

Scottish Canals

Lowland Operations Consultation 2019



28 February 2020

What we did

From 18th October 2019 - 20th January 2020 we held a public consultation seeking the views of our boating customers on the Forth & Clyde and Union Canals. The consultation questions related to the following areas:

- User and remote operations
- Diesel and pump out
- Aquatic weed control
- Dredging
- Channel clearance
- Canal opening times and scheduling
- Online booking
- Customer communications

The consultation was co-ordinated by Target Applications, an independent research company, who developed the survey and gathered responses on Scottish Canals' behalf.

In addition to sharing communications with customers via email, on Scottish Canals' website and via social media channels, we engaged with the Royal Yachting Association Scotland,

British Marine and marinas around the country. We also hosted a series of information evenings during the consultation period to ensure that as many people as possible had a chance to get involved.

These meetings were held in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Falkirk and Bowling between December 2019 and January 2020, and offered customers the opportunity to find out more about the consultation and to ask questions of our leadership team and representatives from Target Applications.

The consultation was open for 12 weeks and closed for responses on Monday 20th January 2020. The results have since been evaluated by Target Applications and shared with Scottish Canals.

Why we held the consultation

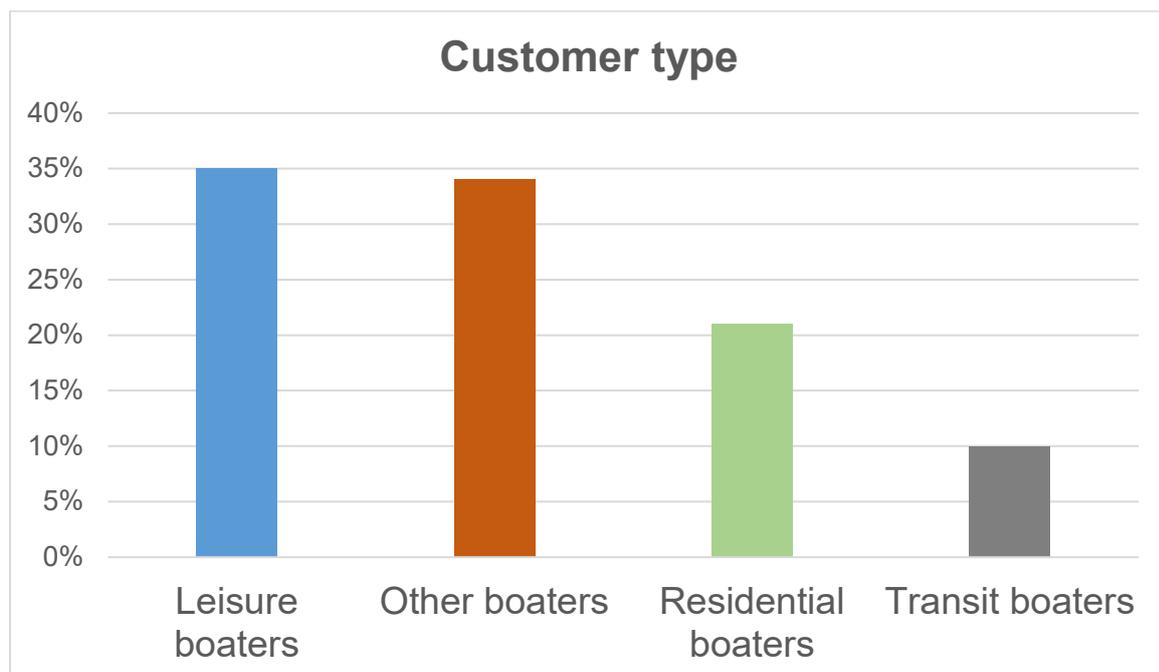
We want to encourage busy, vibrant canals that welcome as many boats as possible onto the water. However, there is currently a substantial gap between the cost required to operate and maintain Scotland's canals, and the income we receive from boating customers.

Scottish Canals has recognised that we need to change in order to become more sustainable. This means directing our resources to the areas of biggest need and to activities our customers want most. The consultation outlined our proposals for achieving this, and sought customer feedback before final decisions were made.

Customers will be able to see income and expenditure levels in a Scottish Canals' Boaters' Report which will be published on the website before the end of March 2020.

Who responded

A total of 126 consultation responses were received from a range of customers. Leisure boaters were most likely to respond (35%), followed by 'Other' boaters (34%), residential boaters (21%) and transit boaters (10%).



What customers told us

We asked customers how they felt about our proposal to extend user and remote operations across the Lowland canals. This would free up staff resource while also allowing boaters greater freedom to transit at their own pace. 79% of respondents were either 'happy' or 'very happy' with these proposals.

