

Transport Minister rallies North Wales community against plans to weaken rail services

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Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales Ken Skates has called on community leaders in North Wales to rally support in opposing plans which, if selected, would be detrimental to the region's rail commuter experience and cross border connectivity.

The Manchester Recovery Task Force (MRTF) has opened a public consultation, running until March 10th, offering three options to alter timetabled passenger and freight services in an attempt to improve the performance of the rail network in the Manchester area.

The three proposed changes would have direct impacts on Transport for Wales' services between North Wales and Manchester.

- Option A – North Wales to Manchester services diverted to serve Manchester Victoria and Stalybridge stations, removing direct services between North Wales and Manchester Airport, and the removal of stops at Manchester Piccadilly and Oxford Road stations.
- Option B – retain the current North Wales to Manchester Airport/Manchester Piccadilly services.
- Option C – divert North Wales to Manchester services via the “Mid-Cheshire Line”. This would remove direct services between North Wales and Manchester Airport, with the service calling at the following stations east of Chester, Northwich, Knutsford, Altrincham and Manchester Piccadilly only.

Transport for Wales (TfW) has engaged with the MRTF team and understands Options A and C will increase journey times for passengers travelling between North Wales and Manchester Airport, potentially leading to worse performance for North Wales commuters.

In his letter, Ken Skates said: “I am concerned the approach being taken is focussed only on addressing the symptoms caused by the fact the rail infrastructure in the Manchester area does not support the level and quality of services passengers in Wales and beyond require, rather than addressing the fundamental infrastructure issues.

“The only acceptable outcome of this consultation for Wales is the retention of our direct TfW services to Manchester Airport as set out in Option B.

“It is of great importance that all stakeholders in North Wales are aware of this consultation, and make their views heard. North Wales must retain its direct link to Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly. If Union Connectivity and levelling up is to be more than just words this must be the only option to take.”

Photo credit: Welsh Government