

The Thames Navigation



NRA

*National Rivers Authority
Thames Region*

CHARTING ▲ THE ▲ FUTURE





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**A consultation document
issued by the
NRA Thames Region**



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The pressures for change

Public pressure to improve the Thames Navigation—the locks, bridges, moorings and other facilities—has been growing steadily over the last 30 years.

In recent times, the pressure has accelerated. An increasing number of pleasure boats, a marked trend towards bigger craft and the extensive queueing at some locks at busy times of the year have all combined to bring matters to a head.

At the same time, increasing concern for the environment has brought calls for greater protection of the unique character of the Thames.

The National Rivers Authority (NRA) is charged with improving rivers and protection of the river environment. The NRA now needs, therefore, to develop a long-term strategy for the Thames Navigation, striking a balance, inevitably, between conflicting interests, views and requirements.

This consultation document sets out the main options, and seeks further views and suggestions from a broad range of interests in order to determine the way forward.

What has happened so far?

Attempts to address the problems were made by the NRA soon after its inception. In 1990 and 1991 its proposals for long-term structure standards and lock enlargement at the five existing “bottlenecks”—Caversham, Hambleton, Bray, Boveney and Shepperton—were broadly welcomed.

However, accompanying proposals for preferred size standards for boats and incentive charges were heavily criticised. As a result, a broader range of options are now contained in this further consultation document.

This consultation document is being distributed, initially, to all those boat and user groups and individuals known to be interested, as well as the local and specialist press, the Regional Rivers Advisory Committee and the majority of Thames boat owners, via the *Thames user* magazine.

Copies will be available on request from: Public Relations Dept., NRA Thames Region, Kings Meadow House, Kings Meadow Road, Reading, Berks., RG1 8DQ.

Responses and comments should be sent in writing to reach us by not later than 1st July, 1992.

Following consideration of all the comments, firm proposals will be drafted and forwarded to all those who have made responses. The aim is to complete this exercise by the end of July, 1992.

The final draft is scheduled to be discussed by the Regional Rivers Advisory Committee with a view to final publication of the adopted proposals during August, 1992.

The timetable
for discussion

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Who should respond?

Anyone who is interested and wishes to comment or offer suggestions.

We would like to hear, particularly, from people who have boats on the Thames or who visit in boats from other rivers or canals; from people who enjoy the river for all sorts of other recreational pursuits; from river-based clubs and societies of all kinds.

We should also like to hear from other navigation authorities and national boating organisations since whatever is done on the Thames can affect others, too.

(Please refer to the end of the document to see how to respond).

Paying for the navigation

Several million pounds are spent every year in the operation, maintenance and improvement of the Thames Navigation—with its 45 locks, bridges, moorings, machinery, staff and facilities.

Much of the money comes from Government grants. Users do pay towards direct costs, but their contribution by no means covers costs. However, lack of any long-term strategy makes it extremely difficult to continue to justify such large sums of expenditure.

It should be made clear, too, that the operation of the Thames Navigation plays an integral part in the overall management of the river for flood defence, water supply abstractions and water quality management, although all these other services are paid for separately by the beneficiaries.

Most of the locks and machinery on the Thames were installed many years ago to cater for a steady commercial traffic. Locks are designed to last (typically for about 100 years). Therefore, any new works must be designed to satisfy future demands and trends, as far as these can be predicted.

The conclusion is that there needs to be some control over the future sizes of boats as current trends point to more and more larger craft.

Incentive charging may therefore be the fairest, most practicable and sensible way of dealing with increased sizes for the future.

The need
for
structure
standards

The problems of congestion

As stated earlier, there has been a long-standing argument for enlargement of the five "bottleneck" locks on the Thames, but this view is not universal; other river users contend that the problem is not serious enough to warrant the cost—a cost which would be borne by the users.

Some congestion can occur, of course, at many other locks on occasions... Bank Holidays and regattas, for instance, or when equipment fails, but this is not a matter for discussion and debate here.

While some queueing is, perhaps, inevitable the overcrowding at the smaller "bottleneck" locks can lead to waiting times of one, two or more hours.

