



# Quick Guide to Steering on the Tideway

## **WARNING**

**This document is only an introduction. All coaches, water safety advisors and coxes/steers who go out unsupervised must be familiar with the detail of the PLA document 'Rowing on the Tideway'**

# General Principles

**The cox/steer is master in charge of a vessel** in a working port (it might not feel like it but the Tideway is part of the Port of London) so you must:

- Know and obey the rules– make sure that you keep up-to-date with any changes in the Tideway Code.
- Check that the boat and the crew are fit for each outing.
- Think about getting British Rowing membership – it gives you for civil liability and personal accident insurance.
- Keep a good lookout – coxes should check what is happening behind as well as in front of the boat. Bow steers should look round (over both shoulders) at least every 5 strokes and more often in hazardous areas eg bridges, crossover points.

## Avoid collisions

- If you see a crew which is in danger of hitting you (or someone else), shout 'Head and the boat type or club name' **very loudly** and give everyone plenty of time to change direction or to stop.
- Assume that others can't see you.
- Let people know in good time what you are doing, especially if you are in the wrong place.
- Allow yourself plenty of time/space when stopping, turning around or crossing the river

**Don't baulk** ie don't row immediately in front of someone or attempt to slow down a faster boat which is trying to overtake. If you want to do starts or exercises, move to the side of the big boat.

## Be polite and considerate to all other river users

**Only 'approved steers' should cox/steer boats.** If you are untrained make sure you have someone who knows what they're doing at bow and 2, ideally only go out with experienced crews till you are confident and competent.

**If it is dark/lighting-up time you MUST have white lights visible for 360 degrees and 800m on the stern and bow.** Flashing lights are not legal. Your lights must be securely attached to the boat so that they can't get knocked off. Take a spare one too.

**Report motor boats breaking the rules.** The PLA is concerned that they receive loads of complaints against the rowers but that we don't bother to report the cruisers which makes us look like the bad guys and we all know that this isn't the case. For speeding / misbehaving motor traffic call PLA VTS number **020 8855 0315**.

**Report Incidents** eg capsized, swamping, crash with bridge/boat via the British Rowing website and don't forget to put it into your club incident book <http://incidentreporting.britishrowing.org/>  
Report bad navigation peer to peer ie to the club involved.

**If you need emergency assistance while on the water, call 999 and ask for the coastguard –** there is a lifeboat station downstream at Chiswick pier.

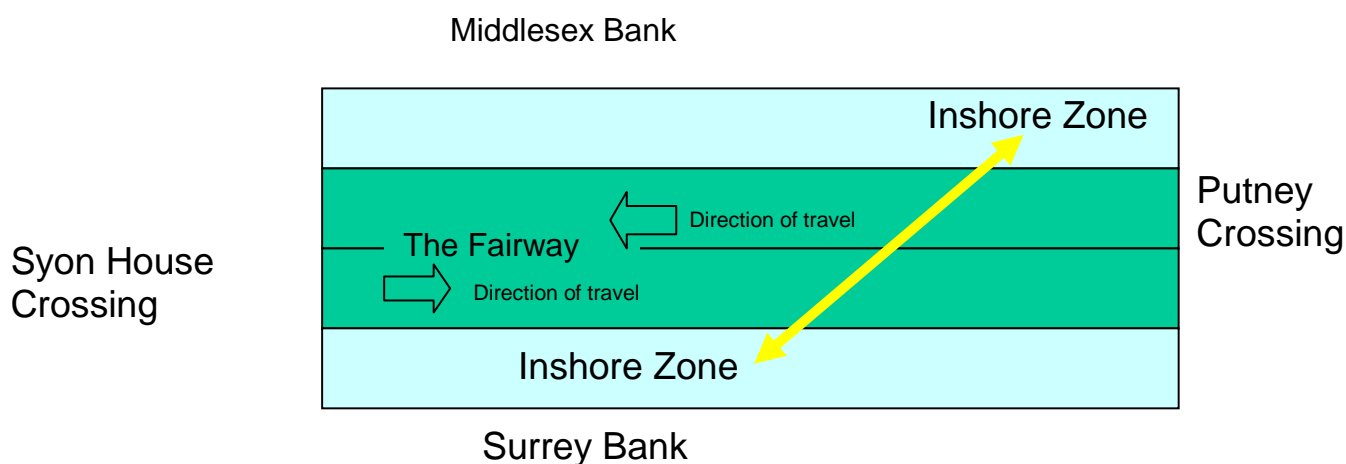
# Tideway Code Basics

The Tideway is a difficult piece of water to steer on, because:

- It is a very busy stretch of water
- **It is tidal** ie the direction of the stream changes and the height of the river rises and falls
- **The stream** moves quickly, so even if you are sitting still you will still be moving relative to the bank, bridges, piers and moored boats etc – it is very easy to be swept into danger whilst doing nothing
- **Special navigation rules known as the Tideway Code** apply to rowing boats between Putney and Kew. On the Tideway, rowers are allowed to ‘work the slacks’ and row on the inside of the bends when rowing against the stream. For the rest of the River Thames ie upstream of Syon and downstream of the Putney crossing, the ‘starboard rule’ applies ie stick to the right hand side of the channel. This is also known as Colregs.

