

# The world's first underground railway celebrates 160 years of serving the capital

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Happy birthday to the Tube, the world's first and most famous underground railway.

Tuesday (January 10) marks 160 years since the first Tube journey took place between Paddington and Farringdon stations, on what was then the Metropolitan Railway. To mark this milestone birthday, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan met with four London Underground staff members who have given a total of 160 years of service in a range of roles. Transport for London (TfL) has also announced that a series of activities will be held throughout 2023 to mark the anniversary.

The celebration took place at Baker Street station, one of the original stations that opened on 10 January 1863, and also saw the Mayor unveil a special 160th year roundel, Love the Tube, that customers will be able to spot at stations across the network including at Gloucester Road, Brixton, Oxford Circus and Covent Garden.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "I'm delighted to kick-start a year of celebrations as the world's first underground railway - the Tube - marks its 160th birthday, unveiling a roundel at one of our oldest Tube stations, which celebrates London's affection for our world-famous underground."

“The Tube is a true London icon, connecting people across the capital and transporting tourists and commuters across the city. On 10 January 1863, the world’s first underground railway opened and from that day forward the London Underground has been at the heart of the capital’s history, continuing to grow and evolve alongside the city it transports. I’m so proud of the history of our Tube and I’m determined that the London Underground will continue to deliver a world-leading service fit for the 21st century, and contribute to a better, safer and fairer city for all Londoners.”

The Tube has always played an important role in the success of London. The growth of the early network led to the expansion of the suburbs in the last century, while the extension of the Jubilee line led to the development of Canary Wharf’s financial powerhouse in the 1980s. The Northern Line Extension’s opening in 2021 has enabled the growth of the Nine Elms and Battersea areas, and today’s system, which is once again moving millions of people around every day, helps London continue to recover from the pandemic.

Tube ridership has steadily increased since the pandemic and is now at around 80 per cent, across a weekly average, compared to pre-pandemic levels – with weekend ridership increasingly edging towards levels seen before the pandemic.

Andy Lord, London’s Transport Commissioner, said: “A milestone birthday gives us the perfect opportunity to reflect on the historical significance of the Tube and how it has expanded and improved to meet the needs of an ever-changing world city. During this time the Tube has breathed new life into unconnected parts of London and been the catalyst to many local economies. It also gives us the opportunity to look forward to the next raft of improvements and to continue planning to ensure that the Tube serves our city ably and efficiently for the next 160 years.”

A programme of activities throughout 2023 will celebrate London Underground’s role as the lifeblood of the city, connecting Londoners with work and leisure opportunities for the past 160 years. Activities will be themed around the Tube’s innovation, its contribution to improving the environment, how the Tube connects people and places, how it supports diversity and inclusion, and its unique and world-renowned architecture and design. First up will be a self-guided treasure hunt across all of the original Metropolitan Railway stations on 21 January, including Farringdon, Baker Street and Paddington, encouraging participants to see these historic stations in a new light. Further details can be found here: [tfl.gov.uk/Tube160](https://tfl.gov.uk/Tube160)

The London Transport Museum will be supporting the celebration of the Tube with activities throughout the year, highlighting the heritage and innovation of the world’s most iconic underground railway. This will be alongside the museum’s permanent exhibitions, which encourage visitors to explore the Tube’s origins as the world’s first subterranean railway.

Sam Mullins OBE, Director of the London Transport Museum, said: “The opening of the Underground in 1863 and its evolution over the past 160 years has continually shaped London. Deploying cutting edge engineering, design and service innovation, the Underground has kept the city on the move and given it the strong character we know today. The network has both responded to and promoted the growth of the city, spurred regeneration, connected communities and made it accessible to residents and visitors alike. We look forward to welcoming visitors to the Museum in Covent Garden to share this fascinating lens for

London's history."

Sharon Ament, Director, Museum of London, said: "All of us at the Museum of London wish the London Underground a very happy birthday! The Tube has had a transformative impact on our city for more than a century and a half. It's a fundamental part of London's DNA and of course it keeps evolving; it reaches further, new lines are added, it modernises and as part of our day-to-day lives it keeps us connected. Above all it allows us to explore and enjoy everything London has to offer."

Richard Burge, Chief Executive of London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), said: "Over a remarkable 160 years, the London Underground has become synonymous with London and is a crucial part of our capital city's infrastructure. The Tube provides businesses with essential transport connectivity on a daily basis and where the tube goes, investment, innovation and productivity follow. The Tube has played a major role in establishing London's reputation as the best city in the world to start and run a business. Through continued investment and development, it will no doubt continue to boost London's economy and connect Londoners for the next 160 years and beyond."

A range of further improvements to the London Underground network are on their way including new trains to replace the ageing Piccadilly line fleet and new signalling on the District, Hammersmith & City and Metropolitan lines as part of the Four Lines Modernisation programme (and following the completion of new signalling on the Circle line last year). The project to modernise and expand Bank station is also nearing completion, transforming customer journeys at the heart of the city. Further significant improvements will also be delivered on the Elizabeth line – the evolution of the Tube network – with an increase in frequency and through-running to more destinations introduced later this year.

*Photo credit: Transport for London*