



Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport

(by email)

25th June 2020

Dear Mr Shapps

Queensbury Tunnel

The 'best and final offer' to Bradford Council for the transfer of Queensbury Tunnel into its ownership, which came from your office last week, has caused deep dismay and bewilderment to the thousands of people and the local and national organisations who, since your statement earlier this year, had been expecting something a good deal more positive.

In March you described the tunnel as an asset and stated that you would "work with local leaders and the Combined Authority to come up with a better solution" than the official objective of partially filling it in, which you had "specifically prevented".

On this basis we believed that you fully appreciated the importance of Queensbury Tunnel as a strategic connector between Bradford District and Calderdale, and its potential to create economic, health, social and environmental benefits for our region. An updated assessment, released today by Bradford Council, concludes that a greenway between Bradford and Halifax, via the tunnel, would return £5.60 for every £1 invested (WebTAG compliant), and further benefits would accrue through the route's considerable leisure and tourism potential. This represents very high value for money.

Since March you have announced a £2 billion investment in walking and cycling to build on the huge upturn in active travel seen during the coronavirus outbreak. Yet it seems that you have failed to recognise that the £7 million project to abandon Queensbury Tunnel, which is still being progressed by Highways England, would prevent any direct future link between the emerging cycle network in Calderdale and those around Leeds/Bradford.

Giving Bradford Council four days to decide whether it can accept an offer for the tunnel which would not even pay for its repair does not sit comfortably with your previous statements. Moreover, given the value, iconic nature and deliverability of the proposed Bradford-Halifax Greenway, your offer calls into question the Government's commitment to active travel and its intention to "level up infrastructure and regenerate local economies" as you announced on 23rd May.

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There is significant public support for the repurposing of Queensbury Tunnel. To date, our ePetition has over 13,000 signatures and more than 6,500 people have submitted objections to Highways England's planning application to seal and effectively destroy the tunnel.

Your offer of £4 million put Bradford Council in an invidious position. In the current circumstances, the funding shortfall could not be found from its own coffers and your unfeasible 'take it or leave it' deadline made it impossible to seek assured funds from other sources.

£4 million has already been spent on strengthening works to parts of the tunnel; a further £3 million would be needed to complete its abandonment, subject to planning permission. It is inexplicable that you seem content to spend public money destroying a magnificent piece of Yorkshire's industrial heritage rather than supporting positive plans for a greenway that would reduce congestion in the long term, help communities beset with health problems, attract tourists and stimulate local businesses.

Whilst we recognise that the investment required to deliver the Bradford-Halifax Greenway is substantial - particularly in the current climate - it represents very good value for money and would demonstrate an ambitious intention on the Government's part to support active travel, encouraging more of us to safely take it up.

We urge you to stand by your previous statements and allocate a sufficient sum from your £2 billion active travel fund to give Bradford Council the confidence to take on the tunnel's ownership and construct a cycle route through it. Doing so would support the Government's policies for healthy active travel, mitigating climate change and 'levelling' of northern economies.

We would also welcome your intervention to ensure the £2.9 million earmarked by Highways England for further works in the tunnel during this financial year is spent only on further non-prejudicial strengthening and repairs, maintaining the tunnel as a viable future transport asset whilst the funding challenges are addressed.

We ask you to give this matter further careful attention.

Yours sincerely



Norah McWilliam

Queensbury Tunnel Society