**NB The river is closed during the main Tideway Head races and crews are allowed to ‘take the racing line’ ie the fastest route. The rest of the year, all rowing boats must obey the Tideway Code.**

Think of the river as having four zones...



## Rowing with the stream

Keep as far to the starboard (right) side of The Fairway as is safe and practical. The Fairway is the deep part in the middle of the river, this is sometimes known as the Navigation Channel.

An easy way to work out where to be is to make sure there is enough space on stroke side to allow one of the big passenger boats (eg the Cockney Sparrow) to pass you without running aground.

You may row two abreast, and another crew is allowed to overtake you. Rowing four abreast is not allowed. Be prepared to give way to other traffic.

You must never be more than 2 abreast going through a bridge.

## Rowing against the stream

Between Putney and Syon you are allowed to row in a special channel known as the inshore zone. This channel avoids the worst of the stream, sometimes it is on the Surrey side of the river and sometimes it is on the Middlesex side.

The rowing lane is marked by buoys at points on the river. The buoys are red on the Surrey side and green on the Middlesex side.

You are allowed to cross between the two river banks at designated crossing points which are marked either by buoys or by yellow posts on the river bank. **NB Crossing crews do not have right of way**

Upstream of the Syon 'crossing' and downstream of the Putney crossing you must stick to the starboard rule.

You may not row two abreast, unless you are overtaking

Coaching launches should follow behind, not alongside

## Restricted zones

These are around all bridges and crossing points, and also between Kew Road and Rail Bridges

These are considered to be dangerous areas, and you should not stop, do slow exercises or overtake in restricted zones

## Overtaking

If you are overtaking, you do not have right of way and do not expect to be allowed on the inside.

If you being overtaken and are going against the stream, according to the rules, you should be overtaken on the outside. BUT it takes a lot longer for a crew to overtake you on the outside, so it is sensible to:

EITHER slow down

OR stop

If you are being overtaken and going with the stream, you must maintain your original course and the overtaking crew must go around you.

## Stopping and Turning

- You must not stop or turn in a restricted or crossing zone
- Make sure you stop well away from or downstream of hazards such as moored boats, piers etc
- When you are stationary, avoid causing a blockage by:
  - keeping the boat parallel to the bank;
  - keeping close to the bank when in the Inshore Zone or close to the edge of the Fairway when going with the stream;
  - sitting in single file

# Especially hazardous parts of the Tideway

**Dove Pier** - Make sure that you do not go too wide through Hammersmith Bridge when you are travelling with the stream from Putney to Chiswick. If you go too wide, you risk being swept onto Dove Pier. As a guide do not pass to the Middlesex (right) side of the words 'Hammersmith Bridge'.

**Hammersmith Bridge and Kew Rail bridge** - on very low tides you may go outside the Surrey pier with care – stop first to make sure no-one is coming in the opposite direction.

**Barnes Bridge** - very shallow at low tide. You may go outside the Middlesex pier with care at extreme low tides, but stop first to check no-one is coming in the opposite direction.

**Between Kew Bridges** – no exercises, no stopping, no beginner crews. Except you are allowed to stop and turn quickly, just by the buoy between Oliver's Eyot and Kew pier.

**Kew Road Bridge** PLA rules say that we must not go upstream of the road bridge if you can't get through the side arch.

**Upstream of the Syon Crossing** - the starboard rule applies. If you are rowing down from Richmond and the stream is going out, stick to the Fairway, do not hug the Surrey Bank (if you hug the Surrey bank you run the risk of crashing into crews coming up from Kew).

## Tides and how they affect you

**The tide usually runs out for 8 hours and comes in for 4 hours; we spend the most time rowing on a falling tide, so be extra careful when the tide is coming in as the conditions are not as familiar**

**Low tide;** the river is very shallow, often the water is calmer, but there is not much space for everyone to row, so keep an extra good lookout.

**High tide;** there is lots of water in the river and it can be rough.

**Spring tides;** These happen twice a month (when there is a full moon and a new moon), the high tides are very high and the low tides are very low. This means that the stream is very strong during spring tides

**Neap tides;** these are middling tides' the highs and lows are not extreme and the stream is not as strong

### Very low tides

- you should not go further upstream if you cannot get on the inside of the red buoys
- If the inside arch of a bridge is blocked, due to a low tide, you can go through the middle arch, but you must stop and check the way is clear. Except you may not go upstream through the middle arch of Kew Road Bridge, if the inside arch is impassable.

**Wind and tide;** If wind and tide in the same direction the water tends to be calmer. If wind and tide are in the opposite direction, the water tends to be choppy, so this means...

