



# Report on Special Assistance at City of Derry Airport

November 2023

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## **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 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 UK law following the United Kingdom's (UK) exit from the European Union (EU).
- 1.2 The Regulation requires all airports and airlines in the United Kingdom and European Union 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.
- 1.3 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 14 November 2023 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.
- 1.4 The Forum was very positive about the airport's facilities and, in particular the implementation of recommendations made from the previous visit in November 2022.<sup>1</sup> Significant work had gone into improving airport special assistance services including the installation of a full "Changing Places" toilet available for use to all visitors to the airport.
- 1.5 A number of further recommendations was made by participants. These focussed on staff training, improvements to seating arrangements, and raising awareness of airport facilities.
- 1.6 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [CODA Accessibility Audit - November 2022](#)

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In 2006 European Regulations<sup>2</sup> came into place that require all airports and airlines in the EU to assist passengers with a disability or with a reduced mobility (PRM)<sup>3</sup> when travelling. These have been retained and written in UK law since its exit from the EU<sup>4</sup>. Airlines licensed in the EU, operating flights from a non-EU country into the EU must also assist passengers.
- 2.2 The Consumer Council has been designated by the CAA as the complaints handling body for the Regulation<sup>5</sup> 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.
- 2.3 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'*
- 2.4 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.
- 2.5 The intended outcome of this visit is for the Forum to continue to work with the airport in looking specifically at the 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,

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<sup>2</sup> European Regulation (EC) 1107/2006

<sup>3</sup> People of Restricted Mobility (PRM)

<sup>4</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 (as amended by The Air Passenger Rights and Air Travel Organisers' Licencing (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019)

<sup>5</sup> Civil Aviation (Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/1895)

<sup>6</sup> IMTAC, The Cedar Foundation, North West Forum of People with Disabilities, Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), Guide Dogs for the Blind Association NI, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Deafblind UK, Derry City and Strabane District Council Over 50's Reference Panel

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.

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

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 The Forum met at the airport on 14 November 2023. There were thirteen participants on the day from a range of organisations that represent older consumers and consumers with a disability or reduced mobility.
- 3.2 The Forum began with an introduction from the Consumer Council and airport staff, before proceeding outside for a discussion on airport car parking. The Consumer Council and airport staff then guided the group through the airport, beginning at the check-in area and finishing in the arrivals areas. A brief round-up discussion with the whole Forum was held at the end of the tour.
- 3.3 Staff from the Consumer Council took notes at the visit and recorded the suggestions that were made by the group.

### **4 FINDINGS**

- 4.1 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.

#### Arrival at the airport/parking area

- 4.2 Airport staff highlighted a number of improvements made arising from recommendations made at previous visit. These included increased visibility of signage with call points clearly marked, the regrading of ramps so these are smoother for wheelchair users, and the reconfiguration of bins and advertising hoardings to ensure access is not

restricted. Participants felt that the area was well signposted with unhindered access.

- 4.3 Airport staff noted that blue badge holders are not charged for parking for the first two hours and that this was outlined on the airport's website. Some participants were unaware of this and suggested taking steps to raise more awareness.

**Recommendation:**

- Ensure that the opportunity to avail of free parking is clearly highlighted on the website and consider how to emphasise this at the airport.

- 4.4 The group raised the possibility of setting aside a small number of parking bays for older people who may not be entitled to a blue badge but would find the additional support useful. Airport staff noted that if special assistance had been requested, staff will be available regardless of whether passengers are entitled to a blue badge.

**Recommendation:**

- Consider introducing a small number of "age friendly" parking spaces at the airport.

- 4.5 The distance from the car park to the airport entrance was discussed, as it was a small airport participants felt this did not raise concerns. In any case airport staff are available to assist from the point of arrival to the airport. Pick up and drop off points were placed as close to the entrance as possible given security considerations. It was noted that key walking distances within the airport complex were available on the website.

- 4.6 The group noted new signage at the bus drop off point which clearly highlighted the telephone number for special assistance if required. However, it would be useful to highlight the kerbs to increase visibility. The seating at this point was quite basic, with no backs or armrests (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Bus drop off point

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure kerbs at the bus drop off point are painted in bright, contrasting colours to highlight presence to consumers with visual impairments.
- Staff to liaise with Translink to ensure that buses serving the airport are all fully accessible vehicles.
- Consider adding armrests and backs to the benches to help people with mobility impairments to sit down, balance and manoeuvre on and off the seating.

### Entrance to the airport

- 4.7 An “Entrance” sign had been added to the side door following a previous recommendation (Figure 2). It could be added to the blank space above the door also to assist signposting.



Figure 2: Side door entrance to airport

**Recommendation:**

- Consider adding the Entrance sign on the side door to above it, to assist signposting.

