Simon Lightwood MP
Member of Parliament for Wakefield and Rothwell
(by email to [redacted])

29 October 2025

Dear Simon

Queensbury Tunnel

Thank you for your email of 24 October 2025 via which you forwarded the letter sent by Lilian Greenwood MP, Minister for Local Transport, regarding Queensbury Tunnel. We note that you have reappropriated her letter in response to enquiries from multiple MPs, stakeholders and members of the public, including Norah McWilliam, Leader of the Queensbury Tunnel Society (QTS), who is copied into this reply. It is unfortunate that, before sending it out, you did not seek to validate its contents independently, especially given National Highways' (NH) previous behaviour of exaggerating and misrepresenting its own engineering evidence.

Whilst it is not disputed that inspections of the tunnel have been carried out by "qualified" examiners, the particular circumstances which led to NH deeming Queensbury Tunnel "no longer safe to enter" raise legitimate questions around the experience and competence of the examiner who undertook the visual inspections in 2024 and 2025. Furthermore, NH's response - to effectively write-off the tunnel and adopt a position of ignorance - suggests that its HRE team cannot manage the asset and risks appropriately.

We note that in order for NH to carry out the first stage of its proposed abandonment scheme (the installation of a plug below No.4 Shaft), the issue raised by the examiner will have to be investigated and resolved. It is therefore unclear why NH has not already taken this action, given that it might reveal an entirely benign cause. Instead, NH has provided advice to the DfT/Minister - upon which the decision to abandon the tunnel was based - without being evidentially informed. This is obviously a cause for concern.

The letter states that it would cost "£7.5m to carry out the essential safety works which involves stabilising the shafts". We note that it neglects to point out that this figure is an estimate and relates to a 'cut down' version of the scheme for which planning permission has actually been sought. QTS has written to Bradford Council about this matter. If the full scheme was implemented, the likely cost would be £12.5M (see Cost Breakdown in Appendix).

Phone: [redacted] Email: [redacted]
Facebook: @queensburytunnel X: @QburyTunnel

NH is no longer proposing to infill the section of tunnel between the south portal and No.1 Shaft which, according to the Planning Statement submitted as part of its planning application, is necessary due to the potential for a collapse to cause "substantial settlement in the ground at surface level" through an area where a footpath is located. It is therefore clear that the form of abandonment now proposed will result in increased public safety risk at the tunnel's south end, if NH's published documentation is to be believed.

The letter also neglects to point out that the shafts remain in Fair condition and have already been strengthened/stabilised through a £7.3M programme of taxpayer-funded works, following the intervention of former Transport Secretary Grant Shapps in 2020. He rejected the advice of the same NH engineers to abandon the tunnel due to its status as a transport asset.

No.2 Shaft was infilled under misapplied emergency permitted development rights in October 2019, whilst No.3 Shaft is supported by a grout plug installed in 2021. Nos. 4, 6 & 8 Shafts were strengthened with reinforced sprayed concrete in 2020. NH claims that the sprayed concrete does not constitute a permanent repair, but this is contradicted within the schematics for the tunnel remediation scheme developed by Jacobs, NH's engineering consultants, which identify that no further work is required at these shafts (see Appendix).

The letter also neglects to point out that the flooding at the southern entrance is entirely resolvable through dialogue with the landowner. The issue there has arisen through NH's failure to pay three years' rent on property occupied by a pumping station, resulting in forfeiture of a lease and the equipment being switched off. The rent remains outstanding and you should instruct NH to pay it immediately, as well as enquiring as to why it was not paid in the first place, resulting in an additional burden on the taxpayer of several million pounds.

The letter also neglects to point out that, even with the flooding, there is a secondary means of escape for any worker in the tunnel via No.4 Shaft. However, there is no evidence from recent inspection reports that examiners feared entrapment or injury from "falling debris"; neither is there any record of a "build-up of noxious gases".

