

**AUTORIDAD DEL CANAL DE PANAMÁ**  
**PROCEDURES FOR SECURING A HANDLINE TRANSIT**  
**OF THE PANAMA CANAL**

**Small craft** are vessels up to 38.1 meters (125 feet) in length overall, which normally transits the Canal as *handlines*, and do not use locomotives in the locks. Handlines under 20 meters (65 feet) in length overall will normally transit the Canal with a transit advisor; while handlines of 20 meters (65 feet) or more will normally require a pilot. The following are guidelines for yacht and other handlines interested in transiting the Panama Canal:

**1. GUIDELINES FOR TRANSITING HANDLINES UNDER 125 FEET**

- a. Before Arrival:** Effective July 1, 2004, all information required for transiting the Panama Canal must be submitted utilizing the Electronic Data Collection System - EDCS (Web or CIG), at least 96 hours prior to arrival at Panama Canal waters. Since many small craft do not have a computer on board, the Admeasurement Office, (Atlantic and Pacific) has a computer available where the required information can be introduced upon arrival. If you need help inputting the information, we have employees that can help you. For more details, please read in our web-page <http://www.pancanal.com/eng/maritime/advisories/index.html> all the advisories relating to the EDCS.
- b. Arrival:** Upon arrival at the Balboa Anchorage or Cristobal Breakwater, the vessel must contact the appropriate Signal Station announcing its arrival and requesting anchoring instructions. The Signal Station will direct the vessel to the anchorage and give any operational restrictions that may be in effect. In no case shall handlines be allowed to pass beyond the Bridge of the Americas northbound, or beyond buoys 3 and 6, Limon Bay, southbound, without the services of a Canal Pilot or Transit Advisor.
- c. Transit Hours:** Handlines will normally be scheduled to transit during the evening hours in the southbound direction, and in the morning hours in the northbound direction. Southbound handlines will normally be scheduled to transit in two days, the second portion generally carried out during daylight. Northbound handlines may be scheduled to finish transit in one day, depending on lockage availability and speed of the handline.
- d. Speed:** The ACP has determined that the minimum full ahead speed required for vessels in order to complete transit in standard times is 8 knots. The Panama Canal Authority shall deny transit if a handline vessel cannot maintain a minimum speed of 5 knots. However, a vessel may be towed through the Canal by another handline vessel if it can tow her at 5 or more knots, or make arrangements to be towed, at their own expense, by a Panama Canal Authority launch. Sailboats cannot transit the Canal under sail. They must transit with motor propulsion. If the vessel is equipped with an outboard motor as its primary propulsion, it must have a means of reversing the engine. The operator must be able to control the outboard motor from the cockpit, or else, the vessel may need a Port Captain's inspection. Make sure to tell the Canal Inspector the correct top speed that your vessel can sustain. There can be hazardous currents associated with the transit, and it is important that your vessel be able to maintain a safe speed at all times. If, at the beginning of the transit, the craft cannot maintain a safe speed, as reported to the Canal Inspector, the craft will be turned around and returned to the starting point. If this occurs, an aborted transit charge will be billed to the craft and any other related charges. Sailboats and other slow vessels, normally will transit in two days. If the vessel must anchor for the night at Gamboa or Gatun

Anchorage, no one other than Panama Canal Authority personnel is allowed to go ashore without the Port Captains' permission and on ACP launches only. No dinghies or rowboats are permitted.

- e. **Transit Advisor:** Small crafts less than 20 meters (65 feet) in length shall be assigned a Transit Advisor, who will function as an advisor to the skipper; providing knowledge of the Canal operating area, and procedures to follow. He also provides communications with the locks, transiting vessels and Authority Transit Controllers. These vessels will be assigned a Panama Canal Pilot only under special circumstances.
- f. **Radio:** You must stand by channel 12 VHF while in Canal waters.

## 2. EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

All handline vessels are required to be equipped with 4 ropes, of adequate strength for the size of the vessel to maintain it stable in the lock chamber under strong turbulence. These ropes must be a minimum of 125 feet (38 meters) long and have a loop tied on one end about 3 feet in diameter. The ropes must be free of knots or splices in order to pass freely through the chocks. The vessel must be equipped with adequate fenders, at least 4 to prevent damage from making contact with the chamber walls during lockages. Normally, ropes and tires for fenders can be rented from local yacht clubs, or shipping agents if needed. It is the vessel's responsibility to have enough fenders on board and properly placed. All vessels must have an anchor capable of being retrieved without delay. The vessel must be equipped with a working whistle or horn. The vessel must have a toilet on board or they could experience delays while relieving the Pilot or Transit Advisor. The vessel must provide the Pilot or Transit Advisor with a meal and fresh drinking water, or there could be an additional charge to provide these items for them. An awning must be installed over the cockpit to provide the Transit Advisor and crew with shelter from the sun and rain. Vessel must maintain its schedule, regardless of weather conditions.

