

# General Directions for Navigation in the Port of London



**PORT OF  
LONDON**  
AUTHORITY

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## INTRODUCTION

**The Port of London Authority (PLA), in exercise of its powers under Section 111 of the Port of London Act 1968, as amended (the Act) and as the Competent Harbour Authority under the provisions of the Pilotage Act 1987, and with the agreement of the Chamber of Shipping, has reviewed and updated the PLA General Directions and provides the following General Directions to Vessels in the Port of London.**

**In order to maintain and enhance safety of Navigation on the Thames, it is important that Masters and watchkeepers are familiar with current PLA Byelaws, General Directions and Notices to Mariners. It is therefore vital that owners/agents ensure that all such publications and relevant information are promptly distributed to Vessels as appropriate.**

**Note should also be taken, as appropriate, of the content of the VHF navigation information broadcasts issued on a regular basis by the PLA VTS centres (London VTS).**

**It is the duty of the Master of a Vessel to which a General Direction applies to comply with that General Direction. However, the giving of a General Direction does not diminish or in any other way affect the responsibility of the Master in relation to his Vessel, Persons on board, its cargo or any other Person or property (Section 116 of the Act).**

**Failure by the Master of a Vessel to comply with a General Direction constitutes an offence, and renders that Person liable, on conviction, to a fine up to level 5 on the standard scale. However, it is a defence for the Master of a Vessel to prove that he had reasonable grounds for supposing that compliance with the General Direction in question would be likely to imperil his Vessel or that in the circumstances compliance was impracticable (Section 117 of the Act).**

## 1 COMMENCEMENT

These Directions came into force on 1 March 2021 and are updated as of 1 September 2023.

## 2 SHORT TITLE

These Directions may be cited as the PLA General Directions.

## 3 DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION

3.1 In these General Directions:

- a) "the Act" means the Port of London Act 1968 (as amended);
- b) "AIS" means automatic identification system;
- c) "Approved Vessel" means a Vessel approved in writing by the Harbourmaster for the conveyance on the Thames of petroleum-spirit or of any other liquid of Class 3 with a flashpoint of less than 23°C or of a substance of Class 6.1 or Class 8.0;
- d) "the Barking Creek Limit" means a line drawn across the Thames on the line of longitude 00° 06'00 east;
- e) "Berthed" in relation to a Vessel, means:
  - i) secured to land or premises or to a landing stage extending above the level of mean high water springs or to a floating pier; or
  - ii) made fast to another Vessel so secured;
- f) "Bunker Vessel" means any Vessel, normally navigating within the Thames, used for the storage, transportation or delivery of oil products to Vessels or facilities in the Thames;
- g) "Bunkering" means the transfer of liquid hydrocarbons, intended for the main propulsion and/or operation of the auxiliary machinery of a Vessel or a liquid intended for lubricating the Vessel's engine or her other machinery.
- h) "Certificate of Compliance" means a certificate issued to a Vessel where it has been assessed against the Technical Requirements for the Issue of a Certificate of Compliance;
- i) "the Chapman Limit" means a line drawn across the Thames on the line of longitude 00° 37'00" east (which is in the vicinity of No. 7 Sea Reach Buoy);
- j) "the Coalhouse Point Limit" means a line drawn across the Thames from Coalhouse Point on the north bank to Shornmead Beacon on the south bank;
- k) "Commercial Vessel" means any Vessel which is not a Pleasure Vessel;
- l) "Conning Position" means the place on the bridge with a commanding view of the Vessel and it is the position used by navigators when commanding, manoeuvring and/or controlling the Vessel;
- m) "Crayfordness Limit" means a line drawn across the Thames from Crayfordness on south bank on the line of longitude 00°12'50" east;
- n) "Creek" means any Creek in the Thames, which includes:
  - i) Deptford Creek;
  - ii) the River Lee or Bow Creek;
  - iii) Barking Creek;
  - iv) Dartford Creek;

and also the Creeks to the north and west of Canvey Island and of the island known as Leigh Marsh or Two Tree Island, which are:

- v) Holehaven, Vange and Pitsea Creeks north of line drawn from Holehaven Point on a bearing 270°T;
- vi) Leigh Creek, Hadleigh Ray, Benfleet and East Haven Creeks west of a line drawn from Canvey Point on a bearing 000°T to the Leigh-on-Sea shore; and

- vii) Yantlet Creek;
- o) "Crew" includes every Person, other than the Master or a Pilot, employed or engaged in any capacity on board a Vessel;
- p) "Dangerous Goods" has the same meaning as in the Dangerous Goods in Harbour Areas Regulations 2016;
- q) "the Denton Limit" means a line drawn across the Thames on the line of longitude of 00° 23'50" east;
- r) "Designated Anchorage" means an area designated by a Harbourmaster as an anchorage area or berth and published on charts, in the PLA Handbook of Tide Tables and Port Information or in Notices to Mariners;
- s) "Escort Tug" means a Tug which is capable of fulfilling towage and firefighting requirements in the event of an incident and is of a suitable size to tow the Vessel whilst it is navigating.
- t) "Exclusion Zone" means any area of the Thames, defined by the PLA as being closed to Navigation for the purposes of navigational safety or emergency response;
- u) "Facility" means any pier, jetty, wharf, terminal, quay, anchorage, landing stairs, shore or other landing or loading place in, on, or alongside the Thames;
- v) "Fairway" means a regular course or track of shipping, comprising all marked and/or chartered navigable channels within the Thames and includes the following areas:
  - i) the Fisherman's Gat;
  - ii) the Princes Channel from the Tongue Sand Towers to the Oaze Precautionary Area;
  - iii) the Black Deep and Knock John Channels from the seaward limit to the Oaze Precautionary Area;
  - iv) the Barrow Deep and Mouse Channels from the seaward limit to the Warp;
  - v) the East and West Swin Channels from the seaward limit to the Warp;
  - vi) the Warp;
  - vii) the Oaze Precautionary Area; and
  - viii) the Thames to the west of Sea Reach No. 1 Buoy;
- w) "Ferry" means a Vessel conveying Passengers over a short distance by crossing the river between the same two piers as a regular service;
- x) "Gravesend Pilot Station" means the boarding and landing area charted in position latitude 51° 26.9'N longitude 000° 22.5'E;
- y) "Harbourmaster" means a Person appointed by the PLA to be a Harbourmaster and includes the deputies and assistants of a Person so appointed, and officers authorised to discharge the Harbourmaster's duties through one of the PLA's VTS centres;
- z) "High Speed Craft Code" means the International Code for the Safety of High-Speed Craft 2000, as adopted by IMO as Annex to Resolution MSC.97(73) as amended by MSC.119(74) and from time to time;
- aa) "IMO" means the International Maritime Organisation;
- ab) "International Collision Regulations" means the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972 (as amended), as now given effect by the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996 (as amended);
- ac) "Intra-port Vessel" means a Vessel that normally navigates wholly within the Thames, including to and from the Medway Ports;
- ad) "ISM Code" means the International Management Code for the Safe Operation of Ships and for Pollution Prevention as adopted by IMO in Resolution A.741(18);
- ae) "Length Overall" means the maximum length of a Vessel, including overhanging structure, cargo or equipment, and if a Tug and Tow;



