



PASSENGER VESSEL OPERATIONS

A Code of Practice for the Tidal Thames – Fourth edition (2022)



Passenger Vessel Operations – A Code of Practice for the Tidal Thames

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Foreword

This fourth edition (2022) of the Passenger Vessel Operations: A Code of Practice for the Tidal Thames, has been streamlined to provide consistent, clear guidance for operations on the tidal Thames.

The Code of Practice has been written by Thames Partner Agencies to provide both the operator and the mariner with a quick reference guide for passenger vessel operations on the tidal Thames. It does not replace current legislation or regulatory bodies but provides a central collection of advice, regulations and best practice.

The Code is a collaboration, written and produced by the Port of London Authority, London River Services, British Marine, the Marine Policing Unit, HM Coastguard, London Fire Brigade, Company of Watermen and Lightermen and the Thames Skills Academy, as well as experienced passenger boat operator and mariners. Improving skills to operate safely on the Thames is a common goal we all share.

Katherine Riggs CEO
Thames Skills Academy

Introduction

This **Passenger Vessel Operational Code of Practice (PVOPsC)** has been produced to provide guidance to operators and masters of passenger vessels operating on the tidal Thames. It provides an overview of regulation, advice and best practice and provides commonly agreed safe practices for all passenger vessels. Although aimed at vessel operators, masters and crews, it also informs other organisations on how passenger vessels go about their business. It details principles governing safe operation and navigation of all commercially operated passenger vessels, including those carrying twelve or fewer passengers and those operating under the High Speed Craft Code.

The Port of London Authority has navigational jurisdiction over approximately ninety-five miles from Teddington to the outer Estuary; its regulations cover vessels varying from large container vessels and tankers to rowing craft and residential moorings. In order to cover such a wide variety of activity the PLA regulations are probably more extensive than for most other ports.

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (Col Regs) are the primary and most important, regulations and the master of any vessel must have a thorough knowledge and instinctive understanding of them.

Notwithstanding the above, in the interests of promoting safety on the River Thames to all river users, masters and owners of all private and recreational craft are encouraged to abide by this code, which advises on Best Practice for Passenger Vessel operations.

1) Detail panels

These coloured panels are used to either introduce a section, detail important points or highlight a specific reference to a piece of regulation such as a Byelaw or Col Regs.

These panels are relevant and important to both **operators and masters**

A guide to using this Code

This Code is, in fact, two books in one. It contains information for both vessel **operators/owners** and vessel **masters** and has been split into sections pertinent to specific areas of operation. Each section has been colour coded for easy identification. Within each section, information is displayed in one of three ways:

2) Operators' information

Information shown in black is more pertinent to **operators/owners** although often also relevant to masters.

3) Masters' information

Information shown in colour is specific to vessel **masters** and the on-board crew

Some terms have been simplified. For instance although there is a quantifiable difference between a ship and a boat the code simply refers to them all as vessels (unless where specifically used in a title).

All the diagrams are for reference only and should not be used for navigation – they are not charts.

The Code has been designed from the standpoint of someone new to Passenger Vessel operations on the Thames, as an introduction to the essential requirements. It should also serve as a checklist for experienced operators and masters. Therefore throughout the document there are references to *further documents, websites or contact details which are generally shown in italics. [Weblinks are underlined.](#)*

The weblinks used in this document were correct at time of publication but are, by their nature, prone to change. In some instances a generic web address has been supplied and you may have to search on that site for specific details. Please report any dead links via the [PLA website](#)

As an **operator** of a passenger vessel you are legally obliged to comply with a large amount of regulation

This section identifies the regulators you will face and summarises the regulations you will be expected to comply with. Guidance should be sought from the regulators listed below when operating any passenger vessel on the River Thames.

PLA

Port of London Authority

MCA

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

LRS

London River Services

Other Agencies

London Coastguard

Marine Policing Unit (MPU)

London Fire Brigade



Port of London Authority (PLA)

www.pla.co.uk

Email: HM@pla.co.uk

Phone: **020 7743 7908**

The PLA is governed by an Act of Parliament called the Port of London Act which gives the Port of London Authority navigational jurisdiction from Teddington to the Outer Estuary. The list opposite indicates where PLA regulations affect **operators and masters** of passenger vessels. Documentation should be readily available to staff, understood by operators and masters and be maintained up to date.

The best source of current, up-to date-information relating to PLA requirements can be found on the website above.

The Harbourmaster team, who are based in Gravesend and also have an office in central London, are available to advise on passenger vessel operations.

As **master** of the vessel the documents shown below should be held on-board and you should be familiar with their content and meaning. If you are unfamiliar the operator should provide training on the relevant documentation or seek advice from the Designated Person Ashore ([see p.27](#))

Other Paperwork to be found on-board

- Passage plan
- Training records
- Equipment list
- Safety Management System
- Designated Person Ashore's number
- Emergency Procedures
- Incident report forms

Continued >

As **master** of a passenger vessel you have overall responsibility for the vessel, the crew and passengers. There are many regulations that you have to be familiar with and must practise in the day-to-day operation of the vessel.

The **operator** should support you by supplying the relevant regulations and ways in which you as a master must comply.

This page shows a short list of regulations you should have available to you at any time. They can all be found in the Regulation and Guidance section of the [PLA website](#).

International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (Col Regs)

It is the **master's** responsibility to ensure that Col Regs are understood and followed, and that those helming the vessel understand their obligations under the rules



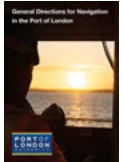
PLA Byelaws

The PLA have several byelaws that will impact operations and the most up-to-date edition of Byelaws can be found on the PLA website



PLA General Directions (GDs)

Operators and masters of passenger vessels should be familiar with the General Directions and a valid up-to-date copy should be held on board the vessel



PLA Notice to Mariners (NtMs)

NtMs indicate areas of works, operations or interest that are not normal daily activities. Operators and masters should be familiar with any Notice which may affect their daily operation



Codes of practice

Supplementary to all of the above the PLA also produce codes of practice such as this one, which operators should be familiar with



Vessel Licensing

Small Passenger Boats

Vessels carrying **12 or fewer passengers** must be certified by the PLA or the MCA

Passenger vessels

Vessels carrying **more than 12 passengers but fewer than 250 passengers** must be certified by the MCA

Large Passenger vessels

Vessels carrying **more than 250 passengers** must be certified by the MCA

High Speed Passenger Vessels

High speed passenger vessels require additional certification
([p.29](#) & [p.30](#))



Port of London Authority (PLA)

[PLA Vessel Licensing](#)

Powers to License Vessels

The PLA has a statutory responsibility under the Port of London Act to inspect and license commercially operated vessels, not licensed by another certifying authority, including passenger vessels carrying **12 or fewer passengers**, on the tidal Thames from Teddington to Category D limits in the Estuary. It meets this responsibility by employing qualified Marine Surveyors to administer the vessel licensing system.

The type of small passenger vessels carrying 12 or fewer passengers regulated by the PLA varies considerably; they include executive launches, historic vessels, RIBs and work boats also engaged in carrying fewer than 12 passengers.

Licensing Requirements

Following a recommendation to all licensing authorities by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch, the PLA has adopted the Inland Waters Small Passenger Boat Code along with industry good practice as the base requirement for licensing Small Passenger Vessels. The specific requirements can be found on the [PLA website](#) but the main licensing requirements for vessels inspected under this Code include:

- Hull and Machinery condition and compliance
- Life-saving appliances
- Fire-fighting equipment
- Stability
- First Aid Kit
- Basic SMS

Registration of Vessels

All commercial vessels navigating within port limits should be registered, as required by General Direction 32.1, regardless of any other registration, licence or certification held. [Please register all Intra-port vessels and barges here](#)



London Vessel Traffic Services

[Vessel Traffic Services website](#)

Teddington to Crayfordness:

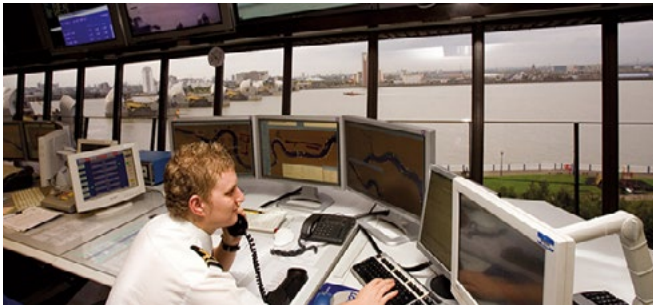
VHF channel 14 Phone **020 3260 7711**

Crayfordness to Seaward Limit:

VHF channels 68 & 69 Phone **01474 562215**

London Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) is a division of the PLA which operates from two state-of-the-art VTS Centres in Gravesend and at the Thames Barrier. In total a team of 44 VTS fully trained personnel oversee the Port of London's VTS area on a 24/7 basis 365 days a year.

The aims and objectives of London VTS are to ensure safety of life on the Thames, to ensure safety and efficiency of navigation, and to protect the marine environment, adjacent shore areas, work sites and offshore installations from the possible adverse effects of maritime traffic.



London Coastguard

[Maritime and Coastguard Agency website](#)

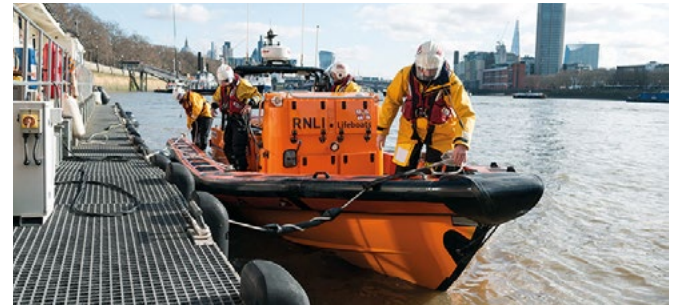
Emergencies: VHF channel 16

Non-emergencies: Phone **023 8032 9486**

email: zone12@hmcg.gov.uk

London Coastguard is based in Woolwich and is responsible for coordinating the search and rescue tasking of all London-based assets in an emergency. The duty officers at London Coastguard and London VTS are stationed next to each other and work closely together to coordinate any emergency situation.

As well as coordinating search and rescue they also have access to the Search and Rescue (SAR) plans produced by operators and submitted to the national maritime centre in Fareham. Vessels with 12 or fewer passengers are not legally required to submit a SAR plan but it is strongly recommended. Contact London Coastguard for further information and guidance.





Marine Policing Unit

[Metropolitan Police website](http://www.met.police.uk)

**Emergencies: London VTS on VHF channel 14
Dial 999 / 112 - ask for police**

Duty officer: Phone **07774 141299**

The Marine Policing Unit (MPU) is based at Wapping. It is there for the public safety and security of the river. They will assist in situations where your crew alone may not be able to and can provide advice on best practice for security.

Police assistance, either on scene or at an arranged berth/wharf/pier should be obtained via London VTS in the first place (see above).

The MPU maintains a continuous listening watch on VHF channel 14. On-board emergency plans should clearly show how to obtain police assistance in your area of operation.



London Fire Brigade

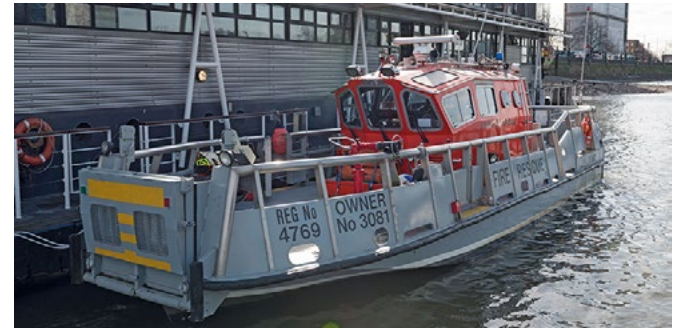
[London Fire Brigade website](http://www.londonfire.gov.uk)

**Emergencies: London VTS on VHF channel 14
Dial 999 / 112 - ask for fire brigade**

Non-emergencies: Phone **020 8555 1200**

London Fire Brigade (LFB) have two specialist vessels located at Lambeth. These vessels are equipped with fire-fighting and salvage pumps as well as casualty handling areas.

Fire Brigade assistance, either on scene or at an arranged berth/wharf/pier should be obtained via London VTS in the first instance (see above)





London River Services

[London River Services website](#)

Phone: **034 3222 1234**

email: river@tfl.gov.uk

The owners of piers may permit passenger boats to embark and disembark passengers via their pier. In order to do this safely the owner of a pier may impose its own regulation and licence on a vessel using the facility.

London River Services (LRS) own and operate the majority of the central London passenger piers. However some are owned and operated privately so, before any passenger transfer takes place, the operator of a passenger vessel should obtain permission from the pier operator and comply with the appropriate regulations.

See [p.58](#) for more details about pier operations.



**THAMES
SKILLS
ACADEMY**

Thames Skills Academy

[Thames Skills Academy website](#)

Phone: **01322 917550**

email: training@thameskillsacademy.london

Established in 2016, the Thames Skills Academy is an employer-led, not-for-profit Group Training Organisation founded by the Port of London Authority, Tideway, the Company of Watermen and Lightermen and Transport for London to make the Thames safer.

The TSA's aim is to raise safety standards and improve skills for everyone working on and alongside the Thames and other inland waterways, with a focus on:

- Developing and arranging delivery of apprenticeships, training to meet the skills needs of regulators, employers and employees
- Attracting and retaining talent for the growing and diverse needs of the Thames



VHF radio

The PLA requires that all passenger vessels should maintain a listening watch on the following channels:

- London VTS
channels 14, 68, 69
- Emergencies
channel 16

Communications with some specific docks are on:

- West India Dock
channel 13
- King George V Dock
channel 72

VHF installations must be licensed and operators should hold a VHF Operator's Licence.

Both the installation and the operator licence are issued by Ofcom, the UK regulator of radio communications. For more details regarding ships' radio licensing, visit the [Ofcom website](#)

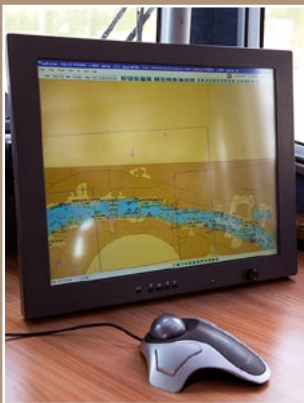
Thames Automatic Identification System (AIS)

Thames AIS is a mandatory aid (Byelaw 12) for all passenger vessels carrying 12 or more passengers between Denton Limit and Richmond Lock. It gives masters improved situational awareness by providing a live traffic image and giving additional warning of other AIS-fitted vessels.

AIS is not a substitute for keeping a good lookout or navigating properly.

The safety benefits of Thames AIS are enhanced by a geographic display unit and 'persons on-board'(POB) reporting system. The POB system should be updated immediately whenever changes occur: the figures entered must reflect the numbers of passengers and crew boarding and disembarking the vessel and always accurately record the total number of persons on board.

It is hard to overstate the contribution to safety made by Thames AIS.



AIS Equipment Defects

If the AIS equipment becomes defective, operators must inform the equipment supplier and receive a number for defect rectification. The defect along with rectification number and date of rectification must be passed to London VTS. When the equipment defect has been rectified London VTS must be informed in order to remove the vessel from the defect list. Failure to comply may result in a vessel being prevented from navigating on the river by the Harbourmaster.

Railway and Transport Safety Act 2003 - Part 4

78 Professional staff on duty _____

- (1) This section applies to—
- a professional master of a ship,
 - a professional pilot of a ship, and
 - a professional seaman in a ship while on duty.
- (2) A person to whom this section applies commits an offence if his ability to carry out his duties is impaired because of drink or drugs.
- (3) A person to whom this section applies commits an offence if the proportion of alcohol in his breath, blood or urine exceeds the prescribed limit.

81 Prescribed limit _____

- (1) The prescribed limit of alcohol for the purposes of this Part is—
- in the case of breath, [^{E1}25] microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres,
 - in the case of blood, [^{E2}50] milligrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres, and
 - in the case of urine, [^{E3}67] milligrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres.

82 Penalty _____

- A person guilty of an offence under this Part shall be liable—
- on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, to a fine or to both, or
 - on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum.

Alcohol and drugs

Operators of passenger vessels must produce an alcohol and drugs policy for staff and passengers. It is an offence for any crew to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs whilst at work and **operators** should ensure that this message is well communicated.

If necessary, operators should introduce testing and sampling.

It is an offence to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs while working on the river.

As **master** of the vessel it is also your duty to ensure that any crew are also fit for duty and not under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Any suspicion or doubt should be notified immediately to the operator.

Continued >

PLA Byelaw 9 (July 2012) – DRINK OR DRUGS

- 1) The master of a vessel shall not navigate the vessel when unfit by reason of drink or drugs to do so.
- 2) The master of a vessel shall not navigate, attempt to navigate or be in charge of a vessel after consuming so much alcohol that the proportion of it in his breath when tested in accordance with paragraph (5) below records a reading of 35 microgrammes of alcohol or more in 100 millilitres of breath.
- 3) If the harbourmaster has reasonable cause to suspect that the master of a vessel has drugs or alcohol in his body which may impair his fitness to navigate, he may direct the vessel to proceed to a designated berth or mooring or, if already on a berth or mooring, to remain in that position.
- 4) The harbourmaster may permit a vessel to proceed notwithstanding that the master is suspected of being unfit to navigate through drink or drugs, if the harbourmaster considers that satisfactory arrangements have been made to replace the said master and to ensure safe navigation.
- 5) A vessel directed under paragraph (3) above shall remain in the position designated until such time as either a substitute master is on board and takes command of the vessel or the master suspected of having alcohol in his body submits to a breath test on equipment provided by the harbourmaster and approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of the Road Traffic Act 1988 and the said breath test indicates a reading of less than 35 microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath.
- 6) It is an offence for the master of a vessel to fail to comply with a direction made under paragraph (3) above.

Alcohol testing

Master's and members of the crew of a commercial vessel, can be requested to take a breath test.

A positive result or refusing to take a test, would initiate legal proceedings.

Offenders would be liable to fines or imprisonment, as is the case for road users.

In addition, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency may revoke a Boatmaster's Licence upon conviction.

