



PANAMA CANAL TRANSIT FREQUENTLY ASK QUESTIONS

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This document intends to provide our clients with a better understanding of transiting Panama Canal. For any questions not addressed in this document, please contact our customer service department at Customerservice@pancanal.com.

ANCHORAGE

Q. What is the minimum distance required between vessels at anchor?

A. The Panama Canal Operations Port Captain analysis established that the safe anchoring between vessels requires approximately 2 to 3 cables apart, always considering, in a case by case basis, the elements such as distance between vessels, vessels dimensions, wind, weather and sea conditions.

ADMEASUREMENT & INSPECTION

Q. WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION TO BE PRESENTED TO THE BOARDING OFFICER?

- The following information shall be ready for inspection, **do not make a copy** unless requested by Boarding Officer:
 1. Arrival draft in salt and fresh water, forward and aft and displacement
 2. Last ten ports of call before arriving to Panama Canal
 3. Crew List
 4. Passenger List
 5. Fuel on board
 6. Voyage Number
 7. Last Port State Control (Date, Port)

- Present the following certificates, do not make a copy unless requested by Boarding Officer:
 1. IAPP Certificate and its supplement
 2. International Ship Security Certificate
 3. Safety Equipment Certificate
 4. Marpol (IOPP) Certificate
 5. Certificate of Fitness (for LPG, LNG, Chemical and Tankers)
 6. International Tonnage Certificate

7. Load Line Certificate
8. International Safety Management (ISM)
9. Ship Classification Certificate
10. Ship Sanitation Control Exception Certificate
11. International Sewage Pollution Prevention Certificate
12. ACP Tolls Basis Certificate

• Copies of:

1. Stowage Plan (Cargo on board and the document certifying the amount and type of cargo)
2. Displacement on arrival (**Neopanamax**)
3. Container Summary, if carrying containers ([Form 4510](#))
4. Bunker Delivery Notes

Note: All documentation requested for Initial Transit (**Only first time, Page 19, Notice to Shipping N01-Vessel Requirement** in [Notices to Shipping - Autoridad del Canal de Panamá \(pancanal.com\)](#))

Q. IS IT REQUIRED TO UPDATE AND INFORM OF ANY CHANGES IN TRANSIT CONDITIONS AFTER THE PANAMA CANAL INSPECTION, PRIOR TO THE VESSEL'S TRANSIT?

A. Affirmative, all changes performed, such as draft, trim, displacement, bunkering, cargo operations (STS or docking), which have not been reported to the Panama Canal inspector during the formalities, shall be reported as soon as concluded.

Q. IN ANY CASE OF CHANGE IN TRANSIT CONDITIONS AFTER ALL FORMALITIES, WHO SHALL BE INFORMED?

A. All changes in conditions shall be documented and informed via the vessel's local agent, who shall update the maritime portal (VUMPA) and inform the required operational offices such as Canal Port Captain, Marine Traffic Control and Admeasurement Unit.

Q. WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED DRAFTS TO TRANSIT THE PANAMA CANAL?

A. The minimum salt water draft according to the length overall of the ship are available on page 14, Table I of the OP Notice to Shipping "Vessel Requirements" in [Notices to Shipping - Autoridad del Canal de Panamá \(pancanal.com\)](#)

LENGTH	MINIMUM DRAFT TSW
Up to 129.54 m (425 ft)	Trimmed so pilot can see the ranges over the forecastle from center of navigation bridge
Over 129.54 m (425 ft)	2.44 m (8 ft) forward, 4.27 m (14 ft) aft
Over 144.8 m (475 ft)	5.50 m (18 ft) forward, 6.10 m (20 ft) aft
Over 160.02 m (525 ft)	6.10 m (20 ft) forward, 6.71 m (22 ft) aft
Over 176.78 m (580 ft)	6.71 m (22 ft) forward, 7.32 m (24 ft) aft
Over 190.50 m (625 ft)	7.32 m (24ft) forward, 7.92 m (26 ft) aft
Over 304.80 m (1,000 ft)	7.92 m (26 ft) forward, 8.53 m (28 ft) aft
Over 335.28 m (1,100 ft)	8.53 m (28 ft) forward, 9.14 m (30 ft) aft

TABLE I - Minimum Salt Water Draft

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Q. IS THE BUNKER DELIVERY NOTE REQUIRED TO BE PRESENTED TO THE BOARDING OFFICER?

