

Andrew Thin, Chairman  
Scottish Canals  
Canal House  
Applecross Street  
Glasgow G4 9SP

By email

12<sup>th</sup> September 2017

Dear Andrew

**Edinburgh Union Canal Towpath Study**

We note that Scottish Canals has recently published the above study on its website and is inviting comments.

We were only made aware of the study by a third party, and we would like to request that IWA is added to the stakeholder lists for all consultations carried out by Scottish Canals.

Whilst much of the content of the report seems very sensible, it would appear that the interests of boaters have not been taken into account. IWA is particularly concerned about two aspects of the report - the proposal for narrowing of bridge holes, and the suggestion that the canal only needs to be a minimum of 4 metres wide to allow for navigation.

We would draw your attention to the comments below which we will be submitting to the email address supplied for comments on the study.

Yours sincerely



**Les Etheridge**  
**National Chairman**

cc Steve Dunlop, Chief Executive, Scottish Canals

cc [17015@harrisonstevens.co.uk](mailto:17015@harrisonstevens.co.uk)

## **The Inland Waterways Association response to Scottish Canals - Edinburgh Union Canal Towpath Study**

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) is a membership charity that works to protect and restore the 6,500 miles of canals and rivers in England, Scotland and Wales. IWA has a network of volunteers and branches who deploy their expertise and knowledge to work constructively with navigation authorities, government and other organisations.

### **Introduction**

We note that this study was funded by Sustrans Scotland and that Scottish Canals appointed Harrison Stevens Landscape Architects to carry out a consultation to identify opportunities to improve the towpath along the Union Canal from Lochrin Basin to the Almond Aqueduct in Edinburgh.

IWA has a general observation that the remit of consultation doesn't seem to have taken account of the waterway's primary purpose as a navigation. Boaters (boat owners, hirers or operators of powered craft) do not seem to have been considered in the research and resulting key findings. The only boats referred to would appear to be canoes/small craft which access the canal from the towpath in specific locations. No consideration has been made of larger powered boats travelling along the canal from Falkirk to Edinburgh as a destination.

### **Place Specific Improvement Strategies**

#### **Bridge Holes**

The proposed soft, hard and visual approaches to the towpath under bridges would be acceptable, but IWA objects to any intrusive widening which reduces the navigable width of a waterway. In particular IWA objects to the proposal for cantilevered sections of towpath which would restrict navigation through the bridge for boats. Lengthening of the towpath that forms the towpath through the bridge hole, ie as per soft/hard widening proposals, would be more acceptable. IWA considers that visual widening through the use of mirrors is a very good idea, although we would suggest that the mirrors should be made out of a vandal-proof material.

The proposed minimum width of 4 metres through bridgeholes and other narrowings such as aqueducts is acceptable, given that the craft gauge for this waterway is a little under that (12 ft 6"/3.81m). The remainder of the channel other than bridgeholes and aqueducts needs to be a minimum of 8 metres, to allow for two boats of craft gauge to pass each other comfortably. In general IWA would object to any loss of water space other than in very specific locations where this could be justified. We would draw your attention to IWA policy on the subject of structures impeding the waterway:

[www.waterways.org.uk/news\\_campaigns/campaigns/briefing\\_notes/pdfs/structures\\_or\\_craft\\_impeding\\_the\\_waterway](http://www.waterways.org.uk/news_campaigns/campaigns/briefing_notes/pdfs/structures_or_craft_impeding_the_waterway)

#### **Access Improvements**

IWA is generally supportive of these proposals.

## **Alternative Routes**

IWA is generally supportive of proposals to create new routes, where third party funding can be obtained to carry out the works, to reduce conflicts between cyclists and other towpath users.

## **Placemaking**

IWA is generally supportive of these proposals.

## **Overall Physical Improvement Strategies**

### **Wayfinding & Signage Strategy**

IWA is generally supportive of these proposals but notes the proposal for every crossing bridge to be signed with the name of the road on either side. Whilst that is acceptable, and useful for those using the canal as pedestrians or cyclists, we would request that you ensure the original signage with the name of the canal bridge, as used in the navigation guides used by boaters, is retained.

