

Autumn 2024



FOR THE COMMUNITY AND RIGHTS OF BOAT DWELLERS

The True Cost of the Licence Fee Increase

The Canal and River Trust (CRT) has introduced a “glide path” with incremental and differential licence pricing through to 2028, which includes a significant surcharge on boats without a home mooring. The previously clear pricing structure has been replaced by online calculators, which obscure the true cost for boaters. Is this deception by design?

Starting in April 2024, these boats will face a 5% surcharge in the first year, on top of planned standard above inflation increases, which have already risen by 18% from 2022 to 2024. For narrowboats without a home mooring, this year’s total increase will be 11%, while widebeams (10ft and 14ft) will see increases of 25% and 39%, respectively.



NBTA volunteers attended events across the country and leafleted beside CRT stalls to raise public awareness about the licence fee surcharge.

Looking ahead, CRT expects standard licence fees for narrowboats with home moorings to rise by 31% by 2028, based on a projected consumer price index (CPI) of around 4%, plus an additional 1.5%. That’s before any surcharge. CRT’s aim is to increase revenue by an average of CPI plus 3%, but most of the burden will fall on boats without a home mooring and larger vessels. By 2028, narrowboats without a home mooring could face a total increase of 61%, while 10ft and 14ft widebeams might see rises of 97% and 130%, respectively. These figures are minimum estimates.

Additionally, CRT only provides five-year projections (2023-2028), despite operating under a 10-year financial plan, leaving future price increases uncertain. In 2022, CRT raised licence fees twice, and they may increase them further in the coming years depending on inflation. Current estimates assume 4% CPI plus 1.5% added by CRT for the next five years.

If CRT manages to extort the surcharge on boats without a home mooring this year, the future looks increasingly unpredictable and financially insecure.

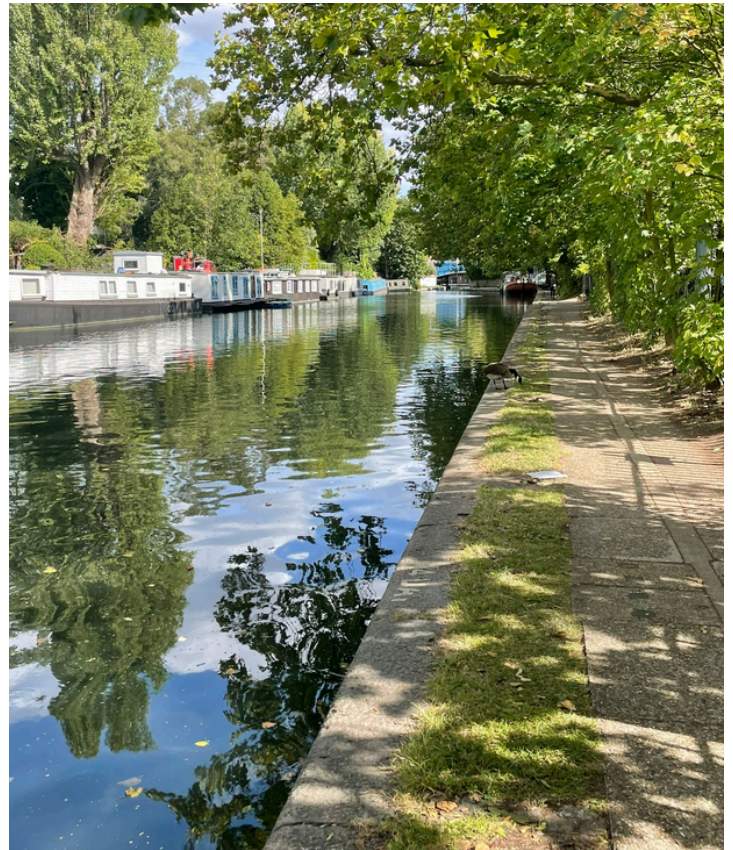
Chargeable Moorings Remain Underused

It's been over a year since Canal and River Trust (CRT) started introducing chargeable moorings as part of their plan to bring down boat numbers in London. So far only part of the plan to bring in 1.1km of chargeable moorings have been implemented and already these ones have had a great impact on the boaters that use these areas. Added to the chargeable moorings that were bought in with CRT's London Mooring Strategy, the length of chargeable moorings in London will do up to 1.5km.

CRT claimed to have consulted boaters in 2022 on the need for such moorings but has not provided the results of this consultation. Notably, their 2022 "Issues & Challenges Report" did not mention a shortage of moorings, instead highlighting concerns about disrepair and lack of facilities.

In reality, these new moorings remain underused. According to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request submitted in June, only 1,203 bookings were made between October 2023 and May 2024 out of a possible 7,224, indicating that the moorings were used at just 17% capacity. Though chargeable moorings have existed since 2019, priced at £10-£12 a night, CRT has significantly raised the price despite low demand, leading to more unused spaces.