- i) If the object(s) towed is or are alongside the Tug it is the maximum length of the longest object towed plus any overhanging structure, cargo or equipment extending beyond its bow or stern and only such part of the Tug or its structure, cargo or equipment which extends beyond that; and
  - ii) If the object(s) towed is or are pushed ahead of the Tug or pulled behind the Tug then it is the length overall of the Tug including overhanging structure, cargo or equipment and the maximum length of the longest object towed in each rank together with any overhanging structure, cargo or equipment which extends beyond its bow or stern, not including the towing medium;
- af) "LNG" means liquefied natural gas;
- ag) "LPG" means liquefied petroleum gas;
- ah) "London Pilotage District" means the area of the Thames from Putney Bridge and lines drawn from latitude 51° 37'N, longitude 00° 57.32'E (Foulness Point in the County of Essex) to latitude 51° 46.08'N, longitude 01° 20.53'E (Gunfleet Old Lighthouse), thence to latitude 51° 48'N, longitude 01° 40'E (Long Sand Head), thence to latitude 51° 36'N, longitude 01° 23.08'E thence to latitude 51° 26.6'N longitude 01° 25.5'E and thence to latitude 51° 24.92'N longitude 00° 54.35'E (Warden Point in the County of Kent) and locks giving access to docks;
- ai) "London VTS" means the Vessel Traffic Service which covers the VTS Sector in which the Vessel lies, through which a Harbourmaster's instructions and advice are issued to Masters of Vessels by VHF radio and to which Vessels report;
- aj) "Margaretness Limit" means a line drawn across the river from the Margaretness light in a direction 334° (T);
- ak) The Port of London Authority's "Marine Safety Management System" (Marine SMS) is the documented system designed to deliver and ensure compliance with the relevant requirements of the Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC);
- al) "Master" in relation to a Vessel, means any Person (except a Pilot) having or taking the command, charge or management of a Vessel, for the time being;
- am) "Medway Ports" means the area of jurisdiction of the Medway Port Authority;
- an) "Moored" in relation to a Vessel, means:
- i) made fast ahead or astern, or both, at a mooring chain or buoy;
  - ii) made fast both ahead and astern by anchors or spud legs; or
  - iii) secured alongside another Vessel so made fast;
- ao) "Navigation" means the movement on or in the water for whatever purpose of any Vessel, whether travelling between two locations or not, but does not include any Vessel under tow;
- ap) "Notices to Mariners" means Notices to Mariners issued by the PLA;
- aq) "Occasionally" means where a Vessel is navigated, worked or Moored within an area of the Thames not more than three times in any 12 month period, and on each such occasion, is navigated, worked or Moored within that area for no more than 48 hours;
- ar) "Operating Draught" means the maximum draught of a Vessel during its current passage, or movement within the London Pilotage District;
- as) "Passenger Vessel" means a Vessel carrying more than 12 Passengers;
- at) "PEC" means Pilotage Exemption Certificate granted under Section 8 of the Pilotage Act 1987;
- Note: A PEC is only relevant to a Vessel for which Pilotage is compulsory.*
- au) "Permission to Proceed" means authorisation by a Harbourmaster to navigate as proposed by a Vessel;
- av) "Person" includes a body corporate;
- aw) "Pilot" means a Person authorised under Section 3 of the Pilotage Act 1987 to act as a Pilot for

the relevant area within the London Pilotage District;

- ax) "PLA" means Port of London Authority;
- ay) "Pleasure Vessel" has the same meaning as in the Merchant Shipping (Survey and Certification) Regulations 1995 and in addition, includes Vessels which are bareboat chartered;
- az) "Port Passage Plan" means a systematic and documented navigational plan for all stages of any voyage into, out of or within the Thames in accordance with the guidelines contained in the appropriate SOLAS regulations, High Speed Craft Code or any similar flag state administration notice issued pursuant to the associated IMO Conventions on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW);
- ba) "Propulsion Requirements & Dimensional Limitations" means the PLA publication containing Vessel size limitations and manoeuvring aid(s) requirements, available from the PLA and published on its website and as updated from time to time as notified in advance by a Notice to Mariners;
- bb) "Pushed Convoy" means a group of one or more Vessels connected by any medium being pushed ahead by a power-driven Vessel;
- bc) "Reporting Vessel" means every Vessel which is required by the PLA's General Directions to report its position, intentions or movements, specifically:
  - i) Vessels of more than 40 metres in Length Overall;
  - ii) Commercial Vessels of gross tonnage of more than 50 tons which ordinarily also navigate outside the Thames;
  - iii) Tugs engaged in towing, or about to tow one or more Vessels;
- bd) "Restricted Visibility" means all circumstances when visibility is less than 0.5 nautical miles;

