



Monday 14th January 2019

Tunnel abandonment cost hits £4 million

The cost of abandoning a disused railway tunnel in West Yorkshire has risen to more than £4 million as a result of logistical difficulties caused by flooding.

For the past five years, the 1.4-mile long Queensbury Tunnel has been the focus of a campaign to reopen it as part of a cycle network linking Bradford and Keighley to Halifax, but Highways England's Historical Railway Estate (HRE), which manages the tunnel for the Department for Transport (DfT), wants to permanently close it because of a perceived threat to public safety.

The abandonment scheme - which is expected to involve infilling around 15% of the tunnel - requires planning permission and was originally costed at £2.7 million in February 2016. This rose to £7 million based on plans submitted to Bradford Council last May, but the specification was then changed to use cheaper materials, reducing that figure to £3.6 million.

For workforce safety reasons, preparatory works to strengthen parts of the tunnel's lining are currently underway, but it was intended that these would be restricted to sections at both ends. However, over the past four months, the southern half of the tunnel has been inundated by an estimated 6.6 million gallons of water. Highways England failed to pay two annual rent payments of £50 for land on which a pumping station is sited, resulting in the equipment being switched-off by the landowner.

To complete the strengthening works, the contractor has installed a new pump and is now faced with the task of establishing a safe access route through a 300-metre long section near the tunnel's midpoint which was previously designated as an exclusion zone due to the severe defects within it. Together with the dewatering operation, this work will add more than £400,000 to the bill.

Graeme Bickerdike, Engineering Co-ordinator for the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "HRE has lost control of this project, largely through its own failings. The public will receive no benefit from abandonment, but the financial burden placed on its shoulders is becoming heavier. Perversely, £1 million is currently being spent improving the tunnel's condition before a further £3 million is wasted on a partial infilling scheme. It's becoming an implausible farce."

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "Shortly, we expect HRE to ask Bradford Council for permission to progress abandonment. Most of the tunnel beneath Queensbury would be left to collapse. HRE hopes that the tunnel is so deep that the 440 dwellings within its zone of influence would not be affected by any collapse, but how can we have confidence in their assessment of the complex risks when they prove persistently incapable to doing the basics competently?"

For the cycle path proposal to go ahead, the tunnel's ownership would have to be transferred to Bradford Council, for which it would receive a £3 million dowry. Funding is currently being sought for a feasibility study into the issues associated with the tunnel's reopening, whilst the Council's Executive Committee is expected to consider the Victorian structure's future at a meeting in February.

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To link to a video on the tunnel campaign or embed it on your webpage:

(Link) <https://youtu.be/Yij7v7lM2H4>

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/Yij7v7lM2H4?rel=0" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" 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. Track lifting 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. 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 liability associated with around 3,200 disused railway bridges, abutments, tunnels, cuttings, culverts and viaducts. HRE's remit was formerly fulfilled by BRB (Residuary) until its abolition on 30th September 2013.



HRE's proposed abandonment scheme has been split into two phases, the first of which is for preparatory works and got underway on 1st October. Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that the original estimated cost of these works was £560,000, but has since risen to £993,000. The scheme's main phase requires planning permission and has been costed by AMCO-Giffen, the appointed contractor, at £3.016 million.

On 22nd October, Bradford Council informed Highways England that it would need to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment to accompany any planning application due to the complex relationship between the tunnel - most of which would be allowed to collapse - and historic local mine workings.