



Wednesday 17th January 2018

## Councillors voice support for tunnel path

Bradford Councillors have expressed overwhelming support for the idea of restoring the disused railway tunnel under Queensbury, West Yorkshire, to host a cycle path connecting the city to Halifax.

They voted unanimously in favour of a motion tabled by Andrew Senior who represents Queensbury ward for the Conservatives. It asks Bradford Council to engage with interested parties in exploring options for the tunnel, investigate the feasibility of taking on its ownership, facilitate discussions with the Department for Transport (DfT), Highways England's Historical Railways Estate (HRE) and other funders, and requests an early report to the Executive setting out these actions.

Mr Senior told Councillors: "The tunnel has been earmarked for an abandonment project involving blocking it all up with concrete at a likely cost of £3 million. If the Council was to allow this to happen, it would mean this marvellous piece of Bradford heritage would be lost forever."

Of the tunnel's "exciting" proposed reuse, he said: "It will attract people from outside of the Bradford district to visit and, in a forward thinking way, this project will create an income back to the Council."

Paul Cromie, Independent - a fellow Queensbury ward Councillor - also focussed on the economics. "We need to keep in mind the long-term effect the tunnel will have on the environment and the community. Sustrans estimates that, over the next 30 years, it will benefit to the tune of £37.6 million from a cycle network with the tunnel as its centrepiece. £3 will be returned for every £1 spent."

"Queensbury Tunnel - we support in principle...it's in line with our cycling strategy to expand key cycling networks across the district," said Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw, Executive Member for Regeneration, Planning and Transport. "The issue is trying to work out the accurate costs. Highways England's is many, many millions; the Queensbury Tunnel Society - who've done fantastic work in raising awareness of the tunnel's potential as an asset - their figure is a lot lower."

Mr Ross-Shaw revealed that the Council will be asking the Historical Railways Estate to extend the June deadline imposed on the Council - after which abandonment works will start - to ensure sufficient time is available to establish a robust repair cost and assess possible funding sources. HRE recently told the Society that works are on course to get underway this summer, subject to the outcome of a planning application.

Taking up this point, Councillor Alun Griffiths from the Liberal Democrat and Independent group, asserted: "It's been there for a hundred years; it won't hurt to hang around for a bit longer whilst a decision is made and funding is sorted. There is no urgency to fill it in. We should do everything we can as a Council - with the support of other organisations - to put a stop on the filling-in so we make some sensible decisions about what could be an absolutely brilliant asset to this community."

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, responded: "What the Councillors' support demonstrates is that this is not a party political issue. Everyone with their eyes open can see the sense in transforming our historic tunnel into a facility that will improve connectivity, benefit the



environment and help in our battle against obesity, rather than pumping public money into a valueless abandonment scheme.

“We must look now to the Council’s own structural investigations to ensure they deliver success, not excess. We have said from the outset that the only sustainable repair option for the tunnel is one that’s proportionate, pragmatic and developed by engineers with deep, specialist insight. We don’t want to waste public money on ‘over-the-top’ repairs either.”

Support for the tunnel’s reuse as a cycle path continues to build. An ePetition, which seeks to suspend HRE’s abandonment plans, has gained more than 7,200 signatures, both from across the UK and abroad. It can be signed at [www.tiny.cc/QueensburyTunnel](http://www.tiny.cc/QueensburyTunnel).

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

[www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml](http://www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml)

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

(Link) [https://youtu.be/c4f0M\\_qfvVY](https://youtu.be/c4f0M_qfvVY)

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/c4f0M_qfvVY" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>`

**More general information on the campaign is available from:**

[www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/](http://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) 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 on 30th September 2013.