

SEAPLANES – YOU NEED TO ACT NOW!

Dear Members,

You will have seen recent coverage in the JEP about the proposed seaplane service between Jersey & Guernsey. Many of us have had the tendency to dismiss the idea as being impractical or improbable in our already congested harbor and to not take it seriously. Some have even regarded it as an April Fools Joke. Well, it isn't – it's an idea which seems to have gained traction with some of those who carry influence in our island, & it is the view of many, including your committee, that there is a now push to make this seaplane service happen no matter what, and soon, and to impose whatever restrictions are necessary on all the other harbour users in order to make it safe.

The promoter of the project, Clear Harbour Airways, has let it be known that deposits on three aircraft have been paid already, so they are presumably feeling fairly sure about their position. In fact they aim to start services in June! They propose up to twenty movements a day (10 return trips) using the Small Roads as the take-off & landing area, with Single Otter seaplanes taxiing into the main harbour to drop & collect passengers – maybe 10 per flight.

Their analysis seems to be based on the assumption that Victoria Harbour in Vancouver, Canada (where successful seaplane operations have run for many years) is similar to St Helier. In Victoria there is sheltered water, a small tidal range, room for two marked runways plus separate marked channels for taxiing and for leisure craft, and no bottlenecks. None of the above apply in St Helier Small Roads.

Single Otter seaplanes apparently require a take off run of some 590 meters, and so a runway of about 900 meters. The runways in Victoria Harbour are of this size or more. In the Small Roads such a runway would have to go pretty much up and down the existing line for commercial vessels. This implies: -

- A huge increase in commercial traffic in the Small Roads which currently only handles some 10 movements of commercial traffic daily. As the only approach to St Helier this area can be very busy in the summer months.
- Ten times daily when an aircraft will suddenly appear literally out of the sky and expect room to land. So all leisure craft (and in summer there are often a lot) will need to make way, especially sailing vessels with their tall masts.
- Ten times daily when an aircraft will expect room to take off. Ditto re leisure craft.
- Twenty times daily when the aircraft will need space to taxi to and from the Harbour (unlikely to take less than 10-15 minutes each way), when the aircraft will need to pass between the Pier heads with its wingspan of 17.69 meters which makes it wider than the Manche Isle ferries and the Ronez & Valiant cargo ships. So anticipate a big increase in the number of red lights at the Pier head and the channel from Elizabeth Marina.
- For safety reasons, all traffic, including high speed ferries, is currently subject to a speed limit of 5 knots for much of length of the Small Roads, yet sea planes will be coming in at 60-80 knots. This speed & the prevailing cross winds will present a serious danger to leisure craft, which include vessels with limited manoeuvrability and rowing boats.

- There are anyway a lot of hazards around the Small Roads for an aircraft – the fueling berth, tankers, & storage, numerous high lighting towers, cranes, high terrain at Fort Regent & Elizabeth Castle, the La Collette Chimney, the Platte Rock Beacon and the East Rock Buoy at the end of the “runway”, numerous lobster pots & shellfish storage boxes all over the area and fishing lines at the pier heads.
- There is likely to be major confusion for visiting yachts, who are already not known for their adherence to the existing rules. And in the short-medium term there are no charts available to reflect the seaplane operations areas.

Clear Harbour Airlines state on their website that “We are therefore confident that the scheme we are developing with the Harbour Masters in St Helier and St Peter Port will allow all traffic to function safely with little, if any disruption”. In our view nothing could be further from the truth. Bear in mind that this service will be at its most successful in the summer months when the weather is fine – which is also when the most boaters are out and about. Disruption is inevitable in our view and we fear that the harbour area will become a less safe place.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of a seaplane service will only work if new and very restrictive rules and regulations are introduced for all users of the Small Roads & the harbour, especially leisure boaters, and even then not all dangers will be eliminated. There are probably better places in the island for the service to operate from.

If you are opposed to this proposal, it is important that you take the time to make your voice heard by registering your objection & the reasons for it. As announced in the Ports of Jersey Notice to Mariners No 8 issued on 3 April 2018, Marine & Risk Consultants Limited have been hired to undertake a risk assessment and will be meeting with stakeholders from 23 April 2018. We suggest that you contact them with your objections before then

IF YOU WISH TO OBJECT TO THIS PROPOSAL PLEASE EMAIL: -

William Heaps

Marine and Risk Consultants Ltd

Marico House, Bramshaw,
Southampton SO43 7JB, United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0)23 8081 1133 Fax: +44(0)23 8081 1177

Email: - william.heaps@marico.co.uk

with copies (optional) to: -

Jersey Coastguard jerseycoastguard@ports.je

St Helier Boat Owners Association admin@sthboa.co.uk

Or write to him at the address above

You can find the relevant Notice to Mariners at the link below.

<https://jerseyharbours.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=0889bc096563867ba94ba4e3e&id=788db09f7c&e=5df67e35f5>

Thank you.

Kind regards

Will Simpson

Chairman

St Helier Boat Owners Association