Starting the shift

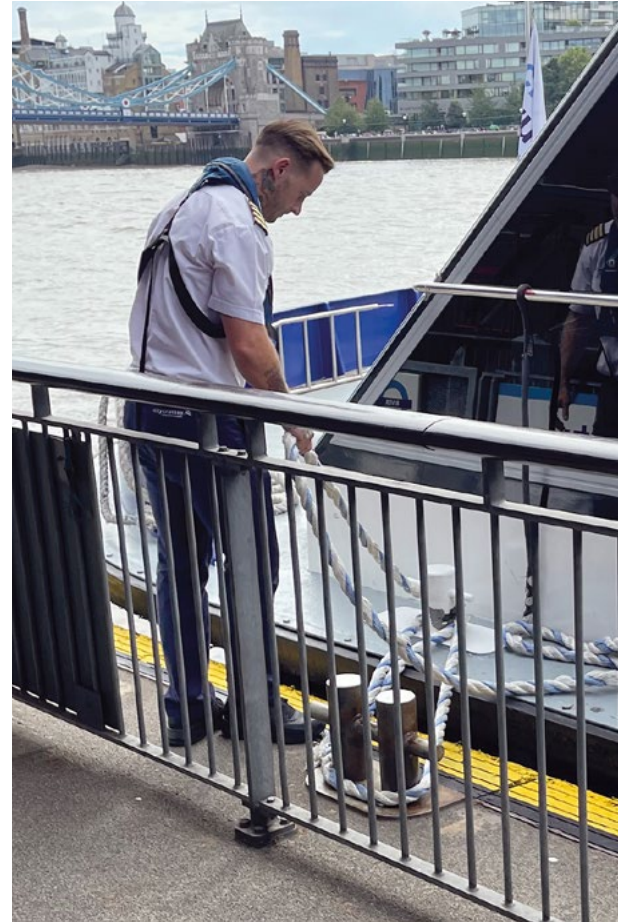
The **master** is at all times responsible for the safety of the crew, but owners are also responsible for ensuring that their vessels are operated without endangering the health and safety of the crew or passengers. The crew should be trained in health and safety matters and particularly on accident prevention.

Crew members should always wear the appropriate safety equipment and in particular, wear life jackets and non-slip safety footwear when working on deck and assisting passengers embarking and disembarking. **Masters** should ensure that safety requirements are enforced and set a good example.

Vessel checks

Before commencing the shift it is the duty of the **master** to check that the vessel is fit for service and that any defects are noted. The vessel should be clean, have enough fuel for the day, be clear of any defects that are classed as critical by the operator and have a fully working PA system and communication system.

The **operator** should provide a checklist which should be completed and returned in the daily briefing folder ([p.15](#)). Also see work boats ([p.20](#))



Crew safety briefings

At the beginning of each shift it is vital that the master briefs the crew, especially all catering, hospitality and entertainment staff, on their duties and responsibilities. **It is a common misconception that contract catering, hospitality and entertainment staff are not part of the crew.** In the event of an emergency the passengers will look to any member of the vessel staff for assistance regardless of whether they are permanent or irregular staff, only working on board for the specific function.

The brief should include:

- Identifying members of the crew and their roles and responsibilities
- The itinerary, outline timing and overall plan for the day or watch
- Location and operation of safety equipment
- The emergency organisation on board, including escape routes
- The crew's duties in the event of an emergency
- Emphasis on the importance of crew members remaining alert and aware of their surroundings and the activities going on around them

Daily Briefing form and Captain declaration

Date	Vessel	Job Description

Bridge Crew	Name	BML
Captain		
Mate		
Apprentice		

Inducted Cabin Crew	<u>Training / Drill Completed</u>	
	Name	Signed

Training Requirement	All Crew Present (Tick)	Signed (by Captain)

Signed By Operations Team: Date:

Captains To Check and Sign

Check	Carried Out	Remarks
Vessel Cleanliness		
Vessel Equipment		
Engines engage fwd & astern before letting go		
Vessel Documentation		
Training Carried out		
Steering prior to departure		

End Of Duty	Carried Out	Remarks
Logbook submitted		
Reports submitted		
Repair requests		
Garbage Management		Number of bags: <input type="text"/>

Captains Name	Signed

Continued >

Above: Example of a Captain's declaration form

Crew safety briefings

Section Contents

1. Daily crew list and master’s declaration
2. Vessel and equipment certificates
3. Log sheets
4. Maintenance and repair schedule
5. Passage Plan / Risk Assessments
6. Special operations orders for the day
7. New Notices to Mariners
8. Operational memoranda

Daily crew list and master’s declaration

Date:/...../.....

Vessel name:

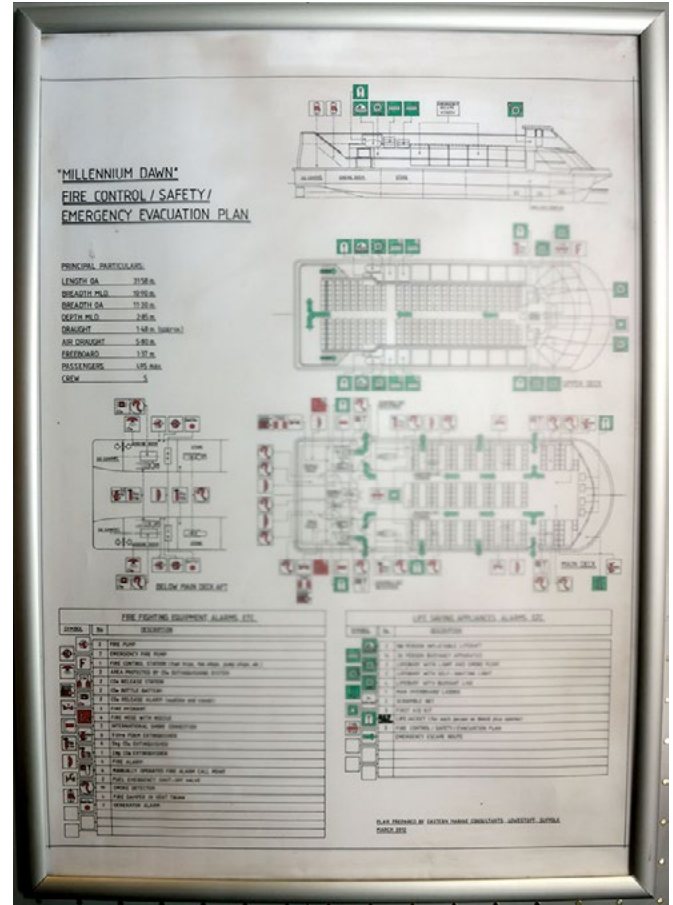
Folder issued by Head of Fleet Operations /
Fleet Operations Manager

Signature / Name:

Bridge duty crew:
.....
.....

Cabin Duty Crew:
.....
.....

Master’s Daily Declaration – Master:
.....
.....



Above: Example of a muster station diagram

Left: Example of the contents of a Daily Briefing Folder

Appropriate instructions for use should be displayed on board.

FERRY PASSENGER 100N BUOYANCY AID
FULLY COMPLIES WITH CEN 100 STANDARDS

DONNING INSTRUCTIONS

Suitable for Adults or Children over 18 Kg
IMPORTANT: CHILDREN SHOULD BE SUPERVISED WHEN USING THIS EQUIPMENT

- Remove from packaging - holding front away from chest, put head through centre opening.
- Ease arms between jacket and slack webbing - forcing webbing down below elbows and into a comfortable waist position.
- Clip together buckles at front.
- Pull free end of waist strap in direction of arrow to tighten.
Tie cords underneath chin.

Follow all instructions from members of crew

NOTE - CHILDREN SHOULD BE ASSISTED - DO NOT OVER-TIGHTEN CORDS.

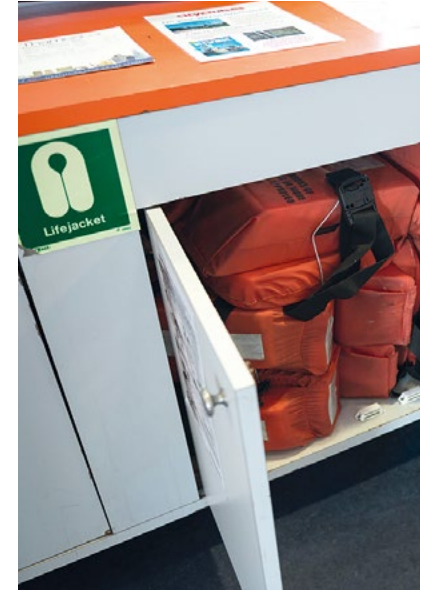
citycruises

All life jackets or buoyancy aids should be suitable for purpose, correctly fitted, correctly stored, well maintained and replaced when necessary. For details see:

MCA [Marine Guidance Note #499](#)

RYA [Buoyancy Aids & Life Jackets](#)

Life jackets (or buoyancy aids)



Crew should set a good example by wearing a life jacket during embarkation and disembarkation.

Life jackets (or buoyancy aids) should be made easily available to any passenger who requests one.

London Port Health Authority (LPHA)

Emergencies: **07050 389861**

Enquiries: **01474 363033**

email: porthealth.denton@cityoflondon.gov.uk

The key responsibilities of the LPHA include ensuring the safety of potable water supplied to vessels, dealing with cases of infectious disease on-board ships, issuing ship sanitation certificates, rabies control, dealing with complaints about noise, refuse and other environmental issues.

The Food Safety Team register and inspect all food floating food premises and will take enforcement action where necessary.

LPHA have a coordinating and enforcement function for dealing with noise issues within the Port of London.

Vessel operators should be aware of noise regulations and should check with the LPHA and British Marine's Passenger Boat Association for further guidance.

Environmental health

Food hygiene and liquor

[HSE website \(Catering\)](#)

The **operator** must ensure that if the vessel in operation serves food or drink then the utmost should be done to ensure that the necessary food hygiene standards are applied.

All vessels supplying food and drink to the public must be registered as a food premises.

If serving alcohol, an appropriate liquor licence must be obtained from the local authority in which borough (or county) the company is based. The licence must be displayed on board.

Operators of passenger vessels must produce an alcohol and drugs policy for staff and passengers.

General Direction 9

Notification of Bunkering and Reporting of Oil Spills

- 9.1 A Bunker Vessel, or any Vessel receiving bunkers pumped from a shore side facility or road tanker, must notify London VTS of the type of bunkers being transferred, and report to London VTS immediately before, and on completion of, Bunkering.
- 9.2 Vessels which are both Intra-port Vessels and Bunker Vessels must notify London VTS of the type and amount of bunker cargo they are carrying aboard prior to every instance of getting Underway.
- 9.3 The master of any Vessel involved in an oil spill must immediately report it to London VTS, reporting location, type of oil, approximate quantity, and action taken to limit and control the spill.

Environmental pollution

Bunkering (Refuelling)

See General Direction 9 (left), Thames Byelaw 8 and NtM 2 of 2021

Vessels obviously require fuel in order to operate. Refuelling operations can be hazardous and there is potential for pollution as well as other safety issues. All **operators** must ensure that they have a robust Bunkering Operational Plan for safe bunkering operations and that all necessary precautions are taken to prevent polluting the river.

Should an incident occur it must be reported immediately to the Harbour Master via London VTS. Oil sheen sightings anywhere on the river should also be reported in the same way.

[Find the Maritime Pollution \(MARPOL\) guidance here](#)

Garbage and waste oil

The **operator** must ensure that the environment is protected by all available means. Operators will have to produce a Garbage Management Plan and a plan to manage the disposal of oil as well as a policy on protecting the environment (including noise pollution). These should be included in the first section of the SMS.

The waste produced during vessel operations **must** be removed by a waste carrier licensed by the [Environment Agency \(EA\)](#).

Work boat

An aspect of any operation is the use of work boats which allow crew access to and from passenger boats. Any work boat used by an operator should be licensed by the PLA (or other licensing authority) and the limits and conditions set out on the licence should be adhered to at all times

Work boat crew should always wear a life jacket. This is compulsory when bulwarks are less than 1m high from the deck.

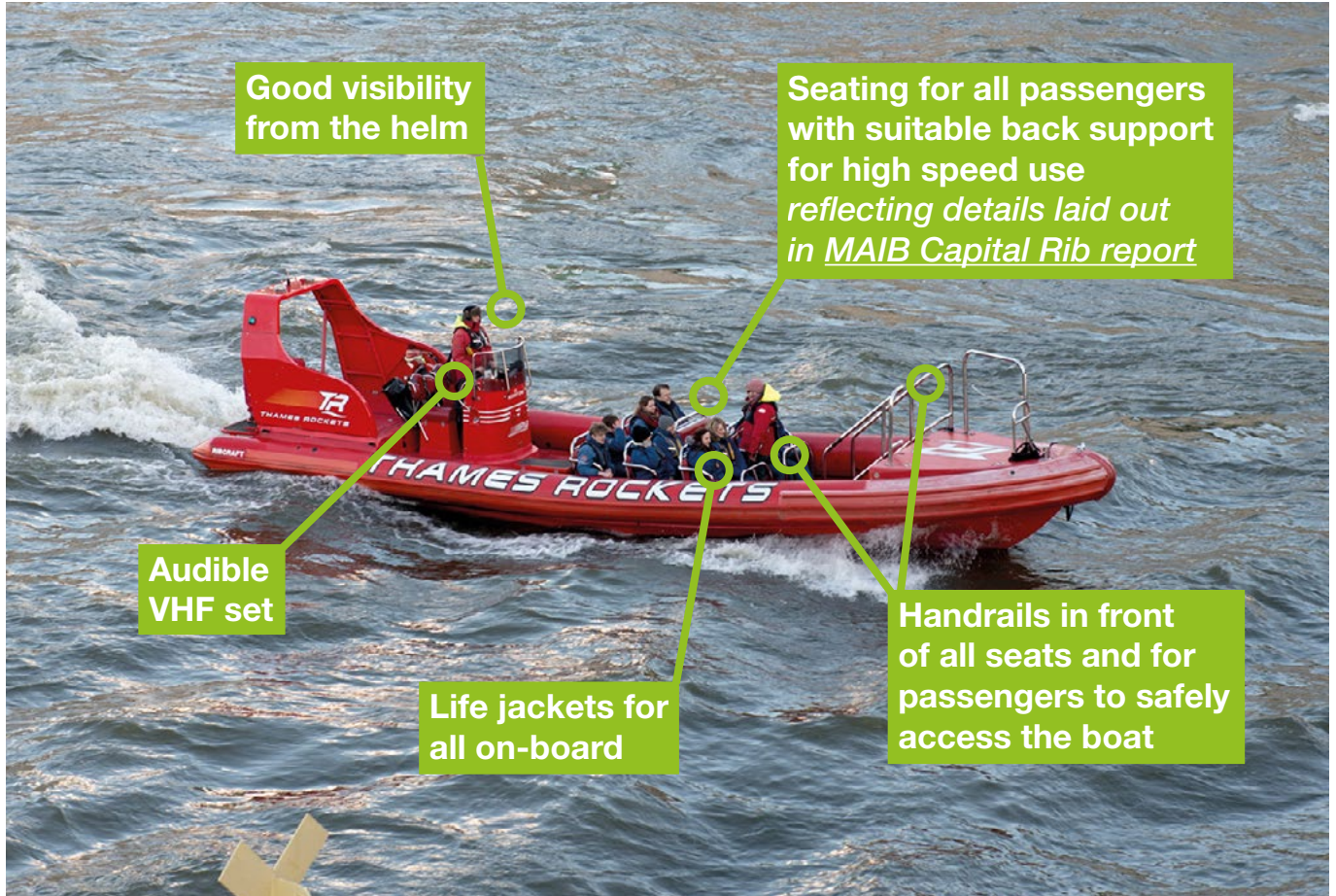
A work boat must be maintained in accordance with the requirements set out in the Thames Freight Standard, or IWSPBC, as appropriate and be supplied with suitable life-saving and fire-fighting equipment, and a hand-held VHF.

Any vessel used to transport members of the public to a passenger boat for any reason, including viewings, should be appropriately licensed as a passenger boat in its own right.

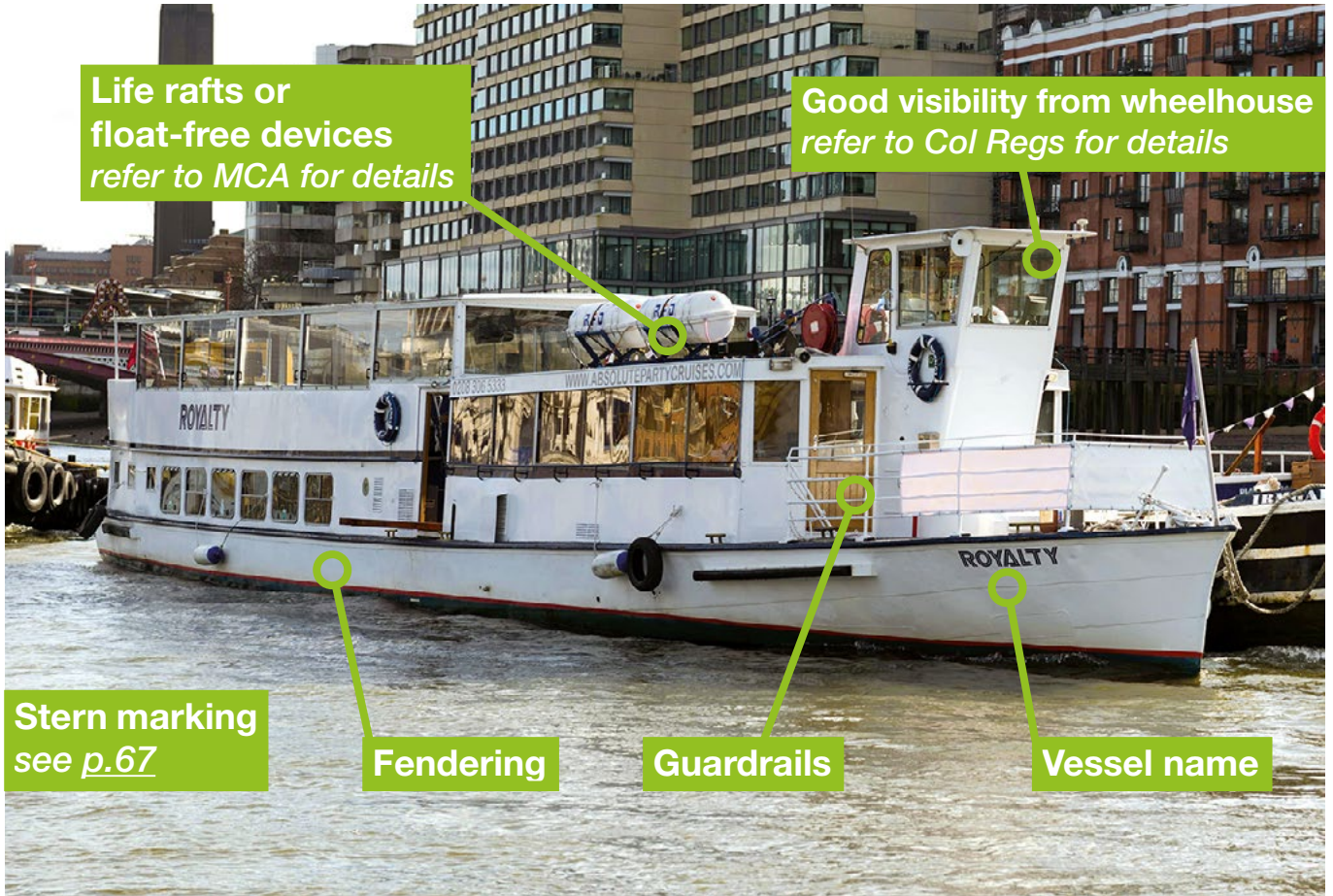


Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB)

See [p.40](#) and [p.41](#) for 'high speed thrill' restricted areas



Class V



High speed craft



Good all round visibility from wheelhouse refer to MCA for details

Amber flashing light

Perry Buoys refer to MCA for details

Stern marking see p.67

Life rafts refer to MCA for details

Anchor

As well as a commercial port, transport facility and tourist attraction, the river Thames is also a popular recreational amenity used by both powered-vessels, such as small cruisers or narrow boats and small man-powered boats used for sport and exercise.