- When the tide changes and the wind does not change direction calm water can become choppy, or choppy become calm, in just a few minutes.
- You may start off in flat water and end up in choppy and difficult conditions as you go round a bend
- Be prepared, know what the tide is going to do, and check the wind direction so you can predict the bad patches.

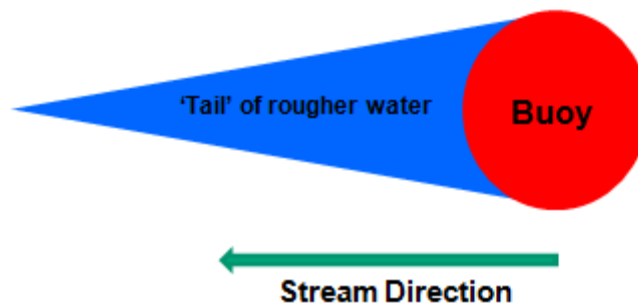
## How to know what the tide is doing

- Consult the tide tables, but remember these are only predictions so you still need to look at the river to be sure which way the stream is flowing.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/coast/tides/london.shtml> for London Bridge

[www.maabc.com](http://www.maabc.com) for Chiswick Bridge

- Look at what everyone else is doing on the river (not always foolproof, but often a good guide)
- Look at a buoy, moored boat, bridge or something which is fixed in the river, and see which way the tail is pointing....



- If you are in the boat and are unsure of the stream direction, put your oars square in the water and unless there is a very strong wind in the opposite direction, the boat will move in the same direction as the stream.

**NB After it has been raining heavily, it is possible that the tide can be coming in ie the river level is rising but the stream continues to flow out – you should always row according to the stream, not what the tide is doing**

## The turning tide

- Delay your outing for a few minutes until you know what the tide is doing
- When the tide is about to change the stream looks 'dead' or slack
- A calm stretch of water may become rough as the tide turns to be against the wind.
- A rowing boat can move faster than the changing tide - this means that you can set off with the tide doing one thing and meet crews who set off with the tide doing the opposite
- The tide changes at different times along the river, it changes first at Putney and moves up the river to Richmond

**If you are in doubt about the direction of the tide, stick to the right hand side of the fairway**

# Sound signals

One short blast

Two short blasts

Three short blasts

Five short blasts

One Long blast

I am turning to starboard ie my right

I am turning to port ie my left.

I am about to reverse. This is usually followed by one blast or two blasts to show which way the boat is about to turn whilst reversing

I have no idea what you are doing and I am worried about your position

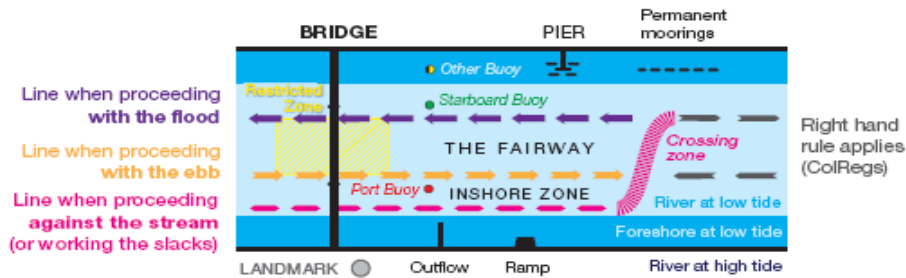
I am coming but I cannot see fully where I am going!



# Basic Principles of Tideway Navigation



A pocket guide - for a more detailed explanation see the wall charts in all Tideway clubs or visit [www.thames-rrc.org](http://www.thames-rrc.org). If you wish to report an infringement of the Code please use the on-line system via the TRRC safety page or go to <http://onlinerep.vorboss.net>



This guide refers to the international conventions of port and starboard.  
**Starboard** = bowside, a coxswain's right, a steersperson's left.  
**Port** = strokeside, a coxswain's left, a steersperson's right.

- **When going against the stream (working the slacks)** - you must stay in the inshore zone, close to the bank and always inside the buoys. You may only cross the river at the designated crossing points, unless you are returning to a boathouse.
- **When going with the stream, either on the ebb or on the flood** - you must stay in the fairway. Keep to **starboard** of the channel at all times.
- **When meeting oncoming craft**, keep to **starboard** so as to pass **port to port**. However, at low water a big craft may need to be in the 'wrong' position. If it is safe you may pass **starboard to starboard**, but show your intentions early.
- You should always paddle according to the direction of the *stream*, not the tide. If you are not sure which way the stream is going, look at the buoys, bridges or moored boats.
- If in doubt when the tide turns, keep to **starboard**.
- Do not stop, turn or overtake within 75 metres of a bridge.
- Do not stop in a **crossing zone**
- If in doubt about any of the above always seek advice
- **Always keep a good lookout. Assume that others cannot see you.**

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