

Commuter numbers hit new high in boost to capital's recovery

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CENTRAL London is at last showing strong signs of recovery with the number of people visiting the West End and travelling on the Tube hitting pandemic highs, latest figures reveal today.

Footfall in the capital's shopping and entertainment district surged to 61 per cent of levels seen two years ago in the last week of August — compared with just 49 per cent at the start of the month — according to data from business group New West End Company.

Meanwhile TfL said more than two million journeys were made on the Tube yesterday as the return to school sparked the highest passenger numbers since March last year. The total of 2,034,000 was the first time the two million figure had been broken in 18 months. It included 325,500 journeys in the 8am to 9am rush hour, up 19 per cent on the previous week.

However, business leaders called on Boris Johnson to do far more to speed up the revival of London, which accounts for a fifth of the UK's entire GDP and has been scarred more than any other region by the pandemic.

Separate figures from the British Retail Consortium showed that, despite



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Commute is back: Paddington today

the August upturn, the capital's high streets and shopping centres were still quieter than those in any other major city or region in the UK. Footfall across the capital last month was down 29.5 per cent on August 2019. That compares with just 17.9 per cent for England as a whole and only 10.8 per cent for the best-performing region, the North-West.

The figures confirm fears that London — so heavily dependent on its daily influx of hundreds of thousands of commuters — has been hit harder than anywhere else by the “work from home” revolution.

Attention is now turning to Monday, the start of the first full working week after the end of the summer holidays

with no major Covid-era restrictions left in place. Latest figures seen by the Standard suggest that office occupancy was still only around 12 per cent last month. Many major London employers, including Government departments, will launch formal “hybrid working” schemes in the coming months requiring staff to come into their offices only two or three days a week at most.

Jace Tyrrell, chief executive of the NWECC, which represents 600 businesses in Oxford Street, Regent Street, Bond Street and in Mayfair, urged employers to work harder to attract their workers back to central London.

He said: “More must be done to encourage workers to return in some capacity. Whether it leads to a quick trip to the shops or a long-overdue lunch with colleagues, every returning office worker will play a vital role in the high street and economy's recovery.”

Ruth Duston, managing director of Primera Corporation, which runs a number of central London Business Improvement Districts, said MPs need to set the lead for the private sector.

She said: “It's clear that we need more direction from Government on flexible working.”

Mayor Sadiq Khan said the rising Tube passenger numbers were “really good”.

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