Saltash Tunnel Works

At the Full Town Council meeting held on 1 August 2024 National Highways presented to Members the plans for the major refurbishment work scheduled for the Saltash Tunnel, due to start later this year.

The Tunnel Manager and Electrical and Technical Manager for South West and South East National Highways outlined the plans for a generational refurbishment of the Saltash Tunnel and overhead traffic management system on the Tamar Bridge.

The last major work was in 2004, and since then, the technological and electrical systems have reached end of life, with no availability of spares to repair them if they fail, necessitating a full replacement to maintain operation safety and functionality of the tunnel, and traffic management over the Tamar Bridge.

The refurbishment involves replacing all existing electrical distribution and tunnel technology equipment with modernised units. Key elements such as the traffic control system, signage in the approaches to the tunnel and Bridge, tunnel lighting, overhead gantries inside the tunnel, communication units, tunnel air quality monitors, tunnel drainage system and electrical distribution systems will be replaced and upgraded.

This project has been prepared over six years with secured funding now in place, adhering to National Highways governance and stringent design specifications.

National Highways has explored various methods to ensure the project's longevity and minimise future impact. The project also addresses the current energy consumption and carbon footprint with technological equipment to be relocated outside the tunnel, with the aim of reducing routine maintenance closures during the year.

National Highways has refined the project to try to minimise disruption and to deliver in two phases.

First Phase - Civil Engineering (starting October 2024 to February 2025):

This phase involves installing advanced warning signs on both tunnel approaches to communicate various information to users. Traffic management measures include narrower lanes, reduction of lanes and reduced speed limits, ensuring continued capacity and safety. Expected peak-hour delays are 15-20 minutes for three months.

Second Phase - Technology Works (starting October 2024 to October 2025):

Overnight tunnel closures will occur, while the Civil Engineering works are taking place during the daytime.

From the end of January, the control system will be switched off to allow installation of new equipment, losing the tidal flow capability and reducing the bridge and tunnel to one lane in each direction for five months.

Delays of up to 45 minutes are expected until the new tidal flow control system can be commissioned and switched on by summer. The rest of the technology install, and commissioning shall continue until October under nightly tunnel closures.

Various alternative traffic flow solutions were explored, but the proposed measures were identified as having the least impact while ensuring health and safety for the workers.

National Highways confirmed at the meeting that consultation has not taken place yet.

The Town Council stressed the importance of clear and regular communication from National Highways to impacted groups and have set up a working group to support this process. The Town Council will be asking rail networks to support the town with additional stops at the Railway station and will be writing to key organisations to highlight the impact the works will have on the town.

National Highways spoke of how they see the works as an opportunity to engage with local schools and technical colleges by inviting students interested in civil engineering to participate and learn from the project.

National Highways expressed eagerness to collaborate with the Town Council to ensure clear, concise, and visual communications throughout the construction period.

End.