



Universal Time: Radical plan to destroy time zones gathers support

Adam Sherwin

February 17, 2016

Would the world run more efficiently if wherever you are on the planet, the time was the same? A radical plan to destroy global time zones and create a single “Universal Time” is gathering support.

The case for collapsing the often confusing landscape of global time zones is being made by Steve Hanke, an economist with John Hopkins University and senior fellow with the CATO Institute think tank, and his colleague Dick Henry, a professor of physics and astronomy at the Baltimore, Maryland institution.

Instead of Russia’s 11 different time zones and the quirky 15-minute time difference Nepal maintains from neighbouring India, our lives would be simplified by conforming to a single, universal date and time.

This would be based on the current measure of Coordinated Universal Time, which operates through zones either 12 hours ahead or behind, tied to the 24-hour clock but which currently permits individual governments to decide their zone.

The benefits, of streamlined communications, trade and travel, would be significant, the [academics](#) argue. But the change to Hanke-Henry Date and Time, which means that when it’s 7am in London, it’s also 7am in Los Angeles, would impose considerable disruption.

Would Angelenos, beyond those who already enjoy a Hollywood lifestyle, adapt easily to going to bed at 7am and eating breakfast at 4pm?

There would be political considerations to any proposal to alter the clocks. A campaign urging UK legislators to adopt Daylight [Savings](#) Time, or British Summer Time, on a permanent basis, aligning the nation to clocks on the continent, was rebuffed by Alex Salmond. The proposal would “plunge Scotland into morning darkness” the former First Minister said, since the sun wouldn’t rise till a 10am in the Winter.

“Today the agency of the Internet has annihilated time and space completely, and has set us up for adoption of world-wide time,”

The academics defended their plan, noting that at least five countries had changed their time zones in the past year. “It remains a political football, which would disappear if our ideas were adopted,” they told The Washington Post. “Today, much activity is global, and one time is called for. You’d quickly get used to the new reading on your watch and your clock.”

Travellers would benefit, they [claim](#). “The reason all the airlines in the world use, today, now, Universal Time (Greenwich time), is so that planes don’t crash into each other. Every pilot and navigator knows what time it is. As it stands now, we passengers don’t have what the pilots do have and we miss flights because of clock issues and time zones and daylight savings time.”

Local time zones in the US were introduced as a result of the development of the railroads. “Today the agency of the Internet has annihilated time and space completely, and has set us up for adoption of world-wide time,” they said. “From a physics point of view, there is only one time! And this principle of physics lines up perfectly with the principles of economics.”

Winning acceptance for the change at an international level is a stumbling block. “(Former President Dmitry) Medvedev consolidated Russian time to some extent in 2010, but these reforms have been undone by the Duma in July 2014. Bungled implementation of a good idea. Now North Korea has adopted a half-hour difference between Chinese time and Japanese time. Confusion abounds!” Hanke and Henry said.

Indonesia, where Hanke acted as chief economic adviser to former President Suharto, has proposed to abolish two of its three time zones for economic reasons. Countries and cities could still have control over their hours of work, the duo conceded.

Hanke and Henry have previously made the case for a new calendar, under which every date would fall on the same day of the week every year. The new calendar would simplify holiday scheduling and financial accounting they claim.

Two 30-day months would be followed by one 31-day month with an extra week called Xtr added on every five or six years to bring the calendar in synch with seasonal changes. The HH Permanent Calendar would launch from January 1, 2018 exactly one year after Universal Time is adopted “everywhere on earth, and forevermore”, under the plans.