



Ministerial visit to Queensbury Tunnel

Under Secretary of State for Transport Robert Goodwill will visit Queensbury Tunnel on Monday 23rd June, following his speech in Leeds last month where he expressed the view that more disused railways have the potential to become dedicated cycleways. Joining the Minister will be Gary Verity, Chief Executive of Welcome to Yorkshire, as well as high-level representatives from Bradford and Calderdale councils. Mr Goodwill's visit is in response to an invitation from the Queensbury Community Heritage & Action Partnership (Q-CHAP) which is campaigning to preserve the tunnel for public benefit.

The tunnel could become an extension of the existing Great Northern Railway Trail which has been created by Sustrans and Bradford Council. The mile and a half long structure would link the Trail to Holmfild and Halifax, and so has the potential to be a vital part of the region's growing cycle network.

The Highways Agency will soon undertake an engineering survey to assess the cost of repairs needed to safeguard properties above the tunnel. Thereafter, the decision has to be made either to seal and abandon it or undertake the works in a way that preserves the passageway through which, in Q-CHAP's view, needs to be protected until the next stage of a cycleway project can begin. The Highways Agency report is expected in the autumn and the timing of the Minister's visit is critical: the position of the Department for Transport will influence the decision-making process.

Whilst the Highways Agency does not have the remit to develop a cycleway through the tunnel, Sustrans is keen to follow on and undertake the necessary works as long as the brick and stone lining can be made structurally sound. Several other former railway tunnels have benefited from similar projects and there is growing evidence that such routes give a good return for the money spent on them. As well as providing safe, off-road options for commuters and leisure users, they are a big attraction for visitors, helping to boost local trade and tourism.

Q-CHAP is hoping the Minister will agree that Queensbury Tunnel is a great asset for Yorkshire. As a legacy of the Tour de France, it could boost cycling and walking in a beautiful corner of the county, as well as standing testimony to the local textile and transport heritage for many generations to come.

Norah McWilliam, who leads Q-CHAP, said: "2018 will be the 140th anniversary of the tunnel's opening. Given the go-ahead, we think Bradford and Halifax could become proud joint hosts to a fantastic sporting event - the Queensbury Tunnel Triathlon. Why not? This is a once-only opportunity to ensure a fantastic piece of our industrial past plays a key role in our transport future. We need to grab that opportunity with both hands."

Press and media outlets, together with campaign supporters, are invited to attend the event which will start at the north portal of Queensbury Tunnel at 11:00am on Monday 23rd June. The portal is located 400m from the bottom of Station Road, Queensbury (BD13 1HR), at the end of a track which heads left off the Great Northern Railway Trail, 200m from its start point. The Minister will go on to visit Black Dyke Mills and Victoria Hall.

Journalists should email any enquiries to u2us@queensburytunnel.org.uk



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 (39), John Gough (40), Richard Jones (33), Frederick Goulding (28) and Captain Pickles (30) 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) Uitz 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>.

A collection of high-resolution images to accompany our News Releases can be downloaded at <http://www.queensburytunnel.org.uk/media/imagery.shtml>. Please ensure the specified credit is included alongside any picture published.