



Thursday 27th September 2018

Flooding delays tunnel works

Highways England has been forced to delay preparatory works for the abandonment of a disused railway tunnel in West Yorkshire after part of the structure flooded to a depth of 11 feet.

On Monday (24th September), AMCO-Giffen, the appointed contractor, was intending to begin the installation of temporary strengthening arches in Queensbury Tunnel - between Bradford and Halifax - but access at the south end was impossible due to water extending more than 350 yards into the tunnel. Although the north end - which is 75 feet higher - remained dry, workers entering there would have had no second escape route in the event of an emergency evacuation.

The situation arose due to the loss of a lease which had been secured in 2015 to allow the construction and operation of a pumping station. The £50 annual rent had not been paid for two years and the Department for Transport (DfT), which owns the tunnel, did not respond to a notice of forfeiture. The landowner allowed pumping to continue for nine months with no lease in place, but turned the equipment off after Highways England and the DfT failed to enter into meaningful negotiations about a new agreement.

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "The lease came at a cost of several hundred thousand pounds in legal action and was vital to Highways England in order to deliver its questionable £3.6 million abandonment scheme. The profound consequences of the £50 rent being overlooked are now becoming clear.

"But this is an opportunity for them to pause and reflect. Bradford Council is looking at the viability of taking on the tunnel's ownership, allowing it to be transformed into a nationally significant landmark on our cycle path network which would bring benefits to the region for generations to come. That process should be allowed to run its course without the threat of abandonment overtaking it."

It is understood that Highways England is now progressing the option of pumping the water to the north end of the tunnel, a distance of 1.4 miles. To do so, pipes and equipment would have to be taken through a 330-yard long section of tunnel which has been designated as an exclusion zone due to two partial collapses of the lining, obstructing the passageway.

Graeme Bickerdike, the Society's Engineering Co-ordinator, said: "It would be extraordinary if Highways England went down this road before they've had sensible discussions with the landowner about a new agreement to re-establish the existing water management arrangements.

"Creating a safe access route through the collapses and putting a more powerful pumping system in place would be technically demanding and add considerable cost, although Highways England seems to habitually forget that it's spending public money. But more importantly, this approach would needlessly expose the workforce to much higher levels of risk. Why would they do that when there's a cheaper, simpler and safer alternative?"

Following two weeks of on-site investigations over the summer, Bradford Council is shortly expected to receive a report from its consulting engineers on the condition of Queensbury Tunnel and the likely



cost of bringing it back into use. The findings will be reviewed alongside other relevant issues before a decision is taken on a transfer of the tunnel's ownership to the Council, without which the proposal to reopen it as a cycle path cannot move forward.

--ENDS--

To link to a new video on the tunnel campaign or embed it on your webpage:

(Link) <https://youtu.be/Yij7v7lM2H4>

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/Yij7v7lM2H4?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 3,200 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.