



Report on Special Assistance at City of Derry Airport

Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

12 November 2024

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Executive Summary

European Regulation (EC) 1107/2006 (the Regulation) provides rights for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility when travelling by air. This has been retained in United Kingdom (UK) law following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU).

The Regulation requires all airports and airlines in the UK and EU to provide assistance to passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. The Consumer Council has been designated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to be the complaints handling body for the Regulation.

In 2014 the CAA issued guidance requiring airports to consult with passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. This report details the findings of a meeting on 12 November 2024 of the City of Derry Airport's Accessibility Forum which involved a tour of the airport building. The Forum is made up of a range of organisations which represent consumers with a disability or reduced mobility.

The Forum was very positive about the airport's facilities and, in particular the implementation of recommendations made from the previous visit in November 2023.

A number of further recommendations were made by participants. These focussed on signage, seating improvements, and raising awareness of airport facilities.

The findings of the visit will be shared with the airport. An update on the progress made against the suggestions will be reported by the airport to the Accessibility Forum at its next meeting.

Introduction

In 2006 European Regulations (European Regulation (EC) 1107/2006) came into place that require all airports and airlines in the EU to assist passengers with a disability or with a reduced mobility (PRM) when travelling. These have been retained and written into UK law since its exit from the EU (Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006, as amended by The Air Passenger Rights and Air Travel Organisers' Licencing (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019). Airlines licensed in the EU, operating flights from a non-EU country into the EU must also assist passengers.

The Consumer Council has been designated by the CAA as the complaints handling body for the Regulation (Civil Aviation (Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/1895)) relating to an airport in Northern Ireland or a flight departing from a Northern Ireland airport. The Consumer Council works alongside the Northern Ireland airports to ensure that their services continue to meet passengers' needs.

In 2014 the CAA issued guidance requiring airports to consult with passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. This 'should, as much as possible, include practical inspections of airport services (generally using 'walk throughs'). Airports should also consider convening regular forums containing representatives of disability groups and individuals.'

In 2019 the Consumer Council worked with City of Derry Airport to establish an Accessibility Forum at the airport. Membership of the Accessibility Forum consists of a range of organisations that represent consumers with a disability or reduced mobility including Alzheimer's Society, Cedar Foundation, Deafblind UK, Derry City and Strabane District Council Over 50's Reference Panel, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association NI, Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee, North West Forum of People with Disabilities, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), Shine and Versus Arthritis. The aim is to provide a forum for users of the airport's Special Assistance services or their representatives, to share their knowledge and experiences of services at the airport.

The intended outcome of this visit is for the Forum to continue to work with the airport in looking specifically at special assistance to help gain a better understanding of the issues faced by passengers using this service. In particular, it is intended to identify areas where it works well, and to implement suggestions made by forum members to help make travel more convenient for those passengers. The airport will provide feedback on actions taken from the guidance and suggestions made at the next Forum meeting.

The City of Derry Airport and the Consumer Council would like to thank those participants who took part on the day.

Methodology

The Forum met at the airport on 12 November 2024. There were eleven participants on the day from a range of organisations that represent older consumers and consumers with a disability or reduced mobility.

The Forum began with an introduction from the Consumer Council and airport staff, followed by a discussion which included airport car parking and bus services. The Consumer Council and airport staff then guided the group through the airport, beginning at the check-in area and finishing in the arrival's areas. A brief round-up discussion with the whole Forum was held at the end of the tour.

Staff from the Consumer Council took notes at the visit and recorded the suggestions that were made by the group.

Findings

The following section provides a summary of the key discussion points that were recorded with corresponding suggestions. The findings are set out in the order of the various stages of moving through the airport, with an overall summary provided at Annex 1.

Arrival at the airport/parking area

Airport staff highlighted several improvements implemented based on recommendations made at the previous visit. These included the kerb highlighted in yellow at the bus drop-off point, a new bench with back and arm rests and Translink's improved bus timetables displayed in a larger font. Another recommendation from the previous year, age-friendly signage markings in the car parking bays close to the building, is expected to be completed soon. Participants agreed the car parking signage regarding assistance and disabled car parking is clearly visible.

