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Study examines economic case for tunnel path

The local economy could benefit by more than £37 million over 30 years if an ambitious network of cycle paths was created incorporating the disused railway tunnel under Queensbury, West Yorkshire. That's one finding from an independent study commissioned by Bradford Council and co-funded by Calderdale Council and Highways England's Historical Railways Estate (HRE), the tunnel's current custodian.

The study, undertaken by Sustrans' Research and Monitoring Unit, looked at seven routes and estimated the annual walking and cycling increase likely to result from each being opened as a cycle path, based on experience elsewhere. The routes were then combined into 11 possible networks and their value-for-money determined using an established transport appraisal tool. Likely tourist spending was also considered.

The work found that the most extensive network - linking Halifax to Keighley and Bradford - would bring economic, health and tourism benefits of £37.6 million over 30 years, an annual average of £1.25 million. Including maintenance, costs over the same period would reach £11.6 million, resulting in a benefit-to-cost (BCR) ratio of 3.2:1. This is regarded as delivering "high value for money". Evidence suggests that the level of capital investment involved would also sustain 80 direct jobs and induce a further 95 indirect jobs. Alternative networks, excluding the legs to either Keighley or Bradford, offer similar BCRs of 3.2:1 and 3.1:1 respectively.

All these BCRs were calculated using the £2.8 million repair cost for Queensbury Tunnel developed last year by the society campaigning to reopen it. When the £35.4 million figure put forward by the Historical Railways Estate is used, all the scenarios offer low or poor value for money. Higher BCRs of 3.8:1 and 3.7:1 were established for networks which *exclude* Queensbury Tunnel, simply extending the existing Great Northern Railway Trail to Keighley and/or Bradford. However, without the tunnel, tourism benefits estimated at £10.8 million over 30 years would be mostly lost.

At this stage, Sustrans makes clear that the study's conclusions are 'preliminary', pending further development work on the routes and a deeper understanding of the tunnel's condition.

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "We want to thank Sustrans for the time and effort they've put into this complex and wide-ranging study, one which has been complicated by the many uncertainties involved.

"In its current form, it does indicate that - when the tourist potential is recognised - three of the five scenarios incorporating Queensbury Tunnel present high value for money. We regard that as a good outcome. A BCR of 3.2:1 is comparable with the Two Tunnels scheme in Bath which has helped to drive a significant uplift in cycling across the city.

"Although the economic case can make or break our campaign, we also need to remember that it's only one of the drivers. We are doing this for our children's future, to improve health, to enhance



connectivity, to provide a new leisure opportunity, to save a fabulous historical asset and to give our community a sense of worth. We want to put smiles on faces - the value of that is incalculable.

“If we are serious about encouraging people onto bikes, there is an absolute need to invest in safe, high-quality infrastructure, separating cyclists from the dangers encountered on our roads. Given the local topography, Queensbury Tunnel has a vital role to play in any path connecting Calderdale to Airedale. Sooner or later, we’re going to want such a link and I don’t want our grandchildren to regret the short-sightedness of today’s generation if we are willing to watch £3 million of public money being spent on the tunnel’s self-destruction. What a wasted opportunity that would be.”

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

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

To link to our latest campaign video or embed it on your webpage:

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

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

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) Uitz 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 more than 3,000 disused railway bridges, abutments, tunnels, cuttings, culverts and viaducts. HRE's remit was formerly fulfilled by BRB (Residuary) until its abolition 30th September 2013.

Unless Queensbury Tunnel is transferred to another statutory body, HRE is intending to begin the process of abandoning it in the summer of 2018. This is likely to involve plugging the entrances with concrete and backfilling its five ventilation shafts. The costs are not yet confirmed, but have been estimated at £3 million. Funding will come from the taxpayer. If a transfer was agreed, the £3 million would be given to the new owner as a dowry.

Sustrans is a sustainable transport charity, its flagship project being the National Cycle Network which has created over 14,000 miles of signed cycle routes throughout the UK. In 2010, it was estimated that the network saw 420,000,000 journeys by all classes of non-motorised users.

The Sustrans' study, entitled "*Estimating the economic impact of reopening walking and cycling routes around Queensbury Tunnel*", identifies seven routes which could form part of a local cycle network. These are:

1. Queensbury North to Cullingworth (incorporating the existing Great Northern Railway Trail)
2. Cullingworth to Keighley
- 3A. Queensbury North to Bradford (via valley floor)
- 3B. Queensbury North to Bradford (via Thornton Road)
4. Holmfield to Halifax
5. Queensbury North to Queensbury village (via Station Road)
6. Queensbury North to Holmfield (via Queensbury Tunnel)

These routes are then combined into 11 possible networks, five of which include Queensbury Tunnel. Of these, the most ambitious combined routes 1+2+3A+4+6, with a total construction cost of £13.82 million. This figure uses the £2.8 million repair cost for Queensbury Tunnel developed in 2016 by the Queensbury Tunnel Society, together with a sum of £1.5 million to lay a cycle path through the tunnel and install lighting. It is assumed that Station Road, linking Queensbury village with the tunnel's northern entrance, would be upgraded as part of the tunnel repair works.

Using modelling tools developed by Sustrans, it is estimated that this network would be used for almost 640,000 leisure and commuting trips annually, bringing economic and health benefits of



£26.77 million over the 30-year appraisal period. Tourism benefits are separately calculated to be £10.81 million. Including maintenance, the cost of the network over 30 years is estimated at £11.59 million. This produces a benefit-to-cost ratio of 3.2:1.

A Highways Agency technical note, issued in 2013/14, provides guidance on the value-for-money categories of benefit-to-cost ratios (BCRs):

- <1 poor value for money
- 1-1.5 low value for money
- 1.5-2 medium value for money
- 2-4 high value for money
- >4 very high value for money