

Scottish Canals

Scottish Canals Lowland Operations Consultation Report

2020

Prepared by Target Applications Ltd

31 Jan 2020



This survey was carried out by Target Applications Ltd on behalf of Scottish Canals. The survey was available on the Scottish Canals website, and was highlighted at the 3 public consultation meetings that were held in December 2020. It was also distributed to user groups for their input.

This was a digital survey and ran between 18th Oct 2019 and 20th Jan 2020.

The survey is in 8 major sections

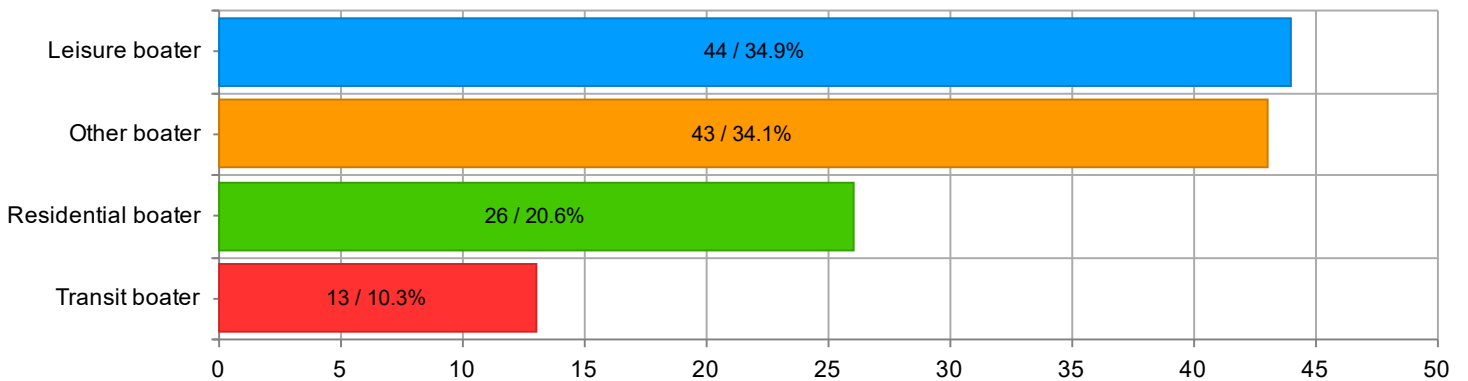
1. User and remote operations of locks and bridges
2. Diesel and pump-out hours
3. Aquatic weed control
4. Dredging and channel clearance
5. Canal opening times and scheduling
6. Online booking
7. Customer communications
8. General comments

This report analyses the results and groups the comments into major themes

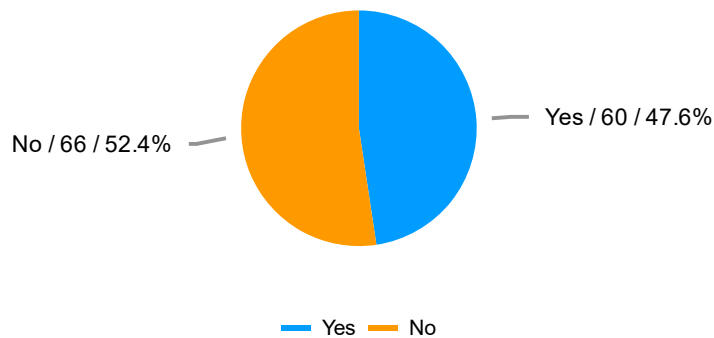
Who completed the survey ?

126 responses were received between 18th Oct 2019 and 20th Jan 2020. The first three questions were demographic in order to establish if there were any major differences in response between those with moorings or other types of boater. An additional question was also asked regarding the number of transits made in the Lowlands canal

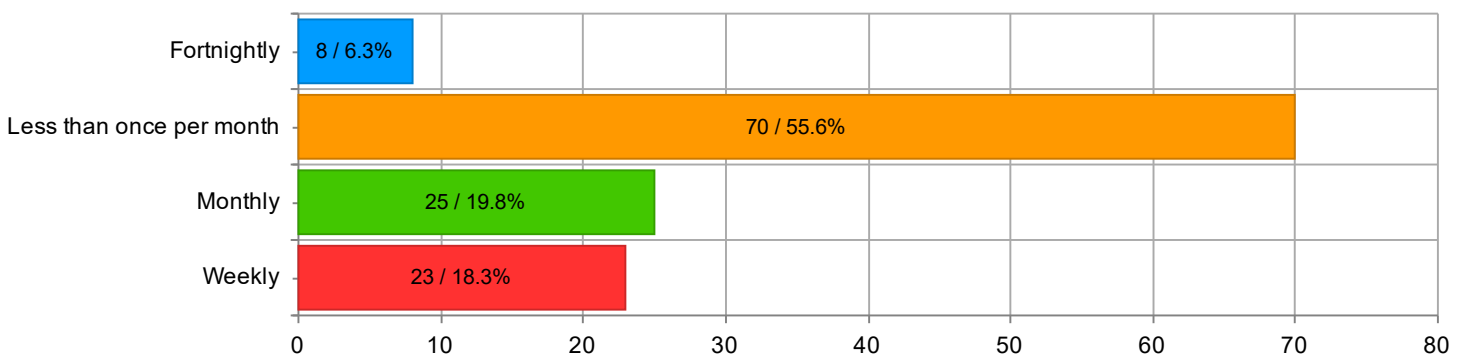
Type of boater



Mooring on the Lowlands Canal



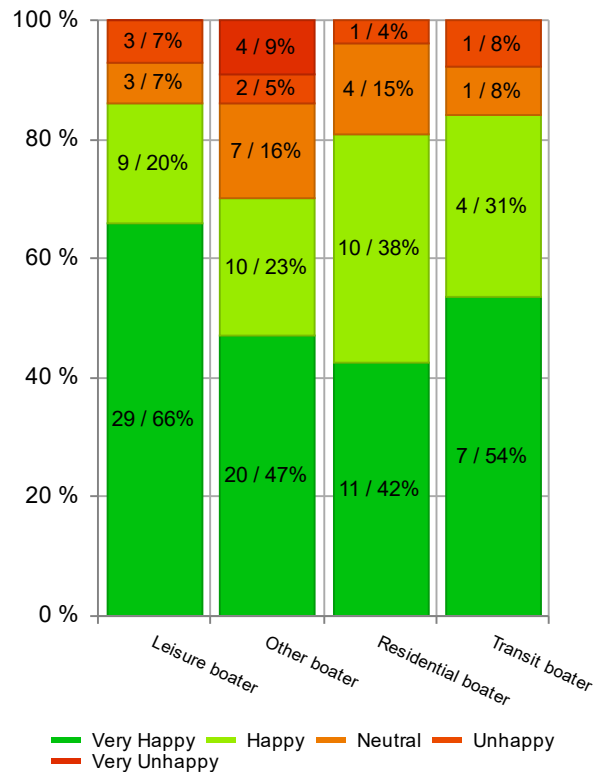
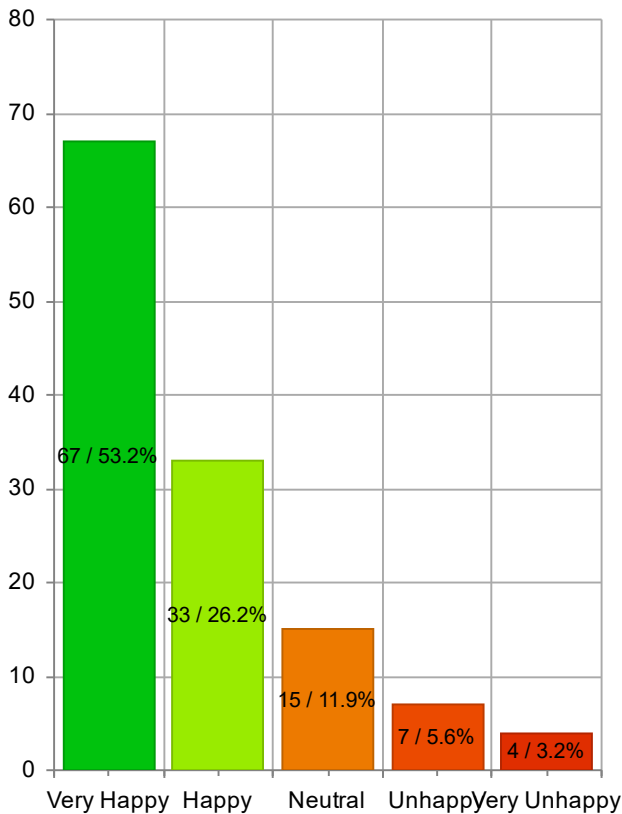
Frequency of Transit



User and remote operations of locks and bridges

SC define user operations as canal boaters being able to safely open and close a canal structure without supervision or reliance on SC staff. Remote operations is the ability for SC staff to safely open a canal structure from an alternative location avoiding the need for an on-site presence.