A spending area is available for dogs which is a grass area available for this purpose outside the main entrance.

Airport staff confirmed that people requiring assistance from the car park can request this. Blue badge holders can take their blue badge with them, and airport staff provide a copy for their car. Some participants were unaware of this and suggested that steps should be taken to raise more awareness.

Recommendation

- Provide clear information on the airport's website and on site that blue badge holders can take their original blue badge with them, and that airport staff would provide a copy for their car.

Entrance to the airport

An 'Entrance' sign had been added to the top of the door to the right of the building following a previous recommendation to assist signposting. Glass safety markings (manifestations) had also been added to glass throughout the airport as necessary.

Check-in area

Improvements since the last visit were notable and included larger information screens and increased text size, placement of a screen at eye level, clear signage regarding the loop system and clearly presented new lower level signage which includes 'Changing Places' and 'Stoma Facilities'. Airport staff confirmed that this information is available on the airport's website and that special assistance is now prominently displayed on the main homepage as recommended.

Airport staff confirmed that the 'Check In' queue has been relocated to the right-hand side, which improves space especially when the airport is busy.

Security

Access to security has been reconfigured, with a new area adapted with direct access for disabled passengers. The glass door leading to this area was clearly marked (Figure 1), and the pathway was clear and spacious.

Figure 1: New security area signage for those requiring special assistance



Seating is also provided at this point for those who require it. Group members noted that the seating provision was good. Some participants noted that the instructions provided by staff were clear.

A new security system scanner has been installed at the airport, and staff informed the group about the rules surrounding liquids. However, participants felt it would be beneficial for information on liquids to be provided before reaching security.

Recommendation

- Consider signage outside the security zone to advise passengers on the current rules about liquids so that they can better prepare before entering the area.

Departure area (after security)

A forum member asked if there is a designated area for PRM passengers. Airport staff confirmed that while some passengers may wish to sit with family or friends there is an area available for PRM upon request.

Airport staff discussed ASpace2 which is available for use by passengers. They noted that information about ASpace2 has been updated on their website following last year's recommendation.

One participant noted that existing seating is too low and how this is an issue for people with mobility issues who struggle to sit down and get up from lower chairs.

Recommendation

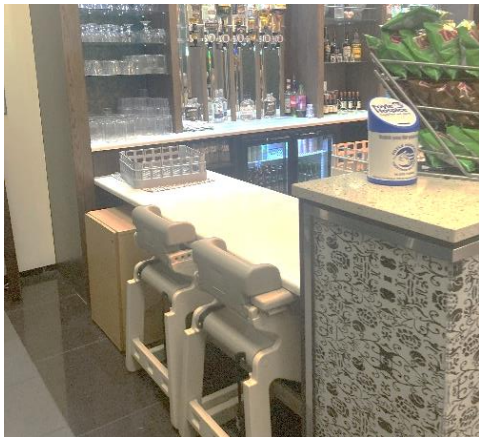
- Consider adding higher seats to facilitate passengers with mobility issues to sit down and get up without difficulty.

Airport staff showed Forum members proposed new signs, following a recommendation last year regarding the need for signage in the 'Fed and Watered'

café to indicate an accessible area (low level counter) located at the side of the main counter and that table service is available in this area. The Forum agreed placement of these signs which were then installed by airport staff.

It is important that the low-level accessible counter in the 'Fed and Watered' café is kept clear to facilitate access for wheelchair users (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Accessible Service Area, Fed and Watered café



A group member noted that the floor entrance to the restaurant/bar area near seating is narrow, potentially making it difficult for wheelchair access, particularly larger motorised scooters (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Entrance to the main service area, Fed and Watered café



Recommendations

- Ensure that the 'Accessible Service Area' is always clear, and that highchairs are not placed directly in this area to facilitate wheelchair access. Ensure that staff are aware of this.
- Provide another two signs indicating that table service is available in the area to clarify that it is not limited to just one designated area. Consideration could be given to adding the second sign to the countertop of the bar/restaurant area. The availability of table service should be highlighted on the website.
- Remove some chairs from tables at the 'Fed and Watered' café to accommodate wheelchairs.
- Review the entrance to the restaurant/bar area and widen if possible.

