

Dartford Tunnel Needs More Investment

Motorists who use the Dartford Tunnel could be in safer hands if the Government unleashed millions of pounds of surplus revenue from tolls charged there, says The AA Motoring Trust. The call for more investment at Dartford comes as a new report into tunnel safety shows that more needs to be done to protect the 73,000 drivers who use the tunnel each day, and to bring it up to the standards of many tunnels on the Continent.

The study, for which 28 tunnels in 10 countries were assessed, was commissioned by the ADAC (the German equivalent of the AA), with The AA Motoring Trust funding the inspection of the Dartford Tunnel. Dartford was one of six in Europe to receive the acceptable rating. Nine were rated very good, a further nine good, one poor and three very poor.

While inspectors praised the day-to-day operation and management of the Dartford Tunnel, as well as its sophisticated fire detection and ventilation equipment, they highlighted the need for more video surveillance cameras, better maintenance of carriageway edge markings, and the soundproofing of emergency phones. Emergency lighting, better signing of escape routes and exits, and heatproof cables were also needed in order to increase Dartfords rating to good, according to the report.

Bert Morris, deputy director of The AA Motoring Trust, says: Since the Dartford crossing reverted to public ownership last year, a surplus toll revenue of some 60 million is sitting unused and unallocated in the bank with more of motorists money accumulating everyday.

This money should be used in the first instance to bring Dartford up to the standards that are now the norm across much of Europe. The funds should also be used to improve safety in Londons other road tunnels and to build new Thames crossings.

On the Continent, nearly 100 people have died in tunnel fires in the last decade. When a fire breaks out in a tunnel, vehicle occupants are not spectators to an accident, they are participants in a potential disaster. Heat builds up very quickly, which is why automatic fire detection and ventilation systems are so important. Emergency exits must be provided, emergency services summoned immediately and emergency plans put into operation seamlessly.

Generally, UK tunnels have a good safety record, and, since The AA Motoring Trust first started inspecting tunnels four years ago, operators have made 30 million worth of improvements. But there is still some way to go before tunnels here rival many of those on the Continent. Providing safety systems to modern European standards, and increasing awareness of what people should do in the event of an emergency would help to ensure that this country does not have a tunnel disaster in the future.

Many factors were taken into account by inspectors when awarding the safety ratings, including the design of the tunnels, lighting and power supplies, speed limits, traffic and traffic control, communication, escape routes, fire protection and crisis management. The number of heavy goods vehicles, and the potential for head-on collisions in two-way tunnels were also considered.

The safest tunnels in Europe were Germanys Berg Bock, Rennsteig and Weser tunnels; the Girsberg in Switzerland; Spains La Cumbre and Maria de Molina; Austrias Noitzmuhle and Stenhaus tunnels; and the Toulon in France. The Tuhobic and Ucka tunnels in Croatia, and the Wattkopf in Germany, received the worst rating of very poor.

ends

NOTES TO EDITORS

The 2004 Dartford Tunnel inspection was organised and funded by The AA Motoring Trust, and was one of 28 tunnels in ten countries inspected in the programme, which was project managed and funded by the ADAC (the German equivalent of the AA). The inspections were carried out with the cooperation of the tunnel managements by highly qualified and experienced engineers from Deutsche Montan Technologie (DMT).

During 2000, 2002 and 2003, more than 100 tunnels were inspected by the EuroTest consortium of Europes leading motoring organisations of which The AA Motoring Trust is a leading member. The full report on this years inspections and those of previous years are [available on this site](#).

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A TUNNEL FIRE

Tunnel users need to know how to behave in road tunnels, and know what to do in an emergency. They should:

- drive safely at the appropriate speed for conditions, leaving plenty of space between their car and the vehicle in front
- not wait to be told what to do if there is a fire ahead. Pull the vehicle over to the left, switch off the engine, leave the keys in the ignition, and walk away from the fire to the nearest emergency exit, or to the tunnel entrance.

WORLD TUNNEL DISASTERS SINCE 1970

14 February 1971 in Bosnia

The Zepce-Zenica early train derailed in the tunnel near Vranduk. 34 people suffocated in the subsequent fire.

6 November 1972 in Japan

In the 13-kilometre-long train tunnel near Fukui, the Kitaguni night express caught fire. This was caused by a fire in the dining car. 29 travellers suffocated.

1975 in England

In London's Moorgate underground station a train full of passengers rammed into the tunnel wall. Human error on the part of the train driver caused this accident. 43 people died, 55 were injured.

11 July 1979 in Japan

In a collision between several lorries and cars in the Nihonzaka tunnel seven people lost their lives.

7 April 1982 in the US

In the Caldecott tunnel near Oakland, California, seven people died in a pile-up.