The letter also neglects to point out that the NH/Jacobs tunnel repair costing "in the region of £30m" involves a disproportionate approach to the engineering, in sharp contrast to the alternative scheme put forward by AECOM, a highly-respected civil engineering firm commissioned by Bradford Council in 2018. Following a series of investigations, they concluded that the tunnel could be repaired for £6.9M (or £9.1M accounting for inflation). Some of the specified work was subsequently carried out as part of the 2020-21 strengthening and stabilisation programme, reducing that figure. There is now little difference between the cost of abandonment and an appropriate repair scheme.

Whilst it is not disputed that Sustrans' recent feasibility study found that "the range of Benefit Cost Ratios (BCRs) for all routes was narrow and that potential usage was not significantly different between the tunnel and non-tunnel (alpine) routes", the letter also neglects to point out that the tunnel would deliver substantially greater benefit for many more people. The Alpine alignment is twice as long as the tunnel alignment, involves 640 feet of climbing (see Appendix), several on-road sections (including through the busy junction of the A644/A647) and would be neither safe nor attractive for leisure or family users.

Sustrans describes the Alpine route as “valuable for the purposes of comparison but would in practice be a highly compromised solution”, with “significant delivery challenges” and uncertainties caused by unrecorded mine workings. It is clear that the only viable alignment for a Bradford/Keighley-Halifax active travel route is via Queensbury Tunnel.

The letter also neglects to point out that the claimed total cost of “circa £66m” to develop the tunnel and “rest of the route” actually relates to a 28-mile active travel network in north Halifax and west Bradford (see Appendix) that should still be completed irrespective of what happens to the 1.9-mile long connecting tunnel section. Less costly and ambitious versions of the network have also been developed. Failure to make this clear was acutely misleading.

Last weekend, the Prime Minister asserted that “Renewal is the only answer to decline”. In this context, it is disappointing that your government is prioritising the distorted, one-dimensional views of a handful of civil servants with a track record of managing these legacy structures as liabilities, disregarding the well-established social and economic benefits they can offer, as illustrated by the Sustrans study. It is a source of surprise that the last Conservative administration showed significantly more vision - and willingness to intervene - than Labour when it comes to these valuable heritage assets.

The Queensbury Tunnel Society was recently contacted by a former member of the tunnels team in AmcoGiffen, the contractor used by NH for the previous works in the tunnel. Their testimony reveals a shocking reality whereby National Highways was “led by the hand” into spending a considerable sum of public money without appropriate oversight. It also goes some way to explaining why NH continues to misrepresent the risks associated with the shafts, as highlighted by the irresponsible scaremongering on its Queensbury Tunnel web page.

As an invested stakeholder, we would welcome the opportunity to play you a recording of the whistle-blower’s evidence - or at least the key highlights - at a meeting and request that you ask your office to arrange one with us.

We fully understand that the challenges around Queensbury Tunnel are many and complex; however, as a connector between two large conurbations, the structure also presents a unique opportunity to deliver an iconic and nationally important addition to our active travel network, demonstrating a level of ambition that has previously been lacking. That opportunity should not be lost to a decision that has been made on partial and skewed evidence.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Graeme Bickerdike

Engineering Coordinator, Queensbury Tunnel Society

Copied to:

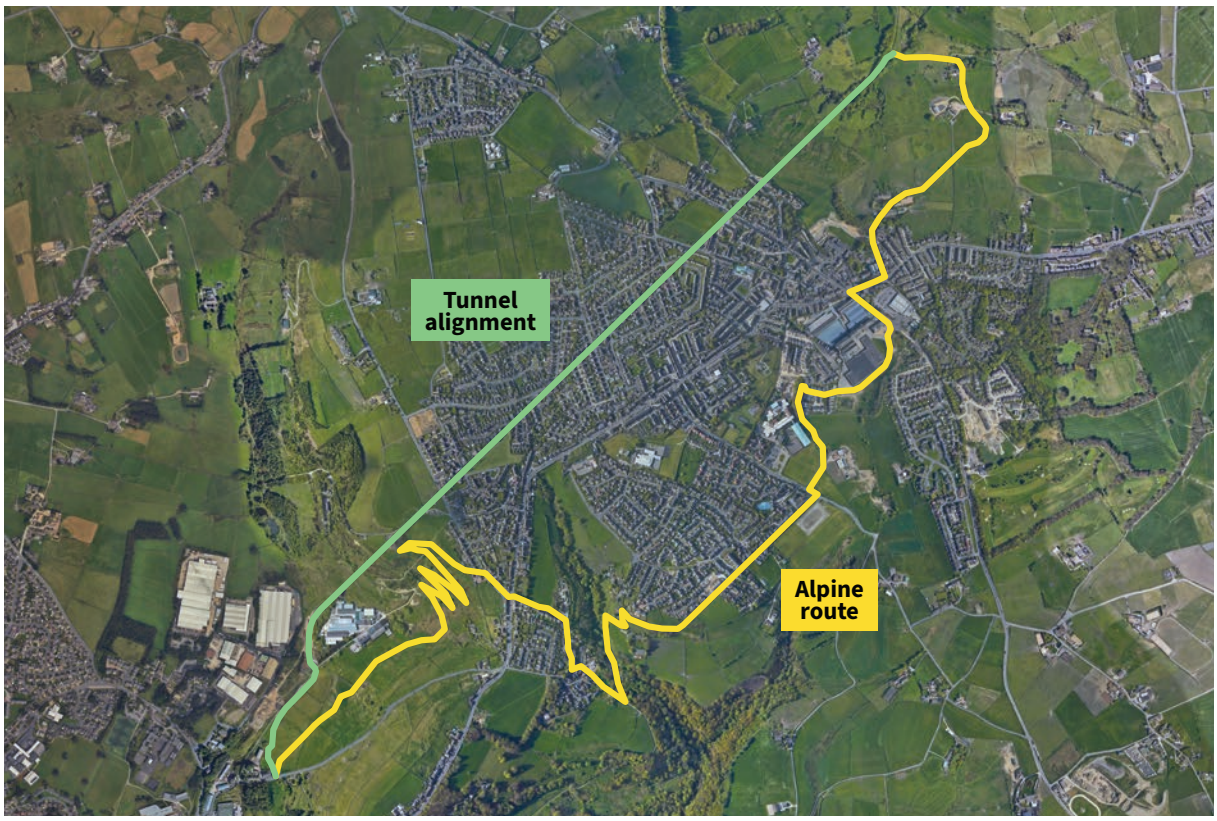
Judith Cummins MP: Bradford South
Cllr Alex Ross-Shaw
Relevant Bradford Council officers
Ruth Cadbury MP: Chair, Transport Committee
[redacted]
Naz Shah MP: Bradford West
Cllrs Mitchell & Johnson: Queensbury Ward
Tracy Brabin: Mayor of West Yorkshire
[redacted]
Lilian Greenwood MP: Minister for Local Transport