A. Yes, is required if the vessel maneuvering fuel is residual marine fuel.

Q. IS IT NECESSARY TO PREPARE THE BOARDING FACILITIES ON ARRIVAL, PRIOR ANCHORING OR PROCEEDING TO DOCK?

A. Yes, the vessel must arrive with the boarding facilities ready (pilot ladder, combination ladder, accommodation ladder, etc., depending on the freeboard) to avoid unnecessary delays or extra charges. Inspections are carried out 24/7.

Q. IS THE PANAMA CANAL INSPECTOR GOING TO BOARD THE VESSEL AT THE OUTER ATLANTIC ANCHORAGE AREA FOR THE CLEARANCE AND TRANSIT INSPECTION?

A. No, the Panama Canal Inspector will be boarding the vessel at the break water entrance or at the inner anchorage, depending on the vessel's itinerary.

Q. WHO DO WE EXPECT TO BOARD THE VESSEL AFTER THE PANAMA CANAL QUARANTINE INSPECTION IS COMPLETED?

A. On Neopanamax vessels, a second inspector from the Admeasurement Unit will board the vessel for the antenna installation (Pilot Portable Unit) before the transit time.

Q. WHICH SIDE (PORT OR STARBOARD) SHOULD I HAVE THE PILOT LADDER FOR TRANSIT THE CANAL?

A. It is recommended, for Canal Transit, you provide your "starboard side" boarding facility since it is at the opposite side of the vessels coming in the opposite direction. So, it is highly possible that your pilot will request this boarding facility once the transit starts, however weather conditions are factors to take into consideration. Please contact Signal Station for recommendations.

Q. DO I RECEIVE MY ACP TOLLS BASIS CERTIFICATE ON MY FIRST VISIT TO PANAMA CANAL?

A. No, on the first transit through the Canal, a Panama Canal Surveyor certifies and validates all the information, the ACP TOLLS BASIS Certificate is delivered to the ship on its second visit to the Canal, as normal procedure.

Q. WIRE ROPES AND ROPES COMPOSED OF BOTH WIRE AND FIBER ARE ACCEPTABLE FOR CANAL OPERATIONS?

A. No, vessels are required to have available for immediate use six manila or synthetic mooring lines forward and six aft in good conditions prior to commencing transit. Wire ropes and ropes composed of both wire and fiber or filaments, are not acceptable for Canal operations and shall not be used. For more information, please refer to Vessel Requirements in [Notices to Shipping - Autoridad del Canal de Panamá \(pancanal.com\)](https://www.pancanal.com)

Q. WHERE DOES THE PILOT EMBARK THE VESSEL TO PROCEED TO THE CANAL?

A. Pilots embark at the anchoring position or at the entrance of Cristobal Breakwater. Vessels are not allowed to proceed to the Canal without a Panama Canal Pilot on board.

Q. IS IT POSSIBLE TO LOWER THE LIFEBOATS FOR A DRILL IN THE ANCHORAGE?

A. This type of operations and others such as hull painting, draft marks maintenance, hot work may be conducted with prior authorization from the Canal Port Captain through your local agent. Please contact your local agent to follow the procedure.

NUMBER AND ORDER OF VESSELS IN THE SCHEDULE

Q. WHAT DETERMINES THE NUMBER OF VESSELS IN THE SCHEDULE?

A. The number of vessels that can be accommodated in the schedule depends basically on the mix of vessels available for transit (types and dimensions); drafts (vessels with deeper drafts require longer lockage); Canal conditions (availability of infrastructure and resources); and the vessels' restrictions in the Canal (for example, if the vessel is restricted to daylight transit or if she can meet opposing traffic in navigation channels). The higher the number of restricted vessels, the lower the number of vessels in a schedule.

Q. WHAT DETERMINES THE ORDER IN WHICH VESSELS BEGIN AND / OR FINISH THEIR TRANSIT?

A. For non-booked vessels, their arrival time determines their turn in transit in relation to other non-booked vessels. They are normally scheduled around booked vessels that must be scheduled taking into account the 18-hour in-transit-time requirement. US military vessels have priority in transit and must also be considered. Once it is determined which vessels rate to transit on a particular day, the scheduler will arrange them in the best possible order so as to optimize the Canal's capacity and the use of resources, and taking into account the arrival, ready times, and transit restrictions of each vessel. For these reasons, the order in which vessels start their transit is not necessarily the same as the order in which they finish their passage through the Canal.

