

OP NOTICE TO SHIPPING No. N-5-2024



Official, Courtesy
and Guest Transits

January 1, 2024

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To: Shipping Agents, Owners and Operators

Subject: Official, Courtesy and Guest Transits

1. Effective Date and Cancellation

This Notice is effective on the date of issue and cancels OP Notice to Shipping No. N-5-2023. A revised Notice will be issued in January of each year or when otherwise required.

2. Purpose and Scope

To establish procedures for *Official*, *Courtesy* and *Guest* transits of the Panama Canal. Experience has illustrated a need to exercise more effective control over passenger transits. Commercial vessels and their agents require positive assurances that *Official* and *Courtesy* passengers have prior authorization from Panama Canal Authority (ACP) officials and that vessels are not forced to assume a liability for passenger safety they are not prepared to accept. Similarly, the Panama Canal Authority must be notified by shipping agents of any *Guest* transit they approve.

3. Definitions

a. *Official Transits* are those made by ACP personnel on board transiting vessels while in an official duty status and by other high-ranking officials or dignitaries who are assigned that status by ACP officials.

b. *Courtesy Transits* are those made by persons not in an official duty status. Such passengers include Authority or other personnel not in an official capacity, but who have some legitimate need or reason to acquaint with the Canal operation. These transits must be authorized by the Vice President for Operations or his designee and are arranged with the approval of the vessel, its owner, operator, or agent.

c. *Guest Transits* are those made for enjoyment by persons invited by owners, masters or agents. Since the Authority is not involved, arrangements for these transits are to be made directly with the local shipping agencies.

4. Procedures

Requests for *Official* and *Courtesy* transits are to be directed to the Integrated Operations Control Center (OP-C) at 272-4224, for coordination and approval. Requests for *Guest* transits are to be directed to the vessel's agent. Division and unit managers may approve and arrange *Official* transits for their employees if job related but must first coordinate with OP-C to ensure that there is no conflict with other *Official* or *Courtesy* transits. All transits involving Authority launch service must be coordinated with OP-C.

a. *Official and Courtesy Transits*

(1) Approval: Must be requested to the Vice President for Operations or his designee prior to transit through the Integrated Operations Control Center (OP-C), or in his absence, the Maritime Traffic Control Manager (OP-CT) supervisor at 272-4224. Job-related transits of ACP employees are to be approved by division and unit managers. Requests for approval and/or coordination will only be processed Monday through Friday between 0730 and 1530 hours. Once approved, the Integrated Operations Control Center Manager will make the necessary arrangements and notifications for the transit. The Authority will alert the agent of all requests for official and courtesy transits as early as possible. Since requests for courtesy transits must be approved by the vessel's master, an occasional last-minute refusal is possible. Courtesy transits will generally be authorized for transits between Tuesdays and Saturdays.

(2) Transportation: The Authority will make available at no expense to the passenger, vessel or agency involved, the launch and land transportation for any approved official transit. Passengers shall make every possible effort to avoid delays in the departure and/or arrival of the official jitneys and launches. Except for land transportation, similar arrangements will be made for approved courtesy transits.

(3) Escort: Official and courtesy transit passengers who are not Authority employees, and Authority employees who are not familiar with the transit evolution, require a competent escort by the sponsoring Authority office from the point of embarkation until debarkation. Pilots may also act as escorts.

b. *Guest Transits*

(1) Approval: Arrangements must be made directly with the local agent, who is responsible for notifying the Canal port captain at 272-4215 of such approval.

(2) Transportation: Land and/or water transportation shall be provided by the passenger and/or the agent. Subject to safety and operational requirements, the Authority may provide launch service with a service charge at the prevailing tariff rate on a case-by-case basis; however, the agent must make the arrangements and present the necessary documentation to the Authority launch/line handling operations clerk.