*Note: Within the Thames a Harbourmaster or his authorised representative may, using all available information, decide that Restricted Visibility prevails in a particular area or at a particular time or is likely to prevail and inform shipping as appropriate.*

- be) "Seagoing Ship" means a seagoing merchant ship subject to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW);
- bf) "Ship Towage" means the towing of a power-driven Vessel which is manned and able to manoeuvre under its own power whilst being towed;
- bg) "SMCP" means Standard Marine Communication Phrases contained within IMO Resolution A.918(22);
- bh) "SOLAS" means the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea;
- bi) "Specified Vessel" means any Vessel having on board (including in its slop tanks), quantities of the following (IMO codings in brackets):
  - i) explosives (Class 1, excluding Class 1.4), in excess of 10 kg net explosive quantity;
  - ii) LNG in bulk, LPG in bulk or being non-gas free following discharge of these cargoes (Class 2);
  - iii) flammable liquids and substances in bulk or being non-gas free following discharge of these cargoes (Class 3 of flashpoint less than 23° C); and/or
  - iv) toxic and corrosive substances in bulk or being non-gas free following discharge of these cargoes (Classes 6.1 and 8.0);
- bj) "Speed Reduction" means a notification from London VTS that Vessels must proceed at reduced speed through areas where activities sensitive to the effects of wash or draw-off are taking place;
- bk) "Thames" means so much of the River Thames as is within the limits specified in Schedule 1 Section 2 of the Port of London Act 1968 as amended, except that it does not include the Medway Approach area and the areas off Southend on Sea and Sheerness as described in Schedule 8 to that Act;

- b) "Thames AIS" means an AIS class alpha derivative incorporating a geographic display unit complying with the Thames AIS Technical Requirements Specification;
- bm) "Thames Barrier" means the flood prevention barrier, which crosses the Thames in Woolwich Reach;
- bn) "Thames Barrier Control Zone" means the area of the Thames between the Margaretness Limit and a line drawn due north from Blackwall Point;
- bo) "Thames Byelaws" means the Port of London Thames Byelaws 2012;
- bp) "Tug" means a Vessel propelled by mechanical power and used for towing or pushing another Vessel or a raft or float of timber;
- bq) "Tug and Tow" means a Tug or other Vessel towing another Vessel or Vessels astern, alongside or pushing another Vessel or Vessels ahead;
- br) "ULCS" means ultra large container ship, which is defined as a container ship of more than 320 metres in Length Overall and/or more than 13.5 metres draught;
- bs) "Underway" means that a Vessel is not at anchor, Berthed, Moored, or aground;
- bt) "Unmanned Aerial Vehicle" means an aircraft operated remotely or by on board computers;
- bu) "Vessel" means a Vessel as defined in the Act and includes Tugs and Tows;
- bv) "VTS Sector" means an area of the Thames covered by one VHF channel monitored by London VTS, and includes the following sectors:
  - i) Barrier Sector (VHF Channel 14) - the Thames between Crayfordness and Teddington;
  - ii) River Sector (VHF Channel 68) - the Thames between Crayfordness and Sea Reach No.4; and
  - iii) Estuary Sector (VHF Channel 69) - the Thames between Sea Reach No.4 and the boundary of the Sunk Precautionary Area in the north, and to the London Arrival/Departure Arc in the east (the outer reporting points).

*Note: Within these General Directions defined terms will always be capitalised and should therefore be interpreted as per these definitions.*

3.2 In these General Directions, unless the context otherwise requires:

- a) words and expressions used in these General Directions have the same meanings as in the Act;
- b) unless stated otherwise in a particular General Direction, for the purposes of Section 111(2) of the Act, all General Directions shall be deemed to apply to all Vessels, to the whole of the Thames and at all times, and a General Direction addressed to a Master shall be deemed to apply to the Vessel of which he is the Master;
- c) the General Direction headings form part of and affect the construction and interpretation of the General Directions;
- d) unless the context otherwise requires, words importing one gender include the other gender; and words in the singular shall include the plural and vice versa; and
- e) where these General Directions refer to an enactment or to subordinate legislation, the reference, unless the contrary intention appears, is a reference to that enactment or the subordinate legislation:
  - i) as amended and includes a reference thereto as extended or applied by or under any other enactment or subordinate legislation including any other provision of the General Directions; and
  - ii) as re-enacted with or without modifications from time to time.

## **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 navigational 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.

4.2 Any Vessel which:

- a) falls outside the scope of the PLA Marine Safety Management System, and intends to navigate in the Thames; or
- b) falls within the scope of the PLA Marine Safety Management System whose operation, in the opinion of the Harbourmaster, causes or is likely to cause a material risk to navigational safety or to the safety of marine operations;

must, when required by the Harbourmaster, provide any information requested in respect of, but not limited to; the Vessel, its equipment, its general condition, certification, organisational and ship management systems, competency of Crew, and be subject to a formal risk assessment, so that the risks associated with the Navigation or operation of the Vessel and any appropriate mitigation of such risks in the Thames can be made.

4.3 Any new intra-port passenger or freight service must not begin, or an existing service be expanded or changed in any way in the Thames, without first submitting passage plans and navigational risk assessments to the Harbourmaster, and subsequently obtaining the Harbourmaster's formal agreement.

With regard to towage operations, this formal agreement will cover:

- i) the fleet of towing Vessels;
- ii) the number, sizes and arrangements of towed objects;
- iii) the anchoring arrangements;
- iv) berths to be serviced; and
- v) any other mitigation measures, as agreed by the Harbourmaster.

4.4 Vessels applying for a Certificate of Compliance must have their generic Port Passage Plan formally agreed by the Harbourmaster prior to commencing operations.