Q. WHY WAS A VESSEL SCHEDULED TO TRANSIT BEFORE ANOTHER VESSEL THAT ARRIVED LATER?

A. In general this happens with vessels that have booked their transit. The booking system allows vessels to transit on a specific date, without needing to wait for their turn in transit based *solely* on their arrival. The transit order may also be affected by the vessel's restrictions or transit conditions.

Q. WHY ARE SOME VESSELS SCHEDULED TO ANCHOR IN GATUN LAKE OR TO STAY AT THE TIE-UP STATIONS?

A. Certain vessels are restricted to daylight transit and / or are restricted from meeting opposing traffic in some areas of the Canal. For this reason, and to assure that booked vessels transit within the 18-hour requirement, it is necessary to regularly schedule some vessels to anchor or tie-up at different areas of the Canal. The use of the tie-up stations, mooring areas and anchorage facilities allows the locks infrastructures to be used more efficiently, therefore optimizing the Canal's capacity.

SCHEDULE CHANGES

Q. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CAUSES FOR SCHEDULE CHANGES?

A. The daily schedules are constantly affected by changes in vessels' status or conditions such as: changes in ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) or arrival times, changes in ready times for transit, changes in vessels' status (for example: changes in orders or transit cancellations), changes in restrictions due to

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cargo or visibility, changes in drafts, and deficiencies. Changes might also be due to breakdowns at the locks, tugs, launches, highway traffic, weather (fog, rain), etc.

Q. HOW OFTEN IS THE TRANSIT SCHEDULE CHANGED?

A. The transit schedule is constantly revised and updated, and changes may occur at any time.

Q. WHY DO SOME VESSELS THAT WERE ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR A FULL TRANSIT STAY OVERNIGHT IN GATUN LAKE? WHY ARE SOME VESSELS' TRANSITS INTERRUPTED OR CANCELLED?

A. Sometimes issues that happen during a transit day, such as breakdowns of the locks or other equipment or resources, unavailability of resources, vessels' delays or deficiencies, weather conditions, etc., cause a cumulative schedule deterioration that impedes the scheduled transit plan from becoming a reality. In such cases, and in order to prevent further delays from impacting the following transit schedule, some vessels' transits are interrupted or postponed for the next day.

Q. WHY ARE SOME BREAKWATER TIMES CHANGED WITH SUCH A SHORT NOTICE?

A. Unfortunately, many changes that occur in the schedule cannot be prevented nor predicted. The breakwater times for some southbound vessels depend on the northbound vessels departing Gatun Locks. If, for example, these northbound vessels experience delays in their clearing times, the lockage times for the southbound vessels will also be delayed, requiring breakwater times to be adjusted, sometimes with short notice.

The breakwater times may also be affected by pilot availability. If the pilot suffers any delay in his transportation to the Atlantic side or to the arriving vessel from a previous assignment, the breakwater time will need to be adjusted accordingly, and again, sometimes with short notice.

PILOT TIMES

Q. WHY DO THE PILOT TIMES CHANGE SEVERAL TIMES WITHIN A DAY?

A. The pilot times are affected by changes in the schedule. For example, when a vessel cancels its transit, this transit slot must be assigned to another vessel and therefore its pilot time changes, sometimes with very short notice. At times one single event may cause a domino effect in the schedule, changing the pilot times of several vessels in the convoy.

Q. WHY ARE VESSELS NOT NOTIFIED EVERY TIME THERE IS A CHANGE IN THEIR PILOT TIME?

A. The vessels are not provided with a new pilot time every time the transit schedule is modified because there could be many changes during the day and it is not practical to contact the vessel every time these changes occur. In order to reduce the number of times a vessel is contacted for this reason, the pilot-time notifications are done twice a day, approximately between 1100 and 1200 hours for vessels scheduled to transit in the afternoon convoy, and between 2000 and 2200 hours for vessels scheduled to transit in the morning convoy of the following day. Other notifications may occur during the day depending on operational needs or if there is a significant change in the pilot time previously provided.

