



18 April 2013

Pedestrian tunnel closure date announced

The historic Grade II-listed Tyne Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnels will close for refurbishment on 20 May 2013 for around 12 months, owners the Tyne & Wear Integrated Transport Authority (TWITA) announced today (18 April 2013).

Contractor GB Building Solutions of Balliol Business Park, Newcastle, has been appointed to carry out the £4.9 million refurbishment which will include the replacement of two of the original four escalators with inclined lifts and the replacement of the tunnels' ageing mechanical and electrical systems.

During the closure, a free, timetabled shuttle bus service for pedestrians and cyclists will operate between the tunnel entrances from 6am and 8pm, 7 days a week. A night service will also be provided by tunnel operators TT2, assisting TWITA, for night shift workers who pre-register.

TWITA project director Paul Fenwick said: "The tunnels are an important transport link between North and South Tyneside, with usage particularly by cyclists increasing in recent times.

"All four original escalators are now out of service and beyond economic repair, so this refurbishment will give the tunnels a new lease of life and will greatly improve the experience for users.

"Inclined lifts are rare in Britain and we expect them to become something of an attraction in themselves once the tunnels reopen."

The refurbishment is being funded from the Tyne Tunnels revenue account so there will be no financial burden on council taxpayers.

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To see a virtual model of the tunnels post-refurbishment go to:

<http://www.tynepedestrianandcyclisttunnels.co.uk/tour-the-tunnels/>

Night shift workers can register for the Night Service by downloading a form from

<http://www.tynepedestrianandcyclisttunnels.co.uk/night-service/>

Background information: The Works

Inclined Lifts

The principal driver for the refurbishment works has been the disruption caused by the regular breakdown of the aged escalators which are original to the tunnels. The escalators are beyond reasonable economic repair and it is not possible to carry out a full refurbishment which would meet modern escalator safety requirements. TWITA has opted for the replacement of one escalator on each side of the river with an inclined lift. This is to be installed alongside the remaining escalator.

Specialist Italian company Maspero Elevatori has been selected to install the inclined lifts.

Within each rotunda the new inclined lift and retained escalator will be screened by glass. At the upper and lower landings the glass screen will contain the landing doors to the inclined lift and an emergency exit door which will give access to the static wooden tread escalator. The remaining escalators are to be locked in position and thus will provide only a fixed stairway to be used in the event of an emergency only.

The inclined lift cars will be able to carry 27 people (without bikes) at a time, with an estimated capacity of carrying 1000 pedestrians or 240 cyclists with their bikes every hour. The lifts will accommodate bicycles, tandems wheelchairs, pushchairs and smaller motorised disabled scooters.

The cars themselves are to be constructed largely of glass to give full all-round vision of the inclined shafts and the retained escalator from the lift car.

Feature lighting will be installed in order to give tunnel users a fascinating insight into the construction and operation of the retained wooden tread escalators.

The cars will be capable of travelling at one metre per second up and down the 30 degree inclines. A 'single' journey will take around 60 seconds compared to around 3 minutes on the old escalators when they were in working order (assuming one stayed on the same step for the entire journey).

The two new inclined lifts will be compliant with DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) requirements for barrier free access and will have all the control and drive requirements for energy saving.

The two vertical lifts, refurbished in 2010/11, will also continue to be available post-refurbishment.

Tunnel Systems

Tunnel fire safety and security systems are to be replaced and improved. A completely new system of CCTV is to be installed, giving full visibility of the tunnels from the Tyne Tunnel Control room. This will be augmented by a new public address system throughout the tunnels. New 'Help' points are to be installed at strategic points in the tunnels, with direct intercom connections to the NTC Control room.

Communications are to be improved, with the installation of 'Information' screens at the entrance to each rotunda, giving status reports, advance notice of disruptions to service, events and closures etc.

Lighting

The original 'cold cathode' linear light fittings in each tunnel and the inclined shafts will be replaced by modern fittings with an integrated housing for cabling incorporating CCTV, public address, fire safety systems and safety signage.

Structural Integrity

The structural integrity of the tunnels is also to be confirmed and anti-corrosion treatment is to be carried out where appropriate. Regular users will have noticed several areas within the tunnels where sections of tiles have already been removed in order to reveal the tunnel structure itself. Such areas will be extended where appropriate to allow repair before retiling with replica heritage tiling to match existing finishes.

Ceramic Tiling

A full tiling condition survey has been carried out. Where the budget allows, tiling repairs will be completed within the project. It is anticipated that after completion of the refurbishment project, a programme of tiling repairs will continue into the future.

The internal 'Warerite' cladding above the lower landing areas and the inclined shafts will be removed to allow corrosion repairs to the structure behind. Where possible the existing cladding will be reinstated. Where the original panels are damaged they will be replaced with new panels of a similar material, with the help of local company Formica Ltd who coincidentally now own the Warerite brand.

Paving

The paving in both tunnels is to be lifted and re-laid throughout the full length of the tunnels. Where necessary damaged paving will be replaced, or repaired.

Signage

Signage throughout the tunnels will be rationalised and improved. The signage is part of the wider strategy being implemented on the Metro system, so Metro users will instantly recognise the branding. This scheme has been chosen specifically to integrate the Tyne Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnels into the wider transport network across Tyne and Wear.

Rotunda Buildings

The rotunda buildings themselves are to be refurbished. Externally the original Crittal windows are to be renovated and reinstated where appropriate. The roof of each rotunda is to be repaired and repainted, to return it to close to what is believed was the original colour – a light grey/silver finish, evident on some archive photos of the rotundas. Further minor repairs to the fabric of the buildings are also to be completed, such as re-pointing of brickwork.

Internally, the rubberised floor panels and ceramic floor tiles within the interiors are to be refurbished and the interiors fully redecorated. Lighting is also to be replaced to match the modern fittings to be used within the tunnels themselves.

A number of the original light fittings are to be retained and reinstalled in the plant rooms for posterity.

What happens to the replaced escalators?

Each linear metre of escalator weighs approximately one tonne. A short section has already been promised to South Shields Museum. Parts and components have been identified and will be stored for possible re-use in the future.

History

The Tyne Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnels (TPCT) were opened on 24th July 1951, heralded as Tyneside's contribution to the 'Festival of Britain' (May to September 1951) at a total cost of £833,000.

At their peak, around 20,000 people used the tunnels every *day*. Now, since the decline of industry along the river, around the same number use the tunnels every *month*.

The structure contained the first purpose-built cycle tunnel in the UK and was the earliest to be used by both cyclists and pedestrians.

The Tunnels run under the River Tyne between Howdon in North Tyneside and Jarrow in South Tyneside. The two tunnels run in parallel, the pedestrian tunnel has a 10 ft 6 in (3.2 m) internal diameter and the cycle tunnel has a larger 12 ft (3.7 m) internal diameter.

Both tunnels are 900 ft (274.5 m) in length, 40 ft (12.2 m) below the river bed, with floor levels 85ft (26 m) below high water level of the Tyne.

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 two remaining escalators will be preserved and opened up to public view.

In 2000, the tunnels were awarded Grade II listing to indicate their historic significance. In 2010 the vertical lifts were repaired and modernised.

Planning permission (Listed Building Consent) for the refurbishment was received in October 2011.