

Lee Waters AC/AM
Dirprwy Weinidog yr Economi a Thrafnidiaeth
Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref : LW /153/20

Leanne Wood AM
Assembly Member for Rhondda

Leanne.Wood@assembly.wales

9 March 2020

Dear Leanne,

I am writing to provide you with an update on the Rhondda Tunnel following your exchange with the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd on 5 February.

I am very supportive of the idea of bringing the network of tunnels across the south Wales valleys back into use but we should be under no illusion of the challenges of doing so. The Rhondda tunnel alone is a very challenging infrastructure project with a large degree of risk attached to it. Furthermore unless it is connected to a broader network of active travel routes into communities then its potential cannot be realised.

A very early estimate of the capital cost of opening the tunnel and creating a walking and cycling track through it was between £5m and £10m, but this is now regarded as a very low estimate. If the project goes ahead and the tunnel is re-opened to the public and connected to the existing walking and cycling network, it will require on-going operating and maintenance costs, including for CCTV, security and lighting.

The size of the challenge should not be underestimated and to progress, this project will need to assemble funding from a range of external sources, as has happened elsewhere and the Welsh Government will lend its support. I should emphasise that until now, no new funding has been offered by either the UK Government or Highways England to go alongside any potential transfer of ownership. The sum of £60,000 is simply not enough and until this changes the potential for progress is significantly restricted.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I have asked Sustrans, who have a strong track record of bringing disused railway lines back into use across the UK, to take the lead in bringing together interested parties and develop a plan to support the project. This will explore ownership models, and funding opportunities both for construction and on-going operation, as well as wider practical aspects that need to be considered. This is expected to be completed by the end of March 2021 and will be part funded by the Transport, Tourism and Regeneration departments within Welsh Government.

I will also be meeting with the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, the leaders of Rhondda Cynon Taf and Neath Port Talbot, Sustrans and the Rhondda Tunnel Society to discuss ownership of the tunnel.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee', with a long vertical stroke extending upwards from the top of the 'l'.

Lee Waters AC/AM

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