

Council could have saved millions on North Bridge repairs

Millions could have been saved if North Bridge had been fully closed to traffic during the refurbishment, it has been admitted – after the latest cost estimate took the total to almost £86m.

The council is planning to cut £12 million from the city's roads repair budget – and borrow the same sum – to meet the most recent £24 million increase.

Added to the previous total, this means the authority could end up spending £86 million which is nearly four times the first estimate, by the time the project is complete in 2025 which will be five years behind schedule.



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The latest price increase led to a claim that it would have been cheaper to build a new bridge instead of undertaking the major repair – which originally had a price tag of £22 million.

Since works commenced in 2018 one-way traffic has been maintained on North Bridge, a key city centre link between the Old Town and the New Town.

But it has now emerged millions could have been wiped off the budget if the crossing had been completely closed as work was being carried out.

Quizzing council officers at the finance committee on Tuesday Cllr Graeme Bruce said the latest figure was “staggering”. He asked: “If you knew it was going to cost over £60 million in the first place would you have gone down a different route?”

Gareth Barwell, Operational Services Director, said: “We could

have made this bridge, I would guess, five-ish million pounds cheaper if we'd fully closed it.

"The impact on the public transport network would have been significant, but this bill could have been cheaper if we'd turned round earlier and said actually we're going to close North Bridge fully.

"£5 million to the council clearly sounds like a lot of cash and I should be clear for members this is a broad estimate."



Cllr Iain Whyte Conservative Group Leader Photo: © 2023, Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

After it emerged the cost of the refurbishment had risen again, with the roads budget set to take a hit as a result, Conservative group leader Cllr Iain Whyte said it would have been "quicker and cheaper" for the the council to "build a new bridge instead".

This suggestion was dismissed by Mr Barwell however, who said: "I can guarantee it wouldn't have been cheaper to build

a listed bridge across the north-east coast main line in a capital city, but I can understand people making that point.”

A report stated: “The North Bridge refurbishment project is experiencing significant cost pressures due to construction market volatility and increases to the scope of the works.

“The condition of the bridge is now largely known and the project team is now confident that the revised budget will not be exceeded.”

by Donald Turvill

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