## **5 PRE-ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE NOTIFICATIONS AND INFORMATION**

5.1 With the exception of Intra-port Vessels, notice of the intention to navigate a Reporting Vessel in the Thames, including an estimated time of arrival or departure, the Vessel's ISPS security level, and PEC number (if applicable) must be given to London VTS either 24 hours in advance, or not later than one hour before departure from the last port, berth or offshore operating area, whichever is the latter. London VTS must be notified as soon as practicable if the Vessel is unable to meet that estimated movement time.

Notifications for arrivals from outside the Thames must include a confirmation that the Vessel complies with the navigational safety requirements of these General Directions. This confirmation indicates that:

- a) the Vessel's charts for the Thames and associated navigational publications are corrected and up to date;
- b) the Master has prepared an appropriate Port Passage Plan for use during the Vessel's passage in the Thames;
- c) the Vessel, if appropriate, is compliant with the requirements of the ISM Code;
- d) if the Vessel is not subject to the ISM Code, that the Vessel has no deficiencies or defects in respect of its manning, navigational equipment, propulsion or manoeuvring machinery; and
- e) arrangements have been made to provide appropriate mooring assistance for the Vessel at its intended berth in the Thames.

5.2 A ULCS or a Vessel carrying LNG in bulk must submit a passage plan to London VTS no less than 6 hours before the planned voyage.

5.3 The Master of a container ship greater than 250m in length must submit the calculated lateral windage area for their Vessel:

- a) through the Vessel's shipping agent prior to arriving in the Thames; and
- b) to London VTS as soon as loading is completed prior to departure from a berth in the Thames.

5.4 A Specified Vessel must not navigate in the Thames unless notice has been given to the London VTS containing such information as is adequate to evaluate the risk created by the substance carried to the health and safety of any Person not less than 24 hours before so starting or, if the Vessel is an Approved Vessel, as much time before so starting (being less than 24 hours, but not less than 30 minutes) as it is reasonably practicable to give.

Except the above shall not apply where both:

- a) the Vessel is navigating into the Thames, including to or from the Medway Ports, from outside the Thames; and
- b) notice in respect of the substance has been given to the Harbourmaster in accordance with regulation 6 of the Dangerous Goods in Harbour Areas Regulations 2016.

## **6 MARKING OF STERNS OF PASSENGER VESSELS**

6.1 Except as described in General Direction 6.2, every Passenger Vessel of Class IV, V and VI (as defined by current Merchant Shipping Regulations) and every Vessel subject to the High Speed Craft Code, which regularly navigates upstream of the Gravesend Pilot Station must have, at or on her stern, an area of high visibility orange coating. So far as is practicable the coated area must be:

- a) of between 3.75 and 4.5 square metres, i.e. 2.5 to 3.0 metres horizontally and a minimum of 1.5 metres vertically, evenly distributed either side of the Vessel's centre line;
- b) in a vertical or near vertical plane facing directly astern;
- c) evenly illuminated from sunset to sunrise by suitably screened lights directed onto the reflective material;
- d) equally effective in indicating the presence of the Vessel in daylight, as it is when illuminated between sunset and sunrise; and
- e) created using a coating proven in the marine environment, which is of a single base colour and does not include any text, pictures or other forms of illustration, and is also acceptable to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency.

6.2 Sailing Vessels operating as Class V or Class VI Passenger Vessels are exempt from the requirements of this General Direction when navigating below London Bridge with masts rigged.

## **7 REPORTING VESSEL MOVEMENTS**

7.1 This General Direction shall only apply to Reporting Vessels

7.2 With the exception of Intra-port Vessels, a Reporting Vessel must confirm with London VTS prior to navigating in the Thames, whether inbound or outbound:

- a) the Vessel's International Ship and Port Facility Security Code security level;
- b) the number of Persons on board;
- c) the Vessel's maximum draught; and
- d) if intending to embark or disembark a Pilot, that the pilot ladder is properly maintained and will be rigged in accordance with the requirements of General Direction 11;
- e) any navigational deficiency, serious defect or any other situation where the Vessel may present an additional risk to port operations during navigation.

7.3 London VTS must be notified 10 minutes before the Vessel gets Underway, moves between berths or shifts at a berth in the Thames. Permission to Proceed must be requested and approved immediately before the Vessel is navigated. If Navigation has not commenced within 15 minutes of the initial advice, London VTS is to be informed.

- 7.4 When the Vessel passes a reporting point, a report must be made to London VTS that the Vessel is passing that reporting point. When entering a VTS Sector, the report must include the Vessel's intended route or destination.

*Note:*

*A full list of current reporting points is published on charts and in the relevant Admiralty List of Radio Signals, Notices to Mariners and the PLA Handbook of Tide Tables and Port Information.*

- 7.5 Vessels intending to navigate in the Knock John Channel must report to London VTS:
- a) when entering the Estuary VTS Sector inward-bound, their ETA for Knock John No.1 Buoy;
  - b) when entering the Estuary VTS Sector outward-bound, their ETA for Knock John No.4 Buoy;
  - c) an updated ETA, if the ETA previously reported changes.

## **8 FISHING VESSELS**

8.1 When any Vessel is proceeding from, to or engaged in fishing operations on the Thames, a report must be made to London VTS with periodic updates of the Master's intentions and movements.

8.2 Any fishing gear must be laid clear of channels, Fairways and navigation marks, so that the safety of navigation on the Thames is not compromised.

8.3 Any gear left unattended shall be marked so as to be clearly visible by day and fitted with a light if deployed between sunset and sunrise.

## **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.

## **10 DISCHARGE OF SEWAGE INTO THE THAMES**

10.1 From 1 July 2024, all commercial Vessels must ensure that they discharge no sewage into the Thames.

10.2 Vessels certificated in accordance with the Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure) Regulations 1998 which only Occasionally navigate within the Thames are exempt from General Direction 10.1.

