



Friday 26th January 2018

Video series puts tunnel in the spotlight

The Queensbury Tunnel Society, which is promoting the idea of a cycle path through a disused railway tunnel to the west of Bradford, will publish a collection of filmed interviews next week with people who have connections with the Victorian structure or see its potential as part of a sustainable transport network.

Each two minutes long, the videos will cover five broad themes - Cycling, Campaign, Engineering, Memories and Politics - and form part of the Society's ongoing efforts to convince stakeholders, including Bradford Council, that the tunnel is an asset, not a liability. A new video will be released every morning and a second series is already planned for later in February. The aim is to raise awareness of the tunnel, its plight and the potential benefits of incorporating it into a cycle network connecting Halifax to Bradford and Keighley.

The tunnel is currently under threat because of abandonment plans being drawn up by Highways England's Historical Railways Estate (HRE) which looks after it on behalf of the Department for Transport (DfT). This will involve infilling critical sections with concrete at a cost to the taxpayer of about £3 million. Political pressure is currently being applied to suspend those works pending the outcome of two investigations - one being progressed for Bradford Council and another from consultants appointed by the DfT.

The first video, to be published on Monday, features Councillor Dot Foster, Calderdale's Cycling and Walking Champion. She outlines the benefits of exercise - specifically the creation of new shared paths - in the battle against obesity and mental ill-health. "If the vision of Councils in the local area is truly to improve the health and wellbeing of the local people, we've got to invest," she states.

On Tuesday, Jeff McQuillan, Chair of the Great Northern Railway Trail Development Group, takes us back to the year 2000 when two railway historians met Bradford's Lord Mayor to convince him that three disused railway viaducts should be saved and adopted for cycling. Having achieved that goal, Jeff believes that "We've got to link towns and cities; that's why the idea of [links to] Bradford, Keighley and Halifax have come about in the last few years. So that is quite an ambitious project."

Wednesday's video sees Graeme Bickerdike, the Queensbury Tunnel Society's engineering co-ordinator, look behind the headline repair figure of £35.4 million which the Historical Railways Estate developed for the tunnel in 2016. "They took a disproportionate approach to the engineering and some of the individual costs were over-inflated," he asserts. "So we've really been confronted by the need for a two-year long damage limitation exercise."

Harry Thompson became a locomotive fireman in the late 1940s, regularly visiting what became known as the Queensbury Lines. On Thursday, he recalls how a colleague had a mishap with a signal in Queensbury Tunnel. "He was asleep! When he passed the signal, it rang a bell and woke him up. He put his head out and, of course, he got caught on the head with it."



Bradford West MP, Naz Shah, offers her perspective on Friday. She believes the tunnel should be celebrated and restored for people to ride through. “I think it’s pretty horrendous really - just the thought of £3 million worth of concrete in a tunnel that people dug out for the purpose of our infrastructure and support and connectivity. It would be an absolute travesty.”

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, says: “We’re working hard to promote our vision of the tunnel as a feat of Victorian engineering that still has a valuable role to play in the 21st century. These videos will help us, through the insight of friends who share the vision. It’s a complex story with lots of sub-plots, but we have to unravel them before it’s too late. There’s no going back if, in 20 years, we suddenly see the need for a cycle path connecting the Calder and Aire valleys. No amount of regret will shift all that concrete or the damage inflicted by time.”

A short trailer, featuring clips from the five interviews, can be viewed at youtu.be/TKdQOYVhoKk.

--ENDS--

To link to the trailer for the ‘Reflections’ series or embed it on your webpage:

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

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/TKdQOYVhoKk?rel=0&controls=0&showinfo=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

General press enquiries: media@queensburytunnel.org.uk

Norah McWilliam: norah.mcwilliam@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. 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 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.