In recognition of this the PLA has a dedicated website for all leisure users:

boatingonthethames.co.uk

It is recommended that **masters** of passenger vessels visit this site and note any points that may affect their interaction with leisure craft.

Recreational use of the Thames by man-powered boats is mostly, but not exclusively, restricted to the parts of the river above Chelsea Bridge and below Tower Bridge.

Small man-powered boats do not usually carry VHF so maintaining a good lookout is essential.

Other passenger vessels

The river Thames is becoming increasingly busy and London remains at the heart of UK tourism interests. As a **master** of a vessel you should be courteous and co-operative with other passenger vessels and operators.

Remember that other passenger vessels are trying to provide the same service as you although they will be working to different timetables and from different piers.



Recreational users

Narrow boats

Passenger vessel **masters** should be aware that narrow boats often navigate on the Tideway. These vessels, by design, are low powered, have a very low freeboard and can look very small against a busy river background.

Narrow boats are not required to carry a VHF set whilst on the Tideway therefore calls may not be heard. Extra caution should be taken when navigating in the vicinity of a narrow boat.



Recreational users – man-powered vessels

Sailing boats

There are numerous sailing clubs that use the tidal Thames year round as well as several organised sailing events. **Masters** should maintain a good lookout at all times and be advised that sailing vessels have a low freeboard and will sometimes manoeuvre in an unpredictable fashion, including tacking across the fairway.

Small sailing vessels may not have access to VHF.



Rowing and paddled boats

Boats powered by oars or paddles such as rowing boats, canoes and stand-up paddle boards have minimal freeboard and masters should bear in mind the dramatic effect that wash can have on them. **These boats are also particularly small and can be hard to spot. They do not carry VHF so maintaining a good look out is essential.**

The area between Putney and Teddington is particularly busy with rowing boats which are obliged to follow a different navigation pattern (working the slacks) and there are similar, rowing-specific navigation patterns between Cherry Garden Pier and Royal Wharf Pier. [See the Tideway Code](#)

Codes specific to other recreational vessels can also be found on the [PLA website](#). It should be noted that all rowing vessels carry an ID code and paddle craft are recommended to do the same.



Safety Management System (SMS)

The SMS is a tool used to help keep people, vessels and the environment safe. It encourages the development of a safety culture where safety becomes second nature.

A safety culture involves everyone from deckhand to a vessel's owner. Everyone is responsible.

An SMS includes a set of documents about how a vessel is operated safely and how risks are controlled. It provides information about:

- How a company and vessel(s) operate on a day-to-day basis
- What happens if there is an emergency on a vessel, for example, a fire or a person overboard
- A vessel, what she does and where she operates
- The Designated Person Ashore (DPA) including their contact details (see panel opposite)
- How things are done on a vessel, who does what, how they do it and when
- How hazards are identified and assessed and how risks are managed
- How records on what happens on a vessel are kept
- How crew are trained and drills conducted

A robust Safety Management System must be produced and maintained by the **operator** but **understood by all working on board a vessel.**

An SMS should consist of the following:

- A health and safety and environment protection policy
- Lines of communication within the company from “ship to shore”
- A Designated Person Ashore
- Procedures for vessels and equipment maintenance
- Training of staff and SMS procedures
- Procedures for handling an emergency situation
- Procedures for reporting accidents and near misses
- Procedures for auditing and complying with the code

Designated Person Ashore (DPA)

A requirement of the DMSC, ISM and SMS is that an operator should have a **Designated Person Ashore (DPA)**.

The role of the DPA is ensure the safe operation of each vessel and to provide a link between the operator and those on board. Every operator, as appropriate, should designate a person or persons ashore having direct access to the highest level of management.

The responsibility and authority of the designated person or persons should include monitoring the safety and pollution prevention aspects of the operation of each vessel and ensuring that adequate resources and shore-based support are applied, as required.

Ideally, a notice, such as in the example below, should be posted in the wheelhouse with the DPA contact details:

In case of an emergency or upon discovering a safety fault of any kind, please contact your DPA

Name

Number

Audits and audit trails

In order to ensure that the safety codes are working well and understood by all, **operators** should endeavour to conduct an internal audit of their system at least once every year or in accordance with their appropriate codes.

The internal audit should be an honest assessment of the company's safety procedures and the capabilities of its crew. Any findings in the audit should be reported to the **Designated Person Ashore** (left), senior management and if necessary, the board so that recommendations for improvement can be made and actions taken to address the shortfalls.

General Direction 15.2**Persons on the Bridge**

There must be, on a Commercial Vessel Underway in the Thames, in addition to a Pilot if embarked:

- a) the Master or a member of the Crew at the Conning Position, suitably qualified in accordance with relevant legislation, in a fit state to undertake navigational conduct of the Vessel, who is capable of understanding a Pilot's directions (if embarked);
- b) in the case of a Seagoing Ship, a qualified helmsman on the bridge;
- c) an additional member of the Crew, in a fit state to take navigational conduct of the Vessel, immediately available to take over the Navigation of the Vessel in an emergency or as circumstances may require.

PLA Byelaw 22

Details the Thames Local Knowledge requirements for every master operating on the Tidal Thames.

Further guidance from the PLA , regarding the TLK is [available here](#)

MSN 1823 (M)

Details the MCA regulations with regards to Passenger vessels operating solely in UK waters

Further guidance from the MCA, regarding types of vessels that can operate on inland waterways in the UK is [available here](#)

Licences and endorsements**Boat Master's Licence (BML)**

email: ColchesterMO@mcga.gov.uk

The BML is a qualification issued by the MCA after successful examination of the candidate.

Local Knowledge Endorsement (LKE)

email: LKE@pla.co.uk

The LKE is assessed by the PLA, following a successful qualification period and oral examination.

Other endorsements

There are numerous endorsements, gained through time and experience, which are issued by the MCA as masters progress in their careers. For example:

- A vessel carrying 250 people will require the master to hold a Large Passenger Vessel Endorsement.
- Further qualifications are also required to master High Speed Craft (see [p.29](#))

Other qualifications, certificates and training

Various qualifications, certificates and training are required by different members of the crew and there may be requirements which are specific to different operations. For example:

- IOSHH Managing Safety certificate
- Working in Confined Space certificate

High Speed Rules

The definition of **High Speed Craft (HSC)** is given in the IMO International Code of Safety for High Speed Craft (the HSC Code).

Speed alone is not the criterion for HSC classification; it is a mix of displacement and operating speed. The Code is a comprehensive set of requirements for high-speed craft, including equipment, conditions for operation and maintenance. It includes very detailed requirements and HSC compliant high-speed craft are deemed also to be complying with the [*International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea*](#) (SOLAS) chapters

I to IV and regulation V (12) (Shipborne navigational equipment). HSC must also comply with other applicable requirements in the SOLAS and ISM Codes.

The HSC Code is based on the management and reduction of risk as well as passive protection in the event of an accident. Risk is managed through accommodation arrangements, active safety systems, restricted operation, quality management and human factors, along with engineering.

For further details see [Passage Planning \(p.31\)](#) and [Navigational Risk Assessment \(p.43\)](#)



Continued >

Certificate of Compliance (CoC)

In order to exceed the mandatory speed limit between Wandsworth Bridge and Lambeth Bridge and/or St Saviour's Dock and Margaretness, under the provisions of [Thames Byelaw 16](#), a certificate of compliance issued by the PLA is required.

The criteria for the issue of a [PLA CoC](#) have been developed following a risk assessment, and encompass the relevant principles and elements of:

- [High Speed Craft \(HSC\) Code \(2000\)](#)
- [International Safety Management \(ISM\) Code](#)
- [Small Commercial Vessel \(SCV\) Code](#)

and where appropriate:

- [Inland Waters Small Passenger Boat Code](#) (IWSPBC) and Thames Freight Standard

The CoC may be issued following either the completion of an applicable PLA inspection, or after the provision to the PLA of evidence of HSC compliance from another recognised surveying authority.

Vessels holding a Certificate of Compliance will be

subject to an annual **PLA CoC Inspection**, which addresses the following broad criteria:

- The overall condition and stability of the vessel (unless a valid MCA or PLA licence is provided)
- The provision and operation of all on-board equipment, including navigational equipment
- Auditing of the safety management system manual, including manning requirements, risk assessment, training and effective passage planning
- Evidence of an appropriate vessel maintenance program
- The management and procedures in place for passenger embarking, disembarking and containment

Detailed inspection criteria relating to the PLA CoC inspection are available from the [PLA Harbour Masters](#)

General Direction 4 Generic Passage Plans and Navigational Risk Assessments

4.1 All Commercial Vessels normally operating primarily in the Thames must prepare and maintain a generic Port Passage Plan and navigation risk assessment, establishing safe air draught and under keel clearances to be maintained, for use during the Vessel's routine passage and operations in the Thames. All such documents may be inspected by the Harbourmaster.

Port Passage Plan (PPP)

Passenger vessels should be well prepared for operating in a busy waterway that is at times restricted, crossed by narrow bridges, dynamic and heavily affected by the tide. In order to be prepared a passage plan for each journey should be produced and held on-board.

Passage plans should be read and understood by all persons in charge of a vessel and those who may helm a vessel.

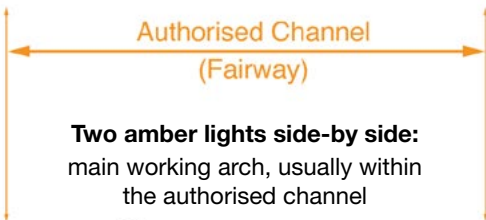
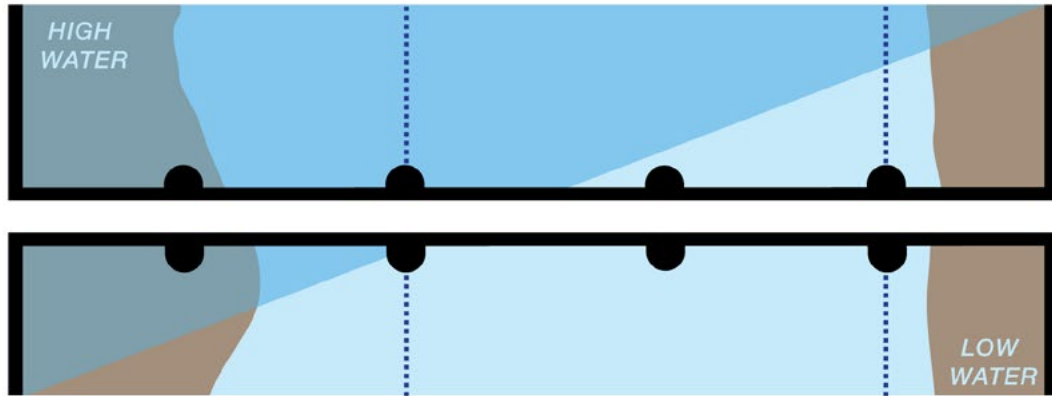
They should also be submitted to the Harbourmaster before commencement of any new or expansion of existing operations and communicated to crew members.

Waiting for a space at a pier can contribute to congestion. **Operators** should take that into account as well as recommendations designed to prevent waiting in the main navigational channel. See diagrams on [p.38](#) and [p.39](#).

A passage plan requires the minimum of the following:

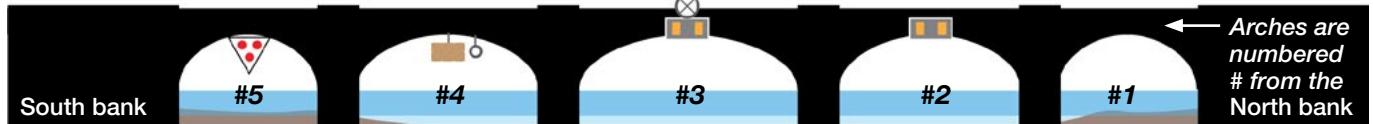
- The basic route to be taken
- Areas sensitive to wash and/or draw-off and recommended revolutions and speed so as to overcome excessive wash and/or draw-off
- List of bridges on the voyage and the maximum height of tide for each arch that can be used.
- Areas of reduced depth and tidal limitations
- A list of obstructions along the route of which to be cautious
- An understanding of other operations and river users who will be met while in transit
- Understanding of current river works, NTM's and operational issues within the area to be navigated
- Weather conditions

Bridge marking – looking upriver / inbound



A bale of straw or single white light:
Arch has reduced headroom

Two amber lights side-by-side:
main working arch, usually within the authorised channel



Three red discs or lights in an inverted triangle:
Arch closed to navigation, do not proceed through this arch

Flashing white light:
Large vessel using this arch, do not impede the vessel transiting

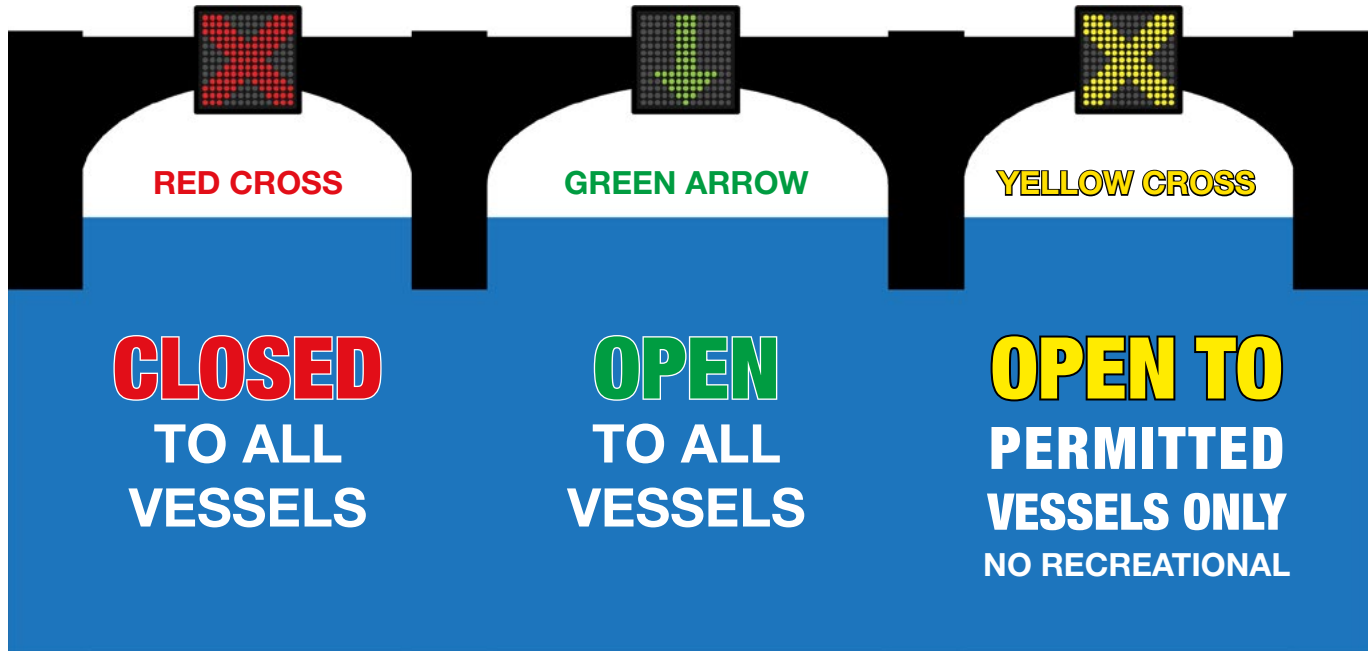
No markings:
Not a main working arch. May be used but is outside the authorised channel and may be shallow

Bridge marking – Smart Lights

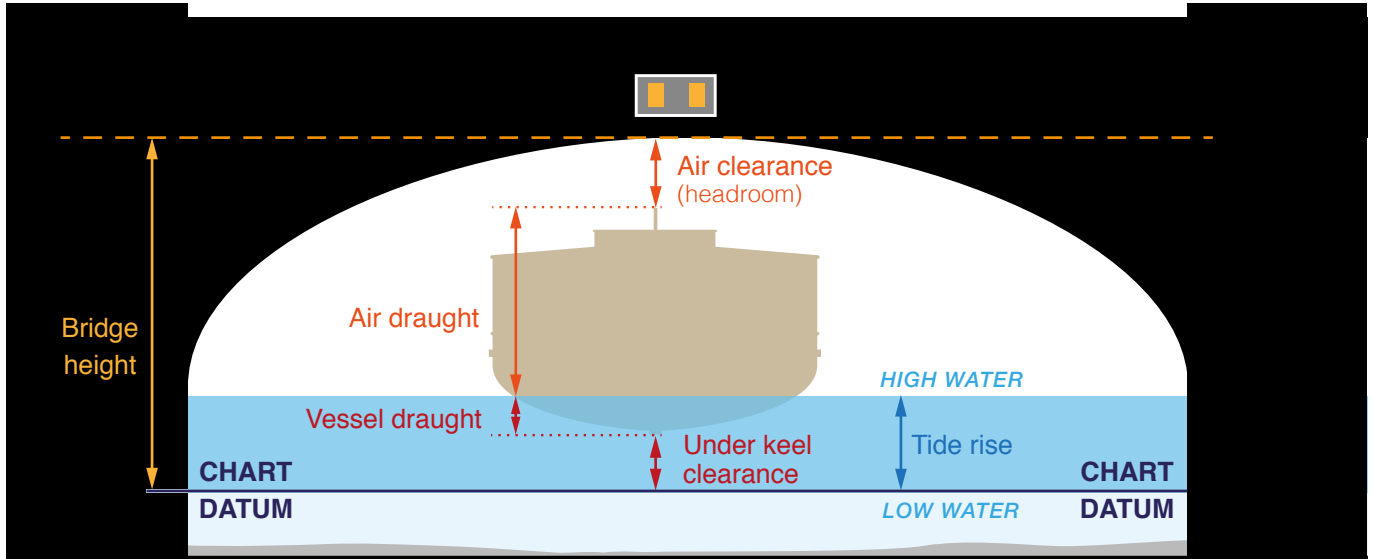
Smart Lights are a new technology being gradually introduced to bridges along the length of the Thames and are already in use on several bridges in the central and upper sections.