Users were asked to indicate how happy they are with this approach.



Conclusions and Comments

The majority of respondents (79.4%) are happy to operate the lock gates either by remote operation or manually themselves. There were some concerns raised

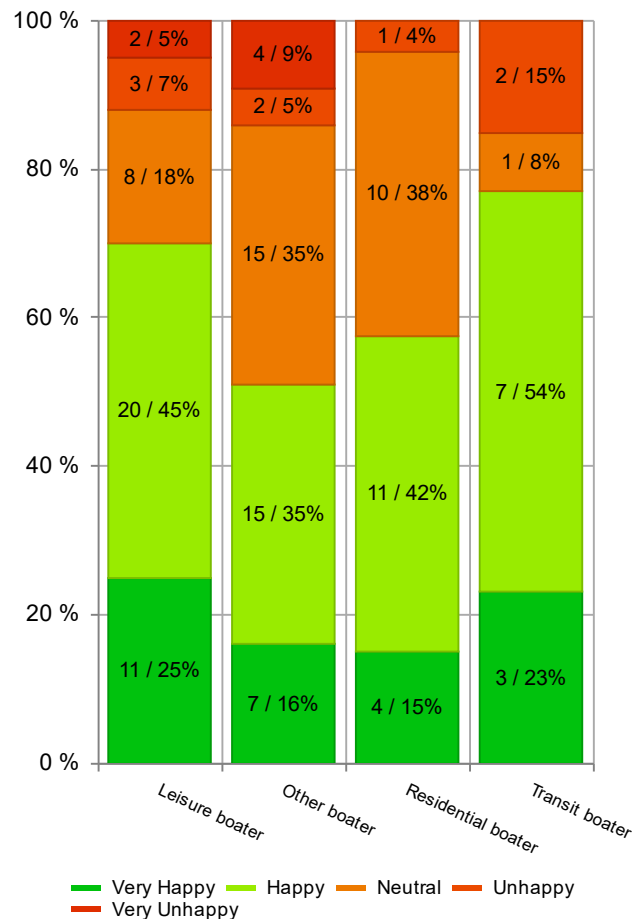
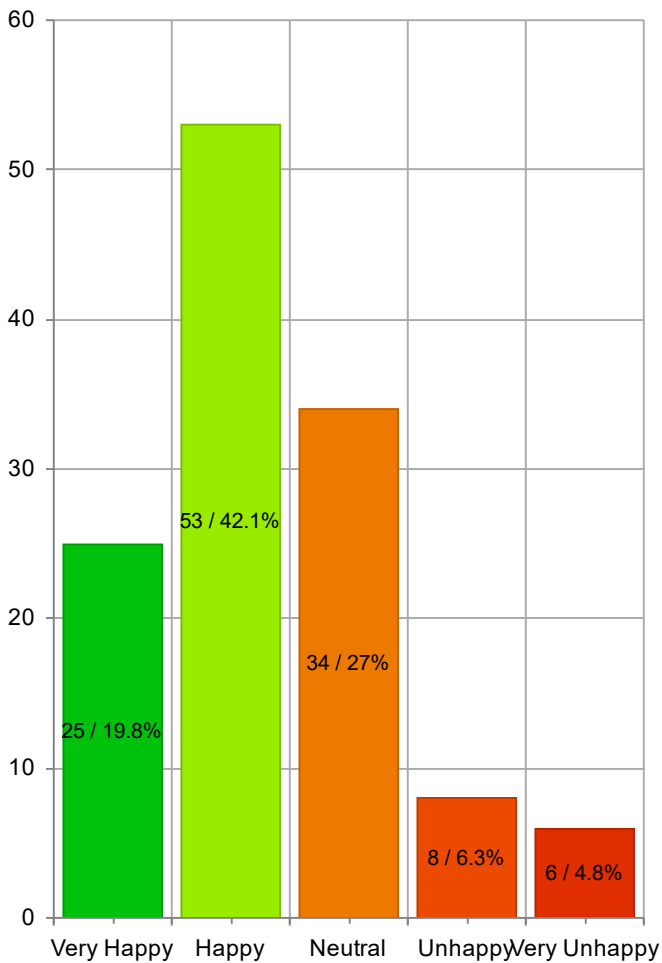
1. Training on the safe operation of the gates is required
2. Not every person who uses the canal is physically able to operate a gate, so an alternative method of lock operation should also be available
3. Request for additional methods of securing boats during the lock operation
4. Use volunteer lock operators where possible to enable redeployment of SC staff
5. Don't restrict the self operation to specific time periods so that people can use the canal during the longer summer evenings
6. Ensure access to the lock from boats is possible and safe for users

To increase boaters' freedom on the water, SC proposes rolling out user operations in 3 stages, subject to funding. The assets identified as suitable are

Phase 1 (User Operation) - Four Bridges - Spiers Wharf Rolling Bridge, Robert Whitworth/Applecross Bridge, Garscube Bridge and Leamington Bridge

Phase 2 (User Operation) - Locks 19 to 17 and Locks 16 to 3 on the Forth & Clyde Canal, assisted passage at both Locks 1 to 3 and the swing bridge of the Falkirk Wheel

Phase 3 (Remote Operations) - Twechar, Bonnybridge, Hillhead



Conclusions and Comments

The majority of respondents (61.9%) are happy with the current proposed 3 phase rollout of the changes to user operations. The following issues have been raised

1. Multiple people would like the rollout to happen as quickly as possible - when complete it will enable users to transit the canal much more quickly and easily than is currently possible

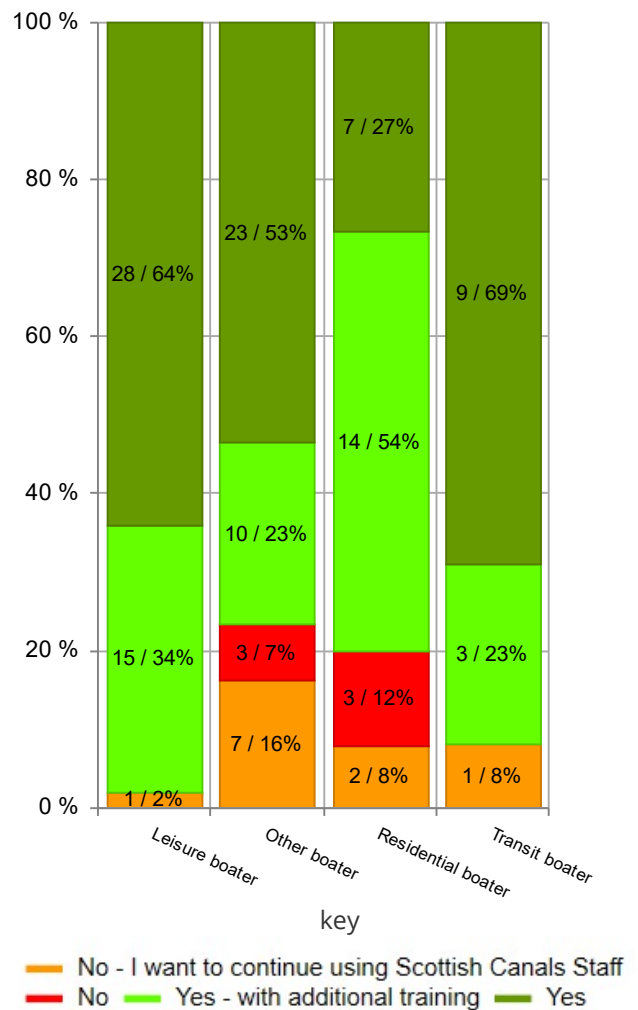
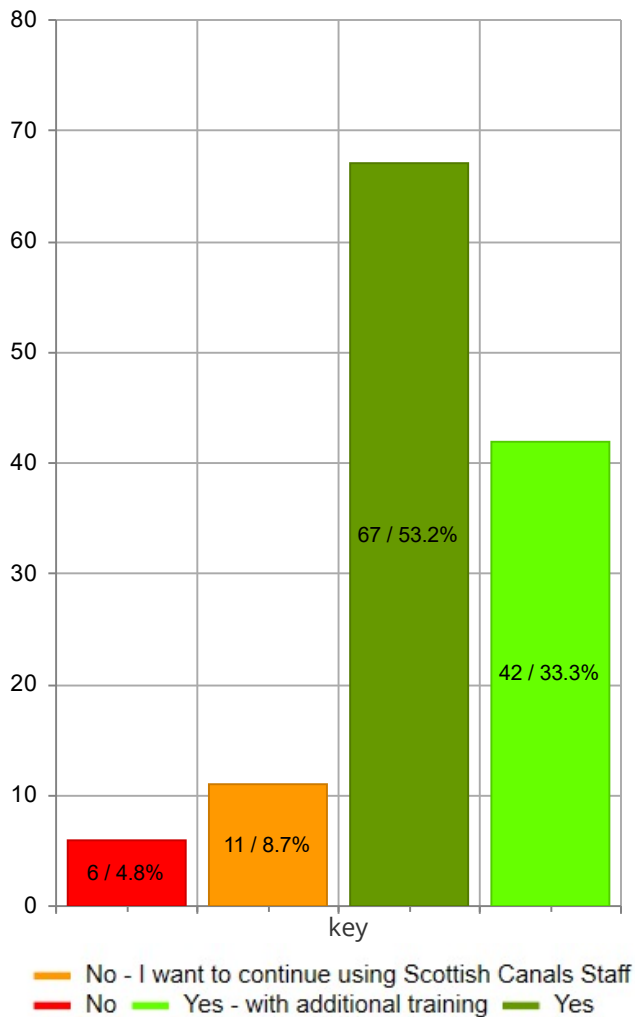
"I think the three phases are too cautious, I would simply open it up to user operation"