### **Lighting Strategy**

IWA is generally supportive of these proposals.

### **Towpath Width Strategy**

The proposed soft and hard widenings would be acceptable, but IWA objects to any loss of waterspace as a result of intrusive widening (eg extension of the path into the water space via deck/pontoons) as this would reduce the navigable width of the waterway. The proposed minimum width of 4 metres through bridgeholes and other narrowings such as aqueducts is acceptable, but the remainder of the channel other than bridgeholes and aqueducts needs to be more than 8 metres, to allow for two boats of craft gauge to pass each other comfortably. In general IWA would object to any loss of waterspace other than in very specific locations where this could be justified.

### **Surface Improvement Strategy**

IWA is generally supportive of these proposals. Where any towpath works are carried out, the opportunity should be taken of installing mooring rings or bollards to create additional visitor moorings for hire boats and other powered boats that use this waterway.

### **Landmark Opportunities Strategy**

Whilst IWA supports innovation in canal restoration and development, and can see the huge success that the Falkirk Wheel and the Kelpies have become, IWA would warn against novel ideas just for their own sake. Some ideas end up not only costing more than anticipated to maintain, but can end up looking unloved and then attract the wrong sort of attention. Novel solutions should therefore take account of ongoing maintenance and running costs.

## **Overall Social Improvement Strategies**

### **Code of Conduct Strategy**

The proposal for a Code of Conduct is a good idea and we suggest that cyclists should also be advised that they should be prepared to slow down and/or dismount when appropriate. As an Appendix we attach IWA's

Cycling Code which Scottish Canals may find useful when drawing up the Code of Conduct for towpath users.

## Appendix - IWA's Cycling Code

- SLOW DOWN when approaching anglers, towpath walkers and other towpath users, especially family groups and disabled people or those with reduced mobility, and be prepared to dismount or wait for people to get out of your way.
- ALWAYS have a bell or horn fitted to your cycle and ALWAYS use it when approaching other users of the towpath.
- BE PREPARED to dismount when local signs or common sense indicate that you should, for example at congested locations and under low, narrow or blind bridges
- BE CONSIDERATE to all other users of the towpath. Pedestrians have priority. Be particularly aware of boat crews operating locks or bridges or stepping off a boat onto the towpath.
- SLOW DOWN when approaching bridges, locks and other structures, especially when there is a blind bend and you cannot see who or what is ahead of you, and be prepared to stop.
- BE AWARE that very occasionally a towpath crosses a road, for example when there is no room under a road bridge for a towpath. Be prepared to stop and be aware of fast moving traffic on busy main roads.
- WATCH OUT for hazards on the towpath such as ropes from boats, mooring stakes and bollards. Allow anglers time to move their tackle before you try to pass.
- If cycling at night have lights fitted to your cycle and use them.
- Wearing headphones can limit communication between cyclist and other users. For this reason it is not recommended.
- AVOID cycling in large groups or having races with fellow cyclists – the towpaths are not an appropriate place for this.
- BE FRIENDLY to other waterway users. The towpaths are there for everyone to enjoy.

Additional advice for cyclists can be found on the IWA website:

[www.waterways.org.uk/waterways/activities/cycling/cycling](http://www.waterways.org.uk/waterways/activities/cycling/cycling)

Advice for other towpath users can be found in IWA's Briefing Note on Mixed Use of Towpaths on the IWA website:

[www.waterways.org.uk/news\\_campaigns/campaigns/briefing\\_notes/pdfs/mixed\\_use\\_of\\_towpaths](http://www.waterways.org.uk/news_campaigns/campaigns/briefing_notes/pdfs/mixed_use_of_towpaths)

More detailed guidance can be found in IWA's Policy on Towing Paths, one of a series of IWA Policy documents that can be found on IWA's website:

[www.waterways.org.uk/information/policy\\_documents/towing\\_paths](http://www.waterways.org.uk/information/policy_documents/towing_paths)