These matrix-style lights are fitted on both the up-river and down-river sides of the bridge and are controlled remotely, allowing for flexible navigation patterns where required.

All vessels must transit the bridge in the channel prescribed by the Smart Lights fitted above each arch, regardless of any pre-existing navigation rules.



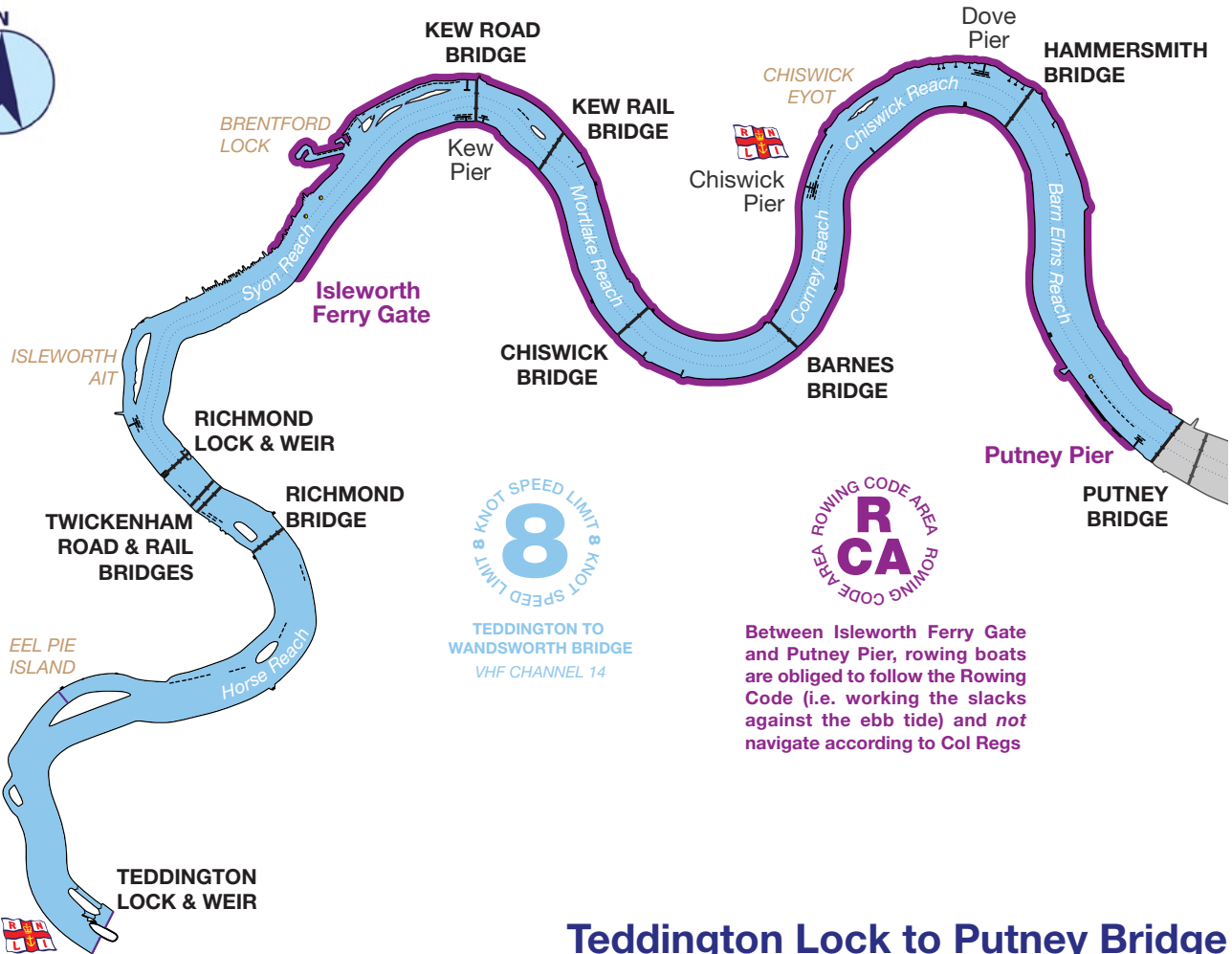
Calculating Bridge Clearances



Under keel clearance = (CHART DATUM + Tide rise) - Vessel draught + Safety [*usually 1.0m*]

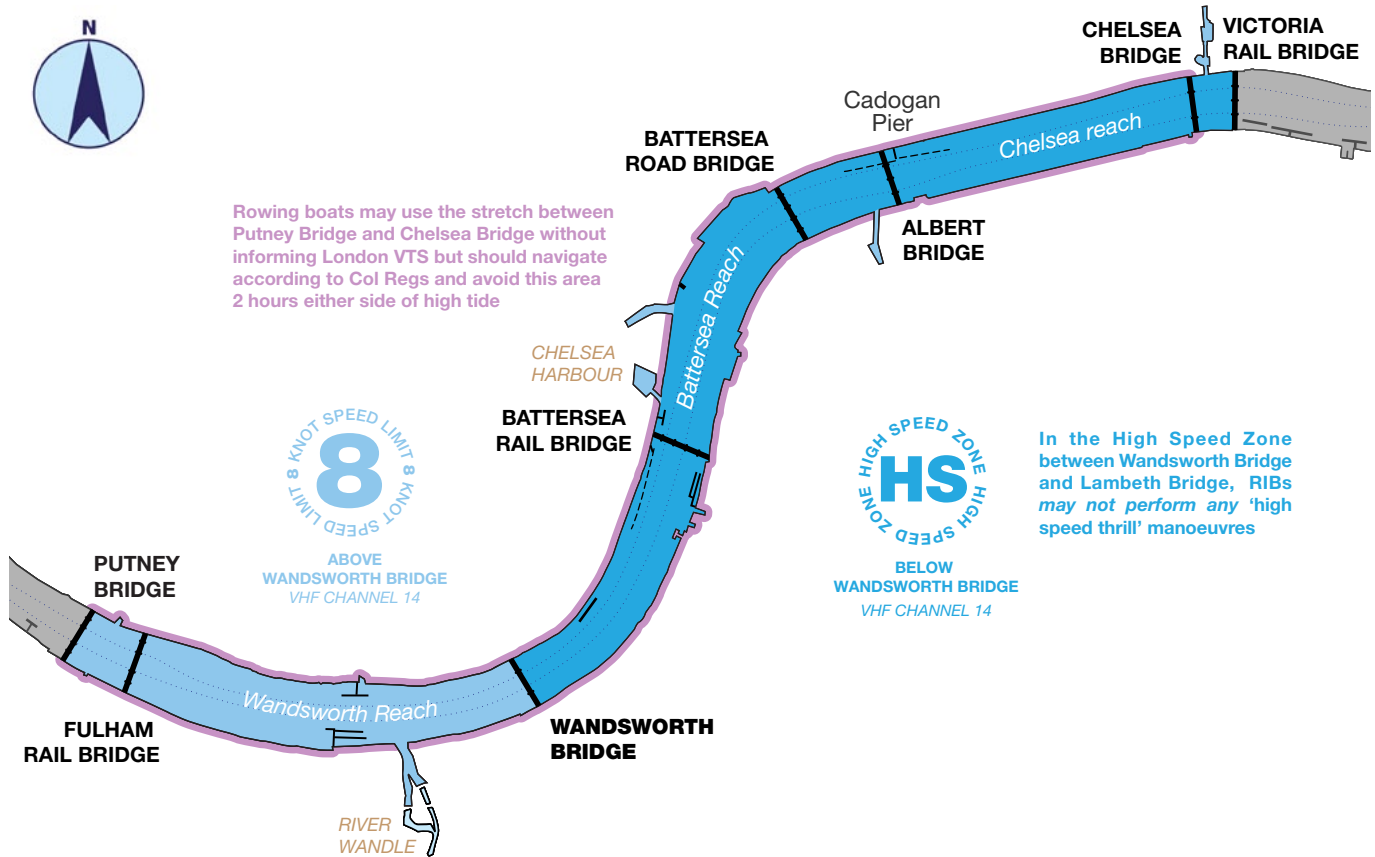
Air clearance = (Bridge Height - Tide rise) - Air draught [*usually 0.7m on ebb, 1.0m on flood**]

*[*these are minimum safe limits]*

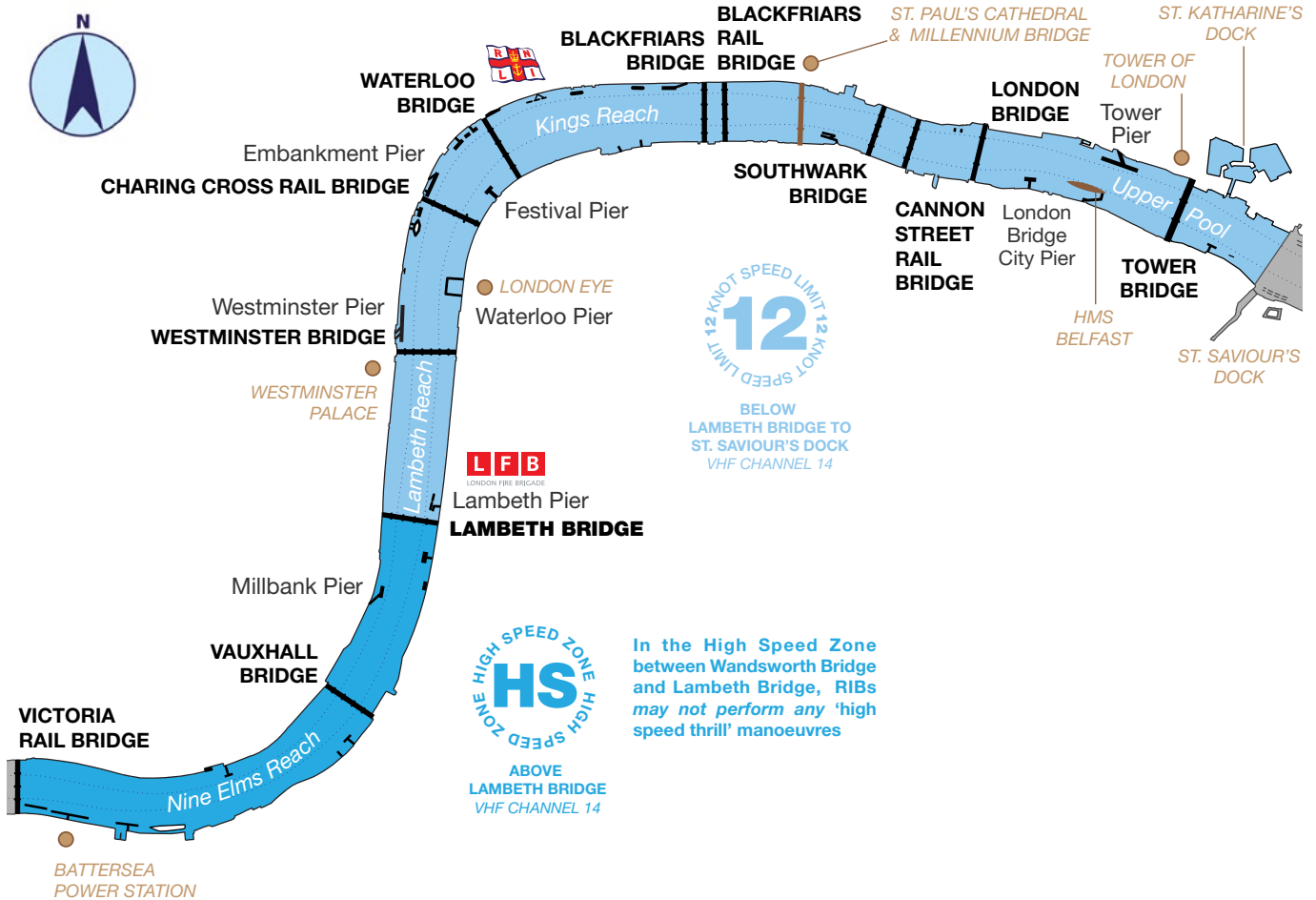


Between Isleworth Ferry Gate and Putney Pier, rowing boats are obliged to follow the Rowing Code (i.e. working the slacks against the ebb tide) and *not* navigate according to Col Regs

Teddington Lock to Putney Bridge



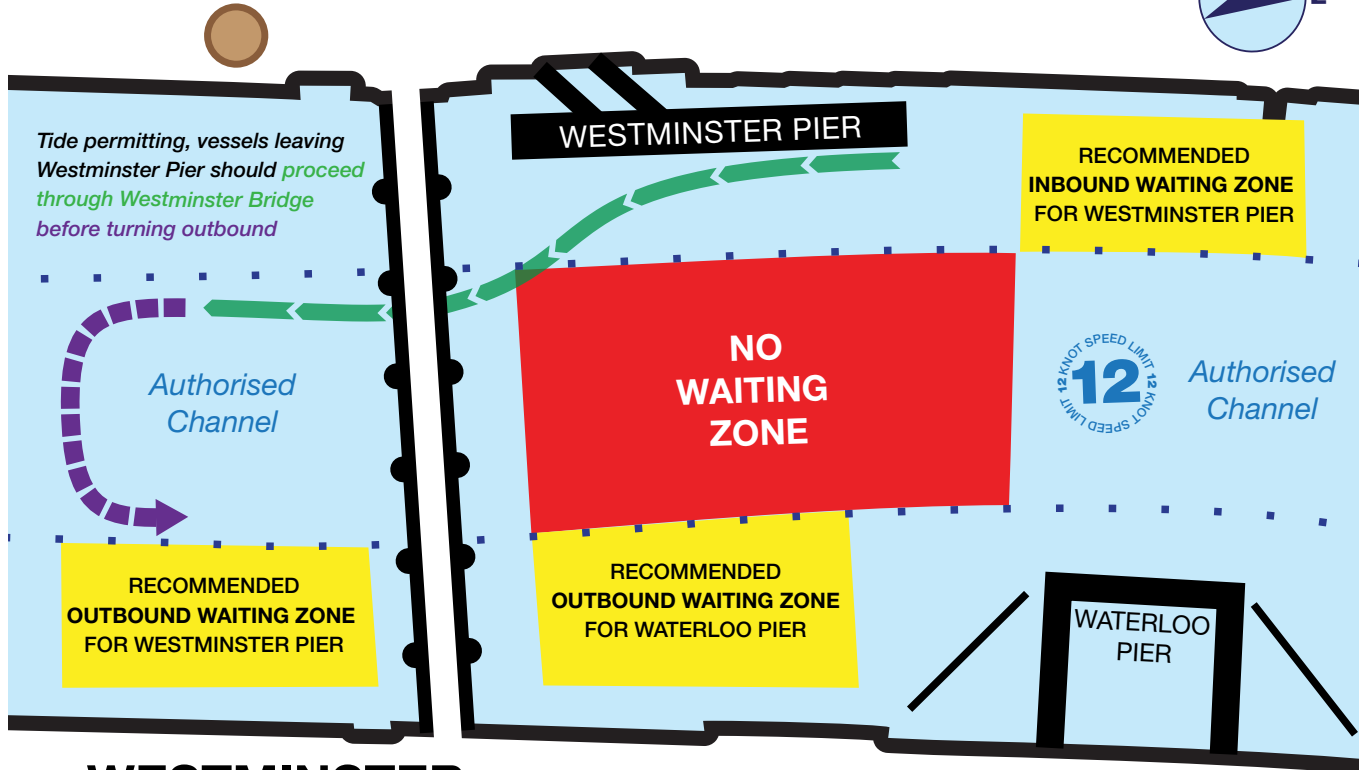
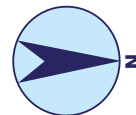
Putney Bridge to Chelsea Bridge



In the High Speed Zone between Wandsworth Bridge and Lambeth Bridge, RIBs may not perform any 'high speed thrill' manoeuvres

