



Thursday 1st December 2016

Campaigners appeal for public support

The group campaigning to save a disused West Yorkshire railway tunnel from abandonment has launched an ePetition to gather support for their alternative vision of reopening it as a cycle path.

Closed since the 1950s, Queensbury Tunnel is under threat because of proposals by Highways England's Historical Railways Estate (HRE) - which maintains the structure on behalf of the Department for Transport - to insert 20-metre long concrete plugs in both entrances and backfill its ventilation shafts. Thereafter it will be allowed to collapse. A desk study has estimated the cost of this work at around £3 million, although no site investigations have yet been carried out to establish exactly what needs to be done. As a result, the figure is subject to considerable uncertainty. The money will come from the taxpayer.

Over the summer, a specialist engineering team visited the tunnel and produced a report on remediation options for the newly-constituted Queensbury Tunnel Society. It found that a proportionate repair scheme could be implemented for £2.81 million. The Society believes that this would transform the tunnel from a liability into an asset, allowing it to repay that investment over time through social, environmental, health and economic benefits.

When funding allows, the ultimate intention would be for Queensbury Tunnel to form part of a cycle path network linking communities between Bradford, Halifax and Keighley. However the tunnel would have to be secured within the next few months as HRE's abandonment works - which are due to start next year - will put it beyond reuse.

Norah McWilliam, who leads the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "We are not seeking any public funds beyond those already committed to the tunnel; we only want them to be spent in a way that isn't destructive. Our aim is to save the structure for future reuse, delivering maximum benefit and value for that £3 million. It's about the legacy we leave for future generations.

"We need the Department for Transport to grant a stay of execution - suspending HRE's work - while stakeholders carry out a full assessment of the tunnel's great potential and its associated challenges.

"It's now or never for our historic tunnel. This is a once-only opportunity."

The Society would like anyone who shares its vision for the tunnel - and the associated development of a local cycle path network - to sign its ePetition on *change.org* (<https://goo.gl/8Z71Yr>).

ENDS



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/

Contacts

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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. At least eight navvies lost their lives during the work which 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.

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) Uitzi Tunnel on the Plazaola Greenway in northern Spain. However plans are being developed to restore Rhondda Tunnel in South Wales for cycle path use; this has a length of 3,443 yards (3,148 metres).

The Historical Railways Estate (HRE), part of Highways England, is responsible for inspecting, maintaining and limiting the associated liability from around 3,200 disused railway bridges, abutments, tunnels, cuttings and viaducts. HRE's remit was formerly fulfilled by British Railways Board (Residuary) until its abolition 30th September 2013.