

GLOUCESTER & SHARPNESS CANAL REMOTE-CONTROLLED BRIDGES

Sandfield Bridge Advisory Group Meeting Note 2 November 2015

Attending:

Clive Field	Cotswold Canal Trust	Nick Worthington	CRT Waterway Manager
Daniel Tiffney	Gloucester CC Highways	Dilwyn Parry	CRT Principal Project Manager
Martin Turner	IWA	Trevor Jones	CRT ICA/SCADA Systems Manager
Cllr Samantha Harrower	Fretherne w Saul	Darren Martin	CRT Principal Electrical Engineer
Cllr William Alexander	Frampton on Severn	Rob Eaton	CRT operations manager
Cllr John Jones	Stroud District Council	Shaun Brown	CRT operations supervisor
		Dave Clements	CRT Operations team leader
		Madge Bailey	CRT Consultation project manager

Update on road and traffic issues

Nick: CRT and Gloucestershire County Council Highways (GCCH) had a constructive meeting after the consultation.

Daniel: GCCH have prepared traffic control measures for every bridge (double yellow lines). Road verges and potholes to be patched up (not kerbs) in order to paint lines. Sandfield Bridge proposals extend 150m west of bridge and up to the marina entrance to the east. Planning consent not required. Double yellow lines acceptable in Conservation Areas (slightly modified design).

Action: Daniel to share proposals with the group.

Daniel: All sites have been packaged into a single Road Traffic Order (RTO). RTO will be subject to pre-consultation with parishes and full statutory consultation in early 2016 with implementation possible April 2016. GCCH funding approval required. Funding contributions from CRT and parishes was requested; these contributions would improve chances of GCCH funding.

Other hatching to be painted in places such as across private drives (not part of RTO).

Nick: Will benefit parishes regardless of whether the remote-control project goes ahead.

William: parishes are supportive of remote-control project if traffic improvements can be made.

William: Issue of resource to police parking on the yellow lines but at least this will be a deterrent.

CRT pay & display car park at Sandfield

Nick: yellow lines on the road are likely to shift bad parking on the road and ensure people use CRT car park.

Samantha/Clive: use of CRT car park is hindered by big puddles, entrance should be hatched, spaces should be marked and signage to second section of parking needed. Pay & display machines not always working.

Action Nick to discuss improvements with estates team

Turning between main road and canal-side track

Samantha: biggest issue is people manoeuvring into/out of this junction. Will be impossible if home-owner on the corner builds on their roadside land currently used for turning. Will worsen if no bridge-keeper to control snarl-ups.

Shaun/Dave: bridge-keepers don't control traffic and only occasionally help people manoeuvre off the bridge if there is a bad snarl-up (caused by parked cars blocking the way) or for safety on the bridge.

Nick: improved road markings should help alleviate some of this.

Martin: CRT should look at the bigger project of a new road behind the Stables Cafe. Nick: we have time to look at this longer term alternative although it will cost several million pounds. Would need planning consent.

Potential car park on land opposite the turning

William/Samantha: CRT should look at this land to include parking (on grass-crete) and wider turning circle area

Nick: we have time to look at this option – let's see how the traffic is after the yellow lines and improved controls at Sandfield.

Update on works at Sandfield Bridge and works to follow

Dilwyn: European funding helped drive the project – the funding enabled us to look at options in various locations across the country. We have researched options and trialled the remote-control via an app at Sandfield which was demonstrated to our European partners in October.

Final works at Sandfield remaining – due Nov/Dec or may be pushed to January:

- reinstall the lasers in protective, secure casing
- wig-wag (flashing light) and barrier to be installed on canal-side track to keep the turning clear for cars. This light will be delayed to enable cars on main road to start moving first.
- yellow hatching and stop line
- position CCTV

Group welcomed this additional control on the canal-side track but strong feeling that it should be located at car park entrance (with hatching at entrance to enable clear passage).

