



19 July 2013

Asbestos delays tunnel works

Work on refurbishing the historic Tyne Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnels has been delayed while contractors, GB Building Solutions, remove asbestos from the ceiling voids in the rotunda buildings.

This means the tunnels are now expected to reopen in August 2014.

Paul Fenwick, project director for the tunnels' owners, the Tyne & Wear Integrated Transport Authority, said: "We were aware of the existence of asbestos and were originally advised that it would be possible to work around it.

"However, our main contractor for the refurbishment works, GB Building Solutions, was concerned that the works themselves and the need to manoeuvre equipment and materials in such a confined space could damage the ceiling and disturb the asbestos.

"I have agreed that the removal of the asbestos by specialist contractors is the best way forward. Unfortunately this will mean a delay to the reopening of the tunnels.

"In the meantime, our free, timetabled replacement shuttle bus service which operates 7 days a week between 6am and 8pm will continue to operate until the tunnels re-open."

The grade-II listed tunnels closed on 20 May 2013 for a £4.9 million refurbishment which will see two of the original wooden-step escalators replaced with inclined lifts, and other works including new lighting.

ENDS

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Background information:

The historic Tyne Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnels opened in 1951 and connect Howdon on the north bank of the Tyne with Jarrow on the south bank.

See www.tynepedestrianandcyclisttunnels.co.uk for further information.

The refurbishment will include the removal of two of the original four wooden-step escalators and their replacement with inclined lifts. The remaining escalators will be renovated and opened up to public view but will not be usable except in the case of an emergency.

Other works include a complete modernisation of the tunnels' mechanical and electrical systems, and improvements to the fabric of the structures.

GB Building Services have been appointed main contractor. The works are expected to take 56 weeks once the asbestos is removed from the rotunda ceiling voids.