



Monday 18th February 2019

'Fragile' road prompts complaints

Residents have written to Highways England about the worsening condition of a road being used by works traffic to access a disused railway tunnel in West Yorkshire.

The company is currently spending more than £1 million on remedial works to Queensbury Tunnel - between Bradford and Halifax - ahead of a £3 million scheme to partly infill and abandon the structure. Meanwhile campaigners, supported by Bradford and Calderdale councils, are trying to save the tunnel for future inclusion within a cycle network.

Vehicular access to the tunnel is only possible via a private road heading down the hill from Queensbury to the site of a former railway station. According to residents, its surface was badly damaged during a tunnel maintenance project in 2015. Following complaints from their drivers, the contractor infilled potholes with loose stone which has since washed out, creating a hazard for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

The latest works, carried out by AMCO-Giffen, has involved heavy goods vehicles delivering plant, equipment, steelwork and other materials, most of which is being unloaded on private land against the wishes of the tenant; it is then taken down the Great Northern Railway Trail towards the tunnel. Daily convoys of workmen and engineers have made matters worse, prompting 11 householders to outline their concerns to Highways England about the deteriorating road surface and mud left on the Trail. More than two weeks later, they are still awaiting a reply.

Councillor Andrew Senior, representing Queensbury Ward, said: "Highways England had a duty to properly repair the road following its last programme of works in the tunnel. Its failure to do so has caused ruts to form and potholes to become deeper over the past few winters, increasing the level of risk to those who use the road.

"The first phase of a potentially much bigger project is now underway and it's clear that the impact on residents has not been given due consideration. I would urge Highways England to provide funding for a full repair of the road. In comparison to the rest of the scheme, the cost involved would be small."

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "The road gets worse on a daily basis and drivers have to weave around the potholes to avoid damaging their cars. It's in a fragile state now - some of the ruts are 8 inches deep and several yards long.

"The contractor recently filled some of the bigger holes, but it's gone beyond the need for patch repairs. You'd think a company called Highways England could do something about it, but they seem unwilling to accept responsibility for their actions. The consequences are being suffered by residents, visitors and people who use the Trail. After four years, everyone's fed up with it."

According to the deed of sale, the road was transferred into private ownership in 1970 and Highways England's right of access over it comes with the obligation of "making good any damage to the said property".



AMCO-Giffen's Sustainability Policy commits it to "engage with the communities in the areas we work in order to make a positive contribution to their environment" and "be a good neighbour and build trust within local communities".

--ENDS--

To link to a 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.

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 £1,109,040. 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.