Chelsea Bridge to St. Saviour's Dock

WESTMINSTER PALACE



WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

COUNTY HALL

LONDON EYE

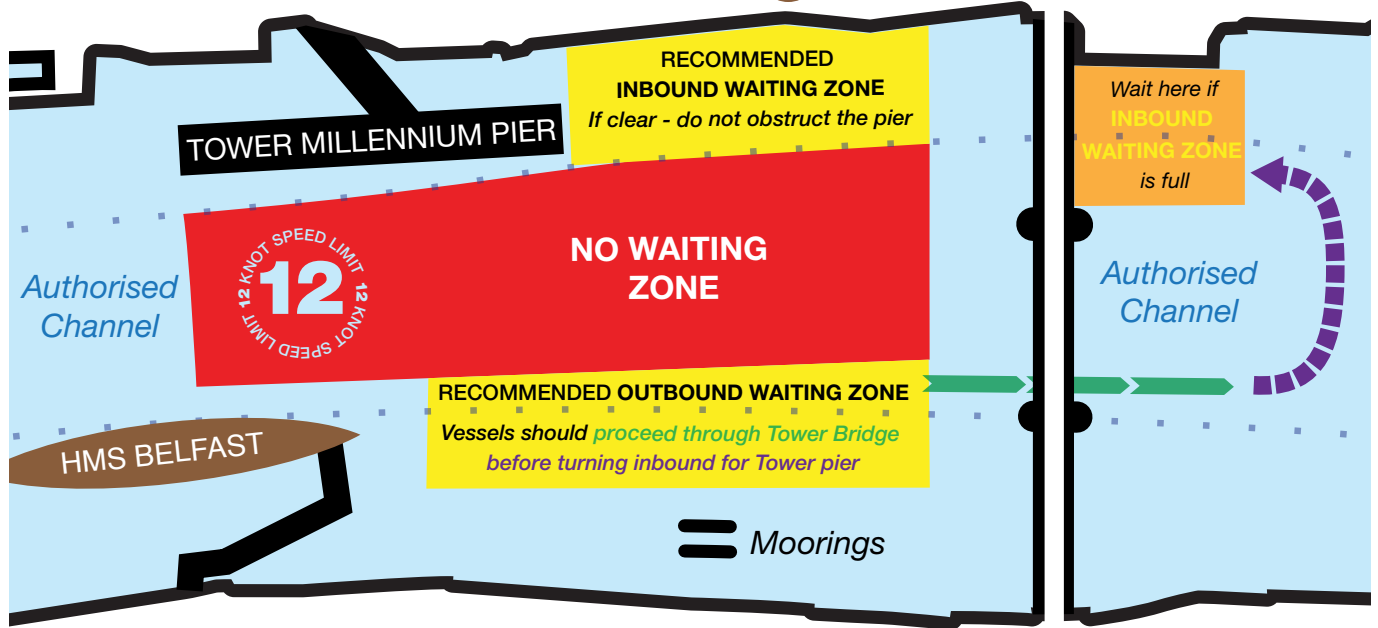
Westminister and Waterloo Piers





TOWER OF LONDON

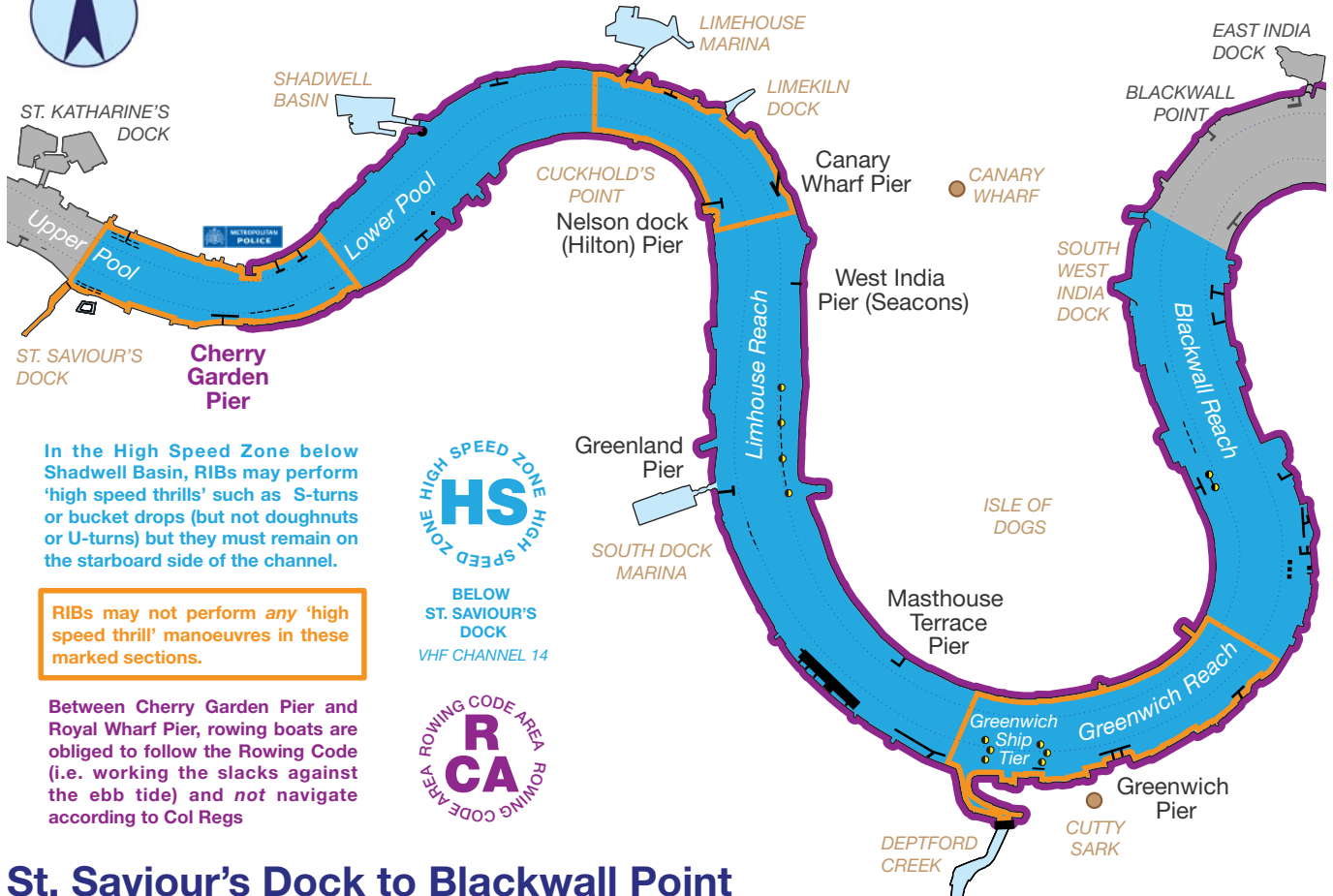
Traitor's Gate



CITY HALL

TOWER BRIDGE

Tower Pier / Upper Pool



In the High Speed Zone below Shadwell Basin, RIBs may perform 'high speed thrills' such as S-turns or bucket drops (but not doughnuts or U-turns) but they must remain on the starboard side of the channel.

RIBs may not perform any 'high speed thrill' manoeuvres in these marked sections.

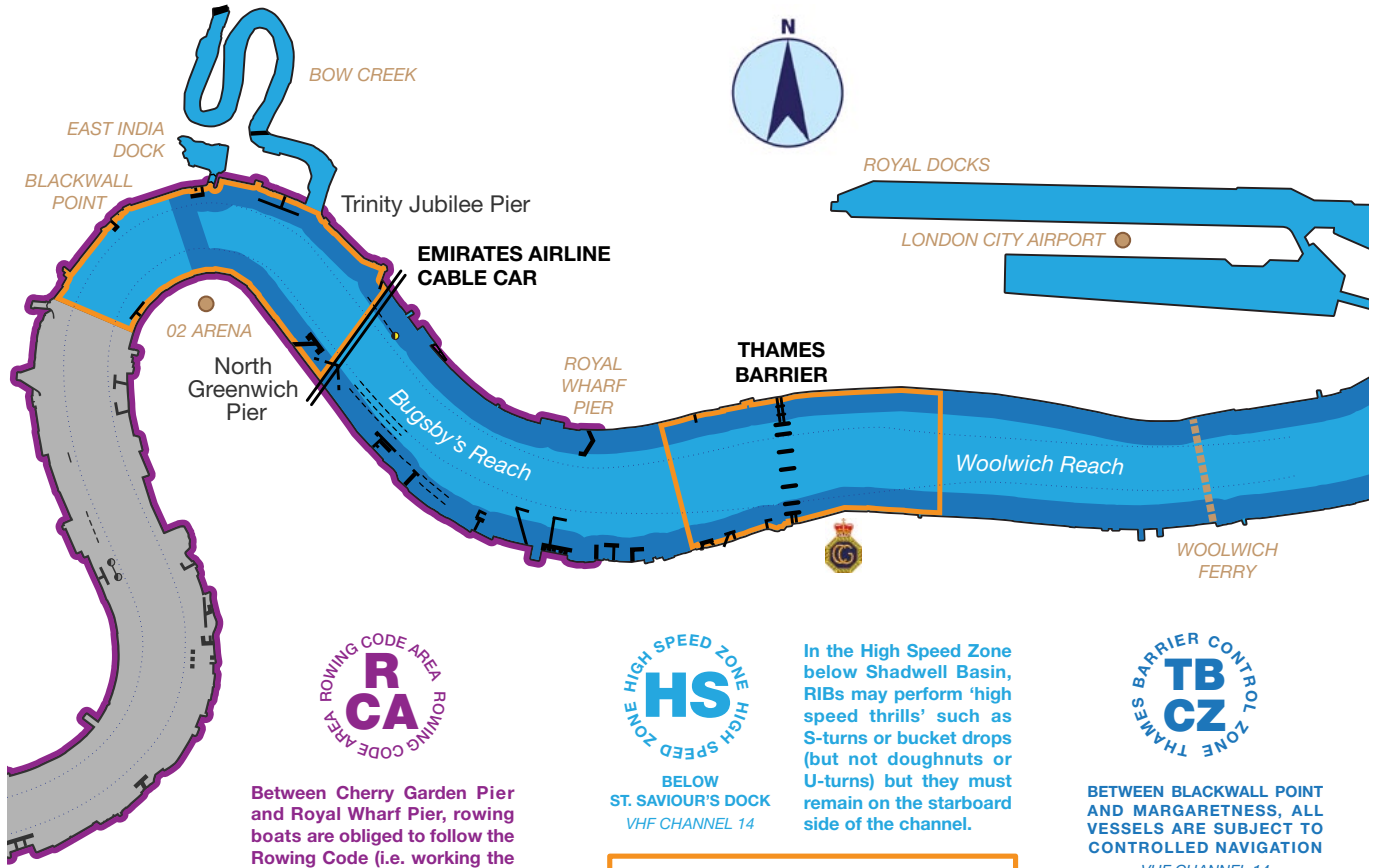
Between Cherry Garden Pier and Royal Wharf Pier, rowing boats are obliged to follow the Rowing Code (i.e. working the slacks against the ebb tide) and *not* navigate according to Col Regs



BELOW ST. SAVIOUR'S DOCK VHF CHANNEL 14



St. Saviour's Dock to Blackwall Point



Between Cherry Garden Pier and Royal Wharf Pier, rowing boats are obliged to follow the Rowing Code (i.e. working the slacks against the ebb tide) and *not* navigate according to Col Regs

BELOW
ST. SAVIOUR'S DOCK
VHF CHANNEL 14

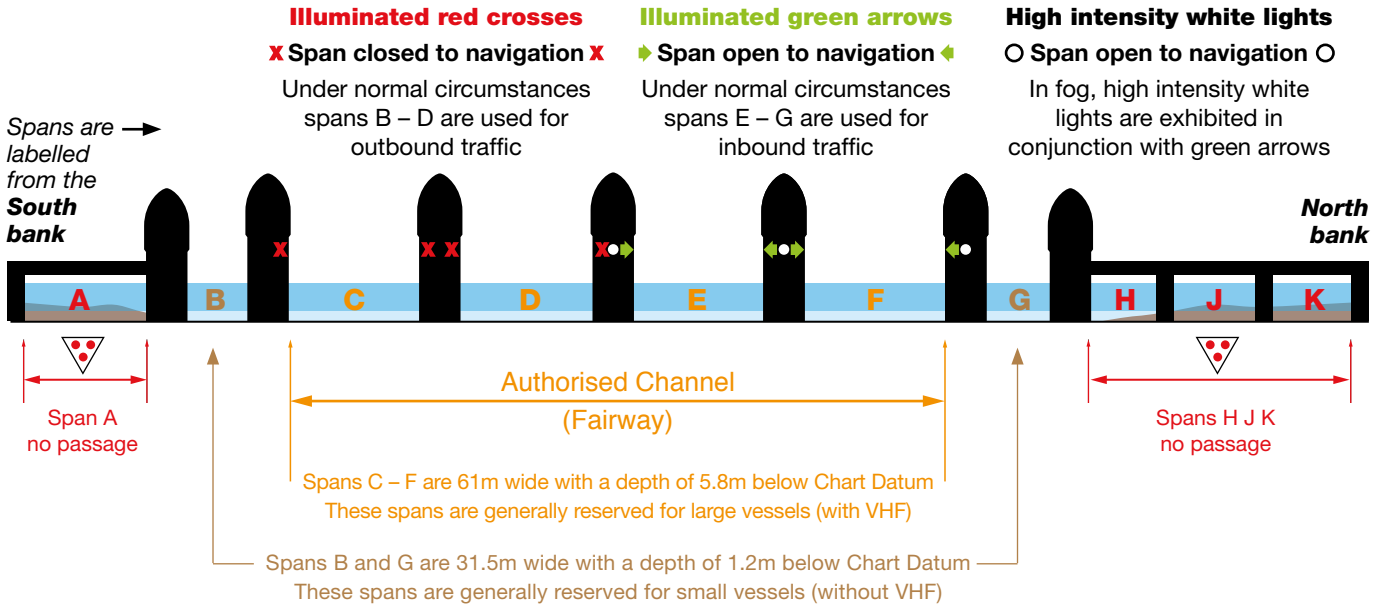
RIBs may not perform any 'high speed thrill' manoeuvres in these marked sections.

In the High Speed Zone below Shadwell Basin, RIBs may perform 'high speed thrills' such as S-turns or bucket drops (but not doughnuts or U-turns) but they must remain on the starboard side of the channel.

BETWEEN BLACKWALL POINT AND MARGARETNES, ALL VESSELS ARE SUBJECT TO CONTROLLED NAVIGATION
VHF CHANNEL 14

Blackwall Point to The Thames Barrier

The Thames Barrier – looking upriver / inbound



Thames Barrier
Control Zone
(TBCZ)

- The TBCZ exists between Blackwall Point and Margaretness.
- All vessels within this area are subject to controlled navigation including entering or transiting the zone, and overtaking, manoeuvring or mooring within it.
- All vessels with VHF radio navigating within the TBCZ should communicate their intentions to London VTS on channel 14.
- No vessel should transit the barrier without first being allocated a navigational span by London VTS.

Navigation in restricted visibility

In poor visibility, navigation through the Thames Barrier is subject to various restrictions depending on the size of the vessel.

For specific details please refer to [PLA General Direction 29](#)

General Direction 4 Generic Passage Plans and Navigational Risk Assessments

4.1 All Commercial Vessels normally operating primarily in the Thames must prepare and maintain a generic Port Passage Plan and navigation risk assessment, establishing safe air draught and under keel clearances to be maintained, for use during the Vessel's routine passage and operations in the Thames. All such documents may be inspected by the Harbourmaster.

Navigational Risk Assessment (NRA)

As well as a robust Safety Management System (p.26) part of the planning process to minimise the potential impact of an incident and to improve the safety of all employees and passengers, a risk assessment for all operations should be carried out by the operator. In order to write a risk assessment operators should where possible:

- Undertake to train crews in creating risk assessments
- Identify all potential hazards expected during the operation
- Determine how to minimise the risks of the identified hazards
- Use experience and prior learning where possible to prove the minimisation of hazards

A register of all risk assessments should be held by the operator and these should be amended and corrected where necessary to always reduce the risk of facing a hazard. Risk assessments should be reviewed annually, after any incident, or when the operator deems it necessary.

Before commencing a new operation on the Thames or expanding/ changing current operations, the Harbour Masters should be consulted.

Vessels which are operated single-handed are recommended to consider the hazards and risks in their Navigational Risk Assessments and Standard Operating Procedures.

Shift and watch duration

It is vital for vessel safety that the operator should provide adequate breaks for the crew of a vessel so that they do not exceed the Working Time Directive as laid down in Marine Safety Notices issued by the MCA. The most current notice can be found [here](#)

General Direction 15.2

Persons on the Bridge

There must be, on a Commercial Vessel Underway in the Thames, in addition to a Pilot if embarked:

- a) the Master or a member of the Crew at the Conning Position, suitably qualified in accordance with relevant legislation, in a fit state to undertake navigational conduct of the Vessel, who is capable of understanding a Pilot's directions (if embarked);
- b) in the case of a Seagoing Ship, a qualified helmsman on the bridge; and
- c) an additional member of the Crew, in a fit state to take navigational conduct of the Vessel, immediately available to take over the Navigation of the Vessel in an emergency or as circumstances may require.

Crew safety

Operators are responsible for ensuring that the vessel can be operated without endangering health or safety of the crews and passengers. The operator should ensure that the master has adequate tools meet to his or her responsibilities, is fit for duty, understands the company's Safety Management Systems (p.26), is fully aware of the vessel's limitations and characteristics and is qualified/type-rated for the vessel class in question.

Members of crew should be duly qualified for the duties which they undertake (p.28) and an appropriate familiarisation training scheme should be delivered by the operator to any person working on a vessel.

The **master** of a vessel is responsible at all times for the safety of the crew, the environment within which they work and passengers on board.

The mate of a vessel should be a competent hand and should be able to helm the vessel without instruction so as to relieve the master where appropriate (see panels left).

An apprentice or trainee may only helm a vessel under direct control of the master, and must not helm the vessel in the absence of the master.

The crew who work in the cabin or have other duties should have a full understanding of their duties, be fully familiar with the vessel's life saving and fire fighting appliances and be regularly drilled in on-board emergencies.

Crew training and recording

The SMS manual should have a section which includes training and recording of training drills.

It is the duty of the operator to ensure that all members of staff are trained adequately in the role they carry out on board and that training is current and relevant.

The following is a list with a few examples of suitable training to be carried out for all staff. The list is not exhaustive and a more comprehensive training schedule can be found in the SMS manual for individual operators

- Man overboard
- Loss of steering
- Collision
- Violent behaviour
- Fire or explosion on board
- Loss of propulsion
- Casualty on board

Once training has been carried out it should be logged appropriately in a record which is then held on board.

The **master** should check the training records for each member of the crew on a daily basis to ensure that all of the crew are current and up-to-date.

If any if the crew's records are out-of-date the **Designated Person Ashore** (p.27) should be informed and suitable training arranged immediately.



Right: Crew should be well turned-out in a uniform with suitable footwear – and life jacket when appropriate



Safety Drills

Safety drills should be carried out in accordance with the SMS at regular intervals.

This page gives a list of drills that should be carried out by the crew on a regular basis as laid down by the company's SMS.

It is the **operator's** responsibility to ensure that these drills are carried out as prescribed in the SMS.

Any problems or questions that arise as a result of these drills should be reported back to the **Designated Person Ashore** (p.27).

Drill and Training Records

Details and dates of musters, abandon ship drills, fire and flooding drills and other on-board training including use of life-saving appliances, should be recorded and scrutinised by the operator's management, as required under the DSMC

Crew Drills

Emergency fire and evacuation drills for the crew should be held on board at regular intervals. Each member of each crew should participate in evacuation, fire and damage control drills. For each sort of emergency, flooding following collision or grounding, fire etc it is useful to stage training through the steps described below:

- **Communications Exercises:** a simple check that all communications function correctly.
- **Table-top Exercises:** an essential step, particularly useful for testing the organisational and coordination aspects of an emergency response, also useful for involving senior management. As these exercises encourage discussion they often bring up new considerations and so test the response.
- **Walk-through Exercises:** similar in philosophy to the communications exercises, these exercises enable people to 'walk through' their functions and roles in a thoroughly benign environment with no pressure. Walk-through exercises achieve the following two significant purposes:
 - To ensure that people know exactly what to do.
 - To give them confidence that they know how to do it.

Such exercises may simply be operating fire-fighting and damage control equipment, turning out oil spill containment equipment or walking through evacuation routes. Ideally, each part of an exercise or anticipated emergency is 'walked through'.

