



There's no doubt that Queensbury Tunnel is a challenging structure, given its condition and associated liabilities. In austere times, it's a big ask for any public body to look upon it as an asset.

So we're faced with the very real possibility that the tunnel will be abandoned this year or next, even if an ongoing study by Sustrans proves that reopening it for public use will bring significant economic benefits to the region. That's the nature of Britain in the 21st century: even if it's not financially hamstrung, officialdom tends to suffer from risk aversion and short-termism.

But we have to live in the real world and most campaign supporters could - with a heavy heart - be pragmatic about the tunnel's abandonment if a robust and thorough review process pointed in that direction. However, what's difficult to accept is abandonment being perceived as the only viable option because of fictional evidence, wishful thinking, shonky costings and a report that should have been rejected. The future of a valuable, remarkable and historic engineering work should not be decided on that basis.

In 2015, the Historical Railways Estate (HRE), Queensbury Tunnel's custodian, commissioned Jacobs, its consulting engineers, to produce a report on future asset management options for the tunnel. That report included some material that, at best, was highly suspect and, at worst, was unequivocally wrong, although nobody in Jacobs or HRE seemingly spotted this.

But, in terms of the campaign, more destructive was the inclusion of a repair cost for the tunnel of £35.4 million which the Minister of State at the Department for Transport immediately deemed to be too expensive. And of course he was right to do so. Trouble is, that cost did not stand up to any critical analysis; it does however remain front and centre in the minds of some stakeholders.

So the Society has just published a study of tunnelling costs to provide context. Some of the findings are spectacular:

- £35.4 million represents a 2,850% increase on the lining repair cost put forward by *the same consultants* in 2009
- a 'secondary' spray concrete lining could be installed *from one end of Queensbury Tunnel to the other* for less than £10 million

- £35.4 million represents a repair cost of £15,470 for *every metre* of Queensbury Tunnel (despite most of it being in fair condition); this is 24% more than HS2 expects to spend on constructing its new single bores
- a *new* Queensbury Tunnel, similar in size to the existing one, could be driven for an estimated cost of £25.6 million.

Whilst none of this allows us to state that Jacobs' repair cost was unequivocally "wrong", this kind of evidence supports the clear view expressed by a number of engineers, specialists and contractors that £35.4 million was not just on the high side, it was completely "off the scale". Alarm bells should have been ringing in HRE's offices as soon as Jacobs' report landed in its in-tray. But for reasons unknown, they either remained silent or HRE chose to ignore them. Either way, it raises questions about the report's approval and acceptance processes.

The campaign's uphill struggle to transform Queensbury Tunnel into a socially-valuable asset has been made very much steeper by a £35.4 million repair cost that should never have seen the light of day. The possibility of the tunnel being lost to future generations as a direct result of it is particularly galling.

You can help us undo the damage by signing our ePetition , asking the Department for Transport to pause HRE's abandonment work whilst stakeholders carry out a full assessment of the tunnel's potential and its associated challenges.

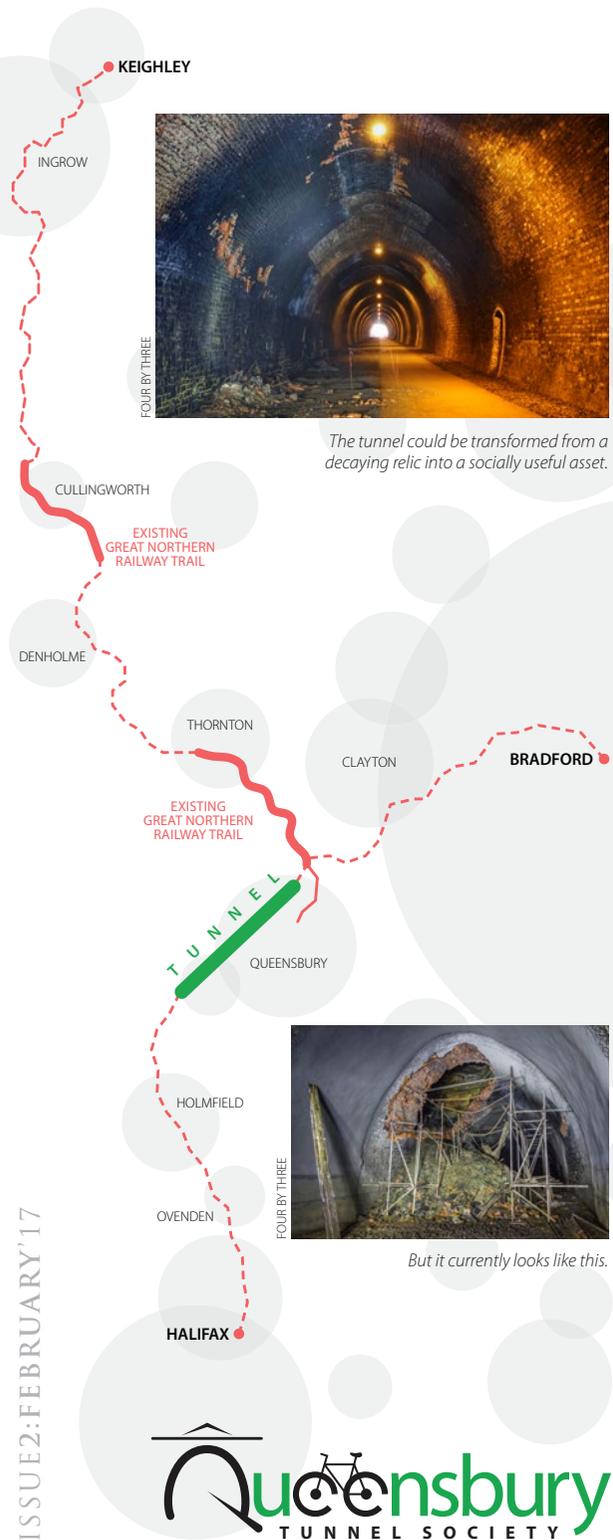
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The tunnel could be transformed from a decaying relic into a socially useful asset.



But it currently looks like this.