



GLOUCESTER & SHARPNESS CANAL REMOTE-CONTROLLED BRIDGES

Public drop-in sessions 14 and 16 May 2015 – note of key points

The public drop-in sessions in Saul Memorial Hall and the Cotswold Canals Visitor Centre on 14th and 16th May saw 80 people talk to 6 operational and technical staff. The majority of people were local residents living across the canal bridges, although there were more boaters at the second session.

We answered many questions about the system and its operation. We also clarified some misconceptions. We listened to specific concerns, most of which centred around road traffic congestion, road traffic management and road access for residents. We also talked at length to some of the local councillors plus residents of the houses at Fretherne Bridge.

This summary of key points has been divided into:

1. Questions for which there is already an answer. The log below highlights the themes that emerged, along with a short answer (full answers can be found in the FAQs on the website).
2. Issues and suggestions that will need to be considered by the Trust.

1. Questions and answers

Using the app

Can anyone download the app? What's to stop someone misusing the system? Only boat-licence holders can download the app, it will only work within range of each bridge's Wifi, it cannot be used to repeatedly open a bridge and we can disable it for anyone who misuses it.

Will boaters know how to use the app? It will be a simple process, we will have information on our website, run demonstration days and local boaters have offered boating buddies.

How will boaters keep their phones charged to use the app? This is an issue currently for boaters, many of whom use their mobile phone and have various ways of charging their phone on their boat, take a spare battery or use mobile phone 'power bars'.

Will the app use the boaters' mobile data allowance and hence cost them to use it? No, the system does not use the boaters' data allowance since it uses the Trust's Wifi to connect.

Smart-phone screens may be less visible in daylight and difficult to use in the rain. The more modern smart-phones have reasonable visibility in daylight; shields and waterproof covers are widely available.

It may be difficult to control the boat at the same time as using the app. The request via the app will be a very quick and simple couple of clicks. Boaters will need to assess whether they can do this safely whilst cruising or pull over first.

Boaters could get stranded when bridges are automatically closed in windy conditions. This could happen now but we recommend they contact the control centre if they have problems. Existing high wind bridge restrictions will still apply

How will the system coordinate requests for the same bridge made by different boaters, one using the app and the other contacting the control centre? The requests will be taken in order of the time they were made. If a request has been made by the app first the system will not let the control centre trigger the opening for the boater who has contacted them and they will need to wait. On the other hand if the control centre has triggered the opening for a boater who has called them, then the boater with the app will receive a message to wait.

How does the system deal with boaters ignoring red canal traffic lights or following other boats through? The canal lights turn red after the laser has been cleared by a boat (at the end of the pre-set maximum open time). If a boat goes through this red light, the bridge will be prevented from closing to canal, the control centre is alerted to an obstruction, staff will be able to identify the boat causing the problem and can take appropriate action.

How secure is the Wifi system? Can the system be hacked, causing disruption to traffic or access to personal data? The Wifi is a closed system solely for operating the bridge opening sequences. Being a closed system, rather than public, there is less chance of it being hacked. The system has been specified to high security standards. Once installed on a boater's smart device the app does not hold or access their personal details.

Management of the canal

Concern at loss of staff who are friendly and provide information. We understand this but unfortunately we have to balance this with the fact that this is a costly and inefficient way of working. We have a growing number of local volunteers will be out and about on the canal, providing a friendly presence and information. The app will also stream information to boaters.

The Gloucester & Sharpness Canal is designated as a commercial waterway. Can bridge-keepers be withdrawn under present legislation? Yes, the legislation does not prescribe how we operate bridges. The commercial waterway status only obliges the Trust to maintain the waterway to accommodate freight relative to the current prospect of use.

My licence fee pays for bridge keepers, so I expect them to stay. The boat licence fee is standard across all canals, regardless of local circumstances.

Can this system be used to improve enforcement of un-licensed boats? Yes because only boats with valid licences can download the app. Control centre staff can also ask the boater for their licence details when contacted to open a bridge. The number of staff involved with enforcement is unaffected by the plans for remote-control.

Road traffic and bridge operation

Without a bridge-keeper does this give boaters unrestricted control of the bridges? The boater *triggers* a pre-set opening/closing sequence. They cannot control or intervene in the sequence. We will work with local advisory groups to establish parameters and any necessary limits, for example temporary opening restrictions during rush hour or when a bridge is held by the control centre for the emergency services.

What about mechanical breakdowns, meaning the bridges or traffic control can't be operated? Will repairs take longer without bridge-keepers on site? The new technology should help the control centre identify certain types of fault immediately, rather than only being alerted during bridge opening. Our bridge-keepers can only deal with some minor faults. Mechanical breakdowns at any bridge will be dealt with as they are now, by a mobile diagnostic and repair crew.

