

£72 million boost for train services in Manchester and the north

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Passengers across the north are set to benefit from fewer delays and more reliable trains after the government announced a £72 million package in Manchester.

The statement from the Department for Transport (DfT) says that in order to deliver for passengers quickly while providing value for money for taxpayers, Network Rail has withdrawn a previous planning application for rail infrastructure work in the city.

At Manchester Victoria Station, Rail Minister Huw Merriman revealed the latest of 4 infrastructure upgrades to improve day-to-day journeys for passengers across the region while supporting productivity and economic growth.

The funding will deliver a third platform at Salford Crescent station and track improvement work across north Manchester to help reduce delays, bottlenecks and station overcrowding, meaning passengers will enjoy more comfortable and reliable journeys.

Manchester Victoria Station will also benefit from extra entry and exit points to platforms, making it easier

for passengers to travel through the station during busier periods.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper said: “This investment supports our commitment to transforming journeys across the north by achieving much needed infrastructure improvements in Manchester.

“Today’s funding, alongside major projects like HS2, the TransPennine route upgrade and Northern Powerhouse Rail, demonstrates our pledge to improving opportunities for passengers across the region and leaving a positive impact for generations to come.”

The funding announced today follows closely on the heels of a new timetable launch in December 2022, which was supported by £84 million of government investment to deliver a better performing timetable and extended platforms for longer electric trains with more seats to better serve passengers.

As a result, delays across central Manchester have already decreased by 40 per cent compared to 2019/20 levels, which exceeds initial expectations.

Rail Minister Huw Merriman said: “This new investment will help make train services more reliable for the people of Manchester and beyond, marking another milestone in a decade’s worth of rail improvements across the region.

“An efficient railway is key to levelling up and the improvements achieved through this package will help boost local economies and connect people to opportunities, as well as friends and family.”

The government says today’s announcement is the latest step in transforming services over the next decade through the Manchester Task Force – a cross industry body, including representatives of:

- Network Rail
- Transport for Greater Manchester
- Transport for the North
- local train operators

Following news Network Rail has withdrawn a previous planning application for rail infrastructure work in the city, the government says it has asked the task force to consider alternative options to better serve passengers and support the £26 million already injected to improve services at Manchester Piccadilly, Airport and Oxford Road stations.

Combined with ongoing electrification projects and the TransPennine route upgrade already underway, the latest measures will pave the way for an enhanced timetable from the middle of the decade and the introduction of future HS2 services into the city.

Network Rail’s Tim Shoveller said: “Today’s announcement is really positive, allowing us to get on with fixing the infrastructure around central Manchester so we can run trains more reliably.

“The rail industry has come together to work on these proposals, building into a long-term vision that will get the best for our passengers and freight users alike.

“We also have ambitious plans for the future of Manchester Oxford Road. We’re removing our previous planning application so we can move forward with a new approach, something we’ll be consulting residents and businesses on later in the year.”

This isn’t the only way the government is investing in Manchester. The recent trailblazer devolution deal committed to supporting reforming local rail in the region, including pilots of pay-as-you-go ticketing and integrated London-style transport on the Bee network.

Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham said: “There is a massive opportunity to change rail journeys for people and businesses in Greater Manchester and the North for the better, and this infrastructure investment is a welcome next step to help make that happen.

“Through the task force and our trailblazer deal, we will continue working with government and the industry to help shape the comprehensive package of improvements needed to transform rail travel and support our growing economy, so that we can create more jobs and homes.”

Responding to the announcement, Darren Oldham, Transport for the North’s Rail and Roads Director, said: “This is excellent news which will enable work to ease railway congestion in Manchester to continue.

“The work that Transport for the North and its partners have already carried out through the Manchester Task Force has delivered a 40% reduction in service delays since December. This latest funding will deliver even more capacity works over the next two years to further ease congestion. We look forward to continuing to work with the Department, Network Rail and our partners on the development of further solutions for Manchester as we grow the network and improve services.

“It all adds up to a better deal for the passenger – Manchester is a key bottleneck on the network, and improvements here will deliver widespread benefits across the North.”

Photo credit: Department for Transport