Apart from the aggravation caused, serious safety problems arise as many boats cannot moor up satisfactorily. While the NRA has a rolling programme of improvements to moorings, it will never be possible, or indeed, prudent to provide for this kind of heavy congestion.

It would cost an estimated £1.5 million to enlarge each of the "bottleneck" locks.

Possible incentives

An alternative for easing congestion would be a reduction in peak-time traffic through off-peak incentives, and there are a variety of ways to implement such incentives, either at the "bottlenecks" or on the whole navigation.

However, the overall income has to be maintained. This means that reductions in one set of charges would produce increases in others. Let us give an example of this:

Say a differential of 25% was adopted, and a third of boat owners plumped for the off-peak rate, the overall effect could be:

- * *An 18% reduction from the present standard rate for the one third of users opting for the off-peak rate.*
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This is a simple example, purely to illustrate the point about charges. Actual increases would depend on the differential adopted and more detailed analysis of traffic.

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Some critical comment has been made concerning temporary lock staff. The NRA already has a training programme for all staff. However, in respect of temporary staff, there is a problem of both recruitment and retention and the skills of such staff are necessarily limited. Nevertheless, efforts are continually being made to improve upon the situation.

Conserving the environment

The NRA, as previously indicated, has a responsibility for conserving and enhancing the river environment, both natural and man-made.

It would not support any moves which would lead to major increases in boat traffic on the Thames Navigation. However, it does not believe that enlargement of the "bottleneck" locks would result in anything other than local traffic changes during the normal working day.

It will be clear from this introduction that the NRA cannot stand still. It must move forward in determining the future of the Thames Navigation. The main options, the NRA believes, can be summarised as shown:—

OPTION A

Establish long-term structure standards only.

A viable option which would maintain, essentially, the status quo, apart from gradually bringing sub-standard infrastructure up to the adopted standard.

There would be no programme, under this option, for enlarging locks, no programme for reducing congestion or other major improvements.

The long-term standards would be based on the existing "best practice" dimensions. In outline these are:—

	Length (m)	Beam (m)	Draught (m)	Air Draught (m)
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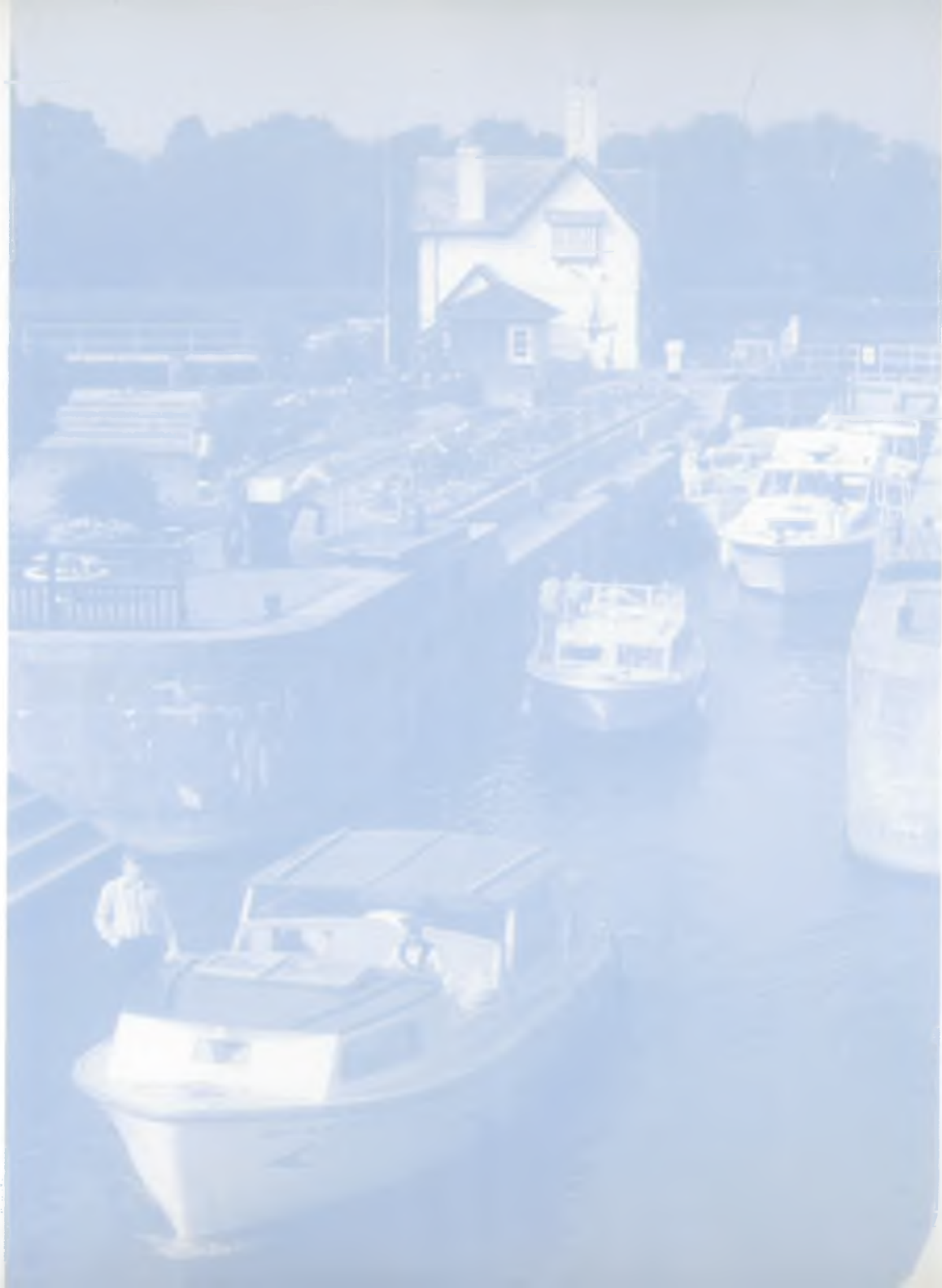
The Main Options