Q. WHY WAS THE PILOT NOT ON BOARD AT THE PILOT TIME GIVEN?

A. The pilot time given during the notification period is an estimated time based on the vessel's scheduled lockage time at the time of the notification.

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The actual time that the pilot will be on board may be affected by changes in the vessel's lockage time. Additionally, issues arising while the pilot is being transported to the vessel may affect the time that he or she actually gets on board.

Q. WHY WAS THE VESSEL NOT GIVEN A PILOT TIME FOR A HARBOR MOVEMENT?

A. For harbor jobs, the projected pilot times is usually provided from the harbor controller to the vessel's agent, who is the one responsible for advising the Panama Canal with the ready times for docking and undocking, based, among other things, on information provided by the ports' operations departments and/or by the vessel's master. The harbor controller then coordinates with the agent the time that the job will be performed, taking into consideration other issues such as traffic restrictions or availability of resources. It is expected that the agent will pass on this information to his client. However, if the vessel is unable to contact its agent, the master may obtain a tentative pilot time by contacting the signal station.

TRANSIT DURATION

Q. WHY CAN'T ALL TRANSITS BE COMPLETED IN 10 HOURS? WHY DOES IT TAKE LONGER IN SOME OCCASIONS THAN IN OTHERS?

A. The number of vessels that can be accommodated in the schedule depends basically on the mix (types and dimensions) of vessels available for transit; vessels' drafts (vessels with deeper drafts require longer lockages); Canal conditions (availability of infrastructure and resources); and the vessels' restrictions in the Canal (for example, if the vessel is restricted to daylight transit or if she can meet opposing traffic in navigation channels). These conditions vary each day and consequently, each schedule is different. That is why in some occasions a vessel's transit may be fairly straight through while in others it may be interrupted and therefore take longer hours.

The Canal strives to provide a safe and efficient service to customers of different requirements and restrictions, taking into account many infrastructure, environmental, and regulatory considerations. Every effort is made to reduce both the waiting time and the in-transit time as much as possible, as well as changes in the transit schedule, but they are all inherent to an operation as dynamic as the transit through the Panama Canal.

Q. WHY DOESN'T THE SCHEDULE CONSIDER THE VESSEL'S CREW REST PERIODS?

A. The Canal strives to provide a safe and efficient service to all vessels, taking into account many infrastructure, environmental, and regulatory considerations. Therefore, in order to maximize the Canal's capacity, it is necessary to anchor or tie-up vessels in different locations of the Canal. Since the transit through the Canal is a 24-hour operation, crew rest periods of each vessel cannot be considered since doing so would increase the waiting times, and decrease both the amount of vessels scheduled for each day and the level of service provided.

In order for this dynamic and complex operation to be successful, vessels shall plan the availability of their crew in such a way that the vessel is manned both in number and qualification as required in order to provide a safe transit.

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Q. WHY ARE PILOTS RELIEVED IN SOME TRANSITS?

A. Pilots may have to be relieved in order to comply with pilot assignment duration limitations as specified in their Collective Bargaining Agreement. Pilots may also be relieved due to vessel deficiencies or other special conditions as determined by the Canal Port Captain.

Q. WHY DO VESSELS SOMETIMES HAVE TO WAIT SEVERAL DAYS TO START TRANSIT? WHY IS A BACKLOG OF VESSELS FORMED?

A. Since the Panama Canal is affected by the seasonal activities of its clients, there are periods during the year in which the number of daily arriving vessels exceed the amount of vessels that may be scheduled for transit. This is the main reason for an increase in the backlog of vessels expecting a transit slot, although in some times of the year Canal maintenance works (especially at the locks) and weather conditions may also impact the said backlog. The number of days that a vessel will be awaiting transit will depend on several issues; usually, restricted non-booked vessels will have to wait longer than vessels that have been able to secure a booked transit, or vessels that have none or few transit restrictions. During periods of increased backlog, the Canal will put in effect the necessary measures in order to reduce this backlog as soon as possible; the measures may include increasing the availability of resources, modify the conditions of the Transit Reservation system, and postpone maintenance works, among others. The Panama Canal is constantly looking for ways to keep these delays to the minimum possible, as allowed by the current circumstances.

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