



EMBARGOED UNTIL 15:00, FRIDAY 28th JUNE 2019

Clearer vision for tunnel greenway

Efforts to create a foot and cycle connection between Bradford and Halifax look set to shift up a gear with the publication of an 'advocacy document' to support funding bids.

The proposal, which is supported by Bradford and Calderdale councils, Sustrans, the Great Northern Railway Trail Development Group and the Queensbury Tunnel Society, would link communities either side of the ridge which separates the two districts. Passing close to several schools and colleges, the new route would follow the Thornton Road corridor out of Bradford before disappearing underground into the historic Queensbury railway tunnel, emerging at Holmfield from where it would head down the valley into Halifax.

Campaigners believe it would become a magnet for tourists as a landmark addition to the country's cycle network and offer the potential for commuting trips between Bradford District and Calderdale. An average of 14,300 work journeys are made between the urban centres every day, but, in 2011, 70% of them involved a car. In order to address health and environmental challenges, both Councils recognise the need to promote a shift to sustainable forms of transport, driven by the provision of safe cycling infrastructure.

Councillor Jane Scullion, Deputy Leader of Calderdale Council, said: "Encouraging people to leave their car at home and instead use active travel methods is a priority for Calderdale Council. Now more than ever, we need to be taking bold steps to ensure we provide high-quality, sustainable alternatives to driving.

"The opening up of the Queensbury tunnel would transform access from the north of Halifax to west Bradford and complement the wider strategic cycle networks planned in both boroughs. This is a unique opportunity to preserve and utilise a historic asset and leave a legacy for future generations."

At 1.4 miles in length, Queensbury Tunnel would serve as the Greenway's focal point, creating a strategic cross-District link without which it would be impractical to establish a route with cycle-friendly gradients. If reopened, it would be the longest cycling tunnel in the country; however its current custodians, Highways England, have recently applied for planning permission to abandon the structure due to perceived safety concerns.

Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw, Portfolio Holder - Regeneration, Planning & Transport, Bradford Council, said: "The evidence shows that a Bradford-Halifax Greenway with Queensbury Tunnel as the jewel at its heart would provide a huge boost to the district economically and for our tourism and leisure industries. Our advocacy document outlines this and has a huge range of support from the National Science & Media Museum, Sustrans, the Civic Society and many others.

"I'm calling on Highways England to withdraw their planning application and get round the table with Bradford Council to talk about how we can sustainably fund this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to save and restore the tunnel as part of a greenway of national significance."



The Bradford-Halifax Greenway - or CityConnect 3 - would run directly through an inclusive growth corridor being developed by local councils and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. Although the route would cost around £16 million to construct, it's expected to return £2.31 in benefits for every £1 invested; the Government regards that as High value for money. An estimated £10.8 million in tourism benefits would be accrued over 30 years, with much of that figure resulting from the inclusion of Queensbury Tunnel.

Holly Lynch, MP for Halifax, said: "I'm proud to support the campaign to save this historic gem which could play a key role in promoting sustainable transport and attracting tourists. We know that there are increasing numbers of foreign visitors coming to our region after seeing the Tour de Yorkshire and wouldn't it be fantastic if our local area could offer both the longest continuous climb in England at Cragg Vale and the longest cycle tunnel?"

"It's a great shame that this engineering triumph could be lost forever and, having met with the tunnel campaigners and heard the strength of feeling from the local community, it's getting my full backing."

Judith Cummins MP, within whose Bradford South constituency most of the tunnel lies, said: "It's important for local people to support the campaign and register an objection to the destruction of the Queensbury Tunnel, which 3,000 people have already done. It shows what it means to residents in Bradford and Halifax, and that they do not want a historical asset to be forever lost.

"A renovated tunnel would form the centrepiece of a cycle and walk trail connecting Bradford with Halifax, which would be enjoyed by current and future generations."

The development of the advocacy document was led by Bradford Council and it was launched at an event in Queensbury's Victoria Hall on Friday (28th June), attended by MPs, councillors, cycling campaigners and members of the local community. It identifies an initial need for a feasibility study to fully understand the challenges associated with the Greenway and further demonstrate that it represents a good investment.

Norah McWilliam, leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society, said: "We're presented with a now-or-never opportunity. If we're serious about meeting our long-term environmental and health obligations, we must commit to schemes like the Bradford-Halifax Greenway.

"We certainly cannot allow Highways England's questionable judgement to destroy a magnificent feat of engineering that could still play a valuable transport role."

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To link to a video on the Bradford-Halifax Greenway or embed it on your webpage:

(Link) <https://youtu.be/LzfdJna0Tno>

(Embed) `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/LzfdJna0Tno?rel=0" frameborder="0" allow="autoplay; encrypted-media" allowfullscreen></iframe>`



To view Highways England's 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) 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 3,100 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/strengthening 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



that figure has since risen to £1.97 million. The scheme's main phase - for which a planning application has been submitted - is costed by AMCO-Giffen, the appointed contractor, at £3.016 million.