## 3. TRANSIT REQUIREMENTS

After inspection, the Canal Port Captain or his designee will determine whether your vessel transits the Canal as a "center chamber" or "sidewall" handline lockage. This determination is based on hull configuration, protruding railings, awnings, tall masts, spars or anything else, which could be damaged when made fast alongside chamber walls.

On up-lockages, heavy turbulence is encountered. Consequently, all lines should be inspected for condition and should be of sufficient size and strength to hold the vessel under heavy strain, size not less than 7/8" in diameter, nor larger than 1 1/2" in diameter is mandatory. Line handlers must have enough strength and skill to control lines during times of turbulence.

Regardless of the type of lockage planned, every vessel must be equipped for center chamber lockage, especially with regard to number of linehandlers and mooring lines.

## 4. ADMEASUREMENT AND CLEARANCES

- a. **Boarding:** All vessels desiring to transit the Panama Canal must be boarded and cleared by an Admeasurer. Vessels must be measured prior to their initial transit or their first transit after structural changes were made.

- b. **Vessels without a local agent:** Can call the Balboa Admeasurement Office at (507) 272-4571, or the Cristobal Admeasurement Office at (507) 443-2293 to make an appointment to have their vessels inspected, measured and cleared. An Admeasurement Clearance form will be issued upon completion of inspection. There is no fee for the issuance of this form, which must be re-issued for each transit and is valid for two months (60 days).
- c. **Vessels with a local agent:** The agent will give an ETA. Vessel will be boarded, inspected, measured and cleared shortly after arrival by an Admeasurer. The Agent will guarantee the proper payments required for transit.
- d. **Measurement and inspections:** Depending upon the particular circumstances of the case, the Admeasurer will visit the vessel to perform any necessary paperwork, measurements and inspections. Such visits will be conducted only between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. local time, and are subject to deferral due to anticipated workload changes. There is a fee for performing admeasurement inspections after normal working hours when resources are available. The fee is \$75.00 per hour with a 2-hour minimum. In most cases, the transit criteria will be established during this visit, and the owner/skipper will be appraised of the requirements for transit.
- e. **Forms:**
  - Admeasurement Clearance and Handline Inspection form (No Agents). This form is required for payment of Canal tolls and fees.
  - *Handline Lockage Request.* This form includes the type of lockage, a physical description of the vessel, and the equipment required aboard during the transit. The Canal Port Captain must approve it.
  - *Handline Undertaking to Release and Indemnify.* It identifies several characteristics that are common to small vessels but that do not comply with Canal regulations. Transit may only be allowed if the skipper signs this form releasing the Panama Canal Authority from liability in case of any accident, damage or injury, caused by use of equipment aboard the vessel that does not meet Panama Canal requirements.

## 5. ASSESSMENT OF TOLLS AND OTHER TRANSIT RELATED CHARGES

- a. **Tolls:** The Panama Canal tolls are assessed on PC/UMS Net Tonnage, which is based on the internal volume of the vessel and also whether the vessel is laden or in ballast, as determined by the Admeasurer. Tolls for small craft of up to 583 PC/UMS Net Tons when laden or 735 PC/UMS when in ballast, are based on their length overall.
- b. **Deposit Fee:** The total deposit fee required for small craft includes the tolls, transit vessel inspection (TVI) and security fees, and the buffer. The buffer is to be used in case additional charges are incurred during transit. The estimated time for refunding the buffer is 2 to 3 weeks after the transit date, if it is not used. The total deposit fee is based on length overall.

Length Overall (in feet)	Transit Tolls	TVI Inspection Charge	Security Charge	Buffer	Total Deposit Required
Up to 50	\$500.00	\$54.00	\$55.00	\$891.00	\$1500.00
50 < length <= 80	\$750.00	\$54.00	\$55.00	\$891.00	\$1750.00
80 < length <= 100	\$1,000.00	\$54.00	\$55.00	\$891.00	\$2000.00
length > 100	\$1,500.00	\$54.00	\$55.00	\$891.00	\$2500.00

- c. **Other related charges:** Whenever owners or representatives of handline vessels that would normally transit with transit advisors request the assignment of a regular pilot instead, that assignment will be charged at the rate of \$2,410.00 if sufficient notification has been provided, as specified on Tariff 1060.0040, or otherwise at the rate of \$4,815.00, if insufficient notice has been provided as specified on Tariff 1060.0045. Whenever owners or representatives of handline vessels request to stop in the Canal interrupting their transit, or whenever handline vessels present some deficiency or condition that prevent the completion of their transit as scheduled, they will be assessed the tariff for transit delay of \$471.00 and other related charges, such as launch and moorage. However, if the transit is interrupted due to Canal scheduling considerations, these charges will not be applied.

