

Report: Canada Day Regatta Survey ~

May 2013

A survey with 11 questions was sent on April 18, 2013 to 88 email addresses from approximately 33 rowing clubs. The survey was forwarded on April 21, 2013 to canoe kayak clubs. The survey was closed on April 29, 2013.

Survey Respondents' Profile

A total of 276 people responded to the survey. The majority of respondents classified themselves as athletes (70%), followed by coaches (20%) and 16 boat trailer drivers (6%). There were a number of "other" categories that people classified themselves as including 10 parents and eight Board members.

Most of the respondents (90%) or 246 were from rowing clubs, with only 24 or 9% from canoe-kayak clubs and three (1%) from dragonboat clubs. The respondents represented 20 rowing clubs and eight canoe-kayak clubs.

About a third (35%) of respondents had only attended the regatta for under three years but almost a quarter (23%) had been attending for more than 16 years and a substantial number (15%) for over 25 years.

Subsidized room night on July 1

As expected, given the profile of respondents, only 30 or 11% indicated that they usually drove the trailer to the Canada Day Regatta on the Island.

Of the 30 that indicated they drove the trailers, 26 responded to the following question: "would you be interested in a subsidized hotel room for the night of July 1, so that you could return to the Island on July 2, retrieve the trailer and leave the Island quickly when there is less foot traffic?" Of these 26, seven (7) said they would be interested in a subsidized room, 12 were not interested and another seven (7) were unsure.

Comments from 19 respondents to this question paralleled the yes/no answers with just under a third (six comments, 32%) indicating that as far as they were concerned, a subsidized hotel room seemed like a reasonable idea that was worth exploring, about a quarter (five comments, 26%) reporting that they were GTA Clubs and therefore there was no advantage and about a fifth (four comments, 21%) reporting that because July 2 was a work day, this would not work for them, they couldn't afford more time off and they already volunteer too much time. The remainder of the comments (four or 21%) could not be interpreted.

Subsidized ferry fee

For those that expressed an opinion (almost half, 45%, said they didn't know or were not sure), four in ten (40%) indicated that they would be more inclined to attend the regatta if the \$200 ferry fee for the boats was subsidized by the DDRA.

The comments in response to this question were equally divided amongst the 12 respondents who noted either (a) they couldn't answer as this was a decision for the Board (3 comments); (b) they thought this would be appreciated by the clubs (3 comments), (c) this was not an issue for them (3 comments) or (d) cost was a problem, but so was the time it took to get the trailers off the island that really mattered (3 comments).

When the responses to this question were cross-tabulated with whether or not the respondent was the driver of the boat trailer, 15 drivers were more inclined to attend the regatta if the fee was subsidized, compared with 3 drivers who were not and 3 drivers who didn't know or were unsure.

Attendance if regatta moved to Welland

Almost half of the respondents (47%) indicated that they would be more inclined to skip the regatta if it was moved to Welland, compared with over a quarter (27%) who would likely attend and another quarter (26%) who were not sure at this point.

This question was cross-tabulated with whether the respondent was a member of a canoe/kayak club, a rowing club or a dragonboat club. Of the canoe/kayak respondents, 13 would be likely to attend if the regatta was moved to Welland whereas four (4) would likely skip the regatta and seven (7) were not sure at this point. Rowers expressed the opposite view, with many more (119) indicating that they would skip the regatta and 58 saying they would attend and a further 61 unsure at this point. Only three dragon-boaters replied to this question, with two saying they would skip and one saying they would attend.

The question attracted 58 comments. Over two-thirds (39 or 67%) of the comments described how they preferred the Island, they valued the tradition and heritage of the regatta on the Toronto Island, they liked the crowds and the family atmosphere, and that the Island provided more profile for the sports that were on display there. They further noted that there were no crowds in Welland, their families would not be as likely to attend, it "*would not be as much fun*", and they go to Welland all the time for other regattas. Some sample comments:

"Present location provides great exposure to the sport to GTA citizens who can contact the local clubs to look into...that will not happen Welland"

"The low cost of the DDRA regatta has always been very appealing, if the fee structure remained the same we would likely attend. However Toronto Island has a great feel and our athletes love it because it is so different. With the loss of

“racing on the island interest may fade. I raced a Canada Day event in Welland 10 or 12 years ago, and it certainly wasn't the same (Toronto garbage strike).”

“I would certainly be less likely to attend. Part of what is special about the Dominion Day regatta is sharing in the festivities and tradition on Centre Island. The regatta is one of my favorites and I would hate to see it become just another Welland regatta. I don't think \$200 is such a barrier to make it worth the move.”

“We frequently race at Welland and the races there are just races, i.e. they are special for what ever regatta they are part of, but The Dominion Day Regatta on Centre Island is not just a regatta it is an event that includes being on the island. Mixing with all of the people on the island for the Day. I am a new Canadian and attending the Dominion day Regatta on Centre Island was a great introduction into Canada. If it left the island it would be a loss of a great and irreplaceable tradition.”

