

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON MANCHESTER CAPACITY RECOVERY OPTION B+ SELECTION

Railfuture is Britain's leading, longest-established, national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users. We are responding to this consultation through drawing together the views of members from the Lincolnshire, North East, North West, Wales and Yorkshire branches and affiliated Rail User Groups and as authorised by Railfuture's national Board of Directors.

We have written before about the need to fund infrastructure changes around Manchester that will reduce the congestion that these proposals are seeking to deal with, and won't repeat them here except to say that any of these timetable changes should be seen as short-term solutions, pending implementation of those infrastructure changes and not a substitute for them

Railfuture is very disappointed that a revised option B from the original list is the one that has been taken forward for further consultation; we felt that a revised Option C (labelled Option C1 in our original response) had the best chance of meeting the needs of passengers while addressing the issues at the heart of the consultation. We do acknowledge the contribution from Northern in gaining a major increase in Southport - Oxford Road services in Option B+ with all south side services calling at Deansgate and Oxford Road, however, it still falls far short of meeting the evidenced demand and documented passenger requirement for the current direct services between Southport/ Wigan and Piccadilly.

That being said, we offer commentary on the merits and viability of these proposals.

Key points for us are that these proposals;

- 1) remove all through journey opportunities from the Stockport to Bolton corridor, requiring changes at the congested platforms of Piccadilly or at best, Manchester Oxford Road adding to passenger inconvenience which we think isn't actually necessary (to reduce the throughput along the Castlefield corridor), because trains that previously made the journey still pass through but to different destinations
- 2) Also remove through Cleethorpes - Sheffield – Manchester Airport services in favour of running through to Liverpool to provide a 30 – minute service along the route, Sheffield - Liverpool

Stockport - Bolton corridor

The train services that presently provides all the Stockport – Bolton direct services are those from Hazel Grove – Blackpool North and Alderley Edge – Southport (referred to later) and under these new proposals, the Hazel Grove to Piccadilly section and Piccadilly - Blackpool North sections still run but as separate services (the latter runs from Manchester Airport to Blackpool North) so no path is saved along the Castlefield corridor and both separate services now occupy more terminal platforms at, Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport that they didn't previously. The rationale presented for not doing this in the consultation was that if such services were provided by swapping destinations, (e.g. Blackpool – Manchester Airport becomes Blackpool - Hazel Grove) is that timings are not interchangeable, there are performance risks because of increased crossing moves south of Manchester and they don't produce a basic aim which was to repeat the pattern of services along the Castlefield corridor every 30 minutes, but since the present Hazel Grove - Piccadilly paths are interleaved we can't this as a rationale for this disconnection, except that it might be a unit, crew scheduling or pathing issue at Hazel Grove but we think if so, every attempt should be made to resolve them to retain the through connection and crucially, reduce passenger congestion on platforms 13/14 at Piccadilly (noting that the only passengers that can take advantage of changing trains at Oxford Road would be those to/from Stockport and Sheffield where two trains per hour will call).

Southport – Alderley Edge provides the other through connection service, and we note that it's proposed to terminate these at Oxford Road instead (i.e., services would be Southport – Oxford Road) and separate services would run from Alderley Edge to Manchester Piccadilly, again occupying limited terminal platform space at Piccadilly and requiring additional units that we think Northern presently does not have. We note in the consultation that it said it would not be possible to accommodate these trains at Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport due to capacity constraints but would note that these

trains never ran to Manchester Airport and presently run to Alderley Edge so its hard to understand where these capacity constraints are.

Railfuture's view is that these services occupy a Castlefield corridor path even by running to Oxford Road, especially on the turnaround, as they effectively occupy both tracks between Deansgate and Manchester Oxford Road either when inbound or outbound, depending on the terminating platform, and therefore removing them is a passenger disbenefit for no other positive outcome. We are of the belief that this is a crewing issue, not a capacity issue; we note that crews change at Oxford Road in both directions on these services and its frequently the case that delays are imparted because the "new" crew is not at Oxford Road because they themselves are working delayed services. We think that this is poor operational practice; having a crew change at such a time critical point on the route leaves the service very vulnerable to last minute delays and should be eliminated before any service cuts for passengers are contemplated.

Liverpool/Warrington – Manchester services

An issue highlighted in the revised proposals is that of skip stopping on the Warrington – Manchester route i.e., the previous 30-minute service is reduced to hourly for some stations by omissions in alternate services, reducing connectivity for those intermediate stations. This may be because of the need for the terminating platform space for the above Southport – Manchester Oxford Road services at Oxford Road, so if the above was addressed, we think that there will be paths available to restore a consistent stopping pattern.

Huddersfield – Manchester local stopping services

In both Option B and C of the proposed timetables in the original consultation, a 2 trains per hour stopping pattern at Greenfield and Mossley stations were retained on this route and we note that Network Rail did not highlight any performance issues with these proposals at the time, so we are at a loss to understand why these seem to have been dropped from these revised proposals, so Railfuture branches want to see the reinstatement of the proposed 2tph at Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite as envisaged in both Options B & C of the original MRTf consultation.

We understand that TPE are also consulting about swapping the TPE paths for the Hull and Scarborough trains beyond Leeds such that Liverpool - Scarbrough services become Liverpool – Hull (via Victoria) and Manchester Piccadilly – Hull services become Piccadilly - Scarborough.

TfN were originally against the proposal for the extra stops on the Hull service that were proposed to try and offer a 2 tph service at these stations, but we understand that TfGM has done some further analysis of the service patterns of these revised routes and believes its now possible to have 2 tph at these intermediate stations, which we of course we support. We also think that links for Stalybridge and Ashton beyond Manchester Victoria to Bolton and Wigan need to be retained at 2 tph

Our view is supported by the fact that overall passenger numbers are now around 80% of pre-Covid levels, that the peak is now much flattened and extended and that leisure passengers are now at pre-Covid levels or above the proposal, so to delete from Option B+ the extra stops at Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite has no rational basis.

Barrow – Lancaster/Manchester/London

The proposed December 2022 timetable has serious implications for passengers on the Furness Main Line. The proposed earlier departures from Preston and Lancaster will mean that of the ten services from London departing between 13:30 and 20:30, passengers from five of those services will now have a 50-minute wait and an equivalent later arrival into stations on the Furness Main Line.

Also, the 40-minute earlier departure from Manchester Airport of the last service to Barrow at 21:29, will mean that concert and theatregoers in Manchester will have to leave the venues before the end of the performances.

Not only that, but in order to make a connection with this service at Lancaster with the service from London, passengers will have to leave London at 19:10 rather than the current 20:30. And they will have a 35-minute wait at Lancaster to boot!

Cleethorpes – Manchester Airport (destination change to Liverpool)

We maintain our case, stated in response to the original consultation and repeated below, that this is not acceptable, and we think it adds to the Warrington – Manchester pathing issues mentioned above.

Sheffield City Region is the largest area of comparable size/population in Western Europe without its own airport and loss of the through service will have a disproportionately detrimental effect on the region. Furthermore, many airport users (air passengers and workers) from South Yorkshire will instead drive to the airport, creating avoidable additional pollution and congestion in the Peak District National Park.

All 'fast' services between Manchester and Sheffield will use Platforms 13 and 14. Passenger facilities (waiting and interchange) can at best be described as 'spartan' on 13/14. Yes, there is a small, dedicated waiting area above platform level, but the platforms themselves are windswept and often cold. Furthermore, use of Platforms 13 and 14 adds an additional 5 minutes to the best journey times as it takes at least 5 minutes to walk from 13/14 to the concourse at Piccadilly.

We also have concerns about the robustness of the Cleethorpes-Liverpool timetable, Lime Street arrivals are shown as xx.00, with departures at xx.19, giving a 19-minute turnaround. Between Sheffield and Manchester in the Westbound direction, the TPE service immediately precedes Northern's Hope Valley all-stations stopper. It's not entirely uncommon for the TPE to be delayed between Cleethorpes and Sheffield (it does cross the ECML), and occasionally the Northern stopper gets out in front. Once the stopper has passed Woodseats Road loop, immediately south of Sheffield station, there is no opportunity for the TPE to get past until New Mills South Junction, by which time it will be a minimum of 18 minutes late. Clearly a 19-minute turnaround at Lime Street will be difficult in these circumstances. The lack of passing opportunities will not be addressed by the Hope Valley Capacity Improvement Scheme. Late inbound EMR Norwich-Liverpool services have been known to be turned back at Warrington. Our worry is that there is a likelihood that Cleethorpes-Liverpool trains could be short-terminated at, for example, Liverpool South Parkway.

General

We would also note that it seems the opportunity has been taken to "bake in" service reductions brought about by Covid on several routes not passing through the Castlefield corridor through this consultation which we think is unacceptable, in particular the irregular pattern with a mix of 30- and 60-minute gaps between services on the Rose Hill Marple – Piccadilly route and the later first and earlier last services on Sundays on the Manchester – Sheffield route."

These changes contradict what was promised in the consultation earlier in the year, are not required to reduce occupancy of the Castlefield corridor and are contrary to the ambition to create a regular repeating service pattern. It will also make it very much harder to rebuild ridership post-COVID

For any queries on this response, please contact Trevor Bishop as below.

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