2. Queries as to the actual timings of the three phases

"it would be helpful to know the proposed timings of the phases"

"it would be really great to travel the whole length of the canal and operate it yourselves"

The users were asked if they felt capable of operating a lock gate on the Forth & Clyde Canal

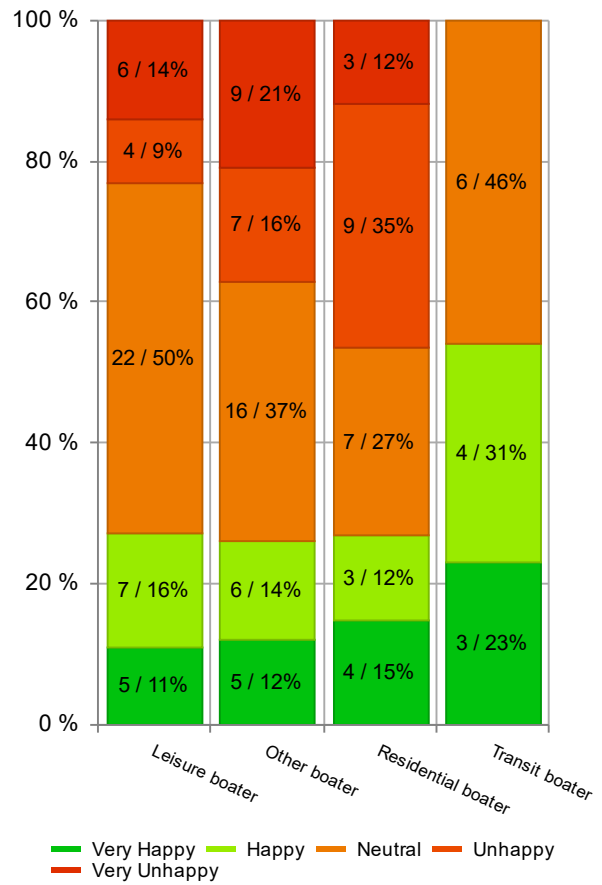
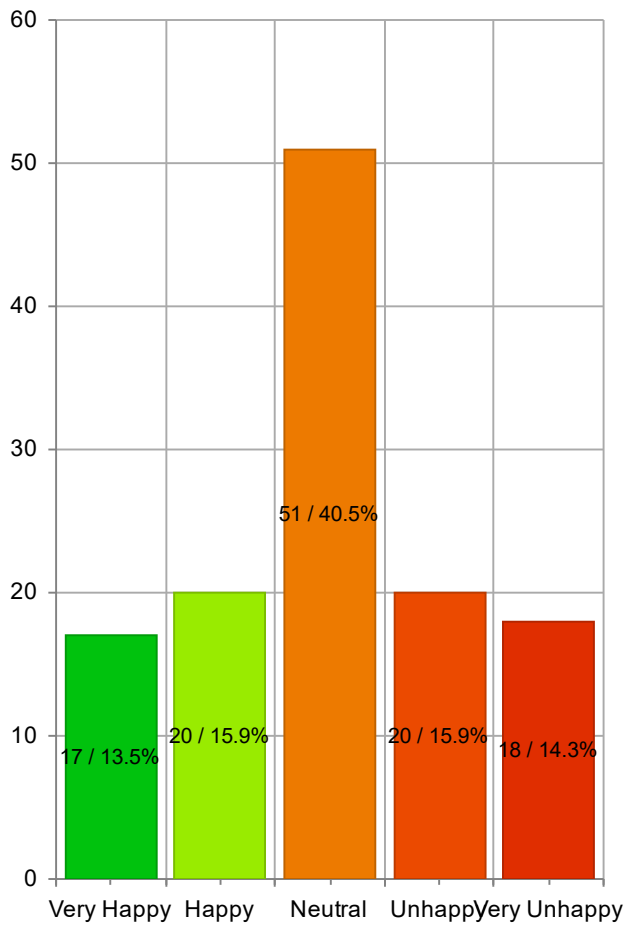


Conclusions and Comments

The majority of respondents (86.5%) are happy to operate the locks of the Forth and Clyde canal themselves or after additional training has been given. 12% of the residential boaters do not believe that they are capable. Comments can be summarised as follows:

1. Training on the safe operation of the gates is required
2. Not every person who uses the canal is physically able to operate a gate
3. Suggestion of implementing a "buddy" system to enable those less physically able or who don't have a crew, to transit easily and safely
4. Offer a chargeable gate operation service
5. Ensure that the gates and locks are well maintained so that users don't run into difficulties
6. Provide signage at the gates that can help those less experienced

Scottish Canals would like to consider extending the hours at Twechar and Hillhead on certain summer days. The users were asked how they would feel about an additional charge for an out of hours service