Customers were also happy with our proposed online booking system (71% in favour), and approach to aquatic weed management (69% in favour). Some 44% of respondents said obstacles impeded their transits in the last year, while 76% of respondents agreed to support our dredging and channel depth works by reporting obstructions as they transit.

We proposed establishing a charge for extended hours at Hillhead and Twechar, and while 40% returned neutral responses to the question, an equal number reported being 'happy' and 'unhappy' (30% response for each) with this proposal.

We also proposed changes to the diesel and pump-out hours, asking if customers wanted to amend these in any way. However, 67% of respondents did not want to propose any changes.

Customer communication feedback

We asked customers what they most wanted to hear from us about. The top responses are as follows:

- 79% would like information about disruptions
- 75% would like information about what's going on around their canals
- 60% would like to receive information about upcoming meetings, and for meeting minutes to be shared publicly
- 52% would like to know about upcoming events

We also asked customers how they would like to be contacted. Email was the most popular option (40%), followed by receiving information through boating organisations (12.7%), the Scottish Canals' website (12%) and via newsletter (9.5%).

What we will do next

In the section below, we will outline how we plan to implement the decisions which the majority of respondents voted for. These changes will be introduced from Wednesday 1st April 2020.

User & remote operations

We are pleased to confirm the roll-out of user and remote operations across the Lowlands in response to high levels of customer support. Phase 1 of implementation (Spiers Wharf Rolling Bridge, Robert Whitworth/Applecross Bridge, Garscube Bridge and Leamington Bridge) will be delivered in 2020/21 and will involve the delivery of training with long-term boaters at Edinburgh Quay & Glasgow, as well as increased third party operations in Edinburgh.

Phases 2-4 will be delivered after that, budget depending, with the approach set out in a proposal to be published in autumn 2020. In response to customer feedback, this proposal will also detail what the training consists of, who will deliver the training, signage that will be required, buddy system options and hours of operation.

Extended hours at Hillhead and Twechar

It has been agreed that Scottish Canals will offer extended hours during the summer season for customers travelling between Hillhead and Twechar as a pilot to be reviewed at the end of the season. During the 2020/21 season, a charge will be set at a rate of £25 for one way travel (£50 return). This charge will allow staff to work extended hours until 9.00pm in the summer season, and will be available from 1st May to the end of September 2020.

Customers will be required to book this service using the Boat Movement Line one week in advance of their planned trip. We hope this extension will allow customers greater freedom to transit during the summer months.

Diesel & pump-out hours

In direct response to customer feedback, the proposed hours of diesel and pump out services will be amended to offer a weekend service at Southbank Marina. This will accommodate the needs of customers who work full time hours. This offer will run from 9.00am to 12 noon every Tuesday and Saturday.

Aquatic weed programme

A high percentage of customers were happy with our proposed aquatic weed programme and therefore it will be uploaded to the Scottish Canals' website on a monthly basis from the start of the 2020/21 season. Customers are advised to report weed growth hotspots via reportanavissue@scottishcanals.co.uk and this will be factored in to our works programme. The publication of this programme will make it easier for customers to stay up to date with the work we're doing to keep the canals clear for transit.

Dredging & channel depth

As a significant number of customers reported being impeded from transit by low channel depth, we have decided to add our dredging plans to the online works programme. We hope that this will allow customers to stay up to date with the areas we are clearing. Customers will be encouraged to report problems via reportanavissue@scottishcanals.co.uk.

Opening times feedback

- Customers requested greater access through Applecross and Leamington bridges, which will be addressed through the introduction of user operations, starting 2020/21.
- Customers also reported issues with the Boat Movement Line booking system. Scottish Canals will review alternative options to support the creation of an online community, and will provide an update at the customer User Group meeting in April 2020.
- Customers also reported that Holiday Hire Boats are currently unable to access Edinburgh Quay due to opening hours. Scottish Canals' Operations staff will pick this up directly with the hire boat companies.

Online booking

A high percentage of customers supported our proposals to introduce online bookings. Scottish Canals hopes to progress this in the short-term, depending on available budget.

Customer communications

Our Communications and Marketing team will continue to deliver boating customer engagement via email, the website and newsletter and will focus on improving communications about navigational disruptions, events and public meetings.

Contact us

Navigation issues

If you spot any navigation issues on and around the canal network, please email reportanavissue@scottishcanals.co.uk.

Moorings

For queries or issues related to moorings, please email Moorings@scottishcanals.co.uk

For anything else you can write to us or contact us by phone at:

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1 Applecross Street
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