5. Restrictions

a. For various reasons, including security, liability and passenger relations, most passenger and cruise ship operators are reluctant to accept transit guests and some operators prohibit such guests. Consequently, arrangements for Courtesy transits aboard passenger vessels will not be initiated by the Authority, unless specifically requested by the agent or master. Any such action must be communicated directly to the Integrated Operations Control Center at 272-4224, Monday through Friday, between 0700-1530 hours, for transits scheduled for Tuesdays through Saturdays.

b. Escorts and persons making a transit must understand that a ship's owner/operator, and ultimately the master, are the final authorities for approving embarkation. As a consequence, some official, and all courtesy and guest transits may be denied, despite the best efforts of the agent and the Authority.

6. Embarking and Disembarking

Embarking and disembarking of *Official* and *Courtesy* passengers will be normally permitted only from Diablo Landing (Balboa Basin) at the Pacific terminal, from Gamboa Landing or Gatun Landing (Gatun Lake), and from Davis Landing or Cristobal Boathouse at the Atlantic terminus. *Official* passengers may be permitted to embark or disembark at other locations, with the Port Captain's prior approval. Other passengers provided with Canal Authority launch service with a service charge at the prevailing tariff rate, or launch service by the *Panama Maritime Authority* provider, may also embark and disembark at other locations. The agent is responsible for making and coordinating arrangements. The above sites have been designated by the Vice President for Transit Business based on safety of the passengers and operational requirements and should not be changed without authorization.

7. Documentation

Persons making an *Official* or *Courtesy* transit are required to have in their possession an approved *Authorization for Transit* form. *Courtesy* and *guest* passengers using Canal Authority launches without charge will also be required to execute a Voucher for Free Pass and a Release and Agreement to Indemnify and Hold Harmless form, releasing the vessel and launch service from liability in the event personal injury occurs during the transit. Vessel masters may also require passengers to sign an internal release of liability form.

8. Cancellations

The magnitude of detail required to arrange a transit dictates that late cancellation by passengers should be extremely rare. Common courtesy demands due consideration by prospective passengers for the considerable effort extended by vessels and others in preparing for these transits.

9. Basic Requirements

Persons requesting a transit are presumed to be in good health, physically agile and not afraid of heights, so that embarking and disembarking by vertical ladder will not present a problem. Persons under 14 years of age will not be permitted to transit. Passengers shall also be properly dressed for the transit. Slacks or jeans and low-heel shoes or sneakers are suggested for female persons making a transit. Groups of passengers shall not exceed five persons per vessel, including the escort.

10. Use of Official Vehicles

Authorization to use official jitneys is restricted to passengers on official transits. *Courtesy* transit passengers shall provide their own land transportation. Passengers, escorts and guests shall avoid placing themselves in a situation of misuse or unauthorized use of an official vehicle, an offense that carries a sanction in accordance with the ACP Personnel Administration Regulation.

11. Safety Concerns

Safety of the passengers is of the utmost importance to all concerned and applicable safety rules and common sense will be observed during the entire transit. Life jackets are available on the launches for boarding. If conditions warrant, they should be used. Escorts have full responsibility for compliance with these rules and must ensure

that passengers have prior authorization from Canal officials, and that the Authority or the vessel is not forced to assume liability for the passengers' safety.

12. Escort Responsibilities

The designated Authority escort for *Official* and *Courtesy* transits is responsible for the following:

a. Obtain the transit schedule from OP-CT and make arrangements for land transportation at least one day before the transit.

b. Confirm the transit schedule with the Maritime Traffic Control Unit watch supervisor at 272-4201 before the associated land or water transportation is initiated.

c. In the event of cancellations or transit schedule changes of greater than one hour, contact the MTC watch supervisor at other times, to make alternative arrangements.

d. Introduce self and party to the ship's officer that receives them on board and escort the party to the bridge or other designated location.

e. Contact the master and pilot in person or by telephone to explain the purpose of the visit and determine any limitations on the visit.

f. Observe ship and bridge etiquette, instruct persons making a transit of same, and abide by any imposed limitation.

13. Questions or Clarifications

If there are questions regarding these procedures, passengers shall seek assistance from the ACP official or agent who coordinated the transit.

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Boris Moreno Vásquez
Vice President for Operations