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The Main Options

OPTION B

Define incentives to encourage the use of boats in line with the long-term standards.

This option is an important consideration towards long-term standards, particularly in view of the growing number of larger craft. There are several ways in which incentives could be introduced, including the NRA's 1991 proposals. Other suggestions have been made for a continuous sliding scale which would overcome many of the previous objections.

The traditional Thames measurement system has also been suggested (see comments from the River Thames Society towards the end of this document).

OPTION C

To enlarge the "bottleneck" locks (having adopted long-term structure standards).

A number of users have called for enlargement of the five "bottleneck" locks as an answer to the worst of the present congestion. The NRA believes there is a good case for enlargement as soon as practicable to at least the minimum structure standard.

This would deal with the equally important aspects of safety.

OPTION D

Adopt incentives for off-peak use.

This could be done in several ways, including:

i) The introduction of a cheaper off-peak only registration, which would rule out lock use at weekends during the summer and on Bank Holidays. The advantage: The system would be simple to operate. The disadvantages: Other users would pay more, and the numbers able to take advantage of off-peak times may be relatively small.

Also, high charges not related to costs could drive people away.

ii) The introduction of a toll at locks at recognised peak times, on top of normal registration. The advantage: More flexibility for boat users. The disadvantage: A cumbersome and expensive system to operate.



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Charging for improvements

It is clear that the extra money for any improvement programmes will have to be found through increased charges, and linked to the pace of improvement.

Charges are being increased already by 25% over a period of years to fund the existing programme. We would like to know:

- * *Are you happy with the principle of increases in charges to fund specific improvements? (The alternative being no significant improvements).*
- * *If the answer is yes, what level of increase would be acceptable? (This would set the pace at which improvements could be made).*

Other Options

At the end of this document we also list suggestions already received from a number of user organisations. Do you have ideas for other ways to safeguard the future of the Thames Navigation to reduce congestion, or achieve improvements?

Please consider carefully the main options and relevant suggestions made by other bodies. We would like to know what YOU think. It would be helpful, particularly, if you could answer the questions on the attached, tear-off form, and add any suggestions or comments of your own.

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Comments from user groups

A number of user groups have submitted comments already, following earlier consultation. Here, for the benefit of others, we summarise the suggestions that are directly relevant to the present consultation.

