

SNOW HILL STATION (AREA C)

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Introduction

Snow Hill is one of three railway stations in Birmingham city centre, along with Moor Street and of course New Street. The station serves Chiltern Line and London and North Western trains to a limited range of destinations including London Marylebone, Stourbridge, Solihull, Kidderminster, Stratford on Avon and Worcester.

Form

There are three entrances / exits –

- At the front, on to the square that abuts Colmore Row (pic 1)
- At the rear (north) on to Livery St (pic 2)
- At the side, via the car ramp, to Livery St, near its junction with Colmore Row (pic 3)

The front entrance is an open portal at the foot of an office block. A long passageway (pic 4) leads to a small concourse from which escalators are taken down to the platforms. There is a ticket office and a few outlets supplying take-away drinks and sandwiches, and a dry cleaner. The platforms are part – covered by a three - level car park and part – open (pic 5), with views to St Chad's and over the Queensway. There are waiting rooms, WCs and a few vending machines.

Only 3 of the 4 platforms are in use, the other having been used as a terminus for the tram between 1999 and 2017. It has been unused since the line was routed next to the station to allow trams to run through the city centre (pic 6).

Between platform 1 and 2 stands 'The Commuter' statue by John McKenna (pic 7). The bowler-hatted figure has been waiting for a connection to Stourbridge Junction since 1996. Glass structures toward the northern ends of the platforms house the stairs and escalators which provide access to the rear entrance / exit on Livery Street (pic 8). This utilises one of the old arches, as do several adjacent retail units.

A hint of the station's former glory may be discernible along Livery St, with its long wall and Great Western Railway insignia (pic 9).

On the other side the station is hidden behind a 'green wall'. Tramlines run between the station and the office blocks of the Snowhill development and there is a stop next to the station named St Chad's to avoid being confused with the railway station. Passengers are not able to transfer directly between the two.

Whilst the station has minimal frontage to a square off Colmore Row, it extends for some distance along Livery Street, with the platforms crossing over the Queensway as far as Lionel Street or thereabouts (pic 10).

The station as a node

Lynch states that 'major railroad stations are almost always important city nodes'.

There were an estimated 2.7m entrances and exits at this station between April 2022 and the end of March 2023. This positions Snow Hill as the third busiest station in the city centre and thereby one of the 'strategic foci' or 'conceptual anchor points' of the city.

For the people who begin or end their journeys here the station is a 'place of break in transportation' and will be an important part of their 'mental map' of the city. For those passengers who pass through the station it will of course just be another stop on their journey elsewhere.

Those arriving in the city by Snow Hill will transfer by one of several transportation modes to their ultimate destination. The station is well connected for those on foot or cycle, and it is near the concentration of bus stops at Colmore Row, the tram stops at Bull St and St Chad's and a taxi rank, again on Colmore Row.

The station may be a functionally important node, but it is not visually impressive. Its presentation to the street is quite underwhelming from any direction and it lacks 'coherent visual interest'. In this it is quite dissimilar from the old Snow Hill station and hotel, the latter having an impressive frontage to Colmore Row and Livery St, a landmark in its day.

But, as Lynch argues, nodes can be important even when the physical form is 'shapeless and slippery', so its lack of visual presence must not detract from its importance as an important transportation node.

Whilst passenger usage has not returned to pre- pandemic levels, the scope for growth in numbers is clear as the city continues to develop homes and business space.

The north entrance onto Livery St is likely to become busier on completion of the redevelopment of the so-called 'bomb-site' opposite, with 722 new homes together with workspaces, bars, cafés and retail outlets.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has included the reinstatement of Snow Hill Platform 4 amongst their 'Midlands Rail Hub' proposals, which – subject to funding being approved by government – could be implemented between 2025 and 2030. As Platform 4 is earmarked for 'early delivery' it will hopefully be sooner rather than later.

References

Kevin Lynch (1960): The Image of the City

Office of Rail and Road (2023): Estimates of Station Usage 2022-3

WMCA: Movement for Growth – 2026 Delivery Plan for Transport.

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