Appendix

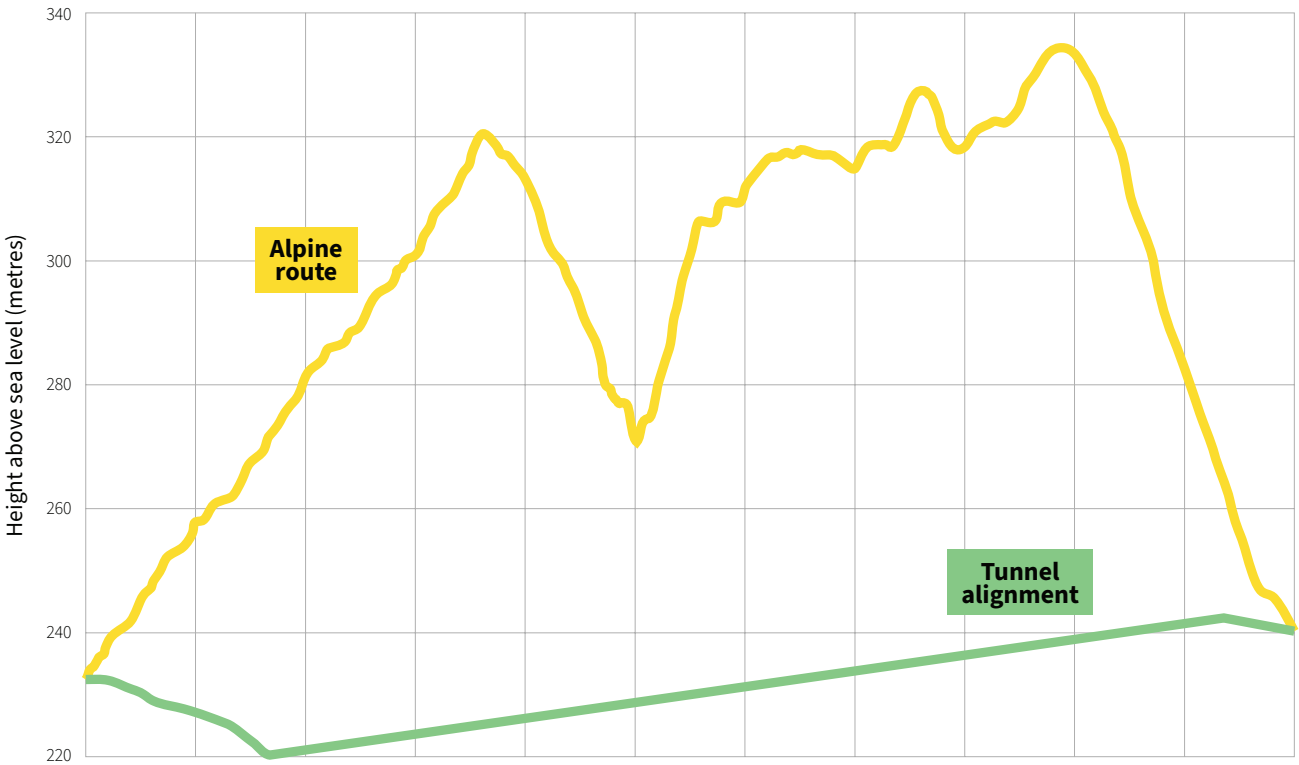
Cost breakdown for abandonment

Financial Year	Works complete per phase	Estimated budget
2025/26	Plug at base of Shaft 4	£2M
2026/27	Plug at base of Shaft 8	£1.5M
2027/28	Fill to North end of tunnel	£2M
2028/29	Fill to Shafts 3 & 4	£1M
2029/30	Fill to Shafts 6 & 8	£1M
Sub total	**(Proposed 'cut down' scheme)**	**£7.5M**
	Plug at base of Shaft 1	£1.5M
	Plug at base of Shaft 6	£1.5M
	Fill to South end of tunnel	£1.8M
	Fill to Shaft 1	£0.2M
Total	**(Estimate for full scheme)**	**£12.5M**