ASSOCIATION OF THAMES YACHT CLUBS

The Association, representing some 54 cruising yacht clubs on the River Thames, in a majority view, considers the question of congestion as more perceived than actual.

The Association contends that most congestion is caused not by the number of boats, but by lock failures. However, it does see an uncontrolled influx of new craft as a potential threat for the future, and endorses the NRA's intended traffic management plan, provided it is eventually acceptable to the majority of present registered users.

The Association favours preservation of the status quo, so that all craft registered with the NRA would be exempt from a new differential charging scheme, and warns that owners of larger craft could be driven out, depriving the NRA of considerable income.

Its proposals are summarised as follows:

- * Differential charging should be used as a regulator only if the current number of registrations rises above 20%. Even then it should not apply to current craft under 4.5 metres in beam or under 16 metres l.o.a.
- * Priority for increasing the reliability of lock operation to improve traffic flow—removing the single biggest cause for complaint.
- * Further extension of electrically-operated

controls to all locks, and extended use of present electric systems to peak times.

- * Provision of further temporary mooring facilities to aid safety.
- * Appraisal of training and performance of lock staff.
- * Introduction of off-peak incentives to encourage more mid-week use.
- * A fairer charging system for those craft users restricted by bridge limitations (e.g. Windsor Bridge).

RIVER THAMES SOCIETY

On the question of differential licences, the River Thames Society favours using the traditional Thames tonnage formula.

The formula is:—

$$\frac{(\text{Length} - \text{breadth}) \times \text{Breadth}^2}{188}$$

188

= Tonnage Rate

*Length and breadth are in feet. Formula would have to be converted to metric.

The Society points out that the resultant figure for each boat should then be multiplied by a set price per ton each year to raise the required revenue. Wider beam craft would face a higher charge, but on an individual basis.

WEYBRIDGE MARINERS' CLUB

Weybridge Mariners' Club suggest that solutions should be simple to operate, cost-effective, sympathetic to the character of the Thames and its environs—and not lead to an increase in speed.

The club's proposed solutions are summarised as follows:

- * A special peak charge on busy days at



congested locks and perhaps a reduced charge outside busy periods.

- ★ “Traffic management” training for lock staff and “equal loading.”
- ★ Extension of lock hours on busy days (as at Henley).
- ★ Improved mooring facilities.

Boat users should pay according to beam size and steamers, perhaps, according to the number of passengers—thus helping to fund the cost of alterations.

WALTON BRIDGE CRUISER CLUB

The Walton Bridge Cruiser Club have reaffirmed their objections to a differential charging scheme, as they consider it irrelevant and counter-productive. Smaller boats, they perceive, could increase, causing even more congestion.

The club sees the problem as one of volume—the sheer number of boats using the river.

By its very nature the Thames forms a self-regulating barrier (e.g. draught, lock sizes), and should be preserved in a “country walk atmosphere.” They suggest:

- ★ An increase in staffing (part-time or temporary), and an extension of manned lock hours.
- ★ An increase in the number of hours of electrically-operated locks.
- ★ Better lay-by and mooring facilities, cutting down pollution and aggravation.

The Cruiser Club calls for boat owners' contributions to be kept in proper perspective. They suggest extension of smaller locks by 30–40 feet, instead of a complete re-build, to save money, ease congestion and avoid greater problems (e.g. turbulent wash from larger locks).

FINCH

FINCH, Fair Inland Navigation Charges, doubts that standard sizes for craft, locks and chamber widths would produce the expected benefits, and urge that there should be no attempt to standardise craft sizes.

They recognise that a new system of charges is likely to be part of any package of solutions, but such a system should be efficient, effective, simple and fair. They also make the following further suggestions:

- * Off-peak licences, with short-term (visitor) licences for users at peak-time in congested locks.
- * Additional locking charges for vessels with annual licences at congested locks to reduce peak demand and take advantage of surplus capacity at off-peak times.
- * Enlargement or duplication of locks.
- * An increase in lock staffing hours, coupled with more efficient lock operation and staff training.
- * More bollards or floating ones.
- * More mooring space to alleviate aggravation.
- * Adoption of a uniform 8-metre lock chamber width, with possible relaxation in upper reaches.