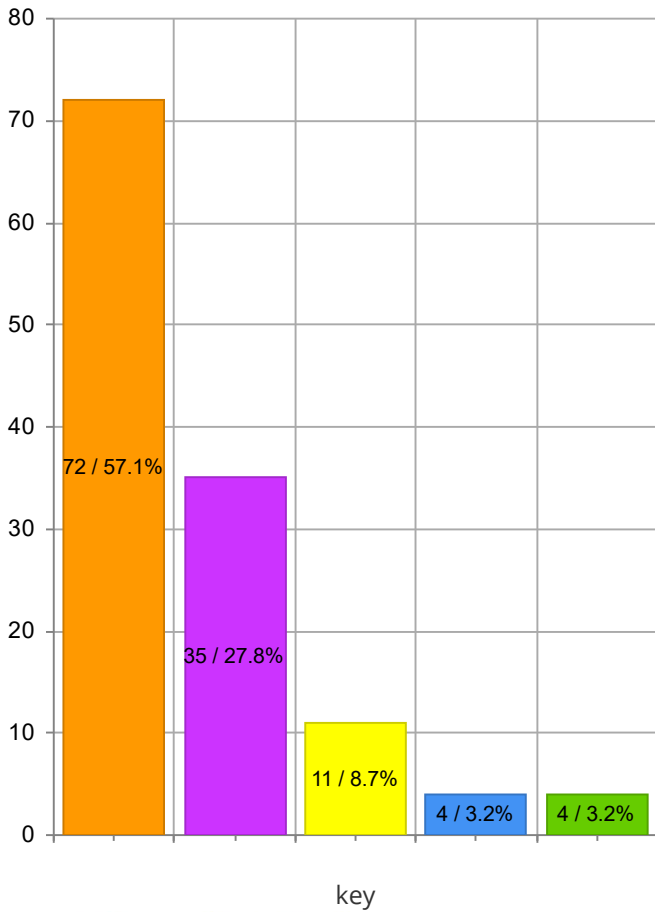


Conclusions and Comments

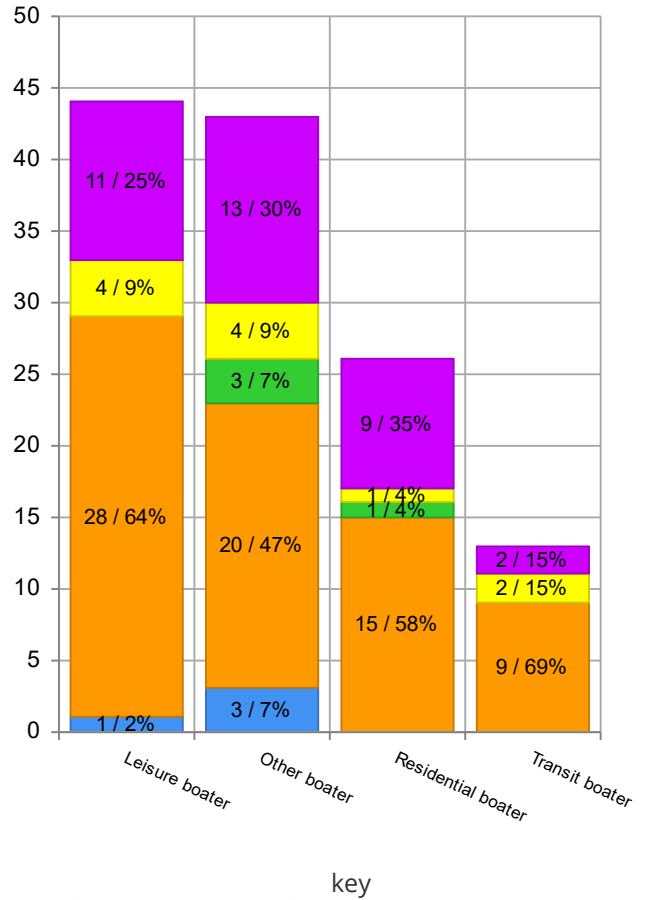
There is a low number of respondents that are unhappy about an out of hours charge at Twechar and Hillhead, the majority are neutral. The comments raised some questions:

1. What is the level of charge?
2. How would this actually work ?
 - 2a. If users operate the locks themselves, is this required ?
 - 2b. If there is remote operation, does that require an SC staff member to operate hence the charge ?
3. What is included in the navigation license ?
4. Comparison to toll roads/bridges which were abolished
5. What hours are "Out of hours" ?
6. If charging is introduced, then improvements in maintenance are required

The users were asked who should deliver user operations training and to add any comments regarding further services or infrastructure that Scottish Canals could consider for user/remote operation



Other Any of the above
 Accredited boating organisation
 Canal societies/volunteers Scottish Canals



Other Any of the above
 Accredited boating organisation
 Canal societies/volunteers Scottish Canals

Conclusions and Comments

The majority of users do not have a preference who would provide training on the operation of locks. The additional comments are

1. There must be some kind of quality assurance built into training that is given by external organisations to ensure safety is a priority
2. Add more pontoons and steps for user access to the canals, and ensure that they and locksides are safe for users to get in and out of their boat
3. Suggestion of providing some kind of SOS facility for those in danger or experiencing difficulty
4. Request for user pump-out and diesel facilities, with pay-as-you-pump available
5. Ensure training is available outwith Mon to Fri 9-5 for those that work full-time
6. Offer advantageous pricing for those who are happy to join a group passage through the bigger locks and who book in advance
7. Multiple requests for Leamington lift bridge and Falkirk Wheel top locks to be considered for user/remote access
8. Additional parking facilities for users such as paddlesports to access the canals

Diesel and pump out hours

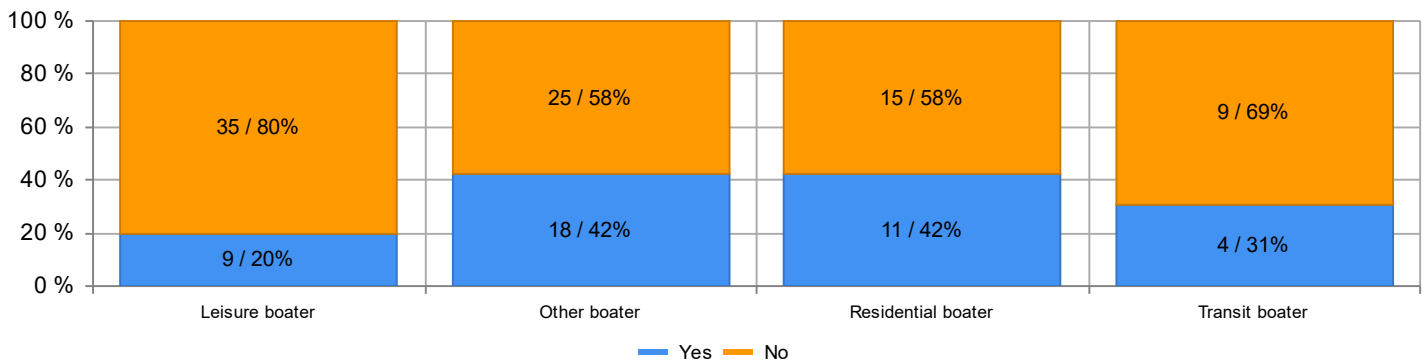
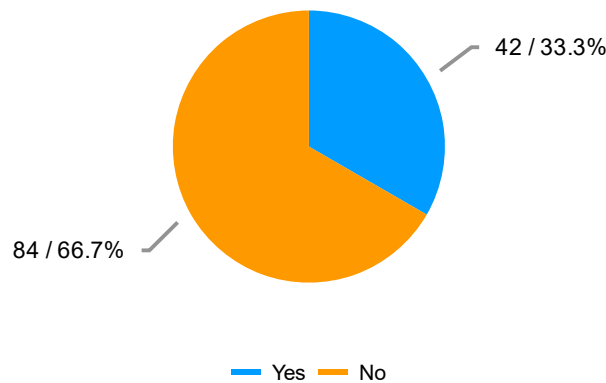
To create flexibility in staff rotas so that our people can be deployed on tasks that customers have told us are important, such as weed-control, vegetation management and channel clearance, we propose making these scheduled customer service hours permanent from 1st April 2020 as listed below. This means locations will be unstaffed outwith these times:

Scheduled Services		Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Bowling Harbour	Diesel Pump-out	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*
Applecross Street	Pump-out		0900 - 1200				1230 - 1600	
Southbank Marina	Diesel	0900 - 1200			0900 - 1200			
<u>Auchinstarry Marina</u>	Diesel Pump-out		0900 - 1200				1200 - 1600	
The Falkirk Wheel	Diesel Pump-out		1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730
Kelpies Marina/ Grangemouth	Diesel Pump-out	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*	4 hours daily*
Ratho Marina	Pump-out		0900 - 1200		0900 - 1200		1230 - 1600	
Edinburgh Quay	Diesel Pump-out	0900 - 1200		1230 - 1600		0900 - 1200	0900 - 1200	0900 - 1200

NB. At the sea locks the services will be provided daily for 4 hours in line with tides. These times include changing access to the sea locks from seven days per week between 0800 and 1800 to four hour windows that coincide with the tides. This will mean that the locations will not be staffed at other times.

Following a trial in 2017/18, the schedule was amended to reflect customer feedback where possible.

With the timetable above, the users were asked if they could suggest any other major changes for Scottish Canals to consider



