



Monday 25th June 2018

Councillors question Highways England's language

Councillors in Queensbury, West Yorkshire, are leading a challenge to recent comments by Highways England on the threat posed by the condition of a disused railway tunnel under the village.

Campaigners hope to restore the 1.4-mile long Victorian structure as part of an ambitious 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, are seeking to abandon it at an estimated cost to the taxpayer of £3.2 million.

On Monday, Bradford's *Telegraph & Argus* carried an article about a letter sent recently to the Transport Secretary by Bradford South MP, Judith Cummins. In it she insisted that a decision on "the future of Queensbury Tunnel must be made on the basis of robust evidence and not on a rush to find a convenient solution for the HRE."

A spokesperson for Highways England responded by saying: "Unless major work is carried out on Queensbury Tunnel, the level of safety risk to the community increases. Due to the deteriorating poor condition of the tunnel, action now needs to be taken... We have been clear on our decision, backed by the Department of Transport, to close the tunnel in order to protect the community and of our intention to start the safety work in September 2018..."

In response, Conservative Councillors Andrew Senior and Robert Hargreaves have joined with Lynda Cromie, Independent - all of whom represent Queensbury ward - in writing to Highways England for an explanation of their comments.

"I feel that the statements made by Highways England are just an attempt to frighten the people of Queensbury, adding pressure to the argument for abandoning the tunnel," says Mr Senior. "We need to remember that they are not proposing to fill it all in - only the two ends and very short sections below the shafts. Large areas will be left for nature to take its course."

"There will be no access for inspections or maintenance which, in my view, increases the risks to the community. They are trying to manage the tunnel with their eyes closed and their fingers crossed. The safest thing to do would be to spend the money on repairing the tunnel, leaving it open so engineers can see what's happening to it."

In an email to Highways England, the Councillors ask for "clear documentary evidence" to support the recent statements due to their potential for causing concern to those who live above the tunnel, particularly near the shafts.

Graeme Bickerdike, Engineering Co-ordinator for the Queensbury Tunnel Society, says: "We know that short sections of the tunnel are in a poor condition and have been for some years. But the idea that we're on the brink of a catastrophic failure that results in destabilisation of a shaft and the undermining of properties - which is a scenario that Highways England has actually suggested to the Department for Transport - is not plausible at this time."



“In reality, the short-term threat to the village of Queensbury is negligible. There is no basis on safety grounds for works to start in September - not this year, next year or the one after that.”

Meanwhile, almost 9,200 people have signed an online petition (www.tiny.cc/QueensburyTunnel) in support of the Society’s aspiration for reopening the tunnel.

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To link to the Society’s promotional video or embed it on your webpage:

(Link) https://youtu.be/c4f0M_qfvVY

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

Contacts

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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 3,500 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.