

TRACK RECORD:
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Ditching 'world's most stupid tunnel' a small win for common sense

FAREWELL then to the "world's most stupid tunnel" (quote courtesy of Dominic Cummings). Plans to build either a tunnel or bridge between Northern Ireland and Scotland, at the cost of a mere \$15 billion, have been scrapped after the Treasury clamped down on spending.

The idea of a tunnel was proposed by the High Speed Rail Group (HSRG) who claimed it would bring the north closer to Britain and would "address problems in (the) economic status of Northern Ireland post-Brexit".

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has an appalling track record of backing stupid, costly and frequently pointless infrastructure projects, thought the plan was wonderful, which it was compared to his original idea of building a bridge between Larne and Stranraer.

One retired Scottish offshore engineer said the 22-mile bridge, which would have to be built in water more than 1,000ft deep, was as feasible as "building a bridge to the moon".

The engineer, James Duncan from Edinburgh, said: "No sane contractor or responsible government would consider building such a bridge, and because of the weather conditions it would probably have to be closed for considerable periods if it did".

It's a shame because I had been looking forward to embarking on the world's most terrifying car journey, driving over a bridge in the knowledge that, at any time, high winds could force me off the road and into freezing waters filled with tons of dumped Second World War munitions.

There were also suggestions – thankfully now dismissed – that England could be connected to both the north and Scotland via a series of tunnels linked to an underwater roundabout beneath the Isle of Man.

Were these proposals dreamt up by someone who wanted to build a Bond villain's lair but had to make do with an undersea Ballygawley roundabout?

The fact that the tunnel plan has

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only now been dismissed following a Treasury spending review shows the lengths government departments have had to go to to placate Mr Johnson.

Enthusiasm for the Conservative leader's ideas, no matter how stupid, seems to be the best way to reach high office.

Surely that can be the only reason to appoint Liz Truss as foreign secretary? Ms Truss, very much in the Karen Bradley school of ministers, is known for the kind of crazed chirpy approach usually seen in aerobics instructors from the early 1990s.

Her speeches at various Tory Party conferences have really been a sight to behold. Most memorable was her glee at

travelling to Beijing to "open up new pork markets".

She can't do any worse than Dominic Raab, who will be forever known as the foreign secretary who refused to return from holiday in Crete during the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the subsequent refugee crisis.

Last week's ministerial reshuffle had the optimistic air of someone holding a party during the eruption of Pompeii.

The new culture secretary is Nadine Dorries, a successful novelist whose stint on *I'm a Celebrity* in 2012 led to her being briefly suspended from the Tory whip.

She has form in expressing a nuanced approach to cultural issues.

In 2017 she tweeted: "Left wing snowflakes are killing comedy, tearing down historic statues, removing books from universities, dumbing down panto."

Presumably Ms Dorries now has big plans to make May McFettridge lead an audience discussion on Sartre's view of consciousness during the interval of Goldilocks and The Three Bears. Happy Christmas children!

At least we've been spared Gavin Williamson as secretary of state – a decision for which we and Mr Williamson should thank Mr Johnson.

The former education secretary, who has experienced his second ministerial sacking since 2019, can enjoy the rest of his career on the backbenches.

In May 2019, Theresa May fired Mr Williamson as defence secretary over the leak of sensitive information about phone giant Huawei from the National Security Council.

That he was appointed as a minister under Mr Johnson shows how keen the prime minister is to surround himself with the chaff instead of the wheat.

Comparison may be the thief of joy, but standing beside someone who genuinely believes that pantomimes are "dumbing down" can only make Mr Johnson look relatively competent.

Now if only he could keep his infrastructure ideas to himself...

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 20 1971

No Going Back!

THE Opposition's alternative assembly to Stormont will meet for the first time in Derry on October 5. It will coincide with the official opening of Stormont and the third anniversary of the start of the Civil Rights campaign in the North. MPs and Senators from the SDLP and Nationalist Party yesterday announced outline plans for the new assembly, to be known as the Assembly of the Northern Irish People. A draft constitution has been prepared. The Assembly will include the SDLP's six MPs and two Senators and the Nationalists' four MPs and four Senators and one Independent MP.

Yesterday's announcement is seen as the Opposition's final break with Stormont. Coming immediately after Mr Faulkner's signing of internment orders, it confirms that the prospect of any meaningful dialogue with the Unionist government has been completely ruled out.

Disabled Children Bombed

TWO handicapped Catholic children were taken to hospital last night after youths attacked their coach with petrol bombs in Belfast. One of them, an eleven year old boy, was detained with burns on his ear and hand, and another boy, aged twelve, was released after treatment for burns to his right ear and right hand. There were thirty handicapped children in the bus which was taking them from their school in Somerton Road. Three youths stopped the coach in Ainsworth Avenue and threw petrol bombs.

Internees Moved to Long Kesh

INTERNEES from the prison ship Maldstone and Belfast Gaol were transferred by helicopter to a camp at Long Kesh, near Lisburn yesterday amid reports that a new Army-RUC swoop on the lines of August 9-10 operation is being planned. Only last week the Army claimed that the camp at Long Kesh was being built for their own use. It has been described as 'a concentration camp'.

IRA Chief Cahill Returns

MR Joe Cahill said on Saturday night in Letterkenny that he had recently been back to the North and had got a 'terrific reception'. 'The rotten English oppressors' must release all the internees and 'get the hell out of our country. We must ensure that the voice of the people of the North is listened to. No compromise will be accepted. The struggle for freedom continues.' **WITHIN 6 weeks of 'Internment Day' it was clear to all, not least the British government, that internment had not only failed to eradicate violence but the accompanying repression and reports of torture had cast the Provisional IRA in the role of minority 'defenders'. As nationalist representatives signalled an irreversible break with Stormont, rioting, bombings and brutal sectarian attacks and evictions became the norm. Civil war seemed a real possibility.**

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