



Tuesday 11th June 2019

Objections flood in against tunnel plans

A planning application for the abandonment of a disused railway tunnel in West Yorkshire has attracted two thousand objections in just six days.

For five years, campaigners have been making the case for Queensbury Tunnel to form part of a new route for walkers and cyclists connecting Bradford and Keighley to Halifax, but Highways England's Historical Railways Estate, which manages the tunnel on the Department for Transport's behalf, wants to permanently close it due to perceived safety concerns.

Nigel Thornley from Chester, one of more than 2,300 people who have objected to the plans since last Wednesday, commented on Bradford Council's planning website: "It would be a travesty if this masterpiece of Victorian engineering was just abandoned when it could serve future generations. The emphasis today is on physical fitness to reduce the demand on our NHS and to increase the wellbeing of the population. This tunnel should be conserved as both a facility to be enjoyed by the population at large but also as a tribute to those gallant people who built it."

Dr Peter Edwards from Pudsey said: "This tunnel has the potential to form an essential link in a developing network of cycle routes across West Yorkshire. It should be saved as part of an initiative to support sustainable, safe, healthy and environmentally-friendly transport linking socially-disadvantaged areas."

Graham Richards from Keighley believes that "This proposal to infill and destroy Queensbury Tunnel is ludicrous. It's a short-sighted solution that completely ignores the multiple benefits that keeping it open and developing it as a resource would achieve. As a leisure cyclist of 65 years old, I am not capable any longer of tackling hills like these between Bradford and Calderdale. This tunnel would be a wonderful asset, opening up a whole new area to cycle in, as well as encouraging people to commute by cycle."

Around 50 people are recorded as being in support of the abandonment scheme; however, of these, all-bar-one have left comments in favour of the tunnel being brought back into use. Two objectors told the Queensbury Tunnel Society that they recorded their 'stance' on the plans as 'Object', only for it to show as 'Support' when their comments appeared online. The Council has been asked to investigate.

In February, Bradford and Calderdale councils confirmed their backing for the tunnel's reopening as part of a greenway linking the two districts. According to a Sustrans study, it could bring £37.6 million in social, economic and tourism benefits over 30 years.

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "We are both overwhelmed and inspired by the number of objections. They send the strongest possible message that the abandonment of Queensbury Tunnel - on very dodgy grounds and at a cost to the taxpayer of around £5 million - is simply unacceptable when it could play a positive future role as a sustainable transport corridor."



"It's time for Highways England and the Department for Transport to listen. Both profess to support active travel and yet they are conspiring to put beyond use a valuable asset which could create a strategic cycle link between Bradford District and Calderdale. It beggars belief."

The planning application can be viewed via Bradford Council's planning portal (www.tiny.cc/TunnelPlans) where comments and objections can also be left. The closing date is 5th July.

Meanwhile, the number of people who've signed an ePetition in favour of the tunnel's reopening has risen above 11,000.

--ENDS--

To link to the new video on the tunnel's abandonment 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>

To view the abandonment plans, or object/comment on them:

<http://tiny.cc/TunnelPlans>

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) Uitzi 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 it's understood that the figure has since risen to more than £1.75 million. The scheme's main phase - which requires planning permission - is costed by AMCO-Giffen, the appointed contractor, at £3.016 million.

On 22nd October 2018, 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 and historic local mine workings.