



Anniversary marks new future for tunnel

21st May 2014 marks the 140th anniversary of work starting on the Great Northern Railway's tunnel under Queensbury which is currently the focus of a campaign to save it for use as host to a cycle path.

The 2,501-yard bore was built as part of a line connecting Halifax with Bradford and Keighley. It was expected that construction would take two years but the contractors, Messrs Benton & Woodiwiss of Derby, were confronted by significant difficulties at every stage. Two of its seven construction shafts had to be abandoned due to the amount of water entering the workings and it was not until a gang of Welsh miners arrived with a rock drilling machine that the pilot tunnel was completed in October 1877. More than four years had elapsed before the first train passed through on 14th October 1878. By that time, at least eight navvies had been killed and many more horrendously injured.

Closed in 1956, Cambridge University established a seismological station in the tunnel during the 1970s to record earth tremors, scientists often sleeping in a hut between Nos. 3 and 4 shafts. After they moved out, railway research teams undertook trials of grouting techniques in the tunnel, drilling holes through the arch before pumping material into the voids behind it. In 2009, consultants working on behalf of British Railways Board (Residuary), the tunnel's then-owner, completed a study into its condition and future management. Their preferred option was to fill the shafts and parts of the tunnel, then bury its ends, effectively removing it as a liability.

But the Queensbury Community Heritage and Action Partnership (Q-CHAP) believes the tunnel could play a role in revitalising the economic fortunes of the village by helping to attract visitors. It wants any remedial works to be engineered in such a way that a through route is retained, allowing a future cycle path to be laid in the tunnel. An e-petition to that end has already secured more than 1,100 signatories. Queensbury Tunnel would form a cornerstone of the Partnership's overall strategy, which would also see it establish a community presence at the iconic Black Dyke Mills complex, linked to the tunnel by a refurbished Station Road.

Q-CHAP's first open meeting will be held on Thursday 15th May at 7pm in Holy Trinity Parish Church, in an effort to build public support for its aims. Amongst those speaking will be Paul Osborne, the new Regional Director of sustainable transport charity Sustrans which is leading negotiations with the Highways Agency, the tunnel's current owner.

The meeting will be followed on Sunday 18th May by Cycle Queensbury's Family Fun Rides event - this year dubbed the *Tour de Queensbury* - along the Great Northern Railway Trail. Hundreds of local people are expected to gather on the site of Queensbury's former railway station to start rides of three or six miles along the old line to Thornton and back. Refreshments will be available as well as a free bike maintenance service. At lunchtime, there will be a gathering at the tunnel's northern entrance where those in attendance will hear about its history and possible role in a strategic cycle route between Halifax and Bradford/Keighley, known as the Fresh Aire scheme.



Imagery

A collection of high-resolution images to accompany this News Release can be downloaded at <http://www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml>

Please ensure the specified credit is included alongside any picture published.

Notes for editors

Queensbury Tunnel was built by the Great Northern Railway between 1874 and 1878 as part of the Halifax, Thornton & Keighley Railway. The work, carried out by contractors Benton & Woodiwiss, 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. Richard Sutcliffe (30), Henry Ingham (37), Sutcliffe Hodgson (27), Henry Jones, John Gough, Richard Jones (33), Frederick Goulding and 'Captain' Pickles all lost their lives in the workings.

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.

It would be the longest tunnel in the UK to host a shared path if the proposal to reopen it for such a purpose was successful. Currently Combe Down Tunnel in Bath holds that accolade 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 Queensbury Community Heritage and Action Partnership (Q-CHAP) is a collective of small, local organisations aiming to widen community involvement in the village's built and rural heritage. Its vision, which has three main elements, would see it take part of the Black Dyke Mills complex for community use, with the former railway tunnel hosting a foot/cycle path and Station Road restored to provide a connection between the two. The group believes that this linked package would bring in visitors and help to regenerate the area.

An e-petition aimed at gathering support for retaining a route through the tunnel can be signed at <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/59903>