

The cost of removing the funicular at Cairn Gorm

Description

1) What work HIE has undertaken on the costs of removing the funicular (whether it has been commissioned)?

I have found that while some information was provided to you, HIE did not explain what relevant information was held at the time your request was made. HIE also holds the **Cairngorm Funicular Railway (Railway Dismantling Report) May 2019**.

Extract from Review of Freedom of Information request by HIE Chief Executive Carroll Buxton 16th October 2019

After Highlands and Islands Enterprise announced that the cost of repairing the funicular would be cheaper than the cost they claimed would be needed to remove it, I asked them for the basis of this claim. Then, when the response revealed very little, I requested a formal review of their decision to refuse the information under the Freedom of Information Act ([see here](#)). The Review, carried out by HIE's acting Chief Executive, has revealed that HIE has in its possession a report **Cairngorm funicular railway (railway dismantling report)** dated May 2019 ([see here and extract above](#)). That HIE has commissioned such a report is very interesting. Unfortunately, they are now refusing to make public any of its contents. They have also failed to answer two of my three questions – so I will be appealing to the Information Commissioner.

My second question asked what the estimated cost of removal was. The response stated:

“HIE has since released SOME [my emphasis] of the information which is provided below”

HIE then quote the figure of £13.3m which they released to selected media outlets subsequent to my FOI request. Their answer, however, suggests there is OTHER information they hold on the costs of removal and provides no justification for why HIE are refusing to release that information.

My third question asked for the basis of how the costs of removing the funicular had been worked out and that too remains answered.

It is essential that this information is made public for two reasons. The first is that the cost of removing the funicular depends to a great extent on how much is removed. Complete removal of the funicular and re-instatement of the ground to how it was before the funicular was constructed would be very costly, mainly because there is no “spare” material on site to fill in the holes that would be created if the concrete pillars supporting the funicular were removed. However, chopping the pillars just below ground level and removing the superstructure above could be done far more cheaply.

While the legal agreement about the operation of the funicular requires it to be removed completely if it ever ceases to function, it's far from clearcut that that is the most sensible option now. It's quite

possible that removing the funicular completely could cause further damage to the mountain and it would be best to leave the pillars in place as happened in Coire na Ciste.

Moreover, if the legal agreement about the funicular cannot be changed, then the costs of removing it entirely should be ADDED to the costs of repairing it to show **WHOLE LIFE COSTS**. That is because eventually the concrete columns supporting the funicular **WILL** deteriorate to a condition where they are beyond repair and the funicular **WILL** need to be removed. No structure lasts for ever and structures in the mountains deteriorate faster than elsewhere. HIE need to include those costs in the business case its putting to the Scottish Government.

I suspect too that when that time comes whoever is running the funicular will argue it would be much better to leave the pillars in place rather than have it completely removed and seek to have the legal agreement revised. If that's likely, HIE should consider that option now. I suspect they haven't because to do so would undermine their argument that the cost of repairing the funicular is cheaper than removing it.

The second reason why HIE needs to make the costs of removing the funicular public is their appalling record at Cairn Gorm when it comes to financial matters. They are not to be trusted and its essential that any business case they put to the Scottish Government is subject to public scrutiny and detailed analysis by Audit Scotland.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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