



Monday 8th March 2021

Campaigners welcome tunnel protection

A group hoping to reopen a disused West Yorkshire railway tunnel for walking and cycling has welcomed provisions to safeguard the Victorian structure.

Queensbury Tunnel, linking Bradford to Calderdale, has been at the centre of a longstanding dispute between Highways England, who intend to partially infill it due to perceived safety concerns, and sustainable transport campaigners who believe the tunnel should be repaired to form a key connector in the proposed Bradford-Halifax Greenway. The infilling works are expected to cost around £8 million but more than 7,300 people have so far objected to the planning application.

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority and two councils at either end of the 1.4-mile long underground passageway have expressed their support for the greenway scheme. Last year, a study by Bradford Council found that the route would deliver £5.60 in social and economic benefits for every £1 invested in it, representing high value for money.

The Council's draft Local Plan, which is currently out for consultation, includes a commitment to expand and improve the district's network of off-road cycle routes, both for commuting and leisure purposes. An extended Great Northern Railway Trail - running from Queensbury to Keighley - is identified on the policies map, together with Queensbury Tunnel and approach paths.

The chapter on Queensbury states that "The Local Plan will protect the Queensbury Tunnel which runs under the settlement as part of a wider connection with the Great Northern [Railway] Trail which provides a longer walking and cycling route connecting settlements including Cullingworth and Thornton."

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "We're obviously delighted that the Council is acting to ensure that this unique engineering asset is safeguarded against the destructive intentions of its current custodians.

"The public's appetite for walking and cycling was demonstrated strikingly through the first lockdown when so many of us took advantage of the green space and clean air that came with so many vehicles being off the road. We have to encourage more people to step outside on foot and bike by creating more safe routes for them to explore."

In January, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority published outline proposals for the development of a mass transit scheme linking major population centres across the county by 2040. Queensbury Tunnel was identified as a possible route for the Bradford-Halifax leg, but WYCA made clear that "the initial priority is that it is retained and becomes a walking and cycling route."

Dr McWilliam continued: "It's very clear that Highways England and the Department for Transport have not recognised the strategic value of Queensbury Tunnel for future transport use and have managed it blindly as a liability for many years.



“As we build a better future for our children and grandchildren after the pandemic, we have an obligation to invest wisely and ensure that maximum benefit is derived from our existing infrastructure. Queensbury Tunnel presents opportunities to help with improvements to our health, our wellbeing, the environment, the local economy and connectivity between communities. These opportunities cannot be lost to ignorance, a wasteful culture and lack of ambition.”

Government-funded studies into the feasibility of a Bradford-Halifax Greenway and technical options for repairing the tunnel are due to be completed by the end of this month.

--ENDS--

To link to a video on plans to abandon the tunnel or embed it on your webpage:

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

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/azIBmmzECgs?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) Uitz 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 2018. However the contractor, AMCO-Giffen, pulled most of its staff and equipment out of the tunnel in October 2019 after a significant inundation of floodwater. No.2 Shaft was infilled under Permitted Development powers later that month.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that the original estimated cost of the preparatory works was £545,000, but had risen to £5.23 million by the end of September 2020. The scheme's main phase requires planning permission and has been costed by contractor AMCO-Giffen at £3.016 million.