



Overview of the Queensbury Tunnel campaign

The largely rural communities to the west of Bradford often feel overlooked in terms of investment as, perhaps understandably, attention tends to be focussed on the significant social challenges faced closer to the city centre. It should however be recognised that, here in Queensbury, we have our issues too. Just recently, an outstanding opportunity has presented itself which, if taken, could bring long-term benefits both to the immediate district and the wider Yorkshire region.

Queensbury Tunnel is a mile-and-a-half long disused railway tunnel which lies broadly on the route between Halifax and Bradford/Keighley. The hill it passes through is more than 400 feet high. Sustrans has a long-standing aspiration to create a connection between the Aire and Calder valleys along which it is already developing cycle paths, and the existing *Great Northern Railway Trail* would form part of that link. Plans are also being progressed for a path northwards from Halifax. However the hill Queensbury stands on acts as a substantial barrier to the overall goal being realised. Whilst the tunnel has long been recognised as the perfect host for an Aire-Calder connection, its generally poor condition has ruled this out.

However the Highways Agency Historical Railways Estate (HAHRE), owners of the tunnel, is seeking funding for a programme of remedial works to ensure the structure does not pose a threat to the dwellings built above it. This work is likely to cost £3-5 million. The preferred solution identified in a 2009 consultants' report is to pour concrete plugs at several locations within the tunnel, backfill the shafts and then abandon it. The community, supported by relevant agencies (Sustrans, local Councils), would like the work to be engineered in such a way that a route through the tunnel is maintained, eventually allowing a cycle path to be laid joining the proposed Halifax route to the *Great Northern Railway Trail*. This same approach was taken with Glenfield Tunnel in 2008 when Leicester City Council inserted 38 concrete rings to provide strengthening at locations where the lining was distorted.

Given the significance and scale of Queensbury Tunnel, we believe that a path through it would become a honeypot attraction - as evidenced by the *Two Tunnels* scheme in Bath - bringing visitors to the area from far afield, as well as opening a strategic corridor which would be used extensively for both leisure and commuting.

But the door to this opportunity will not be open for long. By the autumn of 2014, HAHRE will have to decide on the design for its remedial works. There is a strongly held view locally that, in the current age of austerity, the taxpayer ought to derive some benefit from the multi-million pound works in the tunnel.

We are seeking broad political support for our campaign objectives, as outlined above, and are encouraging those with influence to lobby the Highways Agency on our behalf to ensure that this once-only opportunity is not lost forever. The tunnel needs to remain open as it is of genuine historic, social and economic value.



For our part, we will continue our efforts to push the campaign forward, both in heart and minds, and on the ground. Sustrans is considering options for a route out of the tunnel at the south end, across the property of a local landowner who has generously expressed his willingness to look favourably at its proposals. There is increasing engagement from Bradford and Calderdale Councils, as well as several local MPs, who recognise the positive impact a path through the tunnel could have on this area. And the Highways Agency has committed to working with stakeholders to assess the technical viability of using the tunnel to host a cycle path.

Things are looking pretty positive.

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