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Time extension to tunnels survey

The owners of the Tyne Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnels between Jarrow and Howdon are extending the deadline for a survey of shift workers because of recent bad weather.

The survey is being carried out because of the scheduled temporary closure of the tunnels in the autumn for a £4 million refurbishment. The tunnels' owner, the Tyne & Wear Integrated Transport Authority (TWITA), is examining options to help shift workers affected by the closure.

The first research session at the Grade II-listed tunnels took place on the night of 'The Great Storm' on June 28.

Paul Fenwick, project director at the Tyne & Wear Integrated Transport Authority (TWITA), said: "We thought the results from that night would not have been representative of the usage of the pedestrian and cyclist tunnels by shift workers, so we have extended the deadline from July 20 to the 28th.

"This will enable us to complete a further research session to make up for the one affected by the storm."

The tunnels are expected to close for 12 months once work starts on the refurbishment in the autumn. A free, timetabled replacement bus service with a cycle trailer will operate between the entrances to the tunnels between 6am and 8pm, seven days a week, during the closure.

TWITA is keen that workers who use the tunnels outside of these times are not disadvantaged.

Mr Fenwick said: “It would not be affordable to keep the bus service running throughout the night so we are considering what other measures may practically be put in place to help shift workers.”

Shift workers can fill in a questionnaire online at www.tynepedestrianandcyclisttunnels.co.uk.

Ends

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Note to editors: The tunnels were opened in July 1951 and at their peak were used by 20,000 people every day.

They contain the first purpose-built cycle tunnel in the UK and were the earliest to be used by both cyclists and pedestrians.

A special feature of the tunnels is their four original wooden-step Waygood-Otis escalators. At the time of construction, they were the longest single-rise escalators in the world, with a vertical rise of 85ft (25.9m) and a length of approximately 200ft (61m). They are believed still to be the longest wooden-step escalators in Europe.

The refurbishment will include the replacement of two escalators with inclined lifts, new lighting, CCTV, control and communications systems, repairs to the tunnel structure and to the historic finishes such as tiling and panelling. The concrete floor sections are also to be refurbished or replaced, which will greatly improve the surfaces for cyclists and pedestrians.