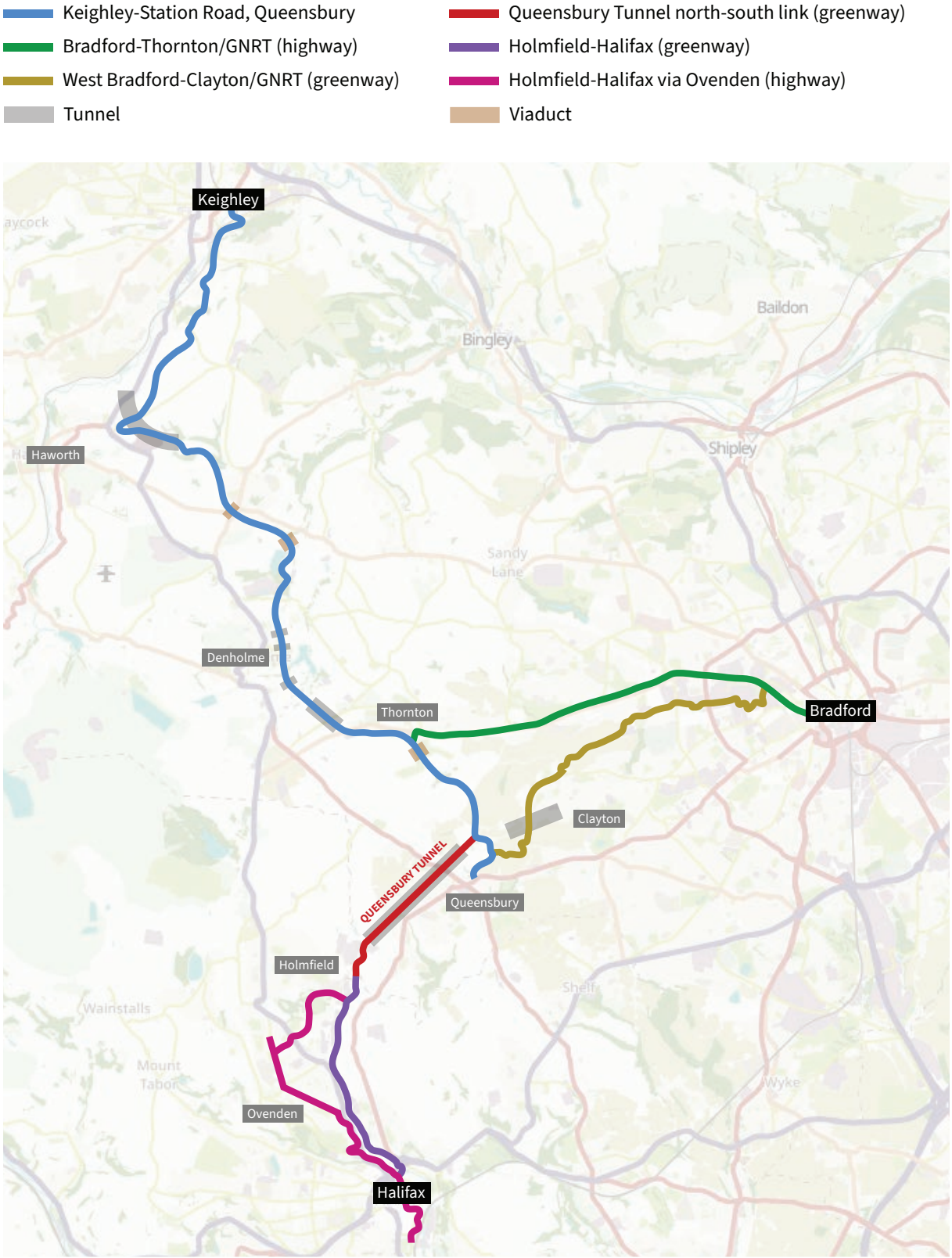
Source for 'cut down' scheme costs: HQU/3D Queensbury Tunnel - Abandonment option report requested by DfT on 17/3/25 (National Highways)



Comparison of the two developed Holmfield-Queensbury alignments, via the tunnel (1.9 miles) and via the surface/Alpine route (3.7 miles).



Comparison of the two developed Holmfield-Queensbury gradients, via the tunnel (23m/75ft of climbing) and via the surface/Alpine route (195m/640ft of climbing).