## **11 PILOT TRANSFER ARRANGEMENTS**

A Vessel's pilot transfer arrangements must be rigged and manned in accordance with SOLAS Regulation V/23 and IMO Resolution A.1045(27) when used by a Pilot or any other Person, unless alternative arrangements have been approved in writing by the Harbourmaster.

## **12 VHF CARRIAGE & USE**

12.1 There must be an operational VHF radio readily available for communication with London VTS aboard the following Vessels at all times when Underway or at anchor in the Thames:

- a) Commercial Vessels of more than 7.0 metres in Length Overall; and
- b) Pleasure Vessels of 13.7m or more in Length Overall, except:
  - i) narrow boats more than 13.7 metres in Length Overall navigating between Brentford and Teddington; and
  - ii) Vessels under oars.

- 12.2 Pleasure Vessels more than 13.7 metres in Length Overall need not carry a VHF radio (including narrow boats) if navigating to the west of Bow Creek in company or a flotilla, provided that there is a lead Vessel which is fitted with an operational VHF radio and is able to communicate immediately and effectively with all other Vessels in the company or flotilla.
- 12.3 All Vessels required to carry an operational VHF radio in this Direction must:
- a) when Underway or at anchor, ensure that an effective, continuous listening watch on the VHF channel used by London VTS in that part of the Thames is maintained by a suitably qualified Person, capable of communicating effectively in English;
  - b) before that Vessel gets Underway, ensure the appropriate VHF channel used by London VTS is monitored for information that may affect the safe Navigation of the Vessel, including the routine half-hourly VHF navigation information broadcast made immediately prior to the intended departure time;
  - c) When making special passing agreements with other Vessels, confirm the identity of that Vessel and conduct communication on the appropriate VHF channel used by London VTS to ensure that London VTS and other river users are aware of the Vessels' intentions.
- 12.4 Specified Vessels must prefix their Vessel's name with the word 'SPECIFIED' in any VHF communication with London VTS or other Vessel.
- 12.5 ULCS Vessels must prefix their Vessel's name with the words 'Ultra Large' in any VHF communication with London VTS or any other Vessel.

*Note:*

*The PLA encourages the adoption of the IMO's 'Standard Marine Communication Phrases' in all VHF communications on the Thames.*

### **13 REQUIREMENT FOR OPERATIONAL AIS**

13.1 A Vessel which is required to carry AIS under PLA Byelaws or SOLAS V suffers a defect to AIS must immediately notify London VTS of the nature of the defect and obtain permission to continue navigating. London VTS must subsequently be provided with details of the intentions for repair/rectification within 24 hours of the defect having been identified.

13.2 All Vessels required to carry AIS under PLA Byelaws must continue to operate AIS when alongside for short periods, but must switch off AIS when unmanned or out of service.

13.3 Vessels required to carry AIS under SOLAS V must continue to operate AIS when alongside in the Thames, except for security reasons, or for safety reasons when the berth requires the AIS unit to be switched off. Such Vessels are to inform London VTS when they intend to switch off AIS.

13.4 Vessels must transmit appropriate AIS navigational status details at all times.

### **14 NAVIGATION IN RESTRICTED VISIBILITY**

14.1 Any Vessel observing that the extent of visibility at its location is not the distance broadcast by London VTS, or that London VTS is not aware of Restricted Visibility at the Vessel's location, should report the current level of visibility at the Vessel's location to London VTS.

14.2 A Reporting Vessel which is not equipped with an operational radar installation must not navigate in the Thames in Restricted Visibility except to proceed to the nearest safe berth, mooring or anchorage.

14.3 A Specified Vessel or a vessel carrying marine pollutants in bulk must not navigate to the west of Sea Reach No.7 buoy when visibility is reported by London VTS to be less than 0.5 nautical mile between Sea Reach No.7 buoy and the vessel's berth.

14.4 A Vessel that requires tugs for berthing or unberthing shall not commence a berthing or unberthing manoeuvre when visibility in the vicinity of the berth is reported by London VTS to be below 0.2 nautical mile, unless otherwise directed by London VTS.

14.5 A Reporting Vessel not requiring tugs for berthing or unberthing shall not commence a berthing or unberthing manoeuvre when visibility in the vicinity of the berth is reported to be less than 0.1

nautical mile, unless otherwise directed by London VTS.

14.6 Any Vessel already navigating, berthing or unberthing at such a time as 14.3 to 14.5 above applies shall seek direction from London VTS.

14.7 Vessels more than 50 metres in length must not navigate through the Thames Barrier when visibility at the Thames Barrier is declared to be less than 0.5 nautical mile. Reporting Vessels of 50 metres or less shall not navigate through the Thames Barrier when visibility is reported to be less than 0.25 nautical mile.

14.8 Where a Vessel is being used for search and rescue, fire brigade, ambulance, law enforcement, security, or police purposes or for training for such purposes or for the purposes of the Harbourmaster 14.2 to 14.7 above shall not apply.

## **15 WATCHKEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

15.1 There must be, at all times on board any Pleasure Vessel Underway in the Thames, the Master or a member of the Crew at the Conning Position, in a fit state to undertake navigational conduct of the Vessel.

15.2 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.

15.3 Public announcements and commentaries must not be made by the Person having navigational conduct of the Vessel, except in an emergency.

## **16 LOOKOUTS**

16.1 All Vessels which, by virtue of their construction, trim or operation, have limited visibility from the wheelhouse, must have an additional lookout stationed in an appropriate position, maintaining an effective lookout, so as to cover the area of limited visibility. That Person must be:

- a) suitably trained and experienced in lookout duties;
- b) given clear instructions to report to the Person with navigational conduct every matter or occurrence which could affect the safe Navigation of the Vessel, including sightings of Vessels Underway; and
- c) if stationed outside the wheelhouse, provided with a telephone or radio communication link to the Person having navigational conduct; and stationed in such a position so as not to be distracted in his duties by lighting on the Vessel, including strobe or similar lights.

except where suitable technical arrangements to maintain an effective lookout in the area of limited visibility have been approved by the Harbourmaster.