Just over a quarter of the comments (16 comments or 26%) reflected the view that the respondents would always want to race whatever location the regatta is held in. Some sample comments were:

“2 regattas in 3 days in Welland is somewhat appealing. Might incline some people to make a weekend in Welland/Niagara and strengthen participation in both regattas.”

“A regatta is a chance to race, not something I want to pass up.”

There was one respondent who expressed that s/he actively disliked the Island and another two who described how they were not likely to attend if the regatta was held in Welland.

Boat-sharing concept

A question asked if respondents would be interested in keeping the regatta on the island if the DDRA provided boats for the athletes, and clubs were no longer required to trailer boats to the island for the regatta.

While almost half (132 or 49%) agreed that this was a good idea, almost a third (86 or 32%) reported that they didn't know and 18% (49) reported that this was not a good idea.

Most of these “not a good idea” respondents wrote comments, as there were 42 commenters and 81% (34 comments) described how this wouldn't work, it was a bad idea, people needed their own boats and it wasn't feasible. Some sample comments:

“I believe the athletes prefer to compete with their own boats”

“It is a better regatta if rowers are using the equipment they train on. The format is not a recreational regatta like the Hogtown heats. The boats are not as 'generic' as a dragon boat where it doesn't mater what boat you step into.”

Four people felt that boat sharing was a positive idea. Sample comment:

“This sounds like a reasonable alternative, although I would anticipate a large amount of whining from athletes.”

Three further commenters made comments about the venue, noting that it is hard getting off the Island at the end of the day, the ferries are crowded, they don't like the Island and they won't attend because its on Island.

One commenter asked if there were other solutions?

Importance of the Island as a venue versus the partnership between canoeing and rowing

Respondents were asked if all the paddlers wanted to move the regatta to Welland and all the rowers wanted to stay on the Island, which did they think was more important. Two thirds of respondents felt it was more important to keep the regatta on the Island, with a third thinking it was more important to maintain the partnership between canoeing and rowing.

There were 64 comments in response to this question, many of which were ambiguous and difficult to interpret. About a third (19 comments or 30%) reported that it was important to continue the event on the Island and seek ways to make it affordable. These respondents observed that there should be other ways to improve our partnership with paddling and that for this event, the Island setting was more important than the partnership. Sample comments:

“And we know why the paddlers want Welland. Welland has obvious advantages but we are there already four or five times in a season. Toronto is, by far, our most populous region in all of Canada. And how many regattas do we attend there? One! And that is Toronto Dominion Day. Sure it has its issues but all of us who have memories of regattas from the past always remember Dominion Day; As a young rower the experience had such adventure. And how do you beat the setting. So what there is some unpredictability? Some of the best learning comes from adversity. Look at how much of the public, and in Toronto's case, the world has a chance to see this sport up close. In Welland, other than the rowers, no one sees this sport. Toronto needs Dominion Day, Rowing needs Dominion Day in Toronto!”

“Considering the facilities in Welland, if this partnership is so important I don't see why we don't have more joint competitions. It's cool but not the primary feature for me anyway.”

However, about a quarter (16 comments), reported also that the Island setting was critical but keeping the two sports together was also critical as it was a unique showcase for both sports on the Island with many people observing. Sample comments:

“It is more important to keep the regatta on the Island AND preserve the partnership.”

*“this is a partnership!! your option B above makes it seem like it a rowers regatta with invited guests
this is the DOMINION DAY REGATTA, NOT THE TORONTO ISLAND REGATTA”*

Another almost a quarter (15) commenters were firm that the partnership was most important. Sample comments:

by definition, Canada Day Regatta is a MULTIPLE discipline event.

The DDR is the nation's largest combined rowing/paddling event, if it has to leave the Toronto Island to continue the tradition, so be it.

There were 10 comments that were unclear, undecided, indecipherable, un-interpretable, or made un-implementable suggestions. A further four observed that the Welland course offered a better competitive experience and for that reason the regatta should be moved.

Final Comments

The last question invited respondents to leave parting thoughts. About a third of respondents took up the opportunity with 102 comments.

Of these 102, over half (59 comments or 58%) emphasized the importance of the tradition of the regatta and that it should continue to be held on the Island.

About 15% (15 comments) were firm that the regatta should be moved to Welland, as it provided a higher quality athlete experience, it was less stressful, and the commenters didn't like travelling on the ferries.

There were 11 comments that contained suggestions about lobbying, chartering ferries, talking with Porter airlines, and generally getting politically active to preserve the regatta.

Another 11 offered comments that the DDRA would not be able to act on, and six thanked the DDRA Executive for its hard work and offered “Good luck in sorting this out”.

Judy Sutcliffe

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