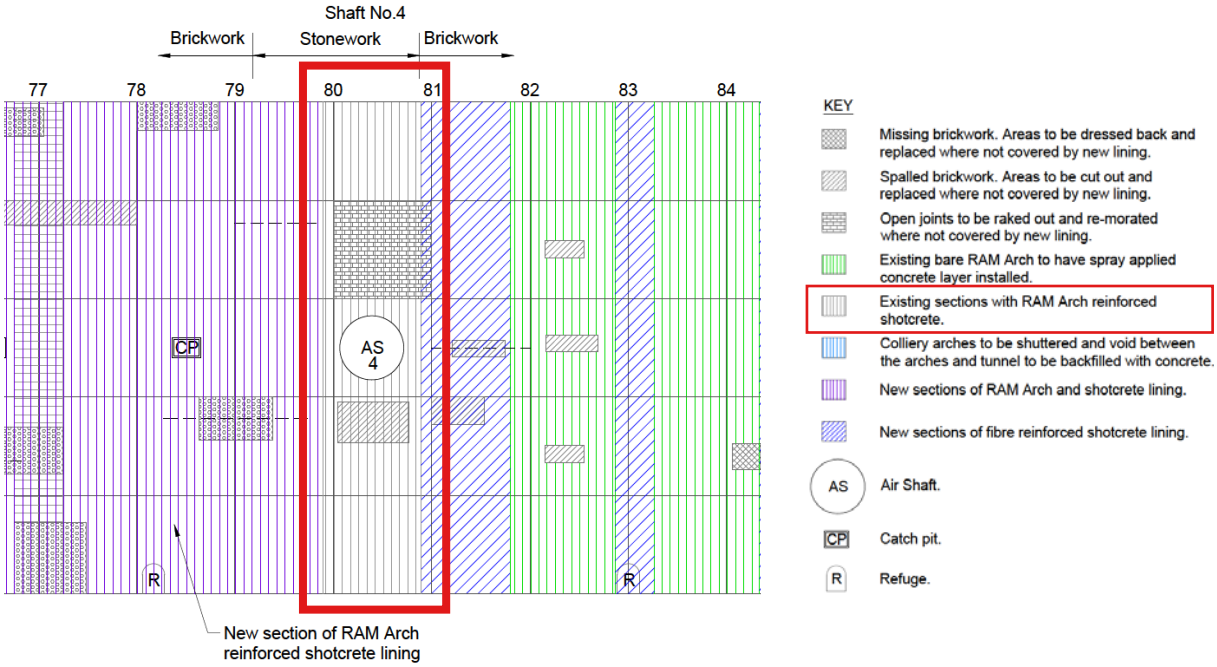


Sustrans' "most advantageous and attractive" active travel network, extending for 28 miles through west Bradford/Keighley and north Halifax, connected by a 1.9-mile section through Queensbury Tunnel.

No.2 Shaft was infilled under Class Q emergency permitted development rights in October 2019, despite Bradford Council issuing a Planning Contravention Notice asking for the work to stop. The work is now unauthorised as it has been retained beyond the statutory limit of six months applicable at the time.

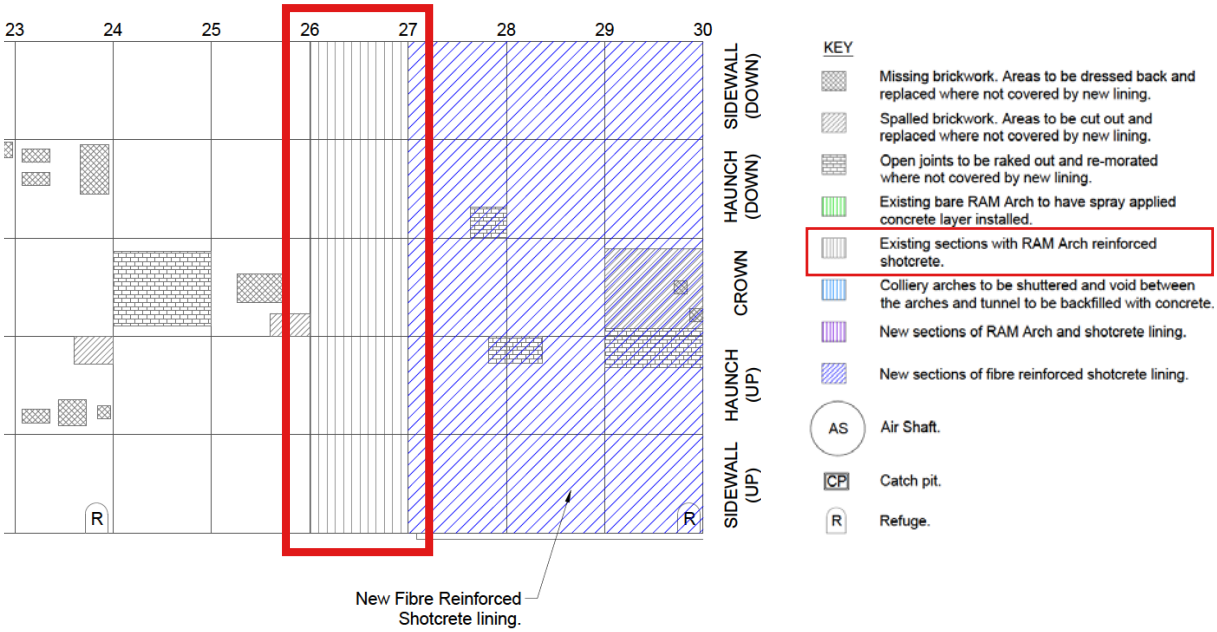
No.3 Shaft has been supported by a RamWall grout plug.