16.2 Public announcements, commentaries, onboard noise or music must not inhibit the ability of the Persons on the bridge and the lookout(s) to:

- a) hear clearly and respond to sound signals and all internal and external communications, including VHF Navigation information broadcasts; and
- b) assess and appreciate fully the intentions of Vessels in the immediate vicinity so that there will be no delay in taking or failure to take such action as may become necessary in compliance with the International Collision Regulations, in particular Rule 8 – Action to avoid collision.

16.3 On all Vessels navigating above Tower Bridge, it must be possible for the Person having navigational conduct to see an object 1 metre in height at a distance of not less than 66 metres from the bow of the Vessel.



## **17 NAVIGATIONAL RESTRICTIONS AND EXCLUSION ZONES**

17.1 No Vessel is to:

- a) enter any Exclusion Zone shown on PLA charts or established in the Thames from time to time by the PLA;
- b) approach within 60 metres of any Berthed tanker, or oil or gas jetty in the Thames;
- c) approach within 50 metres of any wind turbine tower unless for the purposes of construction or maintenance;
- d) transit through a bridge arch or span of the Thames Barrier which is closed to Navigation; or
- e) pass or overtake a ULCS between Knock John 1 and Knock John 4, except in an emergency or with the permission of the Harbourmaster.

17.2 Vessels manoeuvring on or to an adjacent berth, mooring or anchorage where it is unavoidable for navigational safety reasons shall be exempt from the requirements of sub-paragraph a) and b) of General Direction 17.1.

17.3 Reporting Vessels (excluding any assisting Tugs) and Passenger Vessels must maintain a separation of 1.0 nautical mile ahead and 0.5 nautical mile astern of:

- a) a ULCS; or
- b) a Specified Vessel, when navigating in the same direction;

except for the purpose of overtaking or passing with the specific permission of London VTS and with the agreement of the Masters of all Vessels involved.

17.4 Vessels with an Operating Draught of less than 6.0m must not use the Black Deep Channel, except with the permission of London VTS.

17.5 Vessels may be subject to one-way traffic management procedures as follows:

- a) When Reporting Vessels are navigating between Black Deep No. 9 Buoy and Knock John No. 7 Buoy;
- b) When Reporting Vessels are navigating between the West Oaze Buoy and Sea Reach No. 3 Buoys;
- c) When Reporting Vessels are navigating in the Princes Channel Deep Water Route, depending on traffic density;
- d) When Reporting Vessels are navigating in Barking Creek; and
- e) Any other time deemed necessary by London VTS.

## **18 SIGNALS FOR SPEED REDUCTION**

18.1 A Person responsible for any Vessel, installation, works or activity for which a speed reduction by passing Vessel is required, must;

- a) by day, exhibit conspicuously the international code flags "Romeo Yankee";
- b) by night, exhibit conspicuously an illuminated rigid replica of the international code flags "Romeo Yankee" not less than 1 metre in height; and
- c) request permission from London VTS to display the signals in a) and b) above.

## **19 REQUIREMENT TO USE THE AUTHORISED CHANNEL**

19.1 All Vessels of 13.7 metres or more in Length Overall navigating to the west of the Margaretness Limit must navigate only in the authorised channel as identified on PLA charts, and as required by Rule 9 of the International Collision Regulations, except in an emergency, for the purposes of overtaking, with the permission of London VTS, or when manoeuvring to or from berths, moorings or anchorages.

19.2 Where there is sufficient room, Vessels less than 13.7 metres in Length Overall navigating to the east of Putney Bridge must normally navigate outside the authorised channel unless constrained

by their draught or otherwise restricted in ability to manoeuvre, or in an emergency.

## **20 NAVIGATION AGAINST THE PREVAILING DIRECTION OF TRAFFIC FLOW**

The Master of a Vessel intending to navigate against the prevailing direction of traffic flow between two berths, moorings or anchorages on the same side of the river must report their intentions to London VTS.

## **21 VESSELS NAVIGATING AGAINST THE TIDE**

A Vessel navigating against the tide must, when approaching or rounding a bend, approaching or passing under a bridge, or any part of the Thames where one way working is in effect, navigate with caution and prepare to stop to avoid risk of collision with another Vessel that is navigating with the tide.

## **22 WAITING AND ANCHORING**

22.1 Reporting Vessels may only wait for a berth in the Thames:

- a) at a mooring allocated to the Vessel by London VTS for that purpose; or
- b) in a Designated Anchorage.

except with the permission of London VTS.

22.2 Vessels are not permitted to wait or anchor:

- a) in a Designated Anchorage for longer than the period (if any) specified for anchoring in such an area by the PLA;
- b) in a Designated Anchorage where the Vessel's dimensions would normally preclude it using that anchorage; or
- c) in a Fairway, other than for the purpose of manoeuvring;

except in an emergency, or with the permission of London VTS.

## **23 VESSELS MANOEUVRING FOR BERTHS, MOORINGS OR ANCHORAGES**

A Vessel which is not a Reporting Vessel must keep out of the way of any Reporting Vessel approaching or manoeuvring to any berth, mooring or anchorage on the Thames.

## **24 DANGEROUS GOODS – RESTRICTIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF NAVIGATION**

24.1 Vessels carrying LNG in bulk must not use the Princes Channel.

24.2 A Vessel which is carrying in bulk either a flammable or toxic substance of Class 2 must not:

- a) navigate, anchor or moor in the Thames west of the Crayfordness Limit
- b) navigate the Vessel in the Thames west of the Coalhouse Point Limit unless:
  - i) the Vessel is accompanied by an Escort Tug; and
  - ii) arrangements have been put in place, and Crew is available, to make fast the Escort Tug immediately if it is required; and
  - iii) a Crew member is forward at all times, or arrangements have been put in place, to let go the anchors immediately they are required; and
  - iv) the Master of the Vessel has confirmed to London VTS and, when an authorised Pilot is employed, to that Pilot, that the requirements of sub-paragraph (ii) and (iii) are satisfied.

