

The latest misinformation from Highlands and Islands Enterprise about the funicular at Cairn Gorm

Description



Screenshot courtesy of CM(S)L's webcams 19/12/2024

On 17th January BBC Scotland published a story “No opening date for funicular as funicular repairs near end ([see here](#)). In it they stated:

“Owners, public agency Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), had hoped to have it running again late last year but said bad weather had caused delays”.

Consider the image above and compare it to the one taken the following day:

WhiteLady 2024-12-20 14:26:37



Both photos had already appeared on parkswatch ([see here](#)) but the fact that all the scaffolding had been removed, within about 24hours, despite the “bad weather” appears to contradict HIE’s statement.

Balfour Beatty (B.B.) workers are obviously far hardier than HIE suggested to the BBC as is evidenced by the next picture:

WhiteLady 2024-12-10 12:21:38



Notice the cradle almost buried in the snow in the bottom left hand corner.

Five further misleading statements from HIE were reported by the BBC in their coverage:

(1) *“David Oxley, director of strategic projects at HIE, said the agency recognised how important the funicular was to the local economy”.*

Response: As far as I am aware HIE have never released any evidence to support this argument despite them continually using it to support their misguided attempts to keep the funicular operating. If HIE was correct and with the funicular only functioning for seven months in the last six years then surely it would be noticeable how many local businesses had failed. Has HIE carried out a full survey of the numbers and how do they reconcile their claims that the Cairngorms Business Partnership has just reported [\(see here\)](#) a bumper start to the winter season?

(2) David Oxley *“said high winds, snow and ice had hampered efforts to carry out the last of the work to allow the railway to be reopened”.*

Response: *“High winds”* – I walked up the funicular to the passing loop on 04/10/2024 and was several times almost blown off my feet by gusting winds and yet B.B. employees were working that day at the passing loop and near Anchor Block 14 and pier 50/51;



Workers by pier 50/51 on left of photo. 4/10/24.

“Snow and ice” – look again at the third photo!

(3) *“Mr Oxley told BBC Scotland News: “The contractor Balfour Beatty has largely finished most of those works pre-Christmas”.*

Response: If there was outstanding work to be done why had B.B. removed the scaffolding before completion?

(4) Mr Oxley “We’re now going through that final inspection and making sure everything is safe and ready for return to service for the funicular.”

Response: how this fits with the claims HIE made in a news release on Xmas Eve that further works would be scoped in January is unclear:

“Contractor Balfour Beatty has substantially completed an extensive remediation programme to strengthen the 1.8km viaduct, however detailed inspections have shown that further work is required in some areas.”

Cairngorm Estate owner Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), along with the contractor and consultants, will review the scope and nature of the outstanding works early in January, with a view to bringing the funicular back as early as possible in the new year.

Once the remediation works have been concluded, a series of mechanical safety testing, trial runs and staff training will follow. At the same time, HIE will maintain ongoing dialogue with the Health and Safety Executive.”

(5) “He said the latest work would cost more than previously estimated and discussions would be held with its contractors about who has responsibility for those additional costs”.

Response: up until now and throughout the time that B.B have been carrying out “snagging” or “remedial” works HIE have claimed that B.B were bearing the costs, the implication being that they were costing HIE nothing. That now appears to be false.

Is the estimate the £16m that the repairs were supposed to cost? No estimates as to the cost of the works which commenced after the shutdown in August 2023 have ever been published although there have been several guesses that the **total** cost for all the works is somewhere the wrong side of £25m.

Which contractors? Is this a reference to COWI, who designed the repairs, or B.B. or B.B’s sub-contractors or maybe even all of them? Let the blame game begin.

Lightning Protection

HIE responded to my initial inquiry about whether the funicular was adequately protected against lightning ([see here](#)) on 18/12/2024 as follows:

“We checked this with CMSL who confirmed the funicular has an effective lightning protection system and provided the following details.

The railway track forms two down conductors that are connected at the stations to the building’s main equipotential bonding rails. This provides an effective path to earth for any potential lightning strike.

The carriage’s metallic body is connected through special slip rings with the wheels, providing contact with the rails.

As an additional measure to protect public safety, operation of the funicular is suspended during thunderstorms.

I have been trying ever since to get a definitive answer as that lightning protection and earth bonding should be required on a rail track in a mountain environment but with no success so far. HOWEVER, because the funicular rails are not continuous the maximum resistance between rails should not be more than 10 Ohms and this should be checked at every expansion joint. That suggests that earthing the rails only at the top and bottom stations is not adequate. When I contacted the Health and Safety Executive about this they referred me to British Standard BS EN 62305 – 3 Physical damage to

structures and life hazard. While this does contain significant information it does not help in relation to a railway track. I have now gone to Network Rail to see if they can help.

Meantime why has the lightning protection not been mentioned before?

ADAC Structures carried out regular inspections after 2015. No mention of lightning protection!

Sequs Consulting carried out the H&S report sent to the Department for Transport No mention of lightning protection!

LECS UK carried out the final inspection for the funicular to re-open. No mention of lightning protection!

All the new steelwork with the mini lightning conductors in the form of stainless steel studding has now added considerably to the risks. The big question now therefore seems to be "Is better lightning protection and earth bonding necessary"?

It could even be contributing to the current delays. Watch this space.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. funicular
3. HIE
4. Scottish Government
5. Tourism

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