

Review of Subscriber Text Service Trial
Report by Head of Safety Management

Summary: This report sets out the findings of the recent trial of the “Text for Tide” SMS text service.

Members’ views are sought on the conclusions set out in section 6.

1 Background

1.1 The Navigation Committee at its meeting on the 4 September 2013 requested that a mobile phone SMS text messaging service detailing predicted times of low water slack at Great Yarmouth Yacht Station be trialled during the months of May and June 2014.

1.2 The text messaging service was set up to deliver the following message containing the data pertinent to the specific day to users who requested the service.

“29/8/13 Today’s predicted slack water at GYYS is 0930 and 2203, sunset is 1948hrs, tomorrow predicted slack water at GYYS is 1055 and 2314, sunset is 1946hrs”

1.3 Users were required to text “tide” to a specific number and the above message was returned. The cost to the user was only the cost of their own text charge applied by their mobile phone service provider.

2 Publicity

2.1 The Broads Authority and its partner organisations publicised the trial well in advance using the following methods:

- Broadsheet – newsletter sent to all toll payers annually in February with Toll account.
- Broadcaster – visitor newspaper provided to all hire boatyards for provision to all hire
- Press releases- the local press, EDP, carried an article promoting the proposed trial service; Radio Norfolk also included an interview of Breydon Ranger to publicise.
- Broads Authority website
- Broads Hire Boat Federation – Flyers sent to all hire boat operators for inclusion in the hire boat’s skippers manual.

- Norfolk and Suffolk Boating Association – Website and in their newsletter which is sent to all members.

3 Usage and Costs

- 3.1 During the trial period the service was used 253 times by 183 users. 53 of the users used the service more than once but typically only twice.
- 3.2 The direct costs incurred by the Authority for the trial period are as follows:-

Service provider set up costs	£145.00
Service subscription 2 months @ £30	£ 60.00
253Texts @ £0.06	<u>£ 15.18</u>
Total Direct Costs	£220.18

Please note that the above costs do not include officer time spent on the development of the service which was not insubstantial.

4 Feedback

- 4.1 Little feedback was received during and after the trial period with only one hire boat operator enquiring as to the future of the service.
- 4.2 The Norfolk and Suffolk Boating Association polled its members for their views on the service and only received one reply set out below:

‘Since BA introduced their text service to check the times of slack water at Yarmouth Yacht Station I have tried this on 3 occasions (2nd, 16th and 19th June). I travelled across Breydon and through Yarmouth on 3rd and 19th June and the slack water times were pretty much as I expected.

After sending a text message the response was almost immediate on each occasion and showed the slack water and sunset times for the day of the text and the following day.

The times for slack water given by the text response were 1 hour after low water rather than 1¼ hours as indicated on the BA website where it gives information for “Getting safely through Great Yarmouth” (and in the Green Book).

The 1 hour difference is as noted on the information about the text service on the BA website and in Broadcaster.

It would be interesting to know if the results are actually amended if there are extreme conditions (such as tidal surges) or if they are merely automatically calculated from the published tide tables.

The number to send the text to is given in Broadcaster; although I did not spot it when I first looked. Information on the text service was not that easy to find on the BA website.

It would be interesting to know how many requests for slack water times have been made.

My conclusion is that I gained nothing from the service and I would be surprised if many people would.'

- 4.2 Although the trial period has ended users can still text "Tide" to the provider but no message is returned. These requests are logged and since the end of the trial there have been only six requests from users.

5 Other Tide Information Delivery Methods

- 5.1 Tidal prediction information is available from many BA sources, tide tables booklet published by the Authority, Broads Authority Website, the Broadcaster newspaper where tide tables are replicated and at the yacht stations, plus a number of third party websites which provide tidal forecast information.

- There are over 3,000 Broads Authority tide tables sold each year
- 130,000 copies of the Broadcaster are printed every year with a large number of copies available to every hire boat operator for inclusion with their boat hire
- During the trial period the Broads Authority Website tide table page received 8,938 hits which were slightly up on previous years

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 Of the 253 uses of the text service some 130 were of only one enquiry probably indicating that this either was a look at what information was on offer, curiosity, or for information for a single passage. It is likely that only the 53 users who used the service more than once used the service as it was intended. On balance given the feedback we have received from the NSBA and the presence of a great deal of other media where this tide information is already presented it is considered that the trial indicated no real appetite for such a sustained text delivery service.
- 6.2 Although direct costs for the continuation of the service are relatively low, approximately £1k per annum it is recommended that the service is permanently discontinued and efforts are directed to improve existing services the Authority uses to disseminate tidal prediction information.

Background papers: Subscriber Text Service (Navigation Committee 5/9/2013)

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Broads Plan Objectives: None

Appendices: None