Conclusions and Comments

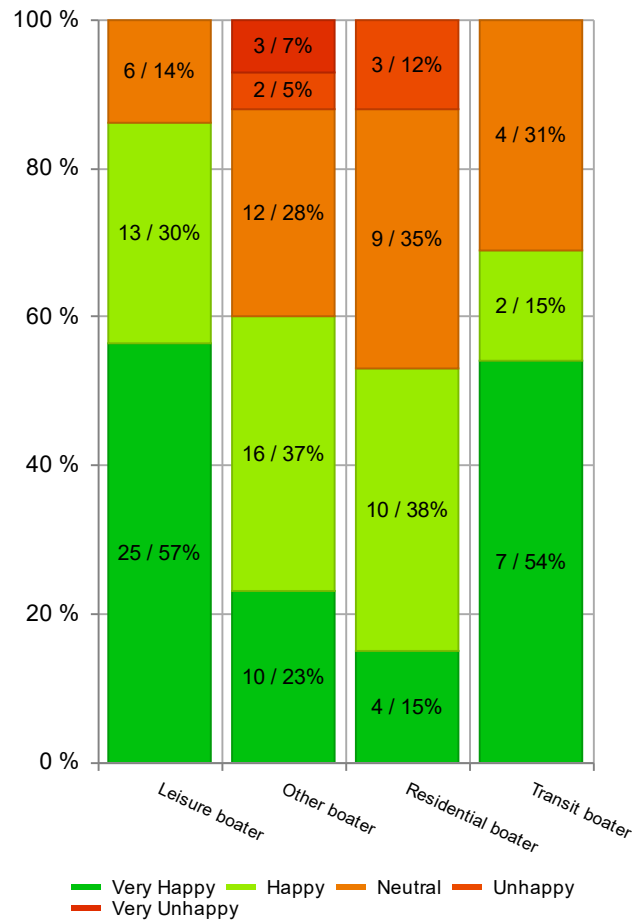
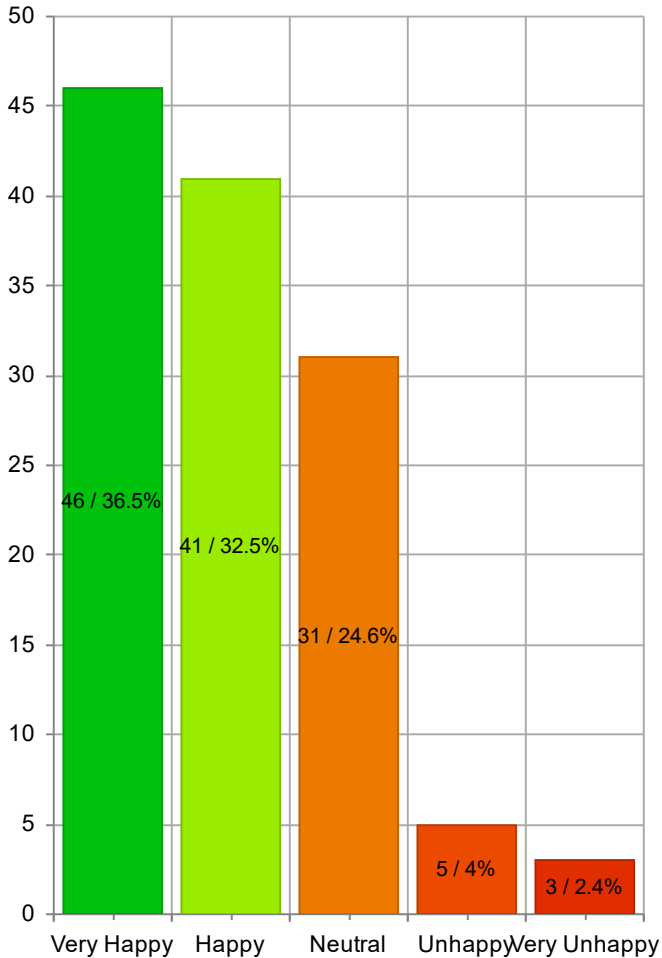
The majority of respondents did not have any suggestions for additional items, however the following comments were made

1. Need to have flexibility built into the schedules to account for people who are working full time and unable to attend during Mon to Fri hours, tidal considerations at the sea locks, reduced daylight hours in winter time
2. The possibility of user operated pumpout and diesel was requested again
3. Request to change laundry facilities from tokens to a credit card system so that boaters can use the facilities as required without needing anything from a member of staff
4. A boat hire business owner expressed multiple concerns
5. The availability of power supply cards is a concern if there are no staff available to provide them

Aquatic weed control

The new schedule will allow Scottish Canals to re-organise the Lowlands workforce in 2020 so that more staff days will be dedicated to aquatic weed control. This will see three two-person teams using all our weed harvesters, five days per week throughout the summer season across the Lowland Canals. There will be a scheduled weed-cutting service operated by the large harvesters with the small cutters forming an aquatic weed response team that tackles weed hotspots.

The users were asked how they felt about this approach

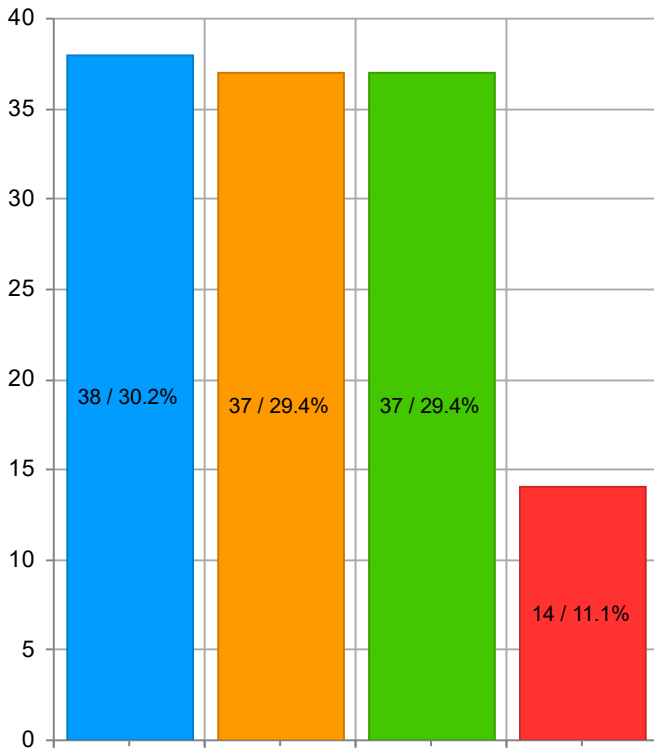


Conclusions and Comments

There is concern from the respondents regarding weed control and ease of passage through the canal. The majority of users are happy with the proposed plan (69%). The themes from the comments are

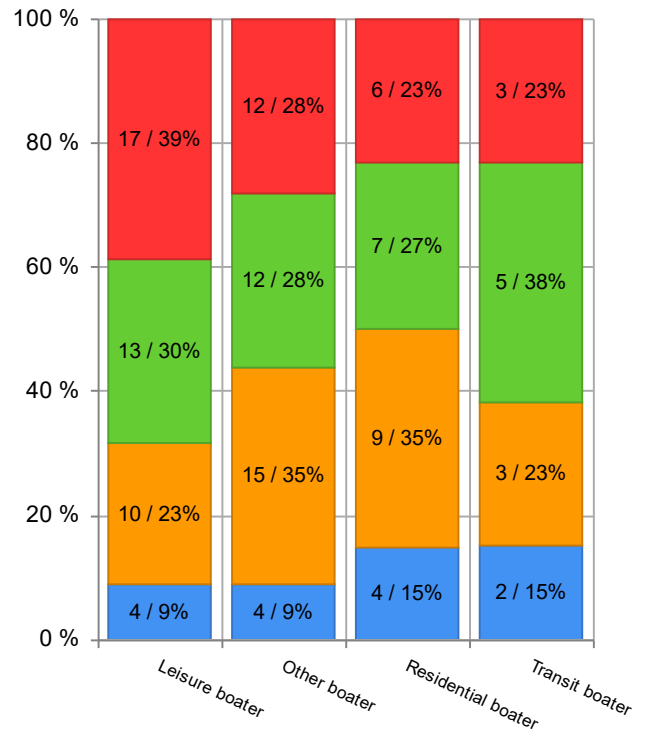
1. Publicise the weed-cutting program so that users can plan trips around it
2. Ensure that there are no clumps of weed left floating as boat with smaller or no weed hatch can struggle, plus other users such as canoes
3. Utilise any volunteers that wish to help with the weed control
4. What is the plan for removing weeds when a hotspot is reported ?
 - 4a. How quickly will there be a response ?
5. Ensure that access to the banks of the canal is not prohibited by the dumping of weed

Users were asked how they would like to report weed hotspots to Scottish Canals



key

- Other
- Report via an app
- Email the location to the relevant team
- Text the location to the relevant team



key

- Other
- Report via an app
- Email the location to the relevant team
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Conclusions and Comments