3 November 1982 in Afghanistan

In the Salang tunnel north of Kabul, a Soviet army convoy truck collided with a tank lorry. The explosion triggered an inferno. 700 to 2,000 people suffocated and were burned.

18 November 1987 in England

In a smouldering fire at London's Kings Cross underground station 31 people died. This disaster was caused by a discarded match.

10 April 1995 in Austria

In a pile-up in the Pfnder tunnel near Bregenz, four cars caught fire. Three people died. A motorist driving into incoming traffic caused this accident.

28 October 1995 in Azerbaijan

289 people suffocated and were burned in a metro tunnel in Baku. A short-circuit in the electrical equipment of a metro car was thought to have caused this disaster.

10 February 1996 in Japan

On the island of Hokkaido, a huge boulder weighing 50,000 tonnes crashed onto a tunnel tube. It took rescue services a number of days to reach the accident site. 20 passengers died.

18 March 1996 in Italy

After a rear-end collision a tank lorry exploded in a tunnel near Palermo. 19 cars caught fire. Five people died, 26 people were injured.

18 November 1996 in the Channel

In the Eurotunnel, a lorry on a freight train caught fire. It took five hours to get the fire under control. Around 30 train passengers suffered serious smoke poisoning.

2 March 1999 in Germany

In a tunnel near Gttingen on the ICE route Hanover-Wrzburg a railway car caught fire. It took 12 hours to extinguish the fire, which was fed by pulp and paper.

24 March 1999 in France/Italy

A Belgian lorry loaded with flour and margarine caught fire in the Mont Blanc tunnel. A lighted cigarette end caused this fire. The fire quickly spread and was not extinguished until 24 hours later. 39 people died.

29 May 1999 in Austria

After a rear-end collision in the Tauern tunnel fire broke out. A lorry carrying paint exploded. 24 vehicles subsequently caught fire, turning the tube into a furnace in which 12 people died. It took 16 hours to get the fire under control.

10 January 2000 in Austria

Another fire in the Tauern tunnel is less destructive: one lorry catches fire, but the drivers and passengers all survived.

11 November 2000 in Austria

At Kitzsteinhorn near Kaprun a fire broke out in one carriage of a cable car running through a tunnel in the Gletscher skiing

area. This was caused by a smouldering fire in the heating system. 155 lives were lost.

12 April 2001 in Austria

In the Helbersberg tunnel on the Tauern route a rear-end collision led to a huge pile-up. A fire did not break out, but two people died and 10 were injured.

10 July 2001 in Austria

After a frontal collision in the Tauern tunnel, disaster was avoided due to the swift reactions of a car driver. He extinguished the fire which was burning in a car.

6 August 2001 in Austria

Two cars collided head-on in the Gleinalm tunnel on the Pyhrn motorway (A9) north of Graz. They caught fire immediately. Five people died. The five injured people who were saved included a child who sustained 70 per cent burns, and two children of three and five years who suffered head injuries and gas fume poisoning.

8 August 2001 in Austria

In the Amberg tunnel on the Rhein valley motorway (A 14) between Frastanz and Feldkirch, an Austrian touring coach and an Austrian van collided. Several approaching vehicles were caught in the pile-up. Three people died.

13 August 2001 in Austria

Near Klagenfurt in Krnten an Italian touring coach carrying 30 Polish pilgrims crashed into the portal of the Reigersdorf tunnel. 24 were injured, some seriously.

26 August 2001 in Switzerland

A frontal collision occurred in the Gotthard tunnel on the A2 between Gschenen and Airolo. Six people were injured, one of them seriously.

31 August 2001 in Austria

Three tunnel incidents in one day resulted in two dead and nine injured. One woman was seriously injured as her vehicle crashed into the portal of the Sonnstein tunnel. In the Lainberg tunnel on the A9 near Windischgarsten in Austria two Austrians were killed and two Germans injured in a frontal collision. In the Katschberg tunnel on the A10 near St. Michael in Lungau six people were injured in a collision.

3 September 2001 in Austria

In the Gleinalm tunnel on the Pyhrn motorway (A9) north of Graz a touring coach caught fire. The tunnel was closed and nobody was injured.

17 October 2001 in Denmark

In the Danish Guldborgsund tunnel between Copenhagen and the ferryport of Rdby a lorry drove into a car in thick fog, causing a massive crash. Five people died and nine were seriously injured.

24 October 2001 in Switzerland

A fire was started by a frontal collision of two HGVs in the Gotthard tunnel on the A2 between Gschenen and Airolo. Eleven people lost their lives in this catastrophe. In addition, eight fires occurred in the Gotthard tunnel in 2000. None of them were fatal.

18 January 2002 in Austria

A lorry with a damaged engine caught fire in the Tauern tunnel, producing a great deal of smoke. The rescue services were however quickly able to bring the fire under control. There were no injuries.