The following are some deficiencies or conditions that may require the assignment of additional pilots or transit advisors in order for the vessel to complete their transit:

- Restricted visibility
  - Inadequate sanitary facilities
  - Inability to develop and maintain the minimum full ahead speed required to complete the transit in standard time. (8 knots)
- d. **AIS System:** Vessels over 20 meter (65 feet) in LOA must have the AIS system installed and operating, otherwise the ACP will provide a portable unit and a rental fee of \$161.00 will be assessed.
- e. **Payment:** Payment of tolls can be arranged through a local bonded agent, or can be paid directly at the Citibank in Balboa or Cristobal. Direct payments are accepted in U.S. dollars cash money only or "Visa" credit card. In order to pay tolls, directly, you must present the proper *Admeasurement Clearance and Handline Inspection* form.
- f. **Bank schedules:**
1. Pacific side: On the Pacific side of the Isthmus, the Citibank is located in Niko's Plaza in Balboa. The telephone number is (507) 314-1596. Tolls may be paid between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. from Monday to Friday. This office is closed for business on weekends and recognized holidays.
  2. Atlantic side: On the Atlantic side of the Isthmus, the Citibank is located next to the Cristobal piers entrance. The telephone number is (507) 441-6303 and (507) 441-6144. Tolls may be paid between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. from Monday to Friday. This office is closed for business on weekends and recognized holidays.

## 6. TRANSIT SCHEDULE INFORMATION

Information regarding transit date and time can be obtained from the Marine Traffic Scheduler only after the vessel has been cleared, transit requested and tolls paid. The telephone number of the scheduler is (507) 272-4202 and should be contacted after 1800 hours the day of the inspection but prior to 30 days after the issuing date of the Handline Inspection form.

## 7. HANDLINE LOCKAGE PROCEDURES

### a. Types of Lockages

There are three types of lockages available to yachts under 125' L.O.A. when transiting the Canal. They are: center chamber; sidewall, or alongside an ACP Tug. All vessels will be required to be capable of making a center chamber lockage. The other two options will be at the discretion of the Canal Port Captain.

1. **Center-Chamber Lockage:** The vessel is held in the center of the chamber by two bow and two stern lines. This type of lockage requires four 125-foot lines, recommended size not less than 7/8" in diameter, nor larger than 1 1/2" in diameter. Locks personnel cannot handle lines any larger in diameter than this.  
**Nested Center-Chamber Lockage:** This is where two or more handline vessels perform the entire lockage tied up or "nested" alongside each other. This type of lockage is used when several handlines are transiting at the same time.
2. **Sidewall Lockage:** This type of lockage uses two of the required 125-foot lines to hold the vessel alongside the sidewall in the chamber, recommended rope size of not less than 7/8" in diameter, nor larger than 1 1/2" in diameter. The walls of the locks are rough unfinished concrete, which can cause considerable damage to vessels not properly protected by fenders. Damage to masts or rigging on sailboats may also occur, if the turbulence causes the vessels to roll and strike the sidewall.
3. **Alongside an ACP Tug:** This type of lockage, when available, also uses two of the required 125-foot lines, recommended size of not less than 7/8" in diameter, nor larger than 1 1/2" in diameter rope. Availability of this type of lockage depends on the ship traffic for the day, and as such cannot be scheduled.

#### **b. Picking Up Mooring Lines**

Following a ship into a chamber, the crew of the handline vessel passes the first bow and stern lines to linehandlers on the approach wall at position 1. At position 2, crew passes the second set of bow and stern lines to linehandlers on sidewall of chamber. At position 3 all lines are made fast on board and ashore for flooding operation.

Sufficient experienced and capable crewmembers must be on board to provide four linehandlers and a competent operator at all times.

Chocks and bitts or cleats shall be inspected to make sure all fittings are in good condition and fasteners well secured. They will be under heavy strain during the transit. The area around these fittings must be clear of gear so that the lines can be safely and efficiently handled.

Remember it is your yacht. If it is damaged due to faulty or insufficient equipment or improper handling of boat or equipment by the crew, the loss of time and expense will be yours. You must have your vessel in top shape. Your cooperation with Canal officials will not only save time and expense, but will result in a much smoother transit for all concerned.