24.3 Except with the permission of London VTS, a Specified Vessel must not:

- a) navigate, anchor or moor in the Thames west of the Barking Creek Limit;
- b) anchor the Vessel in the Thames west of the Chapman Limit;
- c) navigate in Restricted Visibility and if overtaken by Restricted Visibility, must as soon as practicable anchor or moor the Vessel in the most convenient position clear of the navigable Fairway, and must resume the Navigation of the Vessel as soon as practicable after Restricted

Visibility no longer exists;  
except with the permission of London VTS.

## **25 TOWING AND PUSHING RESTRICTIONS**

25.1 Vessels must not:

- a) be engaged in towing a Vessel when pushing another Vessel ahead;
- b) engaged in pushing a Vessel when towing another Vessel alongside;
- c) be engaged in pushing more than one Vessel at a time except where the Vessels being pushed are secured together as a composite unit, which is made fast to the pushing Vessel;
- d) tow or push any combination of objects exceeding 140 metres in Length Overall and/or 27 metres in total beam;
- e) tow or push any combination (including the length and beam of the Tug) exceeding 50 metres in Length Overall and/or 15 metres in total beam above Tower Bridge;

unless such operations have been approved in writing by the Harbourmaster.

25.2 When towing astern, the towline must have an effective means of release operable from all Conning Positions and at the towing point which can safely release the tow under all operating conditions. This release system should be tested at regular intervals to ensure effective operation.

*Note: Details of the towing operation approval process can be obtained from the Harbourmaster.*

## **26 PROPULSION REQUIREMENTS & DIMENSIONAL LIMITATIONS**

All Commercial Vessels operating in the Thames must conform with the Propulsion Requirements & Dimensional Limitations promulgated by the PLA.

*Note: Details of these requirements & limitations can be obtained from the Harbourmaster*

## **27 USE OF UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES**

An Unmanned Aerial Vehicle must not be operated from any Vessel on the Thames without first obtaining the permission of the Harbourmaster.

*Note: Details on how to obtain this permission can be sought from the Harbourmaster.*

## **28 LARGE VESSEL TRANSITS WEST OF MARGARETNESS**

28.1 Gallions Reach – London City Airport

Vessels intending to transit Gallions Reach with an air draught greater than 45m must:

- a) provide London VTS with an ETA at Gallions Reach 24hrs in advance;
- b) at Crayfordness inward-bound, or when departing a berth west of Crayfordness, notify London VTS of their confirmed ETA for Gallions Reach; and
- c) not navigate any part of Gallions Reach without permission from London VTS.

28.2 London Cable Car

Vessels intending to transit the London Cable Car with a Length Overall greater than 130m and/or air draft greater than 55.1m must:

- a) notify London VTS of an ETA for the London Cable Car 24 hours in advance. Where the departure time is less than 24 hours before transit then not less than 12 hours notice must be provided;
- b) at Crayfordness inward-bound, or when departing a berth west of Crayfordness, notify London VTS of:
  - i) a confirmed ETA for the London Cable Car; and

- ii) if their air draught is greater than 55.1m, the place at which the Vessel can safely abort;
- c) not transit beyond their declared abort point until confirmation has been received that the cable cars no longer obstruct the Vessel's passage.

### 28.3 Tower Bridge

Vessels intending to transit Tower Bridge which have arranged for the bascules of the bridge to be raised must:

- a) at Crayfordness inward-bound, or when departing a berth west of Crayfordness, notify London VTS of:
  - i) a confirmed ETA for Tower Bridge; and
  - ii) the place at which the Vessel can safely abort;
- b) establish communications with Tower Bridge control 30 minutes before their ETA for Tower Bridge;
- c) not transit beyond their declared abort point until confirmation has been received from Tower Bridge Control that the bridge bascules will be raised in good time.

### 28.4 Vessels subject to this General Direction must:

- a) notify London VTS when an ETA previously confirmed changes by more than 5 minutes;
- b) if required to take a Tug under the Code of Practice for Ship Towing Operations on the Thames, have a Tug escort in attendance at least 15 minutes before the transit, and harbour service launch in attendance to escort where required.

## 29 NAVIGATION IN THE THAMES BARRIER CONTROL ZONE

### 29.1 Reporting to London VTS

All Vessels fitted with VHF radio must:

- a) upon entering the Thames Barrier Control Zone or departing a berth or mooring within the Thames Barrier Control Zone, report their intentions to London VTS;
- b) if proceeding through the Thames Barrier, request permission and use only spans allocated by London VTS. Requests to use an alternative span for navigational safety reasons must be made in good time to London VTS.

General Direction 29.1 does not apply to Vessels only intending to navigate west of Greenwich Yacht Club or east of the Woolwich Ferry respectively.

### 29.2 Navigational Spans

- a) Navigation between piers exhibiting red crosses or through a span closed to Navigation is prohibited;
- b) Vessels not fitted with VHF radio, including yachts, dinghies, powerboats, sculls, rowing boats and canoes must navigate through the span that lies furthest to the starboard side of the channel and is marked as open to Navigation and having sufficient depth of water.

### 29.3 Thames Barrier Closures

During a Thames Barrier closure, a Vessel must not pass Margaretness inward-bound or Blackwall Point outward-bound without permission from London VTS or a Harbourmaster on a harbour service launch.

### 29.4 Overtaking and Manoeuvring Restrictions

A Vessel must not overtake another Vessel or carry out manoeuvres in the Thames Barrier Control Zone without the permission of London VTS.