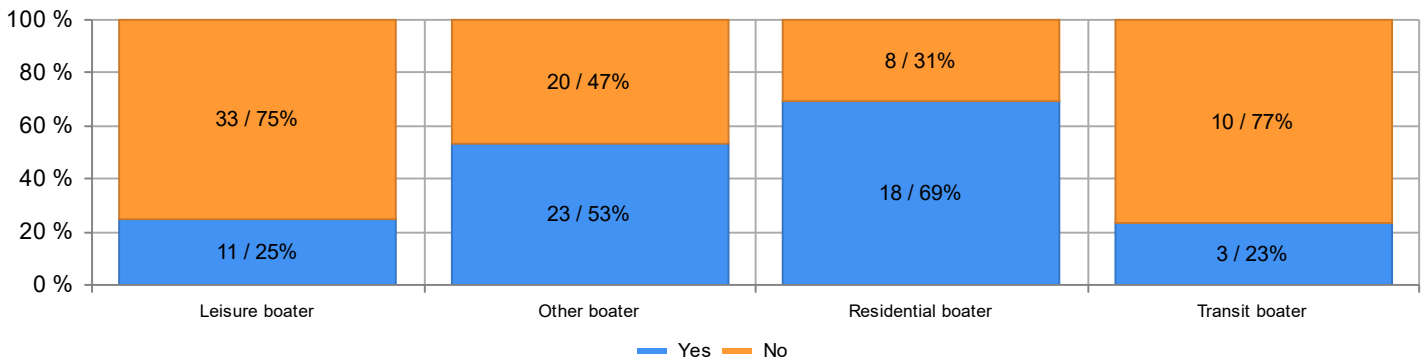
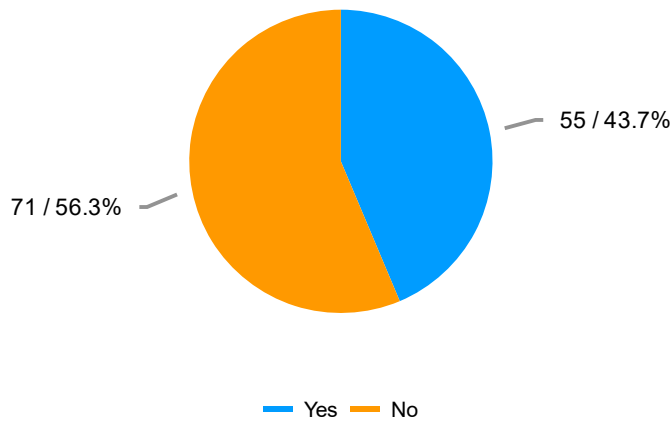
There is a fairly even split between the various methods of reporting weed. The majority of comments advise maximum flexibility in methods of reporting. There were concerns that if a completely digital approach is used, then some users may not be able to report, and that mobile/internet signal strength is not always good enough across some areas of the canals.

"Anything electronic is fine, provided the information is read and the users get a response"

Dredging and channel clearance

The navigational depth of the Lowland Canals currently means that the majority of boats can travel through without any problem. However, ongoing dredging is required at key locations. Given how expensive it is and our commitment to getting the best value for money in money in all that we do, we want to understand how many boats are affected by current channel depth.

The users were asked if channel depth/underwater obstacles impeded their boating experience in the past year, and to give some details about it



Conclusions and Comments

More than half of the respondents encountered obstacles during a journey, with a very high percentage of those being the residential boaters. The comments can be divided into two areas

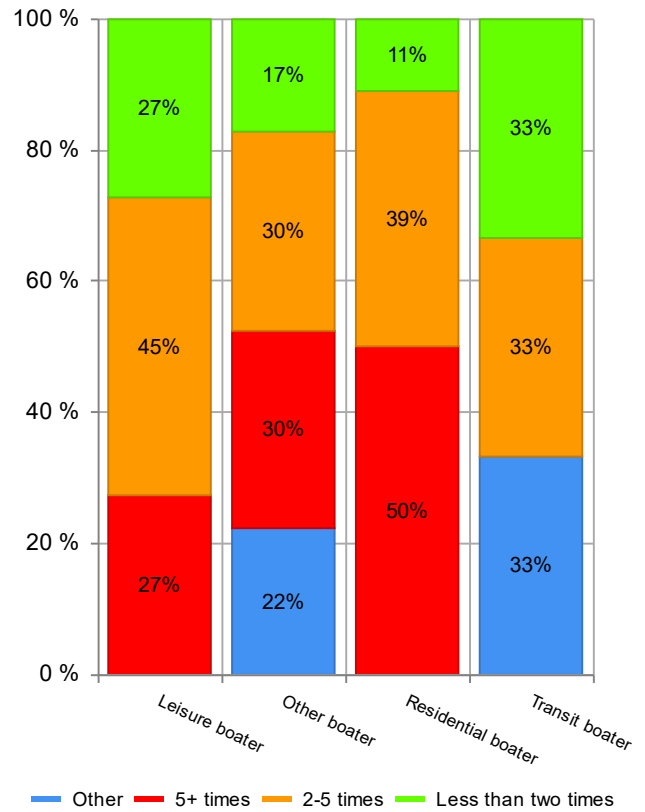
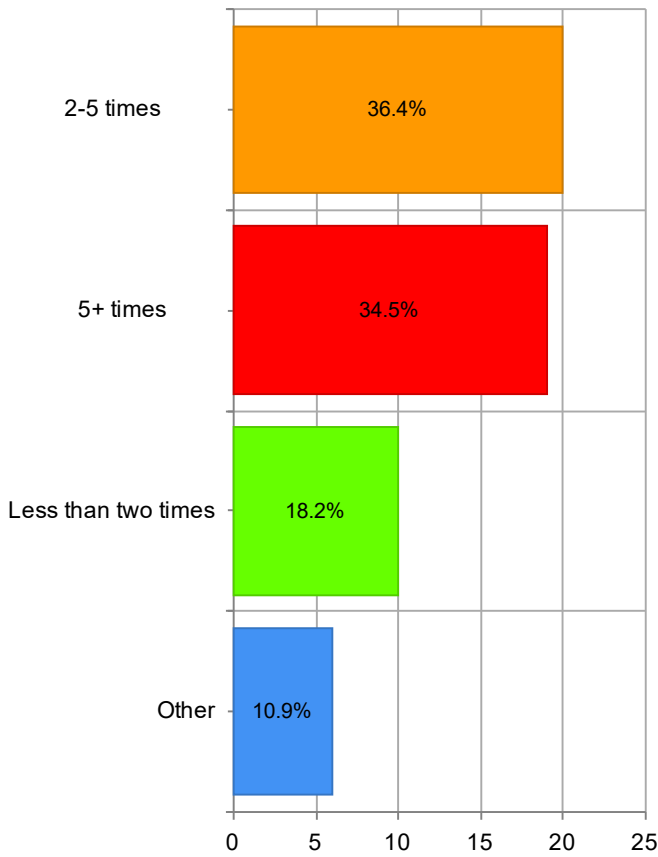
1. Silt and general canal depth

There is a general perception that the depth of the Lowland canals is a problem for many boaters, so some of the respondents say that they deliberately don't use the canal. Respondents mentioned specifically the Union Canal where hulls are making contact with the canal bed, and causing damage to boats. *"The canal has a poor reputation for depth of channel"*. Others mention that depth of the channel is fine in the middle of the canal but is much shallower towards the banks, which have to be used when passing other boats.

2. Objects

Most users accept that most objects in the canal are caused by the actions of people outside of SC or boaters control. However, branches and weed cause problems, that can be dealt with

The users were asked how many times they were impeded, and to give some details of the locations where that occurred

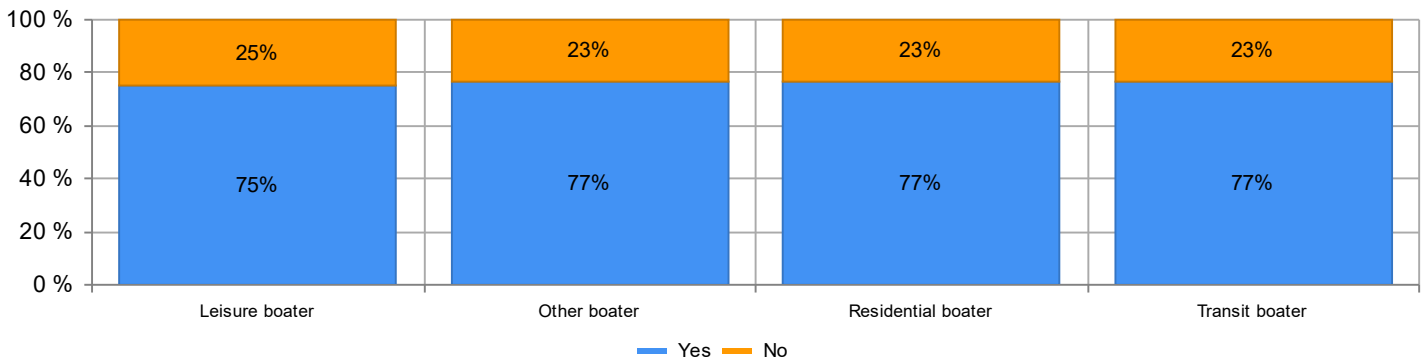
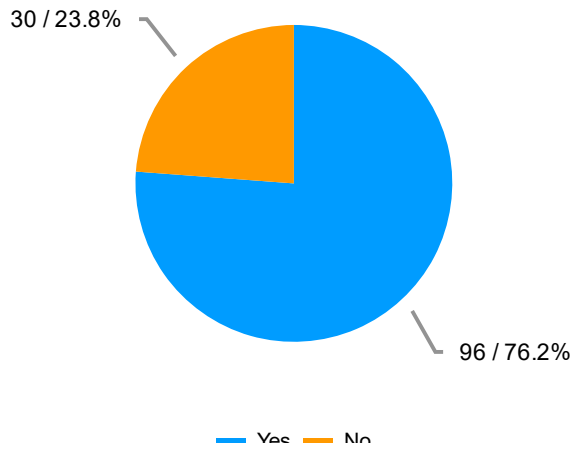