Action: Dilwyn to identify the additional cost of relocating the wig-wag and request funding necessary. Members to all consider potential funding.

Short road stoppages may be needed to calibrate the lasers.

Action: Dilwyn to liaise with Daniel at GCCH and Samantha re wording for the signs and best times (must avoid school run/commuters)

CCTV

Trevor/Darren:

CRT has changed the spec and installed 360 degree cameras. They enable views 30-40m down the road approaches and canal approaches

CRT Control Centre will not be monitoring them continually but will use them when alerted to an issue or when a boater requests a bridge opening

They will record 24/7 and recordings are stored for 28 days. CRT has applied for the necessary licence to operate CCTV. The police can request to view the recordings.

They are not low level light cameras or infrared night vision (not necessary for bridge operation) but can be changed if requested by parishes or police and funding can be found from e.g. Police and Crime Commissioner.

Plan for operating Sandfield Bridge

Currently operated remotely by bridge-keeper stationed at Fretherne Bridge (has been operated from Saul Bridge over past few winters).

Jan- Feb: CRT test and operate Sandfield system with bridge-keeper using the app. Baseline data will be collected – canal and road traffic impact. Lasers count the cars crossing the bridge and the time it takes for a queue to clear – this will be the method to record and analyse road traffic impact after each bridge opening.

Mid Feb: Advisory Group meets to review draft protocols circulated in advance by CRT. Bridge-keeper to then use the app to open bridge which will be subject to the protocols.

End Feb: testing with higher boat numbers and a range of scenarios. Martin, Clive and others can muster volunteers. Samantha and William to observe road impact. GCCH needs to be notified in advance. Must not have serious impact on the roads.

End Feb: protocols to be refined after testing

March- April: app to be rolled out to select boaters

End April: Advisory Group meets to review results and amends to protocols circulated in advance by CRT, along with modelling for busier periods

May onwards: app generally available to boaters who want it

End July: Advisory Group meets to review results. Needs to have included busy agricultural period.

Bridge-keeper will be in place throughout to operate bridge for boaters without app

Clive: The Cotswold Canals Trust hire boat might be available for CRT set-up of the system at Sandfield.

Practicalities for boaters

Martin: majority of boaters accept remote-control plans. Their biggest concern is using a smart-phone or tablet in the rain. Suggestions from group included a dongle and button (like Severn Bridge but Trevor said this was not scalable to the G&S Canal), a blue tooth trigger (like a selfie stick), waterproof pouches for devices and a protective waterproof box attached to the boat.

Action: Dilwyn/Trevor to explore options (operating systems and protective products) and report back; some could be tested in the trial.

Samantha: boaters without the app need a decent place for pulling up to use the intercom (few suitable spaces exist in the right location which must be a way back). Nick: the intercom/help point will be a clearly designated point with suitable space for the boater to step-off and use it (it may not be a long landing but a basic step-off point). It must also be accessible by pedestrians/road users who need to contact the control centre.

Bridge-keeper informal rules or judgement applied

Shaun/Dave: bridge-keepers don't control traffic. They are told their role is not to manage traffic. If they started controlling traffic they could be liable for accidents/issues. At Patch Bridge for example they would be controlling traffic all day if they started. The traffic problems are not actually as bad or as frequent as you would expect, given the approaches. Most times drivers sort themselves out. They do not intervene very often at all, maybe busy sunny weekends but the traffic problems are usually caused by badly parked cars.

Clive: human intervention can help in these instances. Some keepers do more or less than others.

Rob: At anticipated busy times, CRT would send a keeper to the bridge if remote-control is implemented.

Samantha: keepers do sometimes hold boats. Locals worried about the bridges opening too frequently but that's where the protocols come in.

Protocols

Dilwyn/Rob: Limits will ensure that the bridges are not opened more frequently than now. Protocols will be devised to manage road traffic queue dispersal, maximum opening time, elapsed time before opening again, boats waiting on opposite sides of the bridge (controlled by traffic lights), control of boat queues to ensure they do not enter the zone if opening time has elapsed. Protocols will be refined during the trials and with advisory group reviews.

