

Key Manchester rail route gets 21st century signalling upgrade

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A once in a generation overhaul of Manchester's railway signalling system is complete to improve future journeys for passengers and freight.

Equipment which was nearly 40 years old around Trafford Park has been replaced with the latest digital technology.

Network Rail has installed a total of 23 new signals and a further 109 pieces of associated signalling equipment as part of a £36m Great North Rail Project investment.

The work will improve reliability and safety for passengers and freight on this important route into Manchester.

It will also allow longer freight trains to run in the North West taking traffic off the region's roads.

Now the work is complete a total of 26 signals are controlled from Manchester's state of the art signalling centre.

Roisin Nelson, sponsor for Network Rail, said: “This major work on this key rail artery into Manchester will transform connectivity for both freight and passengers across the North West. Work like this has never been more important – future proofing this economically important rail link as Britain emerges from the coronavirus pandemic. I’d like to thank passengers and residents for their patience while we delivered these improvements over the last year. The investment will keep passengers on the move, products on supermarket shelves and vital goods going to businesses across the country for decades to come.”

Chris Jackson, regional director at Northern, said: “Our customers are at the heart of everything we do and the work carried out by colleagues at Network Rail will ensure our customers are able to travel on a more modern and more efficient rail network.

“We’re proud to be part of an industry that is delivering so much for the people of the North and the work to improve the infrastructure goes hand-in-hand with our own improvements which, over the past 18 months, have seen the full introduction of 101 new trains, the complete refurbishment of our older trains and significant enhancements at our stations.”

The upgrade started in August 2020 and finished over the August bank holiday weekend.

Signalling equipment between Flixton Station and Manchester City Centre has been modernised, as well as improvements within Trafford Park Depot estate.

Signalling upgrades to Freightliner Manchester terminal, DB Cargo & GB Railfreight at the Trafford Park Euro Terminal also took place.

This will bring huge benefits to the rail freight companies, increasing the frequency and length of trains they can run and goods they can carry.

Tim Shakerley, UK rail managing director for Freightliner, said: “Manchester is a key location for Freightliner with eight trains currently operating on a daily basis to key intermodal ports at Felixstowe, London Gateway and Southampton. This investment will allow us to continue our train lengthening trials which has seen us running the longest intermodal trains in the UK at 775 metres, increasing the efficiency and productivity of our services. Moreover, there are significant environmental gains from running longer and heavier services. Moving more freight from road to rail will help ease congestion on the UK’s busy roads and thereby reduce CO2 emissions within the supply chain.”

Ian Langton, production director of GB Railfreight, said: “The new state-of-the-art signalling system serving Trafford Park will further enhance reliability on this vital freight route into Manchester. This major investment will provide better connectivity, whilst supporting intermodal volume growth enabling more goods to be delivered sustainably across the country.”

For more information on how Network Rail upgrades its signalling equipment, visit:
<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/looking-after-the-railway/signalling/>

Photo credit: Network Rail