Conclusions and Comments

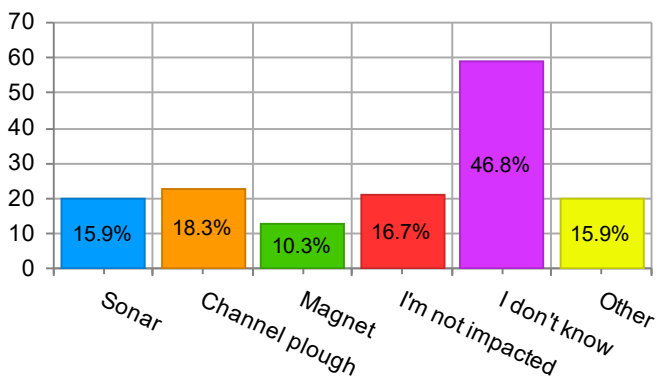
The majority of respondents report multiple cases of being impeded by objects in the canal. The locations reported are along almost the entire stretch of the canal. However, the Union Canal is cited as being particularly bad.

The users were asked if they would be willing to help find obstacles, and what would be the best method for their boat for clearing them

Willing to help clear obstacles



Best method for clearing obstacles



Conclusions and Comments

The majority of respondents are willing to help in finding obstacles, but there is a level of concern on how obstacles are dealt with. The users would like prompt clearance of obstacles when they are reported. Many also advocate the use of a dredger, however, most of them don't know what would be the best method for clearing obstructions.

Canal opening times and scheduling

From 1st April 2020, boat movements will continue to be booked via the Boat Movement Team and will be offered on a pre-booked first come first served basis. To Make the most of our staff resource, this may mean you are required to travel through a bridge or lock at a scheduled time. We will minimise delays wherever possible by grouping vessels together. But we will not be able to guarantee passage at these times if customers have not booked in advance. If there are no bookings 24 hours in advance, staff will be re-deployed elsewhere. The journey from Bowling to Maryhill is not a high demand length of the canal, however it does require a high level of staff resource to operate effectively. SC have assessed resource levels and are proposing to provide a flexible booking service on the west of the F&C with up to 4 days out of 7 days available for transit on a first come first served basis. Having fully reviewed recent years canal activity levels this will provide sufficient and timely cover in peak season (15th May to 15th Sept), SC would look for 24 hours notice, outwith this SC would look for 48hrs notice, other than the winter season (Nov-Mar) where 7 days notice would be required subject to the canal being open

From 1st April 2020 the Lowland operations hours will be

Lowland Canals Summer Boating Hours							
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Bowling Harbour & Sealock to Lock 38	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily
Bowling Lock 38 to Maryhill Lock 21**	0900 - 1730	0900 - 1730	0900 - 1730	0900 - 1730	0900 - 1730	0900 - 1730	0900 - 1730
Applecross bridges		0900 -12.30				1230 -1700	
Hillhead Bridge	0915 - 1730*	0915 - 1730*	0915 - 1730*	0915 - 1730*	0915 - 1730*	0915 - 1730*	0915 - 1730*
Twechar Bridge	0900 - 1730*	0900 - 1730*	0900 - 1730*	0900 - 1730*	0900 - 1730*	0900 - 1730*	0900 - 1730*
Wyndford Lock 20 to Lock 17	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730
Bonnybridge Bridge	10.30 - 1730*	10.30 - 1730*	10.30 - 1730*	10.30 - 1730*	10.30 - 1730*	10.30 - 1730*	10.30 - 1730*
TFW Swing Bridge	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730	1000 - 1730
Falkirk Lock 16 to Kelpies Lock 2	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730	0830 - 1730
Carron Sealock Lock 2 / 2a	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily
Carron Sealock Lock 1	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily	4 hours daily
Leamington Lift Bridge	0900 - 1200	1300 - 1600			0900 - 1200	0900 - 1200	0900 - 1200

* Subject to Road Traffic Restrictions

Summer season (from 1st April until 31st October) - 24 hours notice will be required for boat movements

Winter season (from 1st November to 31st March) - 48 hours notice will be required for boat movements with operational hours constrained by hours of daylight, running from 0900 hours until 1500 hours

Conclusions and Comments

Users were asked for any comments regarding the schedule

1. More than one request to open Applecross and Leamington Bridges more frequently

"Why is Applecross bridge only operated on Tuesday and Saturday?"

2. Users report issues with the Boat Movement Line - telephone not being answered and unable to leave a voicemail as the box is full

"Boat Movement line hardly answers the phone, voicemail rarely responded to"

3. There are queries about holiday hire boats being able to return to base on a Mon to Fri hire

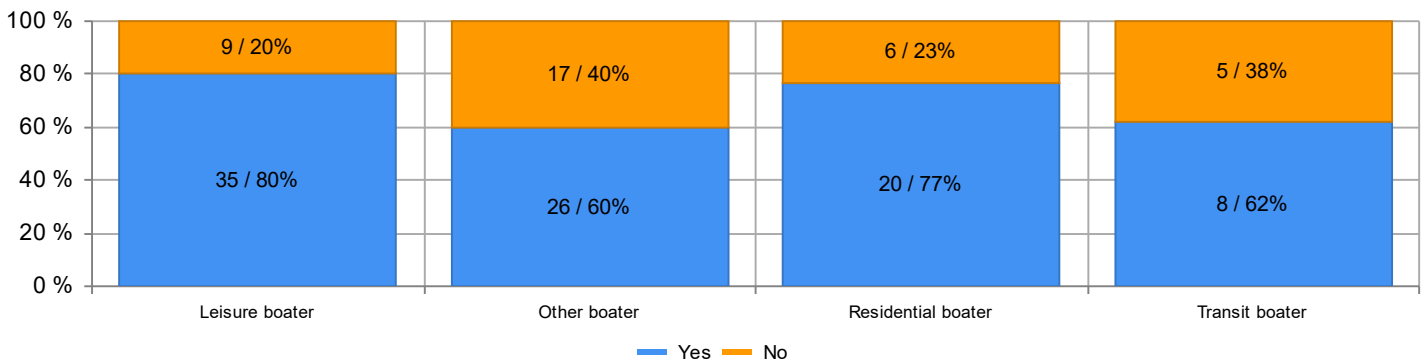
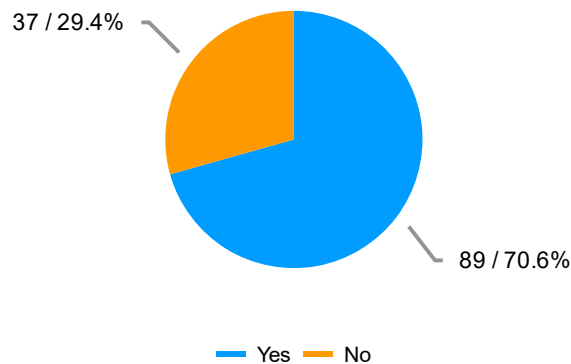
"Holiday hire boaters cannot access Edinburgh Quay, due to the half days and 2 closed days"

4. Concern that the restrictions may not be appropriate during the Edinburgh Festival in August

Online booking

To make it easier and more convenient for customers to book and pay for services, such as boat movements, licenses, diesel and pump-out, Scottish Canals proposes introducing an online booking service.

Users were asked if they would like to book and pay (where appropriate) for pump-out, lock and bridge openings, licenses etc online



Conclusions and Comments

Greater than 70% of respondents are happy to pay for services online, but the comments indicate that users would like to retain some other form of payment for non technical users and instances where there is little or no mobile phone signal or internet availability. Other concerns are around the integration with the other SC invoicing systems, to ensure that everything is joined up.

