

Welcome return to commercial use of Aire and Calder Navigation to link Hull and Leeds

A historic Yorkshire waterway is once again welcoming regular commercial traffic.

The 500-tonne capacity barge MMS Off-Roader has started using the historic Aire and Calder Navigation to transport marine aggregate from the city's Albert Dock to Leeds. It follows significant investment from Hull maritime firm MMS Workboats, AC Marine Aggregates and the Canal and River Trust, and extensive trials.

Each trip is welcome news for those using the strategic road network too, eliminating up to 25 heavy goods vehicles from the A62 and M62. It is hoped more companies will follow the lead.

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Regular commercial traffic has not used the route for more than a decade. The trip starts its journey at the port, using the Humber to head inland, with the vessel locking into the canal at Goole before heading to Knostrop, to the south of Leeds. From there the aggregates are distributed by land across the local building industry.

David Lowe, of the Commercial Boat Operators Association, said: "Commercial traffic is returning to the Aire and Calder Canal after a lot of hard work by a lot of people. Britain's waterways are an underused part of the transport network, with an ability to deliver heavy goods in a quiet but efficient way

that helps keep heavy lorries off the roads. The run of MMS Off-Roader is something to celebrate and is the largest vessel to reach central Leeds for 30 years.”

Take a tour of MMS Off-Roader



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Another sustainable accolade for the MMS Off-Roader is that it has been repurposed. The vessel was originally a tanker named the Humber Princess, built in Hull in 1979. MMS’s skilled team, planned and delivered the conversion project, taking just short of a year.

Rob Langton, MMS’s managing director, said: “As a key part of the local marine industry MMS are very happy to get this ship underway with what we hope is the first of a regular trade for the building industry of West Yorkshire. It is a shipment that takes heavy goods vehicles off our pressurised road network, a win for logistics and the wider environment.”

An important part of the conversion of the 60m by 6m vessel was to ensure the crew operating her have superior facilities onboard, as they journey along the waterways.

Mr Langton added: “We are keen to encourage young people to consider a career in shipping. The safety and welfare of our team is of paramount importance to us, and it was key that we ensured all the comforts of home could be provided to those working the barge.”

Free trial runs are now being offered for those interested in exploring potential waterway options, with capability to handle special cargoes and containers as well as bulks, break bulks and liquids. Two trips a week can be factored in for those looking to charter her.

Simon Bird, ABP Humber director, said: “Operating commercial vessels across the region’s waterways will bring huge benefits to the area. Along with a reduction in emissions, taking heavy goods vehicles off the roads will also help reduce road congestion and improve safety. “Congratulations to MMS Workboats of Hull and the wider team involved with this project.”

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