tickets for each journey. The card itself costs £3, which is refundable, and this cost is likely to be recouped in a single day.

Apart from possible journeys to or from Heathrow Airport, or to tourist attractions such as Kew Gardens, most travel is like to be within London transport zones 1 and 2 (see zone map at http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/lon_con.pdf). The comparative fares are:

	cash	Oyster
single tube journey in zone 1	4.00	1.50
single tube journey in zones 1-2	4.00	2.00 (between 07:00 and 19:00)
	4.00	1.50 (other times)
one-day travel card for zones 1-2	6.60	6.10 (allowing travel between 04:30 and 09:30)
	5.10	4.60 (other times)
single bus journey	2.00	1.00 (Oyster fares capped at 3.00 per day)
tube Heathrow to central London	4.00	3.50 (between 07:00 and 19:00)
		2.00 (other times)

The same Oyster card is good for single or multiple journeys. The system records all journeys and caps daily spending at the amounts shown above.

You can buy an Oyster card at a tube station ticket office or online. To buy online, go to <http://www.visitbritaindirect.com/> and follow the links to Oyster. You will need a 'Pay as you go' card and will be invited to nominate a sum to put on the card, payable by credit or debit card. The amount chosen will depend on how long you plan to stay in London before or after the meeting. The card will be sent to you by mail, so leave sufficient time for this; the card will be 'registered' (see below).

If you buy at a ticket office, there is the choice of 'registering' the card which involves filling a form, or having a simple, anonymous card. The former allows you to check your journey history on the web, to top-up your credit online and to pursue any lost or stolen card; in the latter case, any top-up must be done at a ticket office. In either event, when you leave London you can trade in the card at a ticket office and receive a refund of the £3 deposit and of any unused funds on the card. Alternatively, the card may be reused on a subsequent visit without any time limit.

Points to watch when using an Oyster Card:

- On the underground, it is essential to touch the card on the reader at the entrance and exit on each journey; the system works by debiting your account by £4 at each entrance and crediting the account by £4 less the cost of the journey on exit. If the system detects only an entrance or only an exit, you will be charged £4. On buses, touch the card once only, on entrance.
- When touching the card on a reader, the message 'Seek assistance' will sometimes flash up in red. Provided that the gates have opened, this can safely be ignored.
- When the online top-up facility is used, it is necessary to specify the underground station at which the credit will be taken up; if that station is not used within eight days of the top-up web transaction, the transaction is cancelled and no cost is incurred.