**Lowland Canal Association - Boat Movement Survey**

**Introduction**

There does not appear to be a reliable estimate of the number of boat journeys which are made on the Lowland Canals each year since there are no measures to count trips which do not involve the operation of locks and bridges. In order to determine how many trips are made each year the LCA decided to undertake a survey of boaters on the lowland canals.

In view of the significant canal closures over the past few years and issues with Covid this year, boaters were asked to state how many journeys they would make each year if there were no restrictions on movement caused by such things as faulty infrastructure, new construction works, excessive weed growth or lack of dredging etc. The questionnaire was sent to a wide cross section of canal users including yacht owners who might wish to use the Forth and Clyde Canal for transiting the country. It was also available on line on our website. The Charity Boats based their responses on the trips made during the 2019 season. The hire boat fleets were not included.

LCA are prepared to carry out a similar survey each year in order to determine the actual usage of the canal although it looks as if the figures for 2021 may be skewed by the restrictions imposed as a result of Covid. This would be read in conjunction with our Timeline for Closures on parts of the network.

**Questionaire**

The questions were as follows:-

Where is your home mooring?

Do you class yourself as a Leisure, Residential, Commercial, Charity, Transit or other user?

How many times a year would you move your boat from its home mooring to a list of destinations along both canals?

Would self-operation of bridges and locks increase your boat movements on the Lowland Canals?

For transit boaters, how many times would you use the F&C Canal for Sea to Sea transit?

For transit boaters, if you intend to transit the Forth and Clyde Canal can you tell us where you would like to stop during the transit (if at all) and how many days you would like to spend on the Forth and Clyde during your transit?

Detailed responses to the survey are shown on a separate spreadsheet.

**Summary of Significant Findings**

A total of 109 responses were received and the total number of sailings recorded is 5202. The detailed responses have been sorted into various categories and can be viewed on the attached spreadsheet. It should be noted that the information on the spreadsheet is based on trips to destinations. It does not take into account the return journey which in those cases would increase the actual usage of the canals by a significant number.

The 4 charity boat operators made over 3250 sailings but only a handful would be recorded by Scottish Canals since they rarely require the operation of bridges or locks on either canal.

The 2 commercial boaters based on the F&C would make 104 sailings but would not venture along the Union Canal.

Of the 58 transit or trailer boaters only 2 come from the West coast. They would make 42 sailings on the Union with 131 visits to destinations along the F&C. They would make approximately 50 transits each way per season. The most frequent answer to transit times was 2 days but some boaters were happy to take up to 7 days with frequent stops along the way. The most common stopping places en route were the Kelpies, Falkirk, Auchinstarry, Kirkintilloch, the Stables and Bowling.

The 29 boaters on the F&C would make a total of 809 sailings of which 208 would be along the Union Canal.

The 16 boaters on the Union would make a total of 569 sailings of which only 111 would be along the F&C.

73 boaters stated that self-operation of bridges and locks would encourage them to make additional journeys whereas 34 stated that it would not.

Only about 15% of the leisure and residential boaters on the canal completed the survey so there is an underestimate of the potential for trips on the canals.

The hire boat fleet were not consulted but on the basis that there are 10 boats which are hired out for 20 weeks of the year that would generate a further 1400 day trips increasing the total number of trips to around 6600.

59 visits to Bowling were registered in the survey and boaters from Bowling would make around 8 trips beyond Maryhill so the potential number of movements along this section of the canal is around 134.

A total of 314 trips along the Glasgow branch by both visitors and residents at Applecross St and Spiers Wharf were recorded.

**Conclusions**

There is significant potential for a large increase in boat movements on the Lowland Canals if there are no restrictions to navigation, especially during the summer months.

There is a significant demand for boat movements between Maryhill and Bowling. Since the majority of these visits are by transit boats, it is vital that the whole length of the Forth and Clyde Canal is properly maintained to ensure that there is sufficient depth of water to allow yachts to make a safe passage.