



Christmas Cheer Hits the High Street

1.6 million shoppers to hit Oxford Street & Regent Street for a whopping West End traffic-free Christmas shopping bonanza - forecast of £280m Sales

- **Biggest trading weekend of year**
- **Technology, kids and luxury are top sellers – cold weather driving fashion sales**
- **£180 average spend as shoppers shrug off economic woes for the weekend**
- **Stores offering discounts of up to 50%**

Sunday 11 December 2011, London's West End - Retailers have recorded the strongest weekend's trading of the year as over 1.6 million shoppers flooded into London's West End for the seventh annual traffic-free American Express Shop West End VIP Weekend. Stores on London's premier shopping streets saw 1 million shoppers spending £180 million on Saturday with a further 600,000 shoppers anticipated to put £100 million through the tills on Sunday – up £50 million on normal shopping weekends.

After a slow start to Christmas spending shoppers were out spending in force tempted by exclusive weekend-only discounts, offers and giveaways and the promise of traffic free streets across the weekend for the first time ever.

Says Richard Dickinson, CEO of New West End Company the event organiser: “Christmas has really gone off with a bang this weekend. Based on past experience we were confident that despite the slow start to seasonal spending, shoppers would get the tills ringing over the next two weeks but this weekend has exceeded expectations. Compared to VIP Day last year, when Sunday saw traffic come back into the area, retailers are reporting significant rise in sales, with winter fashion and technology the most popular items. The hard work of all parties involved in securing an extra traffic-free day has really paid off.”

Over 500 buses an hour were cleared from the streets of London's West End, leaving Oxford Street and Regent Street clear for shoppers. Spectacular on street entertainment was put on specifically for the ultimate Christmas shopping day. The highlight, a massive 30 hour West End Christmas Carol-A-Thon to raise money for Kids Company running the duration of the weekend saw the most dedicated singers housed in the window of House of Fraser's flagship store overnight. American Express Cardmembers also helped raise money for Kids Company with American Express giving double points to Cardmembers and £1 to the charity every time an American Express Card was used over the weekend.¹

Continues **Dickinson**, "It's a real shoppers market out there with stores offering discounts of up to 50% - and the tactic is working with £20m going through the tills in the first three hours of Saturday's trading."

Says **Scott Abrahams, Vice President Merchant Services UK, at American Express**, "The West End continues to outperform the rest of the UK in terms of retail spending. In particular it is capturing more and more of the tourist dollar, with data from American Express Business Insights showing that tourists now account for 36 percent of spending in the West End, up from 24 percent in 2009. The strength of the West End has certainly been shown this weekend, with the success of VIP Weekend providing a significant boost for UK retailers in the lead up to Christmas.

Camila Batmanghelidjh, Founder of Kids Company comments, "The money raised over VIP Weekend will give 3,500 vulnerable and disadvantaged inner-city children the chance to have a very special Christmas. Thank you to every shopper who sang in the West End Christmas Carol-A-Thon and to those who made a donation to Kids Company. Thank you also to American Express Cardmembers who secured us a £1 every time they used an American Express card over the weekend."

Lisa Hadley, shopper from **Woking** says, "You can't beat the West End for Christmas shopping and the traffic-free streets makes going from store to store far less hassle. I love all the traditional music on the streets even in the rain; it's made me feel really festive for the first time this year. I've also picked up some great bargains on presents – and a few things for myself too!"

Eleanor Hall shopper from Crouch End says, "There's a fantastic atmosphere here today. I came into to buy my boyfriend something special this Christmas and House of Fraser was offering up to 50% off on menswear, which made it very easy for me."

Meave Wall, Selfridges London's Store Director says,

“This weekend, Selfridges has been flooded with shoppers stocking up on festive supplies ahead of the big day and gifts with big ticket technology items, such as plasma screens and anything Apple, being particularly popular. With traffic-free shopping proving a hit with shoppers as always, our figures demonstrate that Christmas sales have now gained real momentum and we’re confident December will be a positive month.”

Cllr Robert Davis, Deputy Leader of Westminster City Council comments,

“The success of VIP Weekend is testament to the effort of all partners involved in agreeing the first ever traffic free weekend in the West End. Maintaining the success of the business community in Westminster is one of our key priorities, so it is encouraging to see that this VIP Weekend has proved lucrative for West End retailers at such a key time in the retail calendar.”

Peter Hendy, London’s Transport Commissioner, said,

"We were delighted to again be supporting the West End’s VIP Day, which continues to grow in popularity. Buses, taxis and all other traffic were not running along Oxford Street and Regent Street to allow shoppers to enjoy a unique traffic free environment. We continue to work closely with Westminster Council, New West End Company and local businesses to balance the needs of the travelling public and this world class shopping destination.”

Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, said, "The VIP Weekend is now a well established, much heralded date in the seasonal shopping calendar and a great way to celebrate the best the West End has to offer in the run up to Christmas. I have no doubt that the Christmas Carol-A-Thon will be a fantastic success and raise buckets of cash to help give a proper festive celebration to the children who need it most."

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

More Information on New West End Company:

New West End Company is a company dedicated to driving forward London’s West End as the world’s top shopping destination. It is supported and run by major retailers and property owners in Bond Street, Oxford Street and Regent Street.

New West End Company ensures the ongoing commercial success of the area by promoting the district, delivering street management services and funding public realm projects to improve the shopping environment. It is a leading partner in the biggest regeneration programme of London's West End in its history. Find out more at www.newwestend.com

200 million visitors travel into the West End each year. Of these visitors 25% are from overseas and a further 21% are from outside of London.

Oxford Street was named best destination in the Visit London awards 2007 & 2008.

London's West End is the world's top shopping destination, with a world-class mix of 600 shops, 40 renowned theatres, 30 museums and galleries, 17 Michelin star restaurants and 7 tranquil green spaces.

1. American Express will donate up to a maximum of £50,000 to Kids Company. Only UK Cardmembers are eligible for double rewards. For full details and terms and conditions visit www.westendvip.com/weekend.