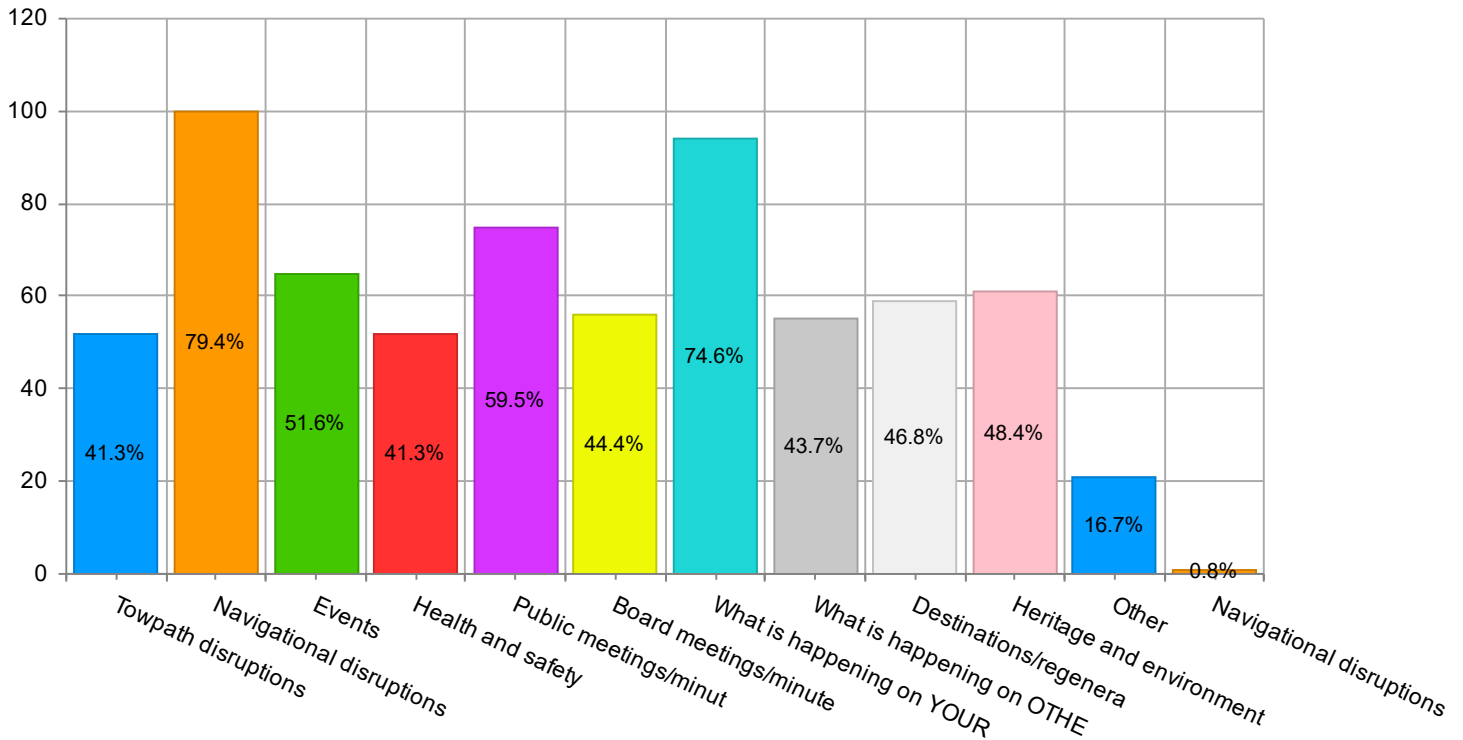
"I often have problems with invoices being wrong and being asked to pay twice for things is an ongoing issue"

Those users who indicated that they don't want to use online for payments mainly don't have access to the internet either via wifi or mobile, or prefer the human contact.

"Who knows if a wi fi signal would be available to allow online payments"

Customer communications

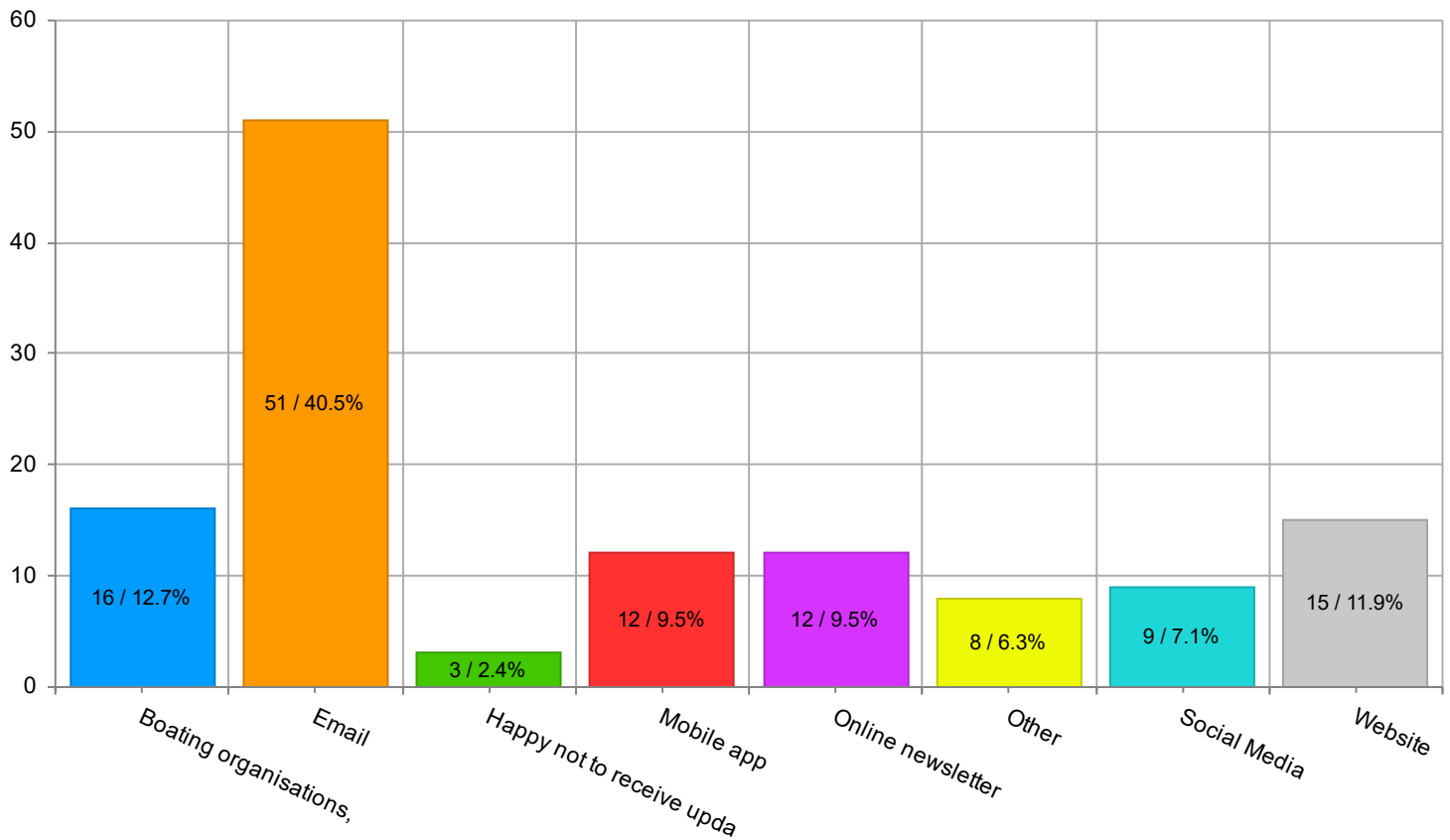
Customers were asked to indicate the areas that they would like to hear more about and to make any suggestions for any other topics



Conclusions and Comments

Respondents are interested in hearing about all aspects of the canal. They are particularly keen on being able to use multiple methods of accessing information from social media to direct communications and greater links with external organisations such as RYA and Scottish Canoe Association. Other user suggestions a series of regular meetings, regular surveying, notice boards

The users were asked to indicate their preference on contact methods, and to give any suggestions or comments



Conclusions and Comments

Email is by far the most preferred method of contact, but arranging that all information is available across multiple mediums will catch the greatest number of people and ensure maximum inclusion. The comments indicate that the respondents want greater and more regular communications. There is a perception that SC are difficult to speak to eg answering the Boat Movement telephone line, or getting a response to an issue that has been raised

"communicatons should be on multiple platforms"

"communication most definitely need to improve at Scottish Canals. Keeping residents informed of up coming events and proposals as well as planned applications"

"More flexible meeting with boaters instead if times set by sc that most boaters are unavailable to attend"

There is also a request to strengthen ties to paddle-sports associations as they are a big user of the canal