

January 31, 2025

Transport Canada

Please consider this correspondence as the official public comment submission in response to the proposed 2025 Navigation Channel Opening Schedule for the LaSalle Causeway from the Heads of Council representing 10 municipal governments along the Rideau Canal corridor. The signatories represent 1.25 million people.

The undersigned are deeply concerned with the recent decision to place a temporary fixed bridge along the former lift-bridge section of the LaSalle Causeway in Kingston. The impact of this decision will be monumental to our communities along the UNESCO World Heritage Site Rideau Canal. The livelihood of our communities and vast number of tourism related businesses rely on marine traffic during the navigation season to fuel our local economies.

The LaSalle Causeway Proposed Schedule for the 2025 Navigation Season provides for limited passage of marine vessels between the Rideau Canal/Catarqui River and Lake Ontario. In fact, the proposed schedule represents a mere **17% of the operating hours** that existed when the lift bridge was in operation. Severely limiting access to a fraction of what boaters are accustomed to will chase away the boaters that make the largest and most meaningful impact on our communities. These boats and their vacation spending habits will be lost. Our tourism-related businesses are slowly recovering from 3 years of pandemic restrictions, and many are barely surviving.

A 2017 Tourism Economic Impact Study of the Rideau Canal prepared by BMO Canada on behalf of the Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association concluded that the tourism sector contributes \$695 million annually to the economies of the 11 municipal members of the Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association. When the cities of Ottawa and Kingston are included in this calculation, it is estimated that the tourism industry contributed \$5.5 billion to the corridor's gross domestic product in 2016.

Our concerns/requests can be summarized in 3 categories:

1. The reduction in operating hours is excessive. The Rideau Canal hours of operation in 2025 represents 1245 hours of lockage service. The Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) proposed schedule for the Causeway opening is only 212 hours for the entirety of the 2025 navigation season. We respectfully request the schedule be **expanded to include Sundays** (as well as Saturdays). The overwhelming concern with such a narrow window of passage (1 day/week during the peak navigation season) is the very real possibility of boaters not making it to the Causeway on Saturday and losing a week of their boating vacation. Reasons could range from inclement weather on the St. Lawrence River to missing a lockage window on the Rideau (this can happen with frequency during peak periods at larger lock stations like Jones Falls). The proposed schedule may inflict timing anxiety (allegrophobia) on boaters seeking relaxation on their

vacations. The worst-case scenario is boaters choosing to simply not make the journey along the Rideau Canal to avoid the risk of being stranded for a week.

2. The proposed drastic change in operating hours will necessitate a **robust communications plan** by Public Services and Procurement Canada to ensure businesses, residents and all tourism/boating stakeholders are made aware of the final schedule for 2025. Time will be of the essence as boaters are actively making plans for their 2025 boating vacations. Providing certainty of passage opportunities in a timely and widespread fashion will assist in minimizing the loss of large vessel boaters wishing to experience the bucolic scenery of the Rideau Canal.
3. The significant reduction in operating hours (Saturday's only during the peak boating season) generates a visceral level of concern over the impacts it will have on vacation spending in our tourism dependent communities. That said, we are seeking a commitment from Transport Canada and Public Services & Procurement Canada to conduct, in partnership with the signatories, a **comprehensive impact assessment** of the 2025 Navigation Channel Opening Schedule at the end of the 2025 Rideau Canal navigation season to identify adjustments to be implemented for the 2026 navigation season.

While we are grateful for a fixed and published schedule, we emphatically urge the federal government to expedite the installation of a permanent bridge structure that will enable all marine traffic to pass through the Lasalle Causeway on a schedule that mirrors the hours of operation of the Rideau Canal.

Sincerely,



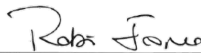
Mayor Cameron
Merrickville



Reeve Fournier
Drummond/North Elmsley



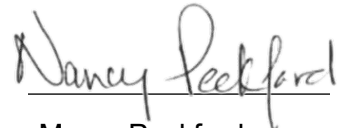
Mayor Hoogenboom
Rideau Lakes



Mayor Jones
Westport



Mayor Pankow
Smiths Falls



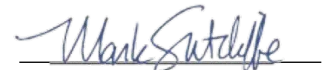
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Leeds & Thousand Islands
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