Birley Lane Tram Hole Update

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South Yorkshire People's Network

What you need to know

Q **What are we doing about the Birley tram hole?**

We know the closure of the tram line between Gleadless Townend and Halfway has been really frustrating and inconvenient, and we're sorry for the disruption it's causing.

Our engineers are working as quickly as possible to get trams running again, but we need to make sure the repair is done properly and safely.

Q **How did nobody know there was an old mine shaft under Birley Lane when the Supertram was built?**

Records from historic mining operations are not always complete, and some old shafts were not accurately mapped – we think this one could date back to the 1800s. As a result, the shaft wasn't on the maps used when the tram was originally built more than 30 years ago. The issue only came to light after changes were detected in the track.

Q **This happened at the end of August – what's taking so long?**

This is a really complex problem for a few reasons. The hole itself is a man-made shaft which dates back to old mining operations in the area, and our engineers believe it is around 55 metres deep. Unfortunately we had no information on it before it opened in August.

To permanently fill the hole, the engineers onsite need to understand exactly how the main shaft connects to old mines below ground. That's why we have been carrying out surveys using Sonar (sound), LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), drones, and industrial drilling equipment. All that takes time, but it's essential to a long-term and safe fix.

If this happened outside the UK wouldn't they just pour concrete in and get services back ASAP?

Without knowing what's underground, just pouring concrete in could be a short-term fix which stores up further long-term problems. To permanently fill and secure the shaft, the engineers onsite need to understand exactly how it connects to old mine workings below ground.

That's because filling the hole without investigating this carefully could destabilise other nearby mineshafts or damage the environment, for example by contaminating the groundwater.

Whatever might happen elsewhere, in this country we maintain a high standard for health and safety. We won't rush reopening the line if it risks anyone's wellbeing or would harm the future of the network.

Can't modern technology speed up the process?

We're using all the technology we can to understand this complex problem and work towards a long-term solution. Our engineers have been carrying out laser tech surveys. We've also used drones, and industrial equipment for drilling boreholes which are tens of metres deep.

Could trams just run on the other track as a temporary solution?

We looked carefully at every option to minimise travel disruption, but investigations found the neighbouring track also sits within the area that could be unstable due to the shaft.

Safety has to come first. Right now, our engineers are not even allowed to walk on the other side of the track near the hole. Unfortunately, running a tram so close would present a risk to passengers which we can't accept.

Q **Why can’t the track just curve around or elevate over the hole?**

We've looked into all options, but fixing the existing track is the quickest way to get services back to Halfway. Any other engineering work would add massive complication, cross private land, and take people away from the job at hand. Overall, it would delay the project to reopen the line.

Q **Are you really spending £276,322 on tram replacement bus services?**

People rely on the tram every day to get to work, school, appointments and other destinations. It's only right that we do everything we can to get people moving again now, but the cost is also one of the reasons we are working to get the track reopened as soon as possible.

Replacement buses are the best way to keep people moving while the tram line is closed and help reduce the impact on local communities.

Q **Why do the buses take longer than the tram?**

We share people's frustration on this. Journey times are typically longer on the replacement bus services as buses have 1 door rather than 4, passengers need to buy or scan tickets before they board, and the bus journey around Crystal Peaks is less direct than the tram route. We're focussed completely on getting the tram running again as quickly as possible.

Q **When will trams run again between Gleadless Townend and Halfway?**

Engineers are working on this to get trams up and running again as fast as we can. However, this is a complex engineering repair and there is still much more to be done before trams can start again. Engineers are still completing their investigation into the ground around the shaft by drilling boreholes, and final approval of our plan from the Mining Remediation Authority will be needed before work can begin.

At this stage, we do not expect the line to fully reopen this side of Christmas, but if we can do it quicker, of course we will. We'll continue to keep passengers and local people updated as work progresses.