Rob: If we feel protocols are not working they can be changed easily to respond to issues.

Martin: important that boaters have clear communication of protocols e.g. they know the next opening will be in 15 minutes' time. The reasonable boaters accept the need for protocols which must of course be sensible. Rob: protocols and live info will be communicated to the boaters' phone or tablet via the app. Regular set protocols and embargos will be on the CRT website (stoppage notices).

Action Dilwyn to circulate draft protocols to group in early Feb

Opening hours

Rob: CRT would trial extended hours on a pattern of 8am to 8pm in the main summer months; reducing to 7pm and 6pm as the summer ends and then 8am to 4pm from November through February (7 days a week) as stated on page 9 of the consultation report. This would only apply if the full scheme is rolled out (it won't apply to just Sandfield Bridge).

Clive: this improves trading potential for waterside businesses

William: extended hours and 7 days a week are OK but school run embargo must be "sacrosanct". Rob: yes, CRT understands this.

Martin: increased boating hours are a real benefit and there must be sufficient time for boaters to get back to their destination in time.

William: flexibility needed for events e.g. Frampton Country Fair where CRT keeps bridge priority for road users.

Madge: CRT understands this and stated on page 7 of the consultation report that it would be happy to make arrangements to hold bridges for exceptional road or canal movements such as farm machinery convoys, large lorries servicing businesses across the bridges, cattle crossing or boat flotillas...

Sandfield Bridge operation over winter and control centre at Fretherne Bridge

Dilwyn: During the winter season Sandfield Bridge is usually operated remotely from Saul Junction. This winter CRT will use the building at Fretherne Bridge to establish the equipment developed as a control centre for the European project and control Sandfield Bridge from here instead of Saul Junction. The Saul Junction system will continue to function as a back up in the event of any systems failure.

Rob: The control centre would also be located at Fretherne Bridge if the remote-controlled project is rolled out to the remaining bridges. This provides better working environment for control centre staff who would potentially be working alone at weekends if it were located at the Gloucester office. There is also more room for the equipment. However it should be noted that control centre staff will remain at their work station and will not have an interface with the public or be controlling traffic at Fretherne Bridge.

William: this is accepted/understood but the choice to locate at Fretherne is very welcome and provides a level of comfort to residents.

Trevor: the planned upgrade at the exchange near to Fretherne Bridge should provide sufficient capacity for data submission and the remote control operating system.

Samantha: what if there are several calls by emergency services to the one dedicated emergency line? Dilwyn: the calls are likely to be very short but CRT can install extra lines on the same number if needed.

John: CRT to make sure the doctor's surgery has the dedicated emergency line number.

Future decision on the remaining bridges

Dilwyn: In July/August 2016 CRT will review the trial outcomes with the advisory group and report on its findings. The project team will report on the outcomes and projected costs of the full project to the Executive Committee in September 2016 and to Trustees in November 2016.

If the Trust approve the wider project and allocate the necessary funding, the works will be implemented in two phases: 2017/18 Phase 1 (bridges north of Sandfield) and 2018/19 Phase 2 (bridges south of Sandfield). Each bridge would take 4-5 weeks to implement.

Samantha: Will advisory groups be established to set protocols specific to each bridge? Rob: yes (we said this in the consultation).

William: once the northern section is done, CRT should invite councillors from the southern section to view the operation from the control centre to build relationships and confidence in the system. Clive: CRT should demo the Fretherne Control Centre as soon as it is up and running, with demos from a boat.

Other points

Samantha: will hire boaters' download of the app expire once they return the boat? Dilwyn: yes. Clive: a new company has recently set up 2 hire boats which are well used, so hire boating is on the increase here.

Date of next meeting

Mid Feb 2016: Advisory Group meets to review draft protocols circulated in advance by CRT.