Consultation launched to improve Manchester's railways

- new consultation launched, focused on improving performance and punctuality of railways for passengers
- proposals will result in increased reliability of services post coronavirus (COVID-19)
- passengers urged to have their say after extensive work between Department for Transport (DfT), rail industry and Transport for the North

A new consultation on improving the performance on the rail network in and around Manchester has been launched today (14 January 2021).

Passengers are being presented with 3 options that feature increasing levels of change from the pre-COVID service patterns. The 3 options affect different routes, and which routes have direct services to Manchester Oxford Road and Piccadilly stations, and Manchester Airport.

The agreed option, scheduled to be introduced in May 2022, will significantly improve overall reliability while maintaining the pre-COVID travel connections for the vast majority of passengers. Some changes may mean making different choices for travel.

This change will give passengers a more reliable service with less risk of knock-on delays, while longer-term infrastructure changes are developed that will enable more services to be added in the future in a sustainable way.

Chris Heaton-Harris, Rail Minister, said:

> We are putting the power to improve Manchester's rail network in the hands of those that use it daily.
>
> I urge passengers to use this opportunity to comment on the future of your railway.
>
> Improving punctuality and reliability is one of my key priorities. As we continue to build back better from the pandemic, these proposals will ensure that the rail network is more dependable for those who use it every day.

Congestion in the region before the pandemic created regular delays to services around Manchester, with knock-on impacts to reliability across the north. While the public are being asked to stay at home, the rail industry is using this opportunity to plan improvements around Manchester ready for when passengers return in much greater numbers.

This work brings together the DfT, Transport for the North, Network Rail, and

the train operators Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE).

The consultation builds on government investment in electrification schemes, and brand new trains for Northern and TPE, as it works together with Transport for the North and Network Rail on the development of a new robust timetable, underpinning a transformed offer to passengers.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, said:

> I welcome this consultation and the government's focus on this issue. The bottleneck in central Manchester is a problem for the whole of the north – and solving these congestion issues will improve the reliability of rail services for passengers right across the north.
>
> As we look to build back better from the pandemic, we want to work with the government to deliver a reliable and dependable timetable, alongside the much-needed upgrades to our Victorian infrastructure.

Liam Robinson, Transport for The North's Rail North Committee Chair, said:

> Passengers need a better deal when it comes to reliability. When they return to the north's trains, they need to step onto services with confidence.
>
> Manchester's congested rail network has long been the source of delays and frustration for passengers, with knock-on effects for the north's communities. We urge everyone to take a look and give their view on these proposals.
>
> While the goal of these short-term changes is to reduce delays and increase reliability, it is clear that the work we are doing with government and the industry on longer-term investment in rail infrastructure is also critically important, alongside changes to services.

Phil James, Network Rail route director for the North West, said:

> The proposed changes to the timetable in Manchester aim to give passengers across the north consistently safe and reliable train services, running to a schedule they can trust.
>
> We look forward to hearing people's views on it.