Continued >

Crew Drills

- **Full Scale Exercise:** needs careful planning to replicate or simulate a ‘real-life’ incident or emergency as closely as is safe and practicable. Such simulations should include instruction and operation of the craft’s evacuation, fire and damage control appliances and systems.
- **Evacuation Drills:** Evacuation drill scenarios should vary each week so that different emergency conditions are simulated. They should include:
 - Summoning crew to muster stations with the alarm and ensuring that they know the order to abandon craft specified in the muster list.
 - Reporting to stations and preparing for duties described in the muster list.
 - Checking that crew are suitably dressed.
 - Checking that life jackets are correctly donned
 - Operation for launching life rafts.
 - Testing of emergency lighting for mustering and abandonment.
 - Giving instructions in the use of the craft’s life-saving appliances

Emergency instructions including a general diagram of the craft showing the location of all exits, evacuation routes, emergency equipment, life-saving equipment and appliances and illustration of life jacket donning should be available to each crew member.

Exercise scenarios can include but not be limited to the following:

- Fire in all sections of the vessel, particularly machinery spaces.
- Passenger management and human factors in emergencies.
- Rescue of people from the water, man overboard and multiple survivors.
- First Aid procedures and passenger care following an evacuation.
- Procedures following grounding.
- Failure of machinery and electrical supply.
- Pollution Prevention and response to a shipboard pollution incident.
- Security incident on-board ([See Security Guidance, p.72](#))
- Going to anchor.
- Steering gear failures.

Exercises should be imaginative and include discussion and debriefs so that participants can debate the effectiveness of emergency procedures and systems and identify other additional or new potential emergency shipboard situations.

Passenger safety is paramount to a good operation.

The **master** has overall responsibility for the passengers and crew carried on board a vessel, however the **operator** should engage with the crew in order to adopt guidance and implement best practices.

The vessel should be safety checked, clean and ready for service before any passengers embark for the journey, adequate time should be allowed to prepare the vessel before commencement of service.

Passenger safety

Passenger safety is of paramount importance to the industry.

The **master** has overall responsibility for the safety of the vessel, passengers and crew, but he is not the only person with responsibilities:

Everyone concerned with the operations of vessels has at least some responsibility for the safety of the vessel, passengers and crew.

The split in responsibility between the master and the person in charge of catering and hospitality staff should be made clear to all employees and form part of vessel operator's (or owner) policy.

There is no magic formula and common sense is probably the best safety tool that we have.

- In all activities: **Stop! Think!**
- Follow set procedures, do not accept sub-standard equipment – report it!
- Familiarise yourself with the established procedures, risk assessments and put them into practice.
- Encourage a culture of “not walking by” and learn from near misses and accidents.

Continued >

Personal Communications

Devices such as personal mobile phones, laptops, tablets and other similar electrical equipment should not be used when they may cause distraction from navigating a vessel or other vessel duties.

Authorised areas may be agreed for their use and appropriate signage should be displayed.

Notices to Mariners and Marine Guidance Notices issued by the PLA provide further, up-to-date detail regarding this issue.

Commentary

If a commentary is being conducted during the voyage, it should be done outside the wheel house in order to avoid distracting the master / helm of the vessel.

Passenger safety

Human error is the root cause of the vast majority of marine accidents. Operators should minimise the potential for error through training, thorough briefing and exercising. The aims should be: to minimise poor or incorrect decision-making; to familiarise people with safety equipment, safety measures and emergency procedures; and to adopt common safe working practices. Be on your guard against complacency.

Adequate communication between the master and the crew by whatever means should be possible at all times.

Once passengers are embarked, vessel design features such as built-in buoyancy and notices advising of safe routes and location of safety equipment etc, should keep passengers safe from most hazards. The crew should ensure that the entry ports are properly secured and access to non-public spaces is restricted. All crew members should watch passengers closely and be alert to anybody likely to do something foolish or dangerous, particularly if they appear to be under the influence of drink or drugs, or appear to be ill.

Arrival and disembarkation

Arriving at a Pier

When arriving at the pier and before disembarking any passengers, a safety announcement should be made in English.

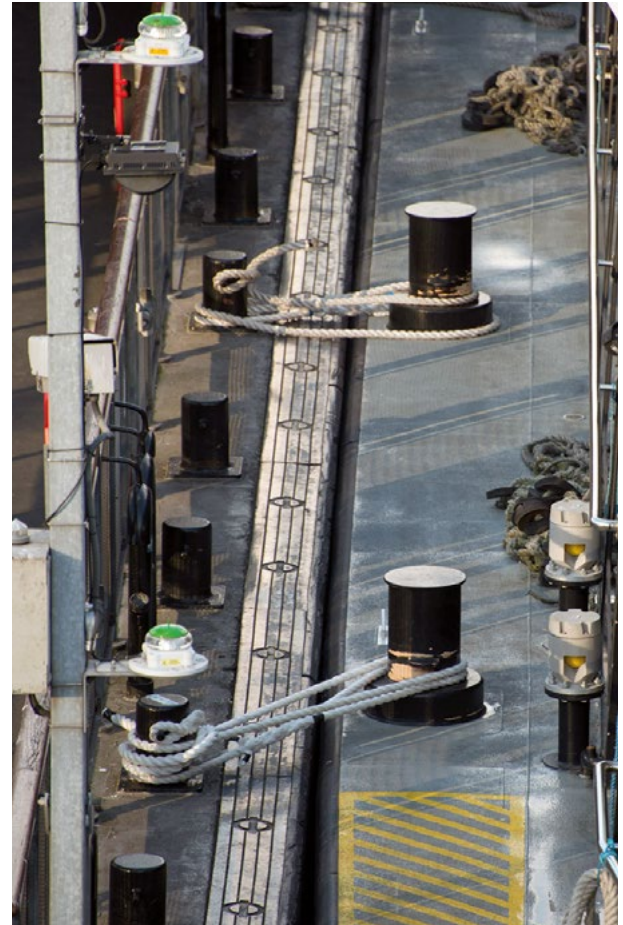
Ideally vessel **operators** should supply either a written text of the message or a pre-recording to be used over the public address system.

The **master** or person navigating the vessel should not be distracted by simultaneously attempting to conduct passenger safety briefings and/or public commentaries.

An example of a typical pre-arrival announcement:

“We will shortly be arriving at [location]. Please remain seated while we come alongside the pier as the boat may move unexpectedly. When securely alongside I will invite you to disembark from the vessel. Please use the handrails at all times”

On arrival at a pier the **master** and crew should ensure that the vessel is secured alongside with at least two mooring lines (unless otherwise agreed by the Harbourmaster and/or MCA) and that the gap between pier and vessel is as small as possible. Only once the vessel is safely moored alongside should disembarkation or embarkation commence. A crew member should be on station at the embarkation/disembarkation point throughout passage loading/unloading operations, with two hands freely available to assist, should a situation arise.



Embarkation

Once all passengers are embarked, the number of passengers and crew must be entered into the AIS/POB *before* the vessel departs the pier.

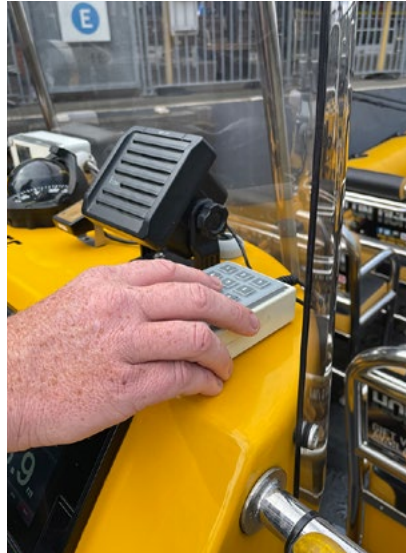
The number entered into the AIS/POB system ([see p.11](#)) must truly reflect the total number of crew and passengers on board.

Therefore a designated crew member should count all passengers that embark and disembark the vessel. A counting device should be used to ensure an accurate passenger count.

Should the AIS/POB system fail for whatever reason, the defect must be reported to the supplier

immediately with a reference number forwarded to the Duty Officer at London VTS and the numbers entered [via this form](#).

Other crew members should aid all passengers during embarkation to ensure that trips, slips and falls are prevented and to guide passengers to the appropriate location on board.



Departure

Departing from a Pier

Before Departure, a safety announcement should be made, in English, briefing passengers about safety and emergency procedures.

Ideally vessel operators should supply either a written text of the message or a pre-recording to be used over the public address system.

The **master** or person navigating the vessel should not be distracted by simultaneously attempting to conduct passenger safety briefings and/or public commentaries. Pre-departure safety briefings should be relevant to the particular vessel and include:

- Fire prevention
- Protection of limbs
- Effect of passenger movement on boat stability

The briefing should also contain verbal instructions and demonstrations, providing passengers with specific information to prepare and guide them in the event of an emergency.

Passengers must be made aware of the location of life jackets closest to their position on the vessel and the survival craft they should board if the vessel has to be abandoned.

An example of a typical pre-departure announcement”

“Welcome on board. I am Captain [name] of [vessel name]. This vessel is shortly due to leave the pier for [location]. In the event of an emergency please follow instructions from the crew. There are enough life jackets on board for all passengers which are located [where]. Please familiarise yourself with the safety information located around the vessel.”



Departure

Additionally, instruction on the location and use of personal protection equipment, vessel safety equipment, and distress equipment is also mandatory.

Merchant Shipping Notice #1409 (M)

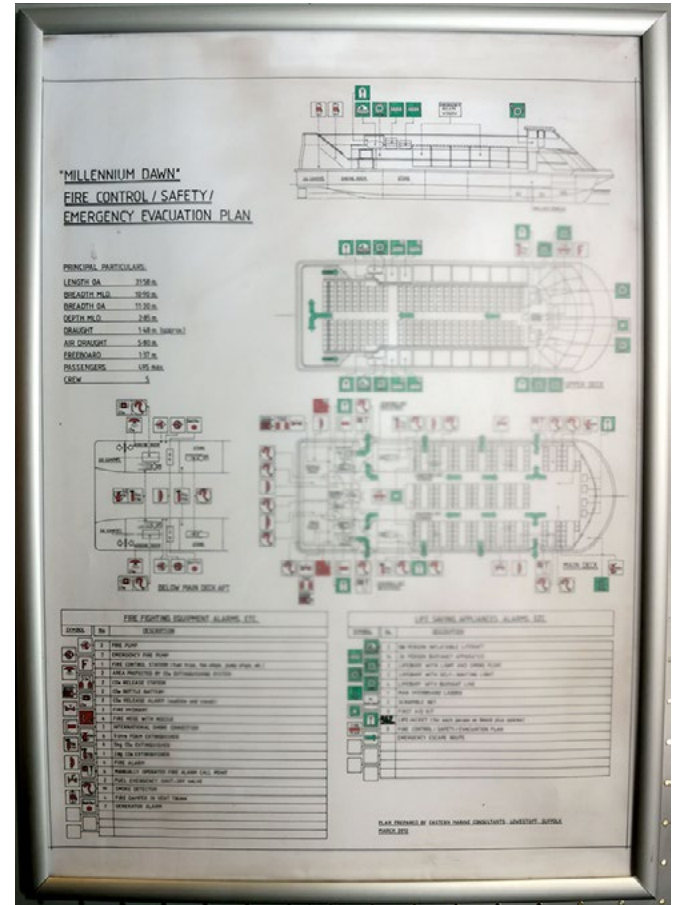
This notice contains very specific information and should be fully understood and followed.

Information cards or posters may be used to supplement the briefing, but should not replace the announcement. The public address system should cover all areas where passengers and crew have access, escape routes and places of evacuation into survival craft.

Emergency instructions including a general diagram of the craft showing exit locations, evacuation routes and emergency and life-saving equipment should be available to passengers.

Keep passengers safe by keeping them informed:

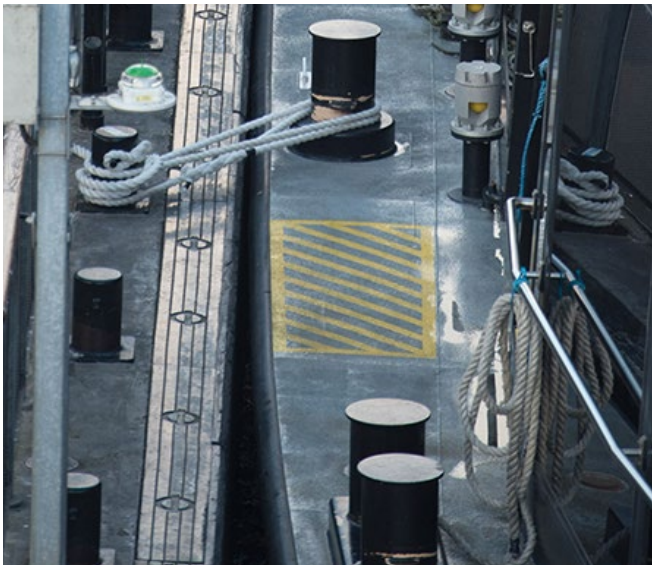
- Signs showing Muster Stations and directions to the Muster Stations
- Exit and Emergency escape signs
- Passenger emergency instruction notices
- Public Address systems
- Draw passengers' attention to passenger emergency instruction notices.



Access

Passenger Access Points

Passenger access points, both aboard the ship and ashore on the pier, should be well lit at night and in poor visibility and marked with high visibility tape or paint. The edges of the deck and the pier at the access points should be highly visible so that any gap between the ship and pier is obvious. Additionally, these areas should be treated with slip-resistant coatings.



Handrails

Hand rails should be of a suitable height to allow passengers to adequately brace themselves while using the stairs, or in the event of an incident.

Posters or notices in the stairwell should also indicate the requirement to use handrails at all times to guard against unexpected movements of the vessel.



Continued >

Access

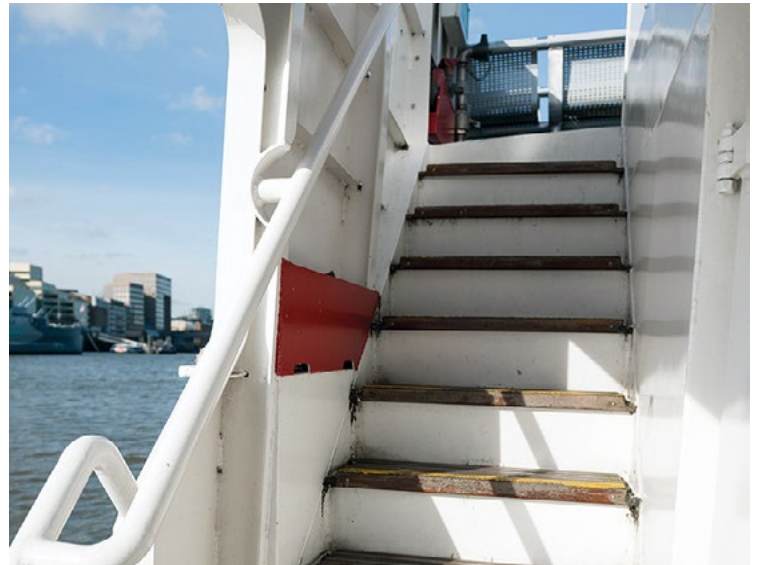
Stairwells and Handrails

The construction of the stairwell can help to reduce the likelihood and consequence of a person falling. Stairwells should ideally be of a suitable width so that both handrails can be comfortably reached. Where this can't be achieved it is recommended that a centre rail is installed.



It can be dangerous for passengers to loiter on or around stairwells while vessels are underway, particularly during manoeuvres, such as berthing alongside a pier. The use of bar staff or other crew to monitor these areas should be considered and accompanied by safety announcements advising passengers to use the handrails at all times when using stairs.

Whenever there is a risk of sudden movements by the vessel, or a heavy contact from coming alongside a pier, passengers should be advised to remain seated.



Boarding ramps/Gangways

Some operators use boarding ramps to aid the embarkation and disembarkation process. If these ramps are used then **crew members should always ensure that the vessel is securely moored and the gangway suitably manned. Gangway operating procedures should be laid down and incorporated into the SMS**

Gangway structure should be lightweight alloy material and counter-balanced to facilitate ease of use by the crew.

The vessel **operator's** (or owner) policy should state how it expects its vessel masters to moor when transferring passengers. The main aim should be to provide passengers with 'step-free' access to and from the vessel; they should not have to stretch or step up or down when boarding or leaving the vessel. Ideally, the whole length of the vessel should lie alongside the pier (if appropriate) and be secured by a minimum of two lines (unless otherwise agreed) and a gangway provided. But, on the Thames, many piers are too short to allow the full length of a vessel alongside; if so, additional precautions should be considered.

On smaller vessels carrying 12 or fewer passengers, mooring and passenger embarkation/disembarkation arrangements may differ, but should be fully risk assessed and be safe and appropriate for the location and circumstances.

When using gangways the following considerations are important:

- Does the gangway allow reduced mobility access? If being used by wheelchairs, both the width of the gangway and its gradient must be fit for purpose
- The crew must ensure passengers do not bunch-up on the gangway
- Be aware of wash from passing vessels
- As always, at least one crew member suitably equipped with life jacket and safety footwear should attend the gangway to assist passengers
- Have a slip-resistant walkway
- Have handrails incorporated and be tested and frequently certificated
- Be well lit, easily accessible, free from obstructions and clear of trip hazards
- Be frequently checked for any signs of wear or deficiencies
- When in use, secure the gangway on the pier-side only, allowing the vessel-side to move with the vessel's motion. Stow gangway when not in use
- Is there a Risk Assessment in place and is it current?
- Ensure all staff are correctly trained on the equipment, with a full training record
- A planned preventative maintenance program is in place and issued to the pier owner

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995/2005

This act states that

“a person has a disability for the purposes of The Act if he/she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

The operator’s SMS should include pier and vessel access guidance for the disabled and those with reduced mobility.

As well as people with physical disabilities and those in wheel chairs, reduced mobility also includes speech, hearing or sight limitations and mental health problems. It also includes the elderly and parents with young children (who are being carried or in a pushchair).

See these notices for details:

- [MSN 1789 \(M\)](#)
- [MGN 306 \(M\)](#)

Disability and access

As well as the detailed references list in the panel (right), consider the following general points:

- Does the pier have specific disabled facilities such as additional handrails, wider passageways, lifts etc?
- If not, assess whether the passenger can safely move around the pier.
- Also consider whether the passenger can get onto and off the vessel with reasonable assistance from their carer, the vessel crew or pier staff (this includes guiding and advising but excludes manual lifting and hoisting those in wheel chairs or push chairs)
- If the vessel master or pier controller considers passenger safety may be compromised then polite but firm refusal must be given together with a reason
- Ensure the limitations for hosting disabled or reduced mobility passengers are clearly stated on signs and in ticket booking terms and conditions. Limitations might include such items as vessel design or ramp angle at low tide



Pier Operations

In the Port of London numerous piers are located between Woolwich and Teddington, many owned and operated by **London River Services (LRS)**, part of Transport for London (TfL). Others are privately owned and operated.

