

The Manchester Marathon is one of the UK's most popular road races, attracting thousands of runners every April. For those planning their race day logistics, knowing which tram stops provide the best access to the start line can save precious time and reduce pre-race stress. This post explores alternative tram stops near the Manchester Marathon start, alongside key details about the race itself.

Manchester Marathon: Quick Facts

Aspect Details Race Date Typically held in April Scale Over 30,000 runners Time Limit 4 hours 30 minutes Course Certification UKA & IAAF Certified Entry Ballot and Charity Places

Race Date, Scale, and Time Limit

The Manchester Marathon typically takes place on the third Sunday of April, making it a key spring marathon in the UK calendar. With over 30,000 runners anticipated in 2026, it's one of the largest city marathons outside London.

Runners must complete the course within a 4 hour 30 minute limit, a generous window catering to a broad range of abilities. This gives ample time even for walkers or those tackling the route at a steady pace. However, be mindful that cutoff points along the route vary and are strictly enforced.

Entry Process and Sell-Out Reality

Registrations for the Manchester Marathon usually sell out quickly, often within hours of the ballot results being announced. Entry via the public ballot is the primary method, and demand far outstrips supply each year.

Third-party websites such as goandrace.com offer additional race information and sometimes provide unofficial GPX files for the course, which can be loaded onto devices like Garmin watches for training. While helpful, these GPX routes are third-party downloads and are not officially endorsed by event organisers.

Charity Places and Real Costs

For runners who miss the ballot or prefer a guaranteed spot, charity places are the alternative entry route. One prominent option is the **MS Trust**, which asks participants to pay a registration fee of £40 plus a minimum sponsorship target of £500.



This cost reflects the real price of securing a marathon place while supporting good causes. I've seen this play out countless times: made a mistake that cost them thousands.. It's worth budgeting for included costs like travel and kit, and confirming charity place registration deadlines well in advance.

Course Route, Elevation, and Certification History

The Manchester Marathon course is a point-to-point route starting near Old Trafford football stadium. It weaves through central Manchester, finishing at the Etihad Stadium.

Elevation is relatively flat, with just gentle inclines, making it an excellent course for those chasing PBs. However, do factor in that certain areas can become crowded, which may slow pace despite the favourable topography.

I'll be honest with you: the course holds uk athletics (uka) and international association of athletics federations (iaaf) certification, ensuring accurate distance measurement and compliance with international standards—important for official timing and record recognition.

Alternative Tram Stops Near the Start

Most runners travel by Metrolink tram to the marathon start near Old Trafford. While the obvious stop is **Old Trafford Metrolink**, several alternative tram stops can help minimise walking distance, depending on your arrival point and race day crowding.

1. Wharfside Metrolink

Wharfside Metrolink is often overlooked but can be an excellent alternative for runners coming from the city centre or MediaCityUK area. It's situated just <https://the5krunner.com/2026/08/27/manchester-marathon-2027/> across the bridge from the Old Trafford football ground, roughly 600m from the official start line.

- *Best For:* Runners approaching from the south or south-west on the Metrolink network
- *Walking Time to Start:* 7-10 minutes
- *Benefits:* Usually less crowded than Old Trafford stop, good shelter nearby

2. Exchange Quay Metrolink

Another alternative is **Exchange Quay Metrolink**, located across the Manchester Ship Canal. While a bit further away (around 1km from the start), this stop can be useful for runners coming from Salford Quays or Deansgate-Castlefield areas.



- *Best For:* Anyone travelling from central Salford or places on the Eccles line
- *Walking Time to Start:* 12-15 minutes
- *Benefits:* Quieter, less congestion on race morning

3. Old Trafford Metrolink

Of course, the closest stop remains **Old Trafford Metrolink**, just a 5-minute walk to the start area. However, this stop is usually crowded on race day. Use it only if you prefer the shortest walk and are prepared for heavier foot traffic.

- *Walking Time to Start:* 5 minutes
- *Benefits:* Closest access, covered walkways along the route
- *Cons:* Peak congestion on race morning, possible delays getting off the tram

Race Week Kit List

Before we wrap up, a quick note on essentials to bring on race day. I keep a small 'race-week kit' note on my phone for quick reference:

1. Race number and safety pins
2. Metrolink day travel ticket (download the app in advance)
3. Watch with GPX loaded (e.g., Garmin device)
4. Layered clothing, including windbreaker
5. Energy gels or snacks
6. Hydration bottle

7. Post-race warmer and change of clothes
8. Cash or card for race-day refreshments

Many runners use a Garmin or similar GPS watch loaded with a route GPX file from sites such as goandrace.com. This helps with pacing and navigation, especially on unfamiliar sections.

Final Thoughts

Choosing the best tram stop for Manchester Marathon start depends largely on your preferred balance between walking distance and crowd congestion. But it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. While Old Trafford Metrolink remains the default stop, Wharfside and Exchange Quay offer worthwhile alternatives to consider, especially if you're targeting a stress-free arrival.

Remember to plan your journey ahead, leaving extra time for travel and potential delays. Pay close attention to race logistics updates published by race organisers, and avoid relying solely on unofficial sources or third-party GPX files, which, while handy, do not guarantee accuracy.

Good luck to all entrants aiming for a PB on Manchester's fast, flat course in 2026!