

Beijing shows public transport gusto with new subways

Beijing opened five new subway lines, an urban planning show of force highlighting the investment the city has thrown behind public transport to curb its notorious air pollution and traffic congestion

Costing nearly 61bn yuans, the newly constructed lines — most connecting the distant and dusty suburbs to the city centre — bring Beijing's subway network

to 336km. According to Beijing Municipal Commission of Transport, this distance is just a fraction of what the city government has planned.



A train driver drives a train through a section of a new subway line

Beijing aims to have a 561km long subway network by 2015, and is planning for between 700 and 1,000km by 2020, Li Xiaosong, the Deputy Director of the Commission, says. "If we are comparing ourselves to London, New York or Tokyo, we are still in the early stages of development, but this shows

the Beijing government's strategic investment priority in public transport," he adds.

At rush hour on some of Beijing's central subway lines, queues with Beijing's 5.3m daily riders can be three and four trains deep, with platform attendants pressing arms and legs in behind closing

train doors. The city has invested more than 250bn yuans in rail and road links over the past five years, 51 percent of which went to public transport. With the flurry of subway construction, city leaders are attempting to make good on promises to clean up Beijing's skies and clear traffic gridlock.

Spain's strict new anti-smoking rules take effect

A tough anti-smoking law has taken effect in Spain

The ban — one of the strictest in Europe — outlaws smoking in all bars and restaurants. Smokers will also be prohibited on television broadcasts, near hospitals or in school playgrounds.

Spain has a strong cafe culture and the owners of bars and cafes have complained the law will hurt business. The anti-smoking rules introduced in 2006 outlawed smoking in the workplace, but it let bar and restaurant owners choose whether or not to allow it. Most chose not to impose any ban. Only large restaurants and bars were obliged to provide a smoke-free area.

Wine under water: a scientific study

It is not your average wine cellar

The Spanish seabed may produce a better quality of beverage than any old underground storeroom. Vast numbers of bottles are being submerged in a major study to see if a marine environment really does

produce a tastier tippie. In the lab, the boffins have plenty to go on for their analysis. Aquatic cameras and monthly checks by divers have been tracking the wine's evolution off the Basque Country's coast.

Iñaki Etaio, a researcher at the

Basque Country University, says that each underwater bottle has a sister bottle in a warehouse so that the two samples can be compared. Back by the water's edge, some wine experts need no convincing. "This wine will be more complete and perhaps more

expressive with more character and structure in the mouth," said enologist Iñaki Murillo. It may appeal to the connoisseurs but this is a serious academic study. Nonetheless, science, it seems, has never tasted quite so good.



Thousands of people run towards the North Sea during the annual New Years Dive

Swimmers' Dutch courage for New Year's dip

What did you do on the first day of 2011?

Well, whatever it was, you would certainly have needed some Dutch courage to join 10,000 or so swimmers near The Hague in the Netherlands. Their first day dive into the North Sea has been going since the 1960s after some local swimmers, started the tradition. This year, there were doubts about whether the annual event would go ahead because of

the freezing conditions, but in the end the water temperature was apparently a bearable 4 degrees Celsius!

But it is not just the Dutch who feel the urge for a dip on New Year's Day. In Portugal, they were also at it, not before a dance and a bite to eat first, of course. While many might think it is the time to sleep off the excess from the night before, one dedicated bunch near Lisbon were determined to get at least their

feet wet. Not to be outdone, around 50 brave swimmers in Slovenia jumped into the sea on the country's Mediterranean coast. Organisers said the temperature was a respectable lukewarm 10 degrees Celsius. But this year's award for daring has to go to Germany where even the brass monkeys were wincing when Berlin bathers took a New Year's Day dip. Apparently, it is good for the health.

Apple sued over iPad and iPhone app 'data leaks'

Two groups of iPhone and iPad users are suing Apple saying apps for the gadgets leak personally identifiable data

The groups want to stop personal data being passed around without owners being notified or compensated. Apple is just one of six application makers being pursued by the two groups of consumers. The legal firm putting together one class action lawsuit said it might also take action against Google over data leaking from Android applications. Backflip Studios, the Weather Channel, Dictionary.com and others were named in court papers supporting the lawsuits.

The papers allege that many applications collect so much personal data that users can be individually identified. This is despite Apple operating a policy that allows data to be shared with third parties only if an app requires the information to keep running. The complainants said many firms, including advertisers,

were managing to track and identify individuals via the unique device ID Apple assigns to every gadget. Apple does not do enough to enforce its privacy policy or restrict use of unique IDs, they allege. Apple has yet to respond to requests for comment.

The law firm behind one of the class action lawsuits said it was considering whether to prepare a case against Google, saying that many Android ap-



plications leak personal data too. Despite the filing of separate lawsuits, some experts suggest the court cases will not succeed.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies