Commuters say their area is ‘overlooked and disregarded’ by station rebuild plans

Commuters travelling from Southport to Manchester have raised concerns that the proposed expansion of Manchester’s Oxford Road station could leave their area “a desert”. According to campaigners, the Southport line has been “overlooked and disregarded” in Network Rail’s development plans.

The ongoing consultation for the station’s remodelling includes reducing platform numbers from four to three while extending them to accommodate trains with an additional 120 seats. The upgrade also envisages new lifts and a footbridge to alleviate rail congestion in Manchester’s city centre.

Construction is slated to start in 2029 and conclude by 2031, with Oxford Road station expected to be closed for most of this period and with preliminary work commencing in 2026. However, the Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers’ Association (OPSTA) warns that these changes could lead to the permanent loss of direct services from Southport to Manchester Piccadilly.

Historically, the Southport line offered two daytime services to Manchester, one to Victoria and another through Piccadilly to Manchester Airport, but the latter was cut in May 2018. Following an OPSTA-led campaign, a full south side service to Alderley Edge was restored in December 2019, reports the Liverpool Echo.

The Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers’ Association (OPSTA) has voiced strong opposition to the proposed changes in train services affecting Manchester. On its website, the group stated: “OPSTA considers the current hourly services to the north and south sides of Manchester an unsatisfactory

baseline, but it does mean all travelling to or from Manchester have a direct service. It is not an acceptable frequency for either and nor is an end to end journey duration of between 72 and 80 minutes.

“For this reason we are working with our MPs, local authorities and businesses to overturn the proposal in the public consultation for improving train performance in the Manchester area which would see the withdrawal of direct services to Manchester Piccadilly. OPSTA will present an argument that this is unnecessary and there is opportunity to run our trains through to Manchester Airport.

“Unchallenged it will be the only northwest route removed entirely and the consultation is further evidence our region is overlooked and disregarded.

“Whenever you look at so called ‘strategic developments’ and plans for rail produced by various bodies, including Transport for the North, our region west of Wigan is a desert; often our Southport Manchester line and our north south Preston Ormskirk line are omitted from network maps altogether. And why is it do we not get the brand new trains? “

A further statement released by OPSTA and shared by Burscough Town Council said: “OPSTA’s concern with the proposed solution is that the current four through tracks and platforms will be replaced with two through tracks and a third platform for terminating services. Network Rail states it will enable a slicker turn back of services from the west. The obvious threat is the Southport line service will be terminated here in perpetuity. We are in discussions but anticipate the need for a strong response that sets out this will not meet all travel needs (direct service to Piccadilly and the airport) and simply embeds current service constraints contra to the stated objective.”

Network Rail has urged people to get involved in the

consultation process. Senior project lead Pete Winters said last month: “The Manchester Oxford Road Remodelling Scheme consultation is an opportunity for the public to hear about our exciting plans for the station, which include platform, track and signalling upgrades, alongside improvements to station accessibility.

“We want to bring all station users, as well as the local community with us on the journey of improving this important station. I urge the local community and station users to let us know their thoughts so that they can be taken into account as the designs progress.”

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