



Wednesday 27th September 2017

Tunnel condition under scrutiny

Plans are being developed for a programme of investigations to gain deeper insight into the condition of Queensbury Tunnel which campaigners hope to reopen as part of a cycle path network.

As things stand, Highways England's Historical Railways Estate (HRE) - which acts as custodian of the disused railway tunnel on behalf of the Department for Transport - could begin work to abandon the 1.4-mile long structure next summer. This will involve infilling critical parts of it with concrete in a project likely to cost around £3 million. Funding will come from the taxpayer. For the cycle path proposal to go ahead, ownership would have to be taken on by Bradford Council, with the £3 million also being transferred as a dowry to cover future maintenance work.

However there is a huge disparity between existing estimates for the repairs needed to make the tunnel fit for public use. Last year, a high-level desk study by HRE's consultants put the cost at more than £35 million; however specialist engineers acting for the Queensbury Tunnel Society visited the tunnel in June 2016 and thereafter developed a 44-week programme of works for £2.8 million.

The new investigations will be funded by HRE and their cost deducted from the £3 million dowry in the event of a transfer going ahead. However, to ensure their independence, the scope of works will be defined by Bradford Council who will also appoint a suitably experienced company to undertake them. Progress will be made over the coming months. Based on the findings, the Council will formulate its final position on the tunnel's future.

Graeme Bickerdike, who co-ordinates the Queensbury Tunnel Society's engineering activities, said: "Until now, the repair proposals and costings have relied on previously available technical evidence, visual inspections and informed judgement as to how defects might develop over time. We anticipate the upcoming work will involve a tactile examination of the tunnel's lining and intrusive investigations to understand the loads being applied to it. This should reveal a sharper picture of the necessary repairs and associated costs, enabling the Council to reach a robust, informed and confident decision."

Meanwhile, the Society has published a three-minute film capturing its aspiration for an ambitious cycle path network linking Bradford, Halifax and Keighley, with the tunnel as its centrepiece. Set to music, it shows walkers and cyclists on the two sections of the Great Northern Railway Trail between Cullingworth and Queensbury, which could be joined and extended to improve connectivity for commuters and attract more visitors to the area.

A recent study by Sustrans suggested that, over 30 years, such a network could drive a £37.6 million economic uplift. Queensbury Tunnel alone would contribute around £10 million to that figure through increased tourism. If the tunnel was repaired for £2.8 million, a high benefit-to-cost ratio of 3.2:1 could be achieved.

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "It's an inspiring film which clearly demonstrates that our horizons extend far beyond the tunnel. We are promoting a bold and positive vision for cycling, linking communities to the west of Bradford just as the Great Northern Railway did.



Despite being disused for more than 50 years, its trackbed and structures are mostly still there - etched into the landscape - as potential assets for reuse.

“As we move towards more active forms of travel and tackle our dependency on fossil fuels, high quality infrastructure will have to be provided to encourage people off the roads. As we know, cars and bikes don't mix safely.

“Whilst our immediate focus has to be on the tunnel given the ongoing threat to its survival, we recognise that it doesn't have a sustainable future without the cycle path. So we will continue to build public and political support for a bigger, better Great Northern Railway Trail, working alongside other groups who share that goal. There's too much at stake for us to allow timidity and short-sightedness to succeed by default.”

The film, which also features attractions within reach of the proposed paths and spectacular aerial views of two viaducts, can be viewed via the Society's website and on YouTube at https://youtu.be/c4f0M_qfvVY.

Last Friday, the Rhondda Tunnel Society announced that it had secured a grant of £90,975 for a tactile examination of a two-mile long tunnel in South Wales as part of a similar campaign. As at Queensbury, the findings will be used to inform decision-making about the structure's transfer from the Department for Transport to the Welsh Government or local Councils, as well as the development of a repair scheme and costing.

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To link to the new film or embed it on your webpage:

(Link) https://youtu.be/c4f0M_qfvVY

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/c4f0M_qfvVY?rel=0" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>`

A collection of high-resolution photos for Media use is available from:

www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml

More general information on the campaign is available from:

www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/

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Notes for editors

Queensbury Tunnel was built by the Great Northern Railway between 1874 and 1878 as part of the Halifax, Thornton & Keighley Railway. Work was initially expected to take two years but was delayed significantly by two of the seven construction shafts having to be abandoned due to water ingress. At least ten navvies lost their lives during the work.

The tunnel, which is 2,501 yards (2,287 metres) long, opened to freight traffic in October 1878 and passenger trains in December 1879. The line between Holmfield and Queensbury, which included the tunnel, was officially closed on 28th May 1956. Lifting of the tracks took place in 1963.

Queensbury Tunnel would be the longest in the UK to host a shared path if the proposal to reopen it for such a purpose is successful. Currently Combe Down Tunnel in Bath holds that position at 1,829 yards (1,672 metres). The longest in Europe is the 2,931-yard (2,680 metres) Uitzu Tunnel on the Plazaola Greenway in northern Spain.

The Historical Railways Estate (HRE), part of Highways England, is responsible for inspecting, maintaining and limiting the liability associated with more than 3,000 disused railway bridges, abutments, tunnels, cuttings, culverts and viaducts. It carries out this work on behalf of the Department for Transport. HRE's remit was previously fulfilled by BRB (Residuary) until its abolition 30th September 2013.

The Great Northern Railway Trail (Route 69 of the National Cycle Network) is currently split in two. The northern part extends for 1.2 miles from Cullingworth to Wilsden, crossing Hewenden Viaduct. The southern section - 1.75 miles in length - was completed in 2012 and links the former site of Queensbury's railway station to a new housing estate west of Thornton. Linking the two parts is a former railway incorporating three tunnels and two 'inverted arches'.

Rhonnda Tunnel is 3,443 yards (3,148 metres) long and was closed on safety grounds in 1968. Currently, both ends of it are buried. The tunnel has been the focus of a reopening campaign since September 2014. If successful, it would be the world's second longest tunnel on a cycle path after Snoqualmie Tunnel in the United States which is 3,963 yards (3,624 metres) long.