

Forth Bridge Experience

Community Update, June 2014

Since Network Rail first announced its intention to develop proposals for two distinct Forth Bridge visitor experiences in September 2013, our team has been working hard to flesh out the plans.

We have been developing business models, figuring out building, maintenance and staffing costs, analysing tourist industry data and, most importantly, listening to potential customers and the local community affected by our proposals.

While the vast majority of feedback we've received so far has been positive, we know that there is particular concern locally about how our proposals may affect traffic in both North and South Queensferry.

This newsletter should bring you up to date with our recent work and what happens next with regards to our proposals.

What do our proposals consist of?

Network Rail believes that there is substantial interest in visiting the Forth Bridge and we have carried out extensive market research which has backed up that assertion.

Our proposal sees two distinct visitor options. In North Queensferry, where the bridge is accessible by land, we propose creating a visitor centre with a glazed ceiling underneath the bridge. The building profile would not interrupt views of the bridge and would be designed to provide visitors with a café, exhibition space and retail opportunities.

The centre would be connected via a step free access to two hoists on the eastern face of the Fife Tower. With a capacity of around 40 people per lift, they would be designed to carry passengers to a viewing platform 110m above ground, on the top of the bridge. The design of the viewing platform will be such that it will not compromise the bridge structure and would be entirely reversible in the event that it was to be removed in the future.

On the south side, we envisage operating a bridge walk aimed at more adventurous visitors. This would include a modest hub building a short walk from Dalmeny Station. Visitors would be given a safety brief, kitted out and hooked on to a continuous safety line. They would then

proceed in groups of up to 15 onto the bridge via the south approach walkway and up the southern most tower before heading back to the hub.

A full summary of our proposal can be viewed at www.forthbridgeexperience.com

Recent activity

In May 2014, Network Rail's panel of tourism specialists reported back on a five month feasibility study. The results demonstrated strong support among potential visitors for the proposals. The study also looked at potential operating and building costs and calculated likely visitor number. We believe that a modest profit could be generated which would contribute towards the bridge's minimum £1m per annum maintenance costs.

In early June, Network Rail's investment panel approved funding which will be used to help generate architectural designs and aid us during the initial planning applications.

As part of the next phase of development, Network Rail has appointed a traffic consultant to obtain baseline figures for traffic numbers in North and South Queensferry. These numbers will be used to model and monitor potential increases in traffic flows around the village

Joined up approach

In relation to traffic models, Network Rail's study will help inform a wider traffic model for the 'three bridges' location conducted by Transport Scotland.

Network Rail, Fife Council, Transport Scotland and Historic Scotland have all committed to attending a community event on 10 Sep in North Queensferry to listen to community concerns about the implications of World Heritage status and Forth Bridge Experience proposals. The meeting will allow the group to present options for managing the potential impact of traffic on the village and to hear feedback on the proposed solutions.

A similar meeting will be arranged in South Queensferry.

Potential benefits of the proposals

From Network Rail's perspective, the development and delivery of visitor proposals would present excellent business diversification opportunities and contribute positively towards the company's public profile.

To date, the proposals have been developed by Network Rail's commercial property team with support from the Scotland route. The proposals potentially allow further revenue streams to be developed from pre-existing Network Rail assets both at the bridge and at Waverley Station.

For Network Rail, the Forth Bridge can become a show room for best practice in terms of restoration, maintenance and railway operation. It can do that by telling the stories of the remarkable people who built, maintained and restored this iconic structure.

Local benefits

Locally, the development of the Forth Bridge Experience would be a big draw for tourists visiting Edinburgh, the UK's most visited city outside London. It would be easily accessed via Waverley Station and would potentially act as a first stop on a visit to Fife or beyond

The transport focus is on maximising the potential use of rail as the primary method for visiting the bridge. This would be actively marketed and incentivised and would be integrated into the overall Forth Bridge Experience. In order to encourage the greatest use of rail travel, we have planned improvements to the station access routes as part of the FBE proposals.

While train travel is our number one priority, we will also be looking at how we could best manage car transport, whether that's through use of satellite car parks and shuttle buses or boat transfer from other locations.

There are likely to be at least 200 jobs created directly as a result of our proposals, with more potentially available through transport opportunities and services. We anticipate that there will be opportunities for new businesses to operate in the area and additional opportunities for existing businesses.

In North Queensferry, we propose making substantial improvements to Battery Road in order to accommodate the visitor centre. Allied with potential improvements to the Town Pier proposed by Fife Council and more closely managed traffic in the village, there is potential for major improvements to the immediate area and further desirability of the location as a place to live or visit.

Finally, Network Rail aims to demonstrate direct benefits of the Forth Bridge Experience for the communities near the bridge. We propose making funding available for community development proposals using profits from the new venture. We would also look to accommodate schools and other local groups for specially arranged visits. The building would also be made available for community events when possible.

Working with you

We have been keen to involve the local community in the development of these plans from day one and have always made ourselves available to community councils and other community forums. While we recognise that there has been an absence of updates in recent months, we expect to be more visible in the next six months as we progress the design and the operational models.

Next steps

Over the next six months, we will begin developing detailed designs of proposed buildings, lifts, walkways and associated infrastructure. Where our proposals have a potential impact on the public, most notably in relation to transport, we will undertake public consultation activities. As noted above, we will be taking a joined up approach to tackling potential traffic issues, with an associated meeting planned for 10 Sep 2014.

The Forth Bridge is a listed structure and both North and South Queensferry are conservation areas and we will be working with local authorities and other statutory bodies to ensure that we obtain the required consents for these proposals.

Our objectives

In summary, we want the Forth Bridge Experience to achieve the following:

Celebration of achievement

As a means of celebrating the world class achievements of generations of railway workers, we want to provide public access for the first time to one of Scotland's best loved structures.

Education and inspiration

We want to provide visitors young and old with an unforgettable experience, profiling the bridge as a site of world engineering excellence, telling the stories of the brave railway workers past and present and offering unparalleled tourism and education opportunities

Sustainable attraction

We want to operate a celebrated, successful, profitable attraction, with profits reinvested in upkeep of the bridge and knock on benefits to the local economy.

Inclusive enhancement

We want any new structures and landscaping to enhance the local amenities within the immediate footprint of the bridge without detracting from its inimitable profile. It should have an overall benefit for neighbouring communities and provide access for all.

The Forth Bridges Forum

The Forth Bridges Forum is a partnership of major public sector bodies and infrastructure owners. Forum members include City of Edinburgh Council, Fife Council, West Lothian Council, Forth Estuary Transport Authority, Historic Scotland, Visit Scotland, Network Rail and Transport Scotland.

One of the functions of the Forum is to promote the unique location of the Forth Bridge, Forth Road Bridge and forthcoming Queensferry Crossing showcasing their educational, engineering and touristic elements. The Forum is committed to the successful management and promotion of all three Bridges for the economic benefit of local communities in which they are located and Scotland as a whole.

The Forum fully supports Network Rail's drive to establish the proposed visitor attractions and has recently commissioned an additional traffic management study incorporating the wider area of all three Bridges.

The Forum has already led the nomination bid for inscribing the Forth Bridge as a World Heritage Site, in conjunction with local community groups. Achieving World Heritage status for the Forth Bridge would enhance the overall visitor experience. UNESCO's decision is expected in 2015.

For further information, visit the Forth Bridges website at: www.forth-bridges.co.uk