



Friday 5th April 2019

MPs show support for tunnel reopening

Local MPs have come together to demonstrate their backing for Queensbury Tunnel's proposed revival as part of a walking and cycling route connecting Bradford district to Halifax.

On Friday afternoon (5th April), Judith Cummins, MP for Bradford South, and Naz Shah, MP for Bradford West - within whose constituencies the tunnel lies - was joined at its northern entrance by Philip Davies, MP for Shipley, and a group of Councillors.

Members of the Queensbury Tunnel Society updated the MPs on the current position with their campaign, buoyed by Bradford Council's recent decision to formally endorse the proposal to reopen the Victorian structure. In February, officials told the Council's Executive that, over 30 years, a Bradford to Halifax Greenway - via Queensbury Tunnel - would generate £2.31 in social, economic and tourism benefits for every £1 invested in it. An advocacy document has been developed to support funding bids for the scheme.

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Society, said: "We're delighted that more and more people recognise the transformative potential of Queensbury Tunnel, attracting visitors to the area and improving connectivity.

"It's not just a wondrous feat of engineering; it's also a key connector that could help us meet our long-term health and environmental responsibilities. We cannot remain reliant on cars for short journeys, but the lack of safe, high-quality cycling infrastructure continues to act as a barrier. We must address that."

Meanwhile Highways England, which manages the 1.4-mile long tunnel for the Department for Transport, is still progressing plans to partially infill it due to perceived safety issues.

Phase 1 of its abandonment project, which involves strengthening vulnerable sections of the lining, has been hampered by flooding and is not now expected to finish before the end of May, two months late. Its estimated cost has risen to "at least £1.2-1.4 million". Phase 2, comprising the main abandonment works, requires planning permission and has a contracted price-tag of just over £3 million.

Philip Davies MP said: "Spending so much money on destroying something with so much potential seems ludicrous. The Queensbury Tunnel would provide a connecting link between the Calderdale and Bradford districts via the longest underground cycle route in the country. We want to promote that and champion the Victorian architecture of the tunnel."

Judith Cummins MP said: "The Queensbury Tunnel is a great historical asset, and destroying it now is just a convenient solution for the DfT. If the tunnel is sealed, any potential economic benefits from it disappear as well.

"The Queensbury Tunnel Society should be praised for finding a positive use of the tunnel as part of a cycling and walking trail that will be one of the best in the country, which will provide a long-term boost to the local economies of Queensbury, Bradford, and the wider West Yorkshire area."



Naz Shah MP said: "What I've seen is really inspiring. To see the tunnel and the engineers working on it, meeting the cyclists and local residents, it really does leave optimism that we can turn this into something beautiful for the rest of the country. The potential is really exciting."

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To link to a video about 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.

HRE's proposed abandonment scheme has been split into two phases, the first of which is for preparatory works and got underway on 1st October. Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that the original estimated cost of these works was £560,000, but has since risen to an estimated £1.2-1.4 million. The scheme's main phase requires planning permission and has been costed by AMCO-Giffen, the appointed contractor, at £3.016 million.

On 22nd October, Bradford Council informed Highways England that it would need to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment to accompany any planning application due to the complex relationship between the tunnel - most of which would be allowed to collapse - and historic local mine workings.