

## **PRESS RELEASE**

---

**Issued: 30 January 2023**

### **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HELPS TO PROTECT HISTORIC CANAL BRIDGES FROM VEHICLE STRIKES**

An innovative artificial intelligence (AI) CCTV system is being trialled by the Canal & River Trust charity on the Lancaster Canal to catch careless hit-and-run motorists, who each year cause thousands of pounds worth of damage to historic hump-back canal bridges.

As well as inconvenience to local residents and boaters, vehicle strikes on 200-year-old stone bridges cost the Trust annually up to £1 million in repairs, diverting vital funds away from work to conserve the nation's waterways.

The charity, which cares for 2,800 historical bridges across 2,000 miles of canals, will be testing the new system on Cockerham Road Bridge (no 79), near Forton, Lancashire, which was hit twice in 2022. In the past, the use of CCTV to providing constant recording of bridge strike hot spots in rural areas has proved prohibitively expensive due to a lack of power supply.

However, this new system is controlled by AI using a mobile phone signal and doesn't continuously record but takes a few photos when it detects vehicle movement. The AI then assesses if the bridge has been impacted. If there is no strike, the photos are deleted and if damage has been caused, Trust staff receive a notification, allowing them to identify number plates to track down the offenders and claim full repair costs on their insurance.

Last summer Cockerham Road Bridge had to be repaired again after yet another strike, at a cost of £25,000. The full-length white steel railings on the top of the stone parapet were also damaged and, in another innovation, have been replaced in sections, leaning away from the road to minimise the risk and make future accident repairs cheaper.

Andy Dobson, asset engineer with the Canal & River Trust, said: "Hump-back bridges, an iconic part of Britain's canal network, were built for the passage of horse-drawn carts, not

for today's modern vehicles and HGVs. Due to the large number of rural, narrow roads crossing the Lancaster Canal, it has more bridge strikes than any other. The bridges are part of the canal's special character and heritage, and each time one is hit a small piece of history is lost.



“The canal bridges in this area are of particular interest, as their stone parapets were lowered and replaced with railings in the Second World War to deny shelter to invading enemy tanks and troops. Lancashire’s gently shelving beaches were considered a perfect spot for a large invasion force to land.

“With all this wonderful heritage to protect, the Trust’s asset team has worked hard to think of innovative ways not only to reduce repair costs but also to prevent strikes from happening in the first place. We desperately need motorists to slow down and take more care. We are grateful to Lancashire County Council who have been working with us over the last two years to install better approach signage to 15 at-risk bridges over the Lancaster Canal. Hopefully the combination of all these innovations will mean our precious historic canal bridges will be preserved for future generations.

“And if the AI CCTV system works effectively, it could potentially be rolled out at other accident blackspots and even be used on sites at risk from vandalism and fly tipping, saving the Trust time and money and most importantly protecting the nation’s precious canal heritage.”

For more information about visiting canals, donating or volunteering with the Canal & River Trust, please check out the website: [www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk).

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors:**

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day  
[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk).

### **For further media requests please contact:**

Lynn Pegler

m 07783 686246 e [lynn.pegler@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:lynn.pegler@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

or Natalya Catton [Natalya.catton@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:Natalya.catton@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

or Naomi Roberts [Naomi.roberts@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:Naomi.roberts@canalrivertrust.org.uk)

Communications Managers, Canal & River Trust