### 29.5 Restrictions on Anchoring

- a) A Vessel must not anchor between the Woolwich Ferry Terminal and Greenwich Yacht Club without the permission of London VTS, other than in an emergency;

- b) A Vessel must not anchor within 100 metres of the Thames Barrier.

#### 29.6 Navigation in Restricted Visibility

- a) Vessels more than 50 metres in Length Overall must not navigate through the Thames Barrier during periods when visibility at the Thames Barrier is declared by London VTS to be less than 0.5 nautical mile.
- b) Reporting Vessels of 50 metres or less in Length Overall must not navigate through the Thames Barrier during periods when visibility at the Thames Barrier is declared by London VTS to be less than 0.25 nautical mile.

#### 29.7 Vessels Under Sail

Vessels proceeding under sail between the Woolwich Ferry Terminal and Hookness must not deviate from the starboard side of the Fairway, except with the express permission of London VTS. Vessels fitted with a working engine must use motor power to navigate through the Thames Barrier.

### **30 NAVIGATION BETWEEN WAPPINGNESS AND BELL LANE CREEK**

30.1 All Reporting Vessels Underway between Wappingness and Bell Lane Creek must carry on board an operational electronic keying device capable of activating the special signal lights which signify that one or more Reporting Vessels are navigating or about to navigate through the bridge displaying the signal. The keying device must be activated when navigating or entering the area or when about to leave a berth, mooring or anchorage within the area. To avoid the continuous activation of the special signal lights in the vicinity, the keying device is to be switched off when the Reporting Vessel is Berthed, Moored or anchored.

30.2 All Reporting Vessels navigating through bridges in the area between Wappingness and Bell Lane Creek, must navigate through the arch fitted with the special signal light unit except when that arch is closed, when otherwise directed or when prudent Navigation would otherwise require. The Master must notify London VTS if they intend to navigate through an arch other than that fitted with the special signal light unit.

30.3 When the special signal light is illuminated:

- a) Vessels which are not Reporting Vessels must not impede the safe passage of a Reporting Vessel that has activated a special signal light on a bridge arch, whilst it is navigating that bridge arch;
- b) when two or more Reporting Vessels are approaching an arch from opposite directions, the Vessel navigating against the direction of the tidal stream must ease speed, stop, or if conditions allow use an alternative arch.

30.4 If the special signal light on an arch is not illuminated, the Reporting Vessel must notify London VTS as soon as possible and the arch navigated with extreme caution.

30.5 This General Direction does not apply to Reporting Vessels bound to or from a berth or mooring between Tower Bridge and London Bridge that require the bascules of Tower Bridge to be opened.

### **31 LIGHTING REQUIREMENTS FOR PUSHED CONVOYS UNDERWAY BY NIGHT**

31.1 A pushed convoy Underway by night must exhibit:

- a) In addition to the masthead light required by Thames Byelaw 35.2 a), two further masthead lights at the bow of the leading Vessel or the Vessel on the port side at the head of the convoy, so that there are three masthead lights in total. The three masthead lights shall all be arranged in an equilateral triangle with a horizontal base, in a plane perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the convoy. The top light must be placed no lower than the top of the hatch coamings. The two lower lights shall be about 1.25 m apart and about 1.10 m below the top light;
- b) Unless already required under Thames Byelaw 35.2 a), a masthead light at the bow of any other Vessel whose full width is visible from ahead. This light shall so far as possible be 3 m below the top light referred to under (i).

The masts carrying these lights shall be positioned, so far as practicable, over the fore-and-aft



centreline of the Vessel on which they are carried; the sidelights described in Thames Byelaw 35.2 b) ii) must be not more than 1 m from the sides of the convoy and at a height of not less than 2 m above deck level;

31.2 A pushed convoy Underway by night must also exhibit:

a) In addition to the sternlight required by Thames Byelaw 35.2 b) iii), two further sternlights on the pushing Vessel, so that there a total of three sternlights, placed in a line perpendicular to its longitudinal axis, about 1.25 m apart and high enough not to be hidden by another Vessel in the convoy; and

b) A sternlight on every Vessel whose full width is visible from astern.

31.3 All lights required by this General Direction must have the same intensity and sectors as prescribed in Annex 1 of the International Collision Regulations.

## **32 VESSEL REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS**

32.1 All Commercial Vessels that are Intra-port Vessels shall be registered with the PLA, regardless of any other registration, licence or certification held.

32.2 The requirement for registration in General Direction 32.1 shall not apply to Vessels that are only Occasionally used on the Thames.

*Notes:*

1. *The arrangements for registering a Vessel will be promulgated by the PLA.*

2. *In the context of this Direction, 'occasionally' means where a Vessel is navigated, worked or Moored within an area of the Thames not more than three times in any 12 month period, and on each such occasion, is navigated, worked or Moored within that area for no more than 48 hours;*

## **33 VESSEL MANNING**

Except with the permission of the Harbourmaster, the master of a Vessel that is larger than 50m LOA, shall at all times when his Vessel is in the Thames, ensure that his Vessel is capable of being safely moved and navigated and that there are sufficient crew or other competent persons readily available to:

a) Attend the Vessel's moorings;

b) To comply with any Directions given by the Harbourmaster for the mooring/unmooring and moving of their Vessel; and

c) To deal, so far as reasonably practicable, with any emergency that may arise.

This Direction does not apply to dumb Vessels.

## **34 THAMES CPD PROGRAMME**

From 1 January 2024, an Intra-port Vessel which is also a Commercial Vessel, operating between Teddington Lock and the Denton Limit, must be under the command of a Master who:

a) is currently enrolled on the Thames CPD programme;

b) has secured a minimum of 10 points on the Thames CPD programme in each one-year period since their enrolment; and

c) has secured a minimum of 150 points on the Thames CPD programme in each five-year period since their enrolment.

Note: The PLA will issue guidance on the Thames CPD programme and its CPD requirements.