The club feels that standardising craft size was not justification for building new locks, and that such a standard would be harmful. Boat builders were unlikely to adjust to new size standards.

It also asks the NRA to confirm the policy that lock sizes should gradually decline as you go up the river.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE
SET OUT ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE

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Comments (continued)

Consultation Document — NRA Thames Region

Do you support any of the main options—either together or singly—put forward by the NRA?
YES/NO

If yes, please give the options in order of preference

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What do you see as the main problem areas?
(Please tick as appropriate)

Too many boats	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unreliable locks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Congestion	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staffing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smaller locks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of moorings	<input type="checkbox"/>

What do you see as the solutions?

Future rules to govern larger craft	<input type="checkbox"/>	Better staff training	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enlargement of smaller locks	<input type="checkbox"/>	More electrically-operated locks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Differential charging policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cheaper off-peak charges	<input type="checkbox"/>

Would you propose to do nothing at all? YES/NO

Would you agree to increases in charges to pay for phased improvements? YES/NO

If yes, what level of increase would you like to see? %

Any other comments or suggestions _____

Name and address (optional) _____

Interest _____

Please attach a separate sheet for further comments if required.

Please tear out this sheet, fold where indicated and moisten gummed edge to seal before posting. No stamp is needed.

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**NRA Thames Region,
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The Walton Bridge Cruiser Club have reaffirmed their objections to a differential charging scheme, as they consider it irrelevant and counter-productive. Smaller boats, they perceive, could increase, causing even more congestion.

The club sees the problem as one of volume—the sheer number of boats using the river.

By its very nature the Thames forms a self-regulating barrier (e.g. draught, lock sizes), and should be preserved in a "country walk atmosphere." They suggest:

- * An increase in staffing (part-time or temporary), and an extension of manned lock hours.
- * An increase in the number of hours of electrically-operated locks.
- * Better lay-by and mooring facilities, cutting down pollution and aggravation.

The Cruiser Club calls for boat owners' contributions to be kept in proper perspective. They suggest extension of smaller locks by 30–40 feet, instead of a complete re-build, to save money, ease congestion and avoid greater problems (e.g. turbulent wash from larger locks).

FINCH

FINCH, Fair Inland Navigation Charges, doubts that standard sizes for craft, locks and chamber widths would produce the expected benefits, and urge that there should be no attempt to standardise craft sizes.

They recognise that a new system of charges is likely to be part of any package of solutions, but such a system should be efficient, effective, simple and fair. They also make the following further suggestions:

- * Off-peak licences, with short-term (visitor) licences for users at peak-time in congested locks.
- * Additional locking charges for vessels with annual licences at congested locks to reduce peak demand and take advantage of surplus capacity at off-peak times.
- * Enlargement or duplication of locks.
- * An increase in lock staffing hours, coupled with more efficient lock operation and staff training.
- * More bollards or floating ones.
- * More mooring space to alleviate aggravation.
- * Adoption of a uniform 8-metre lock chamber width, with possible relaxation in upper reaches.

The club feels that standardising craft size was not justification for building new locks, and that such a standard would be harmful. Boat builders were unlikely to adjust to new size standards.

It also asks the NRA to confirm the policy that lock sizes should gradually decline as you go up the river.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE
SET OUT ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE

The Thames Navigation

CHARTING THE FUTURE

Comments (continued)

Consultation Document — NRA Thames Region

Do you support any of the main options—either together or singly—put forward by the NRA?
YES/NO

If yes, please give the options in order of preference

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What do you see as the main problem areas?
(Please tick as appropriate)

Too many boats	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unreliable locks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Congestion	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staffing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Smaller locks	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of moorings	<input type="checkbox"/>

What do you see as the solutions?

Future rules to govern larger craft	<input type="checkbox"/>	Better staff training	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enlargement of smaller locks	<input type="checkbox"/>	More electrically-operated locks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Differential charging policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cheaper off-peak charges	<input type="checkbox"/>

Would you propose to do nothing at all? YES/NO

Would you agree to increases in charges to pay for phased improvements? YES/NO

If yes, what level of increase would you like to see?

	%
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Any other comments or suggestions

Name and address (optional)

Interest

Please attach a separate sheet for further comments if required.

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