No.4 Shaft has been strengthened using 250mm of RamArch-reinforced sprayed concrete. National Highways claims that this does not constitute a permanent repair, but this is contradicted by Jacobs' *Queensbury Tunnel Study* which identifies that no work would be needed at this shaft if the tunnel was subject to a remediation scheme for repurposing.



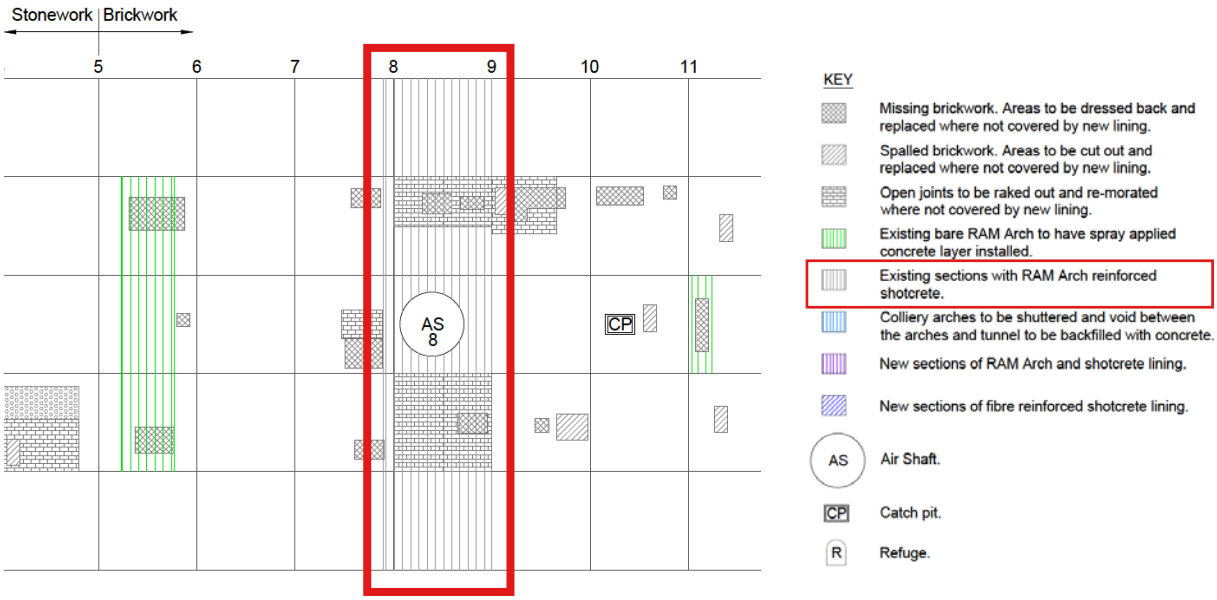
Jacobs' schematic drawing for repairs to the section of tunnel around No.4 Shaft.

No.6 Shaft has been strengthened using 250mm of RamArch-reinforced sprayed concrete. National Highways claims that this does not constitute a permanent repair, but this is contradicted by Jacobs' *Queensbury Tunnel Study* which identifies that no work would be needed beneath this shaft if the tunnel was subject to a remediation scheme for repurposing.



Jacobs' repair schematic for the section of tunnel around No.6 Shaft.

No.8 Shaft has been strengthened using 250mm of RamArch-reinforced sprayed concrete. National Highways claims that this does not constitute a permanent repair, but this is contradicted by Jacobs' *Queensbury Tunnel Study* which identifies that no work would be needed at this shaft if the tunnel was subject to a remediation scheme for repurposing.



Jacobs' repair schematic for the section of tunnel around No.8 Shaft.

When used on Network Rail infrastructure such as in Liverpool Central High Level Neck (above), 250mm of RamArch-reinforced sprayed concrete is regarded as having a design life of 120 years.