Whitwell Tunnel removal

Lafarge Aggregates have announced plans for the removal of Whitwell Tunnel on the Robin Hood Line between Nottingham to Worksop, which lies south of Whitwell
village and north-east of Creswell village in Derbyshire. Built by the Midland Railway in 1874, Whitwell Tunnel is approximately 497 metres (544 yd) long and the proposed scheme will divert the line away from this tunnel, and route it in the open approximately 70 metres to the south-east,parallel to the existing tunnelled section.The reasons for this are that the land surrounding the tunnel, both to the north-west and the south-east, is currently part of Lafarge Aggregates Whitwell Quarry. This quarry is one of only two in the UK at which high quality Dolomitic limestone\* is extracted and it is recognised as a source of national importance for this mineral. The main reserves in the quarry comprise those associated with the railway tunnel which Lafarge wish to remove and to do this means removing the tunnel.

Lafarge already has planning permission from Derbyshire County Council to extract the limestone around the tunnel. In order to remove the stone the proposal is to build about 1200 metres of new track in the quarry base, which will run on previously quarried land to the south-east of the existing line and will begin at a point just after bridge 68 Southfield Lane Whitwell, rejoining the existing line at a point just north of bridge 65 A616 Sheffield Road in Creswell. Bridge 67 a farm access bridge will be lost. The diversion is to be permanent with the line eventually running in a cutting following restoration of the quarry site after exhaustion of the stone. Plans are that initially the rock surface will be prepared; this being followed by the construction of a bridge over a new quarry underpass, which will allow quarry vehicles to access either side of the line. Then ballast will be laid over most of the new line with the exception of the connections at either end. After this new tracks and signalling will be laid and connection of the new line to the existing line will occur over a weekend blockage period. Once complete rail traffic will immediately operate on the new line, the line speed of 60mph
will be retained, but the new section of line will be suitable for upgrading to 75mph.

Says Lafarge project manager David Atkinson: "The impact on rail users will be minimal as only two, short weekend closures will be necessary to connect up the
new track. Once operational, the diverted line will not affect train service quality or timetables." Adds Mr Atkinson: "With the diversion in place, all rail passengers would notice is that the dark of the tunnel would be replaced by an open air, very brief view of our quarry".

The disused tunnel will immediately be sealed to prevent any trespass and possible colonisation by bats and other species. Demolition of the tunnel lining and removal of the old rails will commence shortly after. Network Rail, has agreed in principle to the diversion and is liaising closely with Lafarge. The tunnel removal will benefit Network Rail as the maintenance costs will be dispensed with and they will be left with a brand new section of trackwork. Before any of this occurs and in order to carry out the infrastructure works for the diversion, Lafarge needs the consent of a governmental body called the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC). The consultation period for the proposals will run from Friday 15 October to Friday 10 December 2010.

If a development consent order is issued for the diversion, then Lafarge would be able to begin work on the project in 2012. The rate of progress would depend on trends in market demand for the Whitwell stone from that date. Projections based on current production estimate it would take five to six years to extract the stone around the tunnel and complete the diversion of the railway track. Planning approval for the extraction of the stone in the vicinity of the tunnel expires in 2019. New signalling for the diversion will eventually be required as at present Elmton & Creswell No22 signal is at the north portal of the tunnel and will have to be moved. At the present time the signalling design has not been assigned.The long disused former rail access to the quarry will not be jeopardised,should it ever be required again.

Full details can be found at:-
<http://www.lafarge.co.uk/wps/portal/uk/1_8-Planning>