One participant provided feedback about a passenger (child) boarding an aircraft without a harness that would have ensured the child was balanced in a safe position. The airport staff explained the availability of equipment to assist PRM passengers noting that equipment may vary depending on the layout of the airline's own aircraft designs. Airport staff acknowledged the feedback and agreed to explore if further improvements can be made such as additional staff training. Airport staff emphasised the importance of PRM passengers booking special assistance in advance.

PRM feedback

Airport staff highlighted that they have issues in obtaining feedback from PRM. They noted that over a six-month period, only four feedback forms were completed out of 1200 PRM. A QR code directly linked to the feedback form has been implemented following last year's recommendation. Airport staff discussed the process for providing feedback to CAA and stated that the QR code for feedback has been highlighted throughout the airport (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Signage for feedback highlighted in departure area after security for PRM passengers



Recommendation

- Suggestion for airport staff to notify PRM in person on how to share feedback when checking in, highlighting where the QR code can be found or if an alternative means of accessing the feedback form is required.

Changing Places

Participants viewed the 'Changing Places' toilet installed following a recommendation made on a previous visit which is now fully registered on the official Changing Places website. Participants checked the equipment to explore how this worked. Airport staff highlighted that this facility is available to all, not only to those using the airport. The group praised this as an example of the commitment to special assistance services by the airport and highlighted that not everyone is aware of this facility.

Recommendation

- Consider creating a short video publicising the 'Changing Places' toilet. This should highlight how to use the equipment, and who can access the facility. It

would be beneficial for the airport to feature this video on the airport's website and airport's social media.

Conclusion

Participants welcomed the opportunity to tour the airport complementing the current processes and commending changes following previous recommendations to improve the experience for passengers requiring special assistance. A number of further suggestions were made including raising awareness of the airport's facilities, and improved signage in certain areas.

Next Steps

The comments made by participants will be presented to the airport. The Consumer Council will work with the airport as it implements the changes to ensure that services continue to meet passengers' needs. An update on the progress made against the recommendations will be shared with the airport's Accessibility Forum at its next meeting.

Annex 1 Summary of recommendations

1. Parking
Provide clear information on airport's website and on site that blue badge holders can take their original blue badge with them on holidays, and that airport staff would provide a copy for their car.
2. Security area
Consider signage outside the security zone to advise passengers on the current rules about liquids so that they can better prepare before entering the area.
3. Departures after security
Consider adding higher seats to facilitate passengers with mobility issues to sit down and get up without difficulty.
4. Café (operated by Mount Charles)
Ensure that the 'Accessible Service Area' is always clear, and that highchairs are not placed directly in this area to facilitate wheelchair access. Ensure that staff are aware of this.
5. Provide another two signs indicating that table service is available in the area to clarify that it is not limited to just one designated area. Consideration could be given to adding the second sign to the countertop of the bar/restaurant area. The availability of table service should be highlighted on the website.
6. Remove some chairs from tables at the 'Fed and Watered' café to accommodate wheelchairs.
7. Review the entrance to the restaurant/bar area and widen if possible.
8. Feedback arrangements
Suggestion for airport staff to notify PRM in person on how to share feedback when checking in, highlighting where the QR code can be found or if an alternative means of accessing the feedback form is required.

(The Consumer Council will forward current feedback arrangements to all participants.)
9. Changing places facility
Consider creating a short video publicising the 'Changing Places' toilet. This should highlight how to use the equipment and who can access this facility. It would be beneficial for the airport to feature this video on the airport's website and airport's social media.

Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

Floor 3, Seatem House

28-32 Alfred Street

Belfast BT2 8EN

Freephone: 0800 121 6022

Email: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

Website: www.consumercouncil.org.uk