How noisy will the road barrier alarms be? We must comply with legislation, however the alarms don't need to sound when the barriers are raising and we can adjust the noise level at each location – it needs to be heard above ambient noise and that normally lowers in the evenings so we could also possibly reduce the claxon noise then. We may be able to install a different warning system at bridges which are not public highways, subject to a risk assessment.

CCTV must not encroach into private property. The system will of course respect this issue and has to comply with requirements in this matter.

Will CCTV record car number plates to help with crime investigation? Will it work in the dark? Not as currently planned but we have liaised with the police during the consultation and number plate recognition could be installed within the system if it was made available to us.

Who will salt the bridge deck and approach roads when the bridge keepers have gone? The County Council has confirmed that as Highway Authority they 'own' the surfacing over all the bridges and as such they are responsible for all winter maintenance.

2. Issues and suggestions that will need to be considered by the Trust

Road traffic

Concern that removing bridge-keepers will worsen the traffic congestion because people said they control traffic and that CRT has a responsibility to manage the road traffic problem created by its bridge openings

Regardless of the remote-control plans, there are serious road traffic/congestion problems now

How will the control centre be alerted to a build up of road traffic and hold the bridge to clear cars?

CCTV should cover the road approaches to enable CRT to manage road traffic build up

Road traffic improvements were suggested including locating traffic lights further back on the road approach, traffic calming on the approaches, speed limit, better road markings, yellow lines and more car parks. Cars park along the approach roads at Sandfield to avoid paying the £1 car park fee, which causes bottle-necks. Make the car park free. Create more parking on available land (one person provided a sketch). Residents at Fretherne Bridge should be included in detailed planning for any traffic measures at the bridge.

Retain the bridge-keeper at Sandfield because it is one of the busiest bridges for road traffic and also boating traffic with facilities and the marina.

Bridge-keepers also monitor safety around the bridges and barriers

Priorities should take account of the fact that boaters are using bridges for leisure but road users are using them for work, school, essential trips and affects their livelihood

Opening embargo needs to remain for school run in the morning and be added for return time

Ensure the number for the control centre is widely known so that road users can also get in touch, e.g. a sign at every bridge. Road users must not be left stranded on the wrong side of the bridge in an emergency; the doctor's surgery is across the canal bridge from the residents. Locate the intercom on the west side of the bridge to facilitate residents' communications with the control centre.

Concern that extending canal opening hours will have impact on residents affected by claxon noise at bridges.

Some residents living at the bridges rely on the bridge-keeper to exit their property and will need to see a light indicator to know if it is safe

Large agricultural contractor at Epney with large vehicles needs to be considered in the bridge protocol since they need a long run in and road traffic to be held.

Concern that road traffic data for the bridges is not in place for CRT to develop the protocols. CRT is procuring this data from Gloucestershire County Council Highways dept.

The residents across the bridges are a legal minority under the Equalities Act and CRT must sign off a "due regard" statement that they are not being discriminated against.

Bridge operation

Consider best place to locate the intercom point for boaters and road users. More convenient for boaters on the side of the canal so they can pull up alongside, rather than on bridge parapet which requires them to moor up and disembark. Residents want intercom on western side of canal so they can contact control centre in an emergency if they need to get across to the doctor surgery for example.

Need a means of alerting deaf people to evacuate the bridge

Set the waiting time to the minimum required to avoid holding up cars for boats too far away

Install a sign on the canal bank to show boaters when they are in the Wifi zone and can use the app

How will Sandfield Bridge operation relate to boats coming out of the marina? Can they coordinate to avoid collision?

How many people will be on duty at the control centre and will they be able to watch the screens for bridges as soon as they are needed to?

Locate the control centre at Fretherne Bridge which is the busiest for road traffic

Canal traffic lights for boaters using the bridges

What is the procedure with the app for boaters passing under high air draft bridges that don't need it opening?

At bridges with reduced visibility, concern that green light means it's safe to proceed – should it be amber?

Traffic lights at Patch Bridge are obscured by moored boats.

Purton Bridges – will they be operated in conjunction to prevent boats passing through the bend 'side by side'?

App

Include the Bridge Control Centre contact number in the app

Include the air draft of each bridge

What information will the app stream to boaters?

Consider size of font for legibility

Other boating points

Concern that mobile phone signals will not be good enough for boaters wanting to phone the control centre if they have no smart phone

From how far away should a boater contact the control centre by VHF or mobile to request a bridge opening?

Where will boats moor safely to wait for a bridge to open, particularly in windy conditions?

Boaters generally positive about longer canal opening hours and how the system could make boating simpler

Other points

The outcome of this consultation should be binding i.e. CRT should not make additional changes which affect people without further consultation.

Is planning permission required for the project? The answer is no because the Trust can carry out operational works under its permitted development rights.

Discussions with the residents at Fretherne Bridge have been noted in the 'Bridge Comment Log.'