LRS piers operate to defined rules and standards, but privately owned piers will have variations. Nevertheless this Code establishes the best practice agreed by the industry and regulators and should be adopted by all. Many piers are fully managed and controlled whilst others, generally towards the west of London, are open and in many cases are not piers at all but private and public moorings and jetties installed at or on the bank.

Irrespective of ownership, the guidance and principles described herein should apply to all pier and jetty operations.

Passenger vessels use the various piers according to their ownership and licence arrangements; LRS for example issue a licence for use by passenger boat operators. Others are used by their owners or by third parties with permission and subject to individual agreements.

Design and Installation

Passenger vessels and piers are generally well managed, safe environments, and risks associated with their design and operation are mitigated by safety conscious processes and actions. The following list is not exhaustive but provides a guide:

- Design and installation should be based upon risk assessment
- The pier must be fit for purpose
- Suitable rescue equipment must be located on the pier, be accessible and be properly maintained
- Pier staff should be suitably trained in the use of all safety/rescue equipment fitted on the pier
- Wherever possible there should be a 'Help Point' or source of guidance where any person in difficulty may contact a source of assistance
- The pier structure should be checked regularly for serviceability, particularly for security to the shore and watertight integrity
- Pier fendering and securing arrangements should be frequently inspected and maintained in good working order
- Bollards and cleats should be inspected and tested as part of planned maintenance schedule and the maximum permitted loading must be known

Protective Barriers

Pier gates

These barriers are generally a steel frame with close mesh, forming part of the steel fence or barrier that is fitted at every extremity of a pier.

Gates are fitted at various vessel access points along the water's edge allowing access to the vessel when moored alongside and otherwise latched securely.



Fog chains

Fog chains, which are less common, were the original safety barrier fitted to piers and jetties. They comprise wood or steel posts mounted at intervals along the water's edge between which are fitted one, two or three chains forming a barrier to the water.

The Thames Partners would encourage any pier operator with these barriers still fitted to replace them with pier gates at their earliest convenience.



Mooring

Vessels should moor in the berth formally allocated by the pier operator.

Passengers should be warned by an announcement over the PA system that the vessel is shortly to moor at the pier, and that they are to remain seated until the vessel is securely moored, in order to reduce the risk of possible injury during the mooring operation (p.50).

Visual or verbal contact between the person manoeuvring the vessel and the crew is essential during mooring operations.

Mooring arrangements will vary between vessels due to design but the fundamental principles of mooring are similar:

- A safe mooring requires a minimum of two lines (unless otherwise agreed): one as a spring to position vessel alongside pier and a second for retaining close contact between pier and head of vessel. The vessel should be laid as close as possible alongside the berth and whenever possible the main engines should be in neutral.

- The practice of ‘steaming against a single short spring’ without a gangway may put passengers and crew at risk and leaves the **master** open to accusations of failing in his duty of care in event of an accident; the owners or operators of the vessel or of the pier may also be liable. The vessel should be properly moored alongside the pier.
- **Masters and operators** should ensure that vessels are moored appropriately for prevailing weather and tidal conditions.
- When out of service and moored alongside for longer periods, the vessel should use (a minimum of) two ‘springs’, one leading forward and the other aft, plus two ropes, each from the head and stern of the vessel.
- Mooring lines should be inspected frequently for any signs of wear and replaced as necessary.
- Bollards and cleats (on both the vessel and the pier) must be suitable for purpose and used only in the manner for which they were designed. They should be regularly inspected for any signs of wear and replaced as necessary.



Best Practice

Safety is the prime consideration while embarking and disembarking passengers, which is best addressed through recognising and mitigating risks.

Clear management of the process and an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all vessel crews and pier staff concerned are essential. Vessel crews and pier staff have equal responsibility for safety and this section provides guidance and information on best practice for both communities. The following basic precautions should be taken:

- Shut and latch pier gates before the vessel leaves the pier
- Vessels berthing should place the embarkation/disembarkation point right opposite the pier gate
- Ideally a gangway should be placed between the pier and the vessel
- The vessel **operator** (or owner) should have a clear policy to cover situations when passengers board from or depart to unmanned piers
- The **master's** responsibility for passenger safety ends when the passenger lands safely onto the pier

Staff on Piers

Most piers are not staffed but there are six piers which do have staff in order to aid operators in passenger handling and management. These piers are Tower, Westminster, Embankment, Waterloo, Greenwich and North Greenwich. The piers are staffed as follows:

- **Pier Controllers:** staff employed by pier owners with responsibility for overseeing the safety and smooth operation of the whole of the pier and for ensuring that vessels moor as closely as practicable to the allocated positions; they work closely with the Brow Persons.
- **Brow Persons:** staff employed by individual vessel operators to assist with the safe operation of Vessel Operator (or owner) vessels as they arrive/depart, to provide guidance and assistance to passengers and to help manage passenger flow.

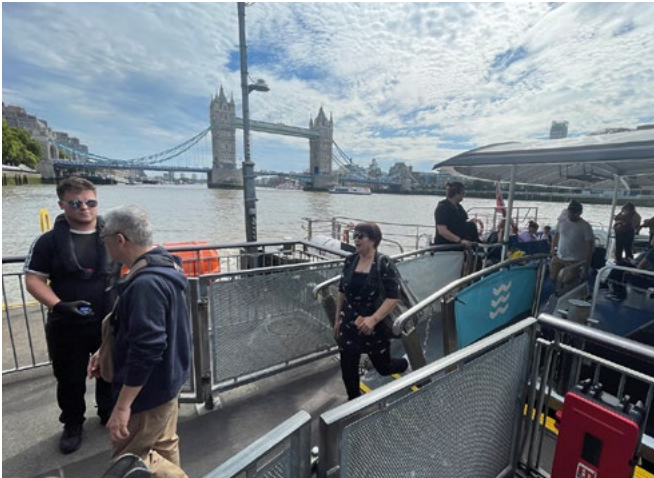
The second key consideration with regard to pier and jetty management is to ensure safe movement of passengers on and off each vessel so that arrivals and departures of vessels and people are undertaken without undue delay.

On occasions, vessels may occupy pier space for an extended period for stores, etc or have a pre-booked pier space for a function, known as 'static lay-up'. Vessels must adhere to pier booking times, particularly during busy periods and waiting vessels should hold station without blocking or compromising vessel movements on and off the pier or the movement of passing traffic, particularly in the main channel.

Continued >

Staff on Piers

A crew member should be on station at the embarkation/disembarkation point throughout passage loading/unloading operations, with two hands freely available to assist, should a situation arise



Overtaking

General Direction 24

Extract from GD24:

“overtaking manoeuvres shall only be undertaken so that the vessels involved do not prejudice their ability to navigate safely, particularly in areas of additional constraint such as river bends and bridges”

Col Regs – Rule 13

Also applies, mainly:

“any vessel overtaking any other shall keep clear of the overtaken vessel until she is finally passed and clear”

General Direction 27

Extract from GD29.4:

“A vessel must not overtake another vessel or carry out manoeuvres in the Thames Barrier Control Zone (TBCZ), without the permission of London VTS”

Overtaking

There is no blanket ban on vessels overtaking in Central London, but there are many more risks involved than when overtaking in open, less crowded waters. **Overtaking must only take place if the Fairway is clear.**

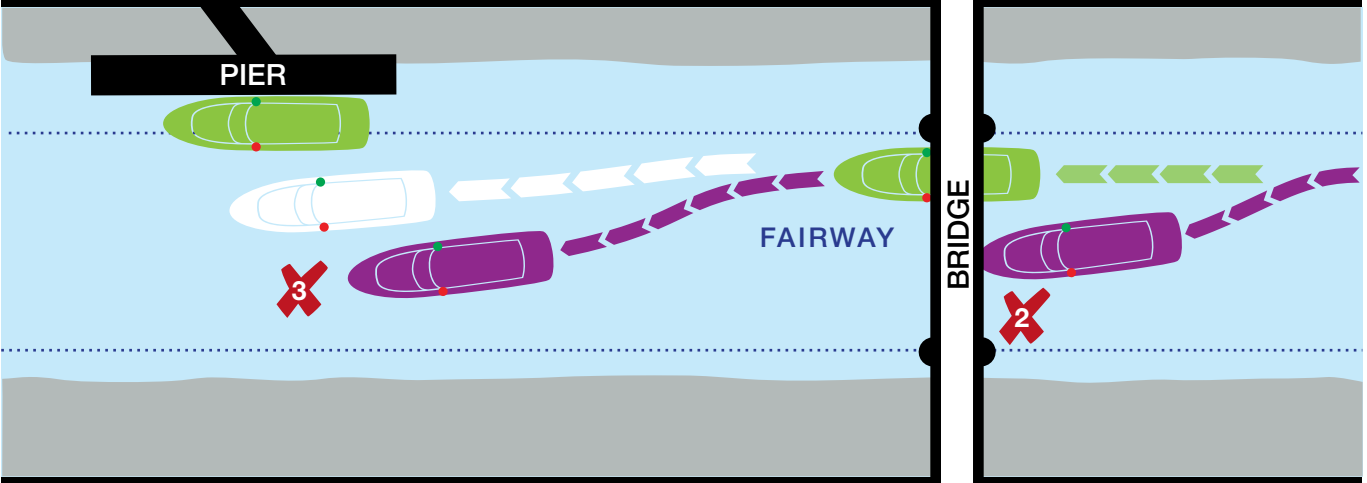
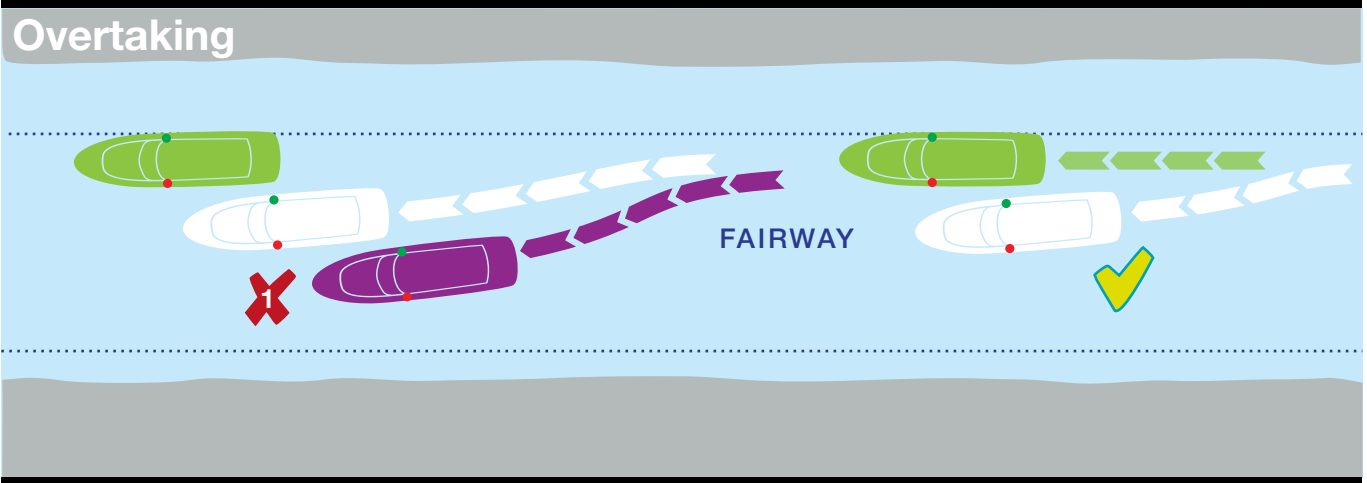
The Col Regs and PLA Byelaws are very clear about the responsibilities between vessels but slower vessels never have the right to impede the passage of other faster traffic. Passing agreements should only be made under exceptional circumstances and in all cases masters must ensure clear identification of the calling and responding vessel.

- 1** A vessel should not overtake another vessel that is already in the process of overtaking
- 2** Overtaking should not take place under most bridge arches
- 3** Overtaking should not take place abreast busy piers with vessels manoeuvring (A good example is Tower Pier particularly when a cruise ship is moored alongside HMS Belfast)



Continued >

Overtaking



Turning

In general, most traditionally propelled passenger vessels manoeuvre into the tidal stream to berth, whereas more manoeuvrable vessels such as some high speed craft berth in the direction they are going (Stern fetching), regardless of the tidal stream.

Occasionally, two vessels can find themselves approaching the same berth from opposite directions at the same time, requiring good seamanship and timely communication between the vessels to prevent this situation presenting any problem.

Note that no single type of operation (e.g. River Bus or River Tours) has any priority over another. Masters must learn to appreciate the nature of other operations and where conflict arises, a passing agreement on VHF is usually the most appropriate solution.

At peak times during the high season a passenger vessel often has to wait for a berth on a pier to become vacant. Vessels waiting for a free berth should endeavour to avoid waiting in the Authorised Channel or abreast of another vessel and must not impede the passage of other passenger vessels proceeding to their allocated berth.

Masters are reminded that waiting vessels are ‘underway’ and the Col Regs apply.

See diagrams on [p.38](#) and [p.39](#) for preferred navigation at Westminster and in the Upper Pool.



Wash and Draw-off

Due care should be taken in the vicinity of vessels moored and working on berths adjacent to the navigational channel

Caution is necessary over the low water period when “draw-off” can cause particular problems to berthed vessels.



Wash and Draw-off

See diagrams on pp.35–42 for speed limits

Central London is increasingly busy with fast commuter and passenger vessels, cruise ships, tugs and tows, leisure craft, emergency services and port service vessels. This activity inevitably causes varying degrees of wash, day and night. Many factors affect wash and/or draw-off from an individual vessel including depth of water, tide height, hull design, type of foreshore and wall, speed, whether accelerating or decelerating, and the propulsion system.

When underway, **masters** of vessels should always be mindful of the wash and/or draw-off being created, particularly at low water. It may be necessary to reduce speed well below the speed limit and if possible, increase the distance passing sensitive areas, which should be included in a vessel’s generic passage plan. When the PLA deals with wash and/or draw-off issues it attempts to find solutions that do not unduly impede river trade whilst ensuring that damage to appropriately engineered structures and correctly moored vessels is prevented.

The responsibility for preventing wash lies with the **master** of the vessel. However a vessel moored or berthed on the tidal Thames should ensure that adequate protection is provided and that the vessel is appropriately moored.

Outside central London, very small recreational vessels such as rowing boats, canoes and stand-up paddle boards have minimal free board and masters should bear in mind the dramatic and sometimes dangerous effect that wash and/or draw-off can have on them.

General Direction 6 – Stern Marking

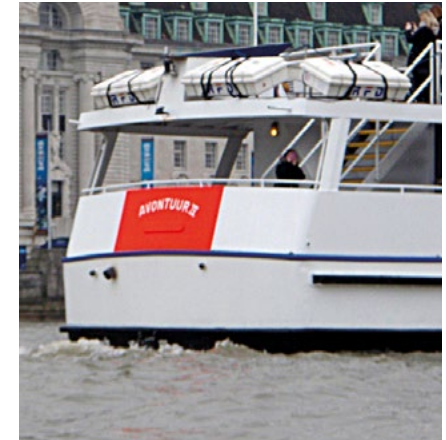
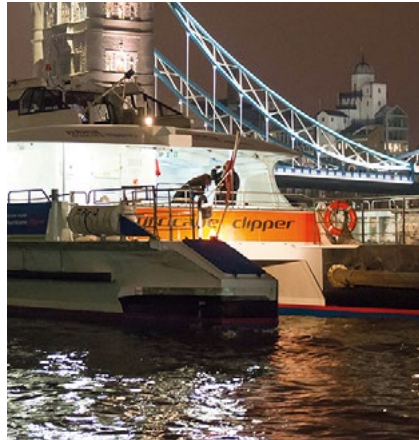
It is mandatory that all passenger vessels have correctly marked sterns in accordance with GD9.

All Class IV, V, VI and HSC vessels should display an area of high visibility reflective material, which is evenly illuminated at night.

These markings will be inspected by the MCA or PLA as part of the vessel certification process and should conform to the following specification:

- Be between 3.75m² and 4.5m²
- Be in a vertical or near vertical plane as possible
- Face directly astern
- Be evenly illuminated between sunset and sunrise

Stern Marking



Col Regs - Rule 5

Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision



Lookout

Col Reg Rule 5 is arguably the single most important element in the safe operation of any vessel. Its importance cannot be overstated, especially on a river as busy as the Thames and more especially through central London.

Rule 5 is short but it has two vital elements:

- You must pay attention to everything – not just looking ahead out of the bridge windows but looking all around the vessel, using all your senses and all personnel and equipment available to you. There must always be someone looking-out. If the weather or the situation around you causes concern, then more lookouts may be needed and you must call them without hesitation
- You must use all of that information continuously to assess the situation your vessel is in and the risk of collision

Central London is particularly busy with other passenger and commuter vessels but outside this area there are many more leisure vessels. Some of these such as canoes, paddle boards and rowing boats are particularly small and hard to see making a good lookout all the more vital.

Col Regs - Rule 5

“Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing ...”

**PLA General Directions
No. 12**

“...an effective, continuous listening watch maintained on VHF...”

**PLA Notices to Mariners
(NTMs) *are available here*****London VTS
(Vessel Traffic Services)**

London VTS staff are available 24 hours a day for advice or information via VHF or telephone and river users are encouraged to visit the Barrier or Port Control Centre facilities.

Teddington to Crayfordness:

VHF channel 14

Phone 020 3260 7711

Crayfordness to Seaward Limit:

VHF channels 68 & 69

Phone 01474 562215

Communications

London VTS

Navigation in the Port of London is always busy and local restrictions change constantly. The PLA issues Notices to Mariners (see panel) to keep river users abreast of events and changing conditions.

London VTS will warn of short notice changes and reinforce Notices to Mariners by the routine half-hourly navigation broadcast on VHF (channel 14) at 15 and 45 minutes past the hour upstream of Crayfordness. Examples of information passed on the navigation broadcast are tide heights, bridge arch closures, sporting events and temporary requests to proceed at slow speed.

The local VHF VTS channel (see panel) is used primarily for vessel traffic management but is also used as a local calling frequency and for making “passing agreements” to mitigate the risk of close quarter situations. VHF channel 14 in particular is very busy, so transmissions must be short and not used for long inter-ship conversations or inappropriate comment.

It is vital that the masters listen closely to VHF at all times.