The FOI revealed that CRT earned a gross income of £36,532 from these bookings, an average of just over £30 per night. This fee forces boaters to pay to moor their own homes, often in cramped conditions with limited views. Rather than improving access to the capital, these charges have effectively priced out many existing boaters, leaving prime central locations empty while the remaining boaters are forced into smaller, overcrowded areas.



Little Venice chargeable moorings in August 2024.
Once brimming with life, now desolate.

The situation has also worsened safety concerns, as the once-bustling towpaths become deserted, leaving them more vulnerable to crime. As a result, many boaters must now cruise for a full day to find affordable moorings or risk fines. Others may opt for a River Only license, staying on the Lee and Stort, reducing CRT's revenue further. Boaters from outside London are likely to avoid the capital altogether, choosing to moor on the outskirts.

A subsequent FOI in October revealed that three Mooring Rangers, tasked with managing these moorings, cost CRT £104k annually, far exceeding the £73k annual income from the moorings. This suggests CRT may even be operating at a loss, with no clear benefit to boaters.



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Want to get more involved with NBTA London? We hold monthly meetings on the first Sunday of each month at 4pm.

The meeting can be accessed online via: <https://8x8.vc/nbta/nbta>
Alternatively, you can use the dial in details: Dial-in: +44 330 808 1706

PIN: 45925961#

No Fire without Smoke!

Councils everywhere are being pushed to reduce air pollution, especially particulates emitted by burning of various fuels. Under Environment Act 2021, some are considering extending existing Smoke Control Areas to cover waterways. This will enable councils to enforce the use of smokeless fuels and/or DEFRA approved stoves on boats in those areas. No evidence is available to show boats to be more than a minor source of emissions. Be very clear, these measures are not climate measures, indeed, if they were, they would be counterproductive, as are LEZs (-replacing old diesels with new diesels does not tackle carbon emissions!).

Few boats are kitted out with DEFRA approved stoves, which of course carry a premium price, and the lowest power output is 4.5kw, so many boats would have to open all windows and doors whilst using. The alternatives left are expensive fossil-based smokeless fuels in current stoves, or in DEFRA-approved stoves-only smokeless again, or kiln dried wood, despite the massive carbon release at drying stage and at transport from the Baltic. One more alternative is to convert to diesel heating, inflicting carbon and particulate emissions, but seemingly compliant with clean air zones.

Of course, we encourage everyone to take care what you burn. Firewood should be as dry as possible and untreated, but we fully accept that many of us cannot afford such things and scavenge wood as and where it presents. We therefore also ask everyone to be a part of the conversation about our responsibilities, individually and as a community in this matter. Perhaps we can do better than we do now! Please contact us at secretariat@bargee-traveller.org.uk



Boaters face another costly winter heating their homes. The enforcement of smokeless fuels and/or DEFRA approved stoves will only increase the cost and concerns.

NBTA
Boats are Homes
National Barge Travellers Association

The **National Barge Travellers Association** (NBTA) is a member-led organisation of travelling boat dwellers and their supporters. We believe in mutual solidarity within our community through our casework and campaigning. We encourage our community to take action for the interests of the community as a whole.

FOR THE COMMUNITY AND RIGHTS OF BOAT DWELLERS

The Campaign for the Energy Grant

As we head into winter, the cost of living on a boat increases massively for many of us, with paying for coal, gas, or diesel to heat our homes. Some of us may forage for free wood to burn. However, this option is now threatened when moored within 'clean air zones' due to bans on burning foraged wood.

In the last few years the cost of fuels to heat our homes has dramatically risen. In some cases costs have doubled. But it hasn't just been boat dwellers that have felt the cost of heating homes exponentially rise. The whole of the UK has seen a great increase in the cost of heating and energy in general. In 2022 in response to this crisis, the government decided to pay £400 towards energy costs for most homeowners. At first however, many households, including boat dwellers, were left out.

Along with non-NBTA members, and other Traveller organisations, we lobbied different MPs across the country. We also lobbied CRT to get them to put pressure on the government. NBTA also met several times with the civil servants, responsible for the Energy Bills Support scheme, including with the deputy director-general of the

Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy.

Many of us sent emails to CRT demanding they do something as well. Then CRT started to talk to the government and made at least one press release stating that boats without home moorings should also get the grant.

Into the summer of 2023 we continued with our campaign including boats with banners and also handing a petition into 10 Downing St. Along with all this, a few boaters without home moorings on CRT waterways started legal action for discrimination against the government on the basis of being left out of the scheme. Two weeks after the solicitor put the papers into court, the government announced that they would pay both energy grants worth £600 to each boat licenced on CRT waterways without a home mooring.

Although we should have got the grant from the beginning, with a campaign, political and legal pressure, we won. This shows that whilst it's never guaranteed, sometimes our collective effort can have a huge payoff.



NBTA LONDON's
WINTER WARMER
Ft short film screening 'Off The Cut' by Wendy Zakiewicz

Lets Eat, Drink
+ Be Boaty!

7pm
Sat 30th Nov
London Action
Resource Centre
E1 1ES

Tickets £2.50 each &
includes 1 free drink:
buytickets.at/nbtalondon/1426067