Passenger vessels must ensure that the noise from the engines, discos, commentaries etc do not interfere with the VHF radio traffic in the wheelhouse.

Should a vessel be navigated for any period of time singled handed, London VTS should be advised accordingly.

Local traffic control

At certain times on the river there will be a need to manage traffic in order to create space and keep all river users safe. The following scenarios are where you might expect to see local traffic control in place:

- River closures
- Events
- Arrival and departure of a large ship
- During the handling of an incident

Local traffic control will be carried out by an attending Harbour Service Launch displaying blue flashing lights. VHF channel 14 will be used by the Launch who will have a call sign prefixed by “**Thames Patrol**”

As a **master** you are to ensure you follow all instructions as given by the local traffic control vessel and remain well clear when advised to do so.

Communications



Contacting emergency services

Emergency call procedure

The best ways to summon help in an emergency while afloat are listed here – in order of preference:

- **London VTS**
on VHF channel 14
- **London Coastguard**
on VHF channel 16
- **London Coastguard**
call 999 / 112

The duty officers at London VTS and London Coastguard are stationed next to each other and are trained to coordinate the appropriate response (RNLI, Ambulance, Police, Fire).

Procedures for Man Overboard ([pp.73–74](#)) and Medical Emergencies (this page) are the exception.

Appendix A on [p.80](#) outlines procedures for making Mayday and Pan Pan calls.

Police or Fire Brigade Assistance

Police or Fire Brigade assistance, either on scene or at an arranged berth/wharf, should ideally be sought via:

- **London VTS**
on VHF channel 14
- or if no response
- **London Coastguard**
on VHF channel 16

Otherwise dial 999 / 112 and ask for Police / Fire Brigade as appropriate.

The Marine Policing Unit (MPU) at Wapping also maintains a continuous listening watch on VHF channel 14.

On board emergency plans should clearly show how to obtain Police and Fire Brigade assistance in your area of operation.

Medical Emergencies

If you have a medical emergency on board, in the first instance you should call:

- **London Coastguard**
on 999 / 112

The Coastguard's key concern is to provide a correct and timely response to the casualty, London Ambulance Service's preferred option is for the casualty or someone with the casualty to contact LAS via 999 so LAS can gather casualty information, triage the casualty and provide the best available care for the patient.

If this is not possible, HM Coastguard can contact LAS on behalf of the casualty, but will require sufficient information to enable LAS to triage and assist the patient.

The vessel may have to wait alongside for LAS response. HM Coastguard may also send a lifeboat or other asset to assist. Medical care of passengers, such as vessel's first-aiders and crew's response should be included in the on board emergency plans.

Although everything will be managed and risk assessed to try and prevent incidents and accidents, they may still happen.

The **operator** should aid the master in controlling the immediate incident and passengers and then assist the relevant authorities in reporting and investigating incidents.

Once an incident has been investigated and concluded the **operator** should take every step to ensure that recommendations are carried out and that any internal findings are managed so as to prevent a re-occurrence of the incident

Security Guidance

Reporting of suspect packages or suspect activity

Operation Boatman is the key reactive plan produced by the Metropolitan Police Marine Policing Unit (MPU) in consultation with the passenger vessel industry and the Port of London Authority. It is aimed at providing a pre-planned response should a threat materialise to public safety and/or navigation.

It is stressed that *Operation Boatman* is limited to the Metropolitan Police area of jurisdiction. Vessel and pier operators on the Thames but outside this area (e.g. Gravesend) will need to engage with the relevant local Police Authority at their home mooring.

Masters and operators should also be familiar with the TRANSEC Guidance document *Maritime Security Guidance, Tidal River Thames Passenger Services (Vessels & Piers)*

This Code does not go into specific details but it is the responsibility of vessel and pier **operators** to be aware of and stay up-to-date with these initiatives and to brief their staff accordingly.

For guidance

Phone the MPU Duty Officer on **07774 141299**

The Marine Policing Unit at Wapping will provide guidance on reporting suspect packages through Operation Boatman.

In an emergency

Contact the MPU **via London VTS on channel 14** or call 999 / 112 and ask for police.

Man Overboard

Each **operator** will have its own procedure (set out in the Emergency Procedures Manual within the SMS) for recovering a **Man Overboard** but this page serves as a general check list of actions to be done in the event of a Man Overboard either while underway, alongside a pier or if a person is discovered to be missing on arrival at a pier.

In all cases the navigation authority and vessel operator (or owner) management must be informed as soon as possible after the immediate incident has been dealt with.

Man OverBoard (MOB)

Immediate response to a Man Overboard is critical if the casualty is to be recovered alive, but care must be taken not to neglect the safety of the passengers remaining on board.

In most circumstances, many of the emergency response procedures for **MOB while underway** will also apply to **MOB/Missing Person at a pier**

- Make every attempt to mark the last known position of the person (MOB) with a life buoy, light or flare
- Press the AIS Lifebuoy icon twice and the VHF DSC Button
- Post additional lookouts to maintain visual contact with MOB – this is vital
- Reduce speed and manoeuvre vessel initially to keep screws away from the MOB and then to recover MOB and provide lee (tidal and wind conditions dependent)
- If a person is lost while passengers are transferring to or from the vessel it is quite possible that other passengers nearby may jump in to attempt rescue and so put themselves into danger. Passenger embarkation and disembarkation need firm control to prevent this.
- If at a pier, additional assistance can be sought from the land-based emergency services

Continued >

Man OverBoard (MOB)

During a MOB incident

- Stop music or entertainment
- Sound General Alarm
- **Initiate MAYDAY or PAN PAN call as appropriate on VHF channel 14** (see p.80)
- If at a pier also call 999 / 112 for Emergency Services assistance
- Provide as much detail as possible including:
 - Time of discovery of MOB
 - Number of MOB
 - Weather conditions
 - Direction of Flow
 - Any likely points where MOB might be found (e.g. bridges, locks, moorings, weirs etc)
- If appropriate, deploy some crew ashore to undertake initial search
- Alert other vessels or persons ashore and seek assistance
- Sound horn regularly to advise vessel whereabouts
- Delegate MOB procedures to all crew and personnel, i.e. launch of LSA, lookout, deployment of grab net or MOB ladder, manning of search light and other aids as required

- Crowd control
 - Keep in constant communications with passengers and ensure other passengers do not take risks or are put at risk
 - Stop passengers congregating on one side of the vessel which may cause list, hindering vessel manoeuvrability and rescue efforts
 - Ensure entrances/exits are kept clear and keep rescue zone clear for retrieval
- Have blanket and other First Aid equipment available and prepared for the rescue zone
- Stand by to assist emergency services

After a MOB incident

- Report the incident to the relevant authorities (p.78) and where appropriate ensure statements, witness names and addresses are taken and photos taken if necessary
- Ensure that any life-saving or First Aid equipment is replaced/restocked

Crew and passenger violence – prevention

Vessel **operators** should attempt to anticipate problem situations by evaluating parties and groups at the time of booking; parties of all ages and sizes have potential to cause trouble and it is wrong to pre-judge any particular age group or community. Potential anti-social situations can often be recognised during the initial booking procedure and appropriate judgements made then. **Operators** should consider early liaison with local police for advice about the viability of the event and measures to prevent crime and disorder.

Events that have previously proved problematic are under-21 events, internet ticketed events and some urban music events. If you have enquiries for any of these events, consideration should be given to carrying out a full assessment.

The Metropolitan Police *Promotion/Events Risk Assessment Form 696* is ideal for this and should be submitted prior to any such event.

Adopting robust assessment processes will assist in identifying appropriate measures to reduce risks, which may then be embodied in booking conditions and include such measures as limiting party size, bar restrictions etc.

All **operators** should be aware of their responsibilities under the Private Security Act 2001 in relation to the vetting of passengers by staff and security procedures

In particular, it must be recognised that a person performing a security function (i.e. vetting and/or searching) must be trained and registered under the Act.

If the assessment highlights a need for licensed door supervisors, consideration should be given to employing dedicated staff. **Operators** should recognise the risks of overburdening their own staff with security and other roles.

Continued >

Crew and Passenger violence – scenarios

There are several approaches that may be taken with unruly or aggressive passengers and each situation must be quickly assessed and acted upon. This section is designed to help **masters** and crews make the best judgment and mitigating action dependent on circumstances. In some instance police assistance may be necessary.

Possible Scenarios

The following list is not exhaustive but illustrates some situations:

- Individual aggrieved by some aspect of the trip and is making a considerable disturbance
- An individual has boarded perhaps under the influence of alcohol or drugs and is behaving aggressively or in an anti-social manner
- A large party has consumed excessive amounts of alcohol and is disrupting other passengers or worse, started fighting

Immediate Course of Action

Mindful of the above, always try to recognise a potential situation developing and take action before it deteriorates. Thereafter:

- Assess risk and/or danger
- Try to calm the situation – talk quietly
- Try to understand the reason for the behaviour
- Request peer passenger or organiser to assist
- Call for emergency services if necessary
- Attempt to clear passenger(s) from the vessel and pier

Secondary Course of Action

- Are crew and staff involved in the incident?
- Advise Vessel Operator (or owner) management
- Complete an Accident/Incident Report Form
- Prepare to make a statement to the Police

Dealing with the Media

Companies should set out ways to deal with possible media interest in an incident; it is recommended that a single company spokesperson is appointed to handle questions.

Operators should have specific responses laid out (in their Crisis Management Document) and train their staff to deal with the media according to those pre-planned responses.

Staff, customers and suppliers should be informed before the story appears and any statements issued should be as positive as possible and appropriate.

In the event of a major incident or event, especially when casualties are expected, the media will rapidly approach the vessel for comments and pictures. It is recognised that this is a daunting and stressful experience for the crew who are not media-trained. Nevertheless they should be briefed to give a holding response rather than a “no comment” response.

An example of a holding response could be:

- *“An incident [fire, bridge strike, collision etc] has happened on the vessel [Vessel name], at [location and time]. Emergency services have been called/are currently on the scene”*
- *“It is not known at this stage if anyone is injured and the rescue operation is underway”*
- *“The media are urged to contact the emergency services or the vessel operator/owner for more details”*

On no account should any member of the crew give names and numbers of possible fatalities, injured or missing persons.

There should be no speculation on the reason for the accident/incident, as that is part of the investigation.



Reporting obligations

The Harbourmaster is obliged under the Port's SMS to investigate all (navigational) incidents and in certain cases to report such incidents to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch and/or the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

In the event of being involved in a navigational incident, either directly or indirectly as a witness, it is most important that all the facts are recorded for any subsequent enquiry.

Failure to report an incident is not only an offence against PLA Byelaw No.8 but causes considerable additional work, insurance difficulties and embarrassment for both the operator and master.

Incident Reporting

Depending on the severity of the incident, the number and range of organisations that can be involved in an investigation, as shown below. This lists the priority order in which they might be contacted:

- **London VTS on VHF channel 14.**
VTS in conjunction with London Coastguard, will coordinate the appropriate emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance, Lifeboat)
- **The PLA** – *for all incidents on the tidal Thames*
Details of any incident will automatically be passed onto the PLA by London VTS
- **The Vessel Operator**
- **The MCA** – *for all incidents (except to PLA licensed vessels) particularly where a vessel is damaged.*
- **The MAIB** – *for serious incidents (fatalities and serious injuries) that occur while afloat.*
- **The HSE** – *for all incidents that occur on piers and jetties.*
- **Pier owners**
- **The vessel insurers**

The **master** should immediately report an incident to London VTS and then make a follow-up written report on a PLA incident reporting form to the relevant Harbourmaster. It is very much in the **master's** own interest to report his view of what happened as soon as possible; the authorities investigating the incident should then obtain a balanced view from all parties of what happened. [See p.79 for contact details](#)

A specific step-by-step checklist to handling and reporting an incident should be included in the **operators** Emergency Procedure Manual (part of the SMS). The DPA should be able to provide details.

Incident Reporting

Port of London Authority (PLA) – via London VTS

Teddington to Crayfordness

VHF: **Channel 14**

Phone: **01474 562215**

Crayfordness to Seaward Limit

VHF: **Channels 68 & 69**

Phone: **020 8855 0315**

The Harbourmaster should be informed of all near misses, safety observations and incidents on the tidal Thames and the on-going internal investigations, as well as being provided with an **incident report form** and any other evidence which will assist in establishing the cause of the incident.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)

Email: ColchesterMO@mcga.gov.uk

Phone: **01689 890400**

The local MCA office should be informed of any incident (except to vessels licensed by the PLA) and in particular any damage to a vessel, so that they can if necessary inspect the vessel and make any recommendations to return the vessel to work.

If unsure, report to the PLA *and* the MCA

Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB)

Phone: **023 8023 2527**

[MAIB website](#)

This number is the MAIB's dedicated accident reporting line and is monitored 24 hours a day.

Accidents, including serious injuries and fatalities, should be reported to the MAIB by the quickest means possible. This is so that the MAIB can decide whether to investigate the accident without delay, and prevents evidence of all types being lost or decaying.

After this initial notification you can expect to be asked to complete the *Accident Report Form* (ARF).

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

[HSE Website](#)

If you are an employer:

You must report any work-related deaths, and certain work-related injuries, cases of disease, and near misses involving your employees wherever they are working.

If you are in control of premises (piers and jetties):

You must report any work-related deaths, certain injuries to members of the public and self-employed people on your premises, and dangerous occurrences (some near miss incidents) that occur on your premises.

If unsure, report to the MAIB *and* the HSE

Emergency Transmissions

Emergency transmissions should generally be made on VHF channel 14 – if there is no response, use channel 16.

The master will have been trained in making MAYDAY and PAN PAN emergency transmission as part of their BML.

Making such a call should not be taken lightly and ideally it is the master's decision whether to do so and which transmission to make.

However if the master (or other suitably trained crew member) is incapacitated then another crew member may have to make the transmission.

Right is a brief synopsis of the type of emergency that should trigger such a transmission and by what method.

It may be a fine line between a MAYDAY and a PAN PAN situation – if in doubt, make the MAYDAY transmission

MAYDAY

A MAYDAY situation is when a vessel or person is in “**grave and imminent danger**” and requires **immediate assistance**, for example: sinking, fire, explosion or Man Overboard.

Thames AIS has a facility to activate a MAYDAY transmission using the lifebelt icon on the toolbar; this then transmits a GPS signal highlighting an emergency on board. It should only be used to supplement a MAYDAY VHF transmission.

Hearing a MAYDAY obliges potential rescuers (including emergency services and other craft in the area) to drop all other activities and immediately attempt a rescue.

Example of a MAYDAY transmission:

“MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY”

“This is [Vessel Name, Vessel Name, Vessel Name]”

“Position [XX XX north, XX XX west] or [opposite this pier/that landmark]”

“My vessel is [on fire/sinking/has suffered an explosion]” or [I have a Man Overboard]”

“I require immediate assistance”

“We have [XXX] people on board”

“OVER”

Wait five seconds then repeat if no reply is heard.

PAN PAN

PAN PAN indicates an urgent situation of a lower order than a “grave and imminent threat requiring immediate assistance”, such as a mechanical breakdown, loss of rudder and control, or a medical problem, but where life is not in peril.

PAN PAN informs potential rescuers (including emergency services and other craft in the area) that a safety problem exists, whereas ‘MAYDAY’ obliges them to drop all other activities and immediately attempt a rescue.

Hearing a PAN PAN obliges other vessels to listen and establish whether they are able to assist. If not they should remain silent and keep listening.

Example of a PAN PAN transmission:

“PAN PAN, PAN PAN, PAN PAN”

“This is [Vessel Name, Vessel Name, Vessel Name]”

“Position [XX XX north, XX XX west] or [opposite this pier/that landmark]”

“My vessel has [lost power and is drifting] or [I have a Man Over Board]”

“We have [XXX] people on board”

“OVER”

Wait five seconds then repeat if no reply is heard.

Glossary

AIS	Auto-Identification System	MCA	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
ARF	Accident Report Form	MGN	Marine Guidance Notice
BL	ByeLaw	MOB	Man Overboard
BM	British Marine (Formally PBA)	MPU	Marine Policing Unit
BML	Boat Master Licence	MSN	Merchant Shipping Notice
CoC	Certificate of Compliance	NtM	Notice to Mariners
Col Regs	International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea	NRA	Navigational Risk Assessment
COSHH ...	Control of Substances Hazardous to Health	Ofcom	Office of Communications
DPA	Designated Person Ashore	PA	Public/Passenger Address
DSC	Digital Selective Calling (on VHF radio)	Pax	Passengers
DSCM	Domestic Safety Management Code	PLA	Port of London Authority
GD	General Direction	PNTM	Permanent Notice to Mariners
HM	Harbourmaster	POB	Persons On Board (part of the AIS)
HSC	High Speed Craft	PPP	Port Passage Plan
HSE	Health and Safety Executive	PVOPsC ..	Passenger Vessel Operations Code
IMO	International Maritime Organisation	RIB	Rigid Inflatable Boat
IMSPBC ..	Inland Waters Small Passenger Boat Code	RNLI	Royal National Lifeboat Institution
IOSH	Institute of Occupational Safety and Health	RYA	Royal Yachting Association
ISM	International Safety Management Code	RCA	Rowing Code Area
LFB	London Fire Brigade	SAR	Search and Rescue
LKE	Local Knowledge Endorsement	SCV	Small Commercial Vessel
LPV	Large Passenger Vessel (>250 pax)	SMS	Safety Management System
LPHA	London Port Health Authority	SOLAS	International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea
LRS	London River Services	TBCZ	Thames Barrier Control Zone
LSA	Life Saving Appliances	TfL	Transport for London
MAIB	Marine Accident Investigation Branch	TRRC	Thames Regional Rowing Council
MARPOL ..	Maritime Pollution	VHF	Very High Frequency (radio)
		VTS	Vessel Traffic Services

We hope that you have found this Code useful and informative. If you have any further questions regarding the Passenger Vessel Operations Code or have any queries or suggestions regarding anything in this document, please contact the Thames Skills Academy or any of the Thames Partners. The weblinks used in this document were correct at time of publication but they are, by their nature, prone to change. Please report dead links via the [PLA website](#).



Based on the 2016 publication: *A Code of Practice for Passenger Vessel Operation on the Thames (Third Edition) 2016*

Produced in collaboration by The Port of London Authority, London River Services, British Marine, the Marine Policing Unit of the Metropolitan Police, HM Coastguard, London Fire Brigade, the Company of Watermen and Lightermen and the Thames Skills Academy.

Photographs: PLA archive / Darren Knight / Ben Fitzpatrick / Neil Pickford

Original illustrations: Neil Pickford (Based on data supplied by PLA Hydrographic services)

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