4.8 The clear glass on the automatic entrance doors should have safety markings (“manifestations”) added to make the glass obvious and help prevent injury.

**Recommendations:**

- Add safety markings to the entrance doors.
- Carry out a review of glass doors throughout the airport to ensure the glazing is marked sufficiently to let people know it is there and prevent them from walking into it.

Check-in area

4.9 The group also noted that the information screens were adequately sized with good text and colour contrast (Figure 3). Consideration should be given to placing one of the screens at eye level.



Figure 3: Flight information screen

**Recommendation:**

- Review placement of flight information screens and consider an additional screen with an increased size similar to current advertising screens. This also applies to the flight information screens in the departures area (after security).

4.10 Signage to the airport facilities was clear in strong, contrasting colours. There were some concerns that the general directional signage at the



check-in area which directed to toilets etc. was too high and therefore not immediately apparent (Figure 4).



Figure 4: General directional signage at check-in area

**Recommendation:**

- Consider lowering the main group of signage by the check-in area.

4.11 A Changing Places toilet had been installed at the airport following a previous recommendation made by the group – its availability should be clearly displayed both on the airport website and on signage around the airport.

**Recommendation:**

- Ensure that the new Changing Places toilet is highlighted on the website and on signage at prominent points throughout the airport.

4.12 A participant raised the issue of toilet accessibility for stoma users and the need to ensure that there are adequate facilities such as a disposal bin in every cubicle to avoid the embarrassment of having to dispose of stoma bags in public view.

**Recommendation:**

- The airport should consider [guidelines on stoma-friendly toilets](#) and investigate how it can update toilet facilities accordingly.

4.13 The signage for the hearing loop system at the Customer Services desk should be visible at all times. The system should also be tested on at least an annual basis and that staff are regularly trained in its use.

**Recommendation:**

- Liaise with RNID to check loop system.

Security

4.14 The security area was busy as a flight was due to depart and a queue quickly developed as passengers sorted their liquids from other hand luggage. Staff did seem under pressure and some participants noted that instructions were not as clear as they could have been. For example, when asking a person to move in a particular direction there should be a clear instruction to “move right” or “go straight ahead”, rather than “go over there”. This is particularly important for people with sight loss or who are partially sighted. Care should also be taken when handling mobility equipment and there should be clear communications with the passenger if this needs to be removed for scanning.

**Recommendations:**

- Consider refresher training for security staff on customer service skills. Organisations involved in this visit would also be happy to arrange additional training.
- Consider signage outside the security zone, or have a member of staff available during busy periods, to advise passengers on the current rules surrounding liquids so that they can better prepare before entering the area.

4.15 There seemed to be only one or two seats available for passengers waiting to go through security. Whilst most passengers will normally have only a very short wait, as a precaution additional seating should be available if required.

**Recommendations:**

- Increase the number of chairs available for passengers to avail of as they wait to pass through security.

- Consideration should also be given to the number of chairs available for passengers after they pass through security and as they get their bags together.

4.16 One participant noted that the security area on this occasion was quite noisy and could prove overwhelming, for example for a person with autism. Staff confirmed that, given the size of the airport it was difficult to create a separate quiet area although passengers could use the business lounge or the boardroom if required. The airport also worked with a local multisensory sensory centre (ASpace2) located near the airport. This allowed passengers who preferred a quieter space to use the centre prior to their flight with airport staff keeping them informed of what time they needed to be at the airport to check in.

The group agreed that this was a very worthwhile arrangement and should be adequately highlighted so that passengers are aware of the facility.

**Recommendation:**

- Set out the arrangement with the “ASpace2” centre on the airport website – there is a link to their Facebook page but it would be useful to provide additional information on the benefits for passengers using the airport.

Departure area (after security)

4.17 Participants noted that the area looked much less “busy” from the last visit with the removal of advertising signage and the dividers put in place for COVID-19 (Figure 5). The layout of the seating made it difficult for a wheelchair user to comfortably slot in beside other members of their party.



Figure 5: Seating in departures area

**Recommendation:**

- Consider removing a small number of seats within the departures area – this will create space to accommodate wheelchair users.

4.18 There was an accessible service area to the side of the main area in the Fed and Watered café – however this was not immediately apparent (Figure 6). Staff also informed the group that table service was available for those who preferred this. The café was “card only” and did not accept cash.



Figure 6: Main service area, Fed and Watered café

### **Recommendations:**

- Place a sign by the main bar area to indicate an accessible service area is available to the left hand side.
- In addition, provide a notice to state that table service is available in this area.
- Flag with Mount Charles (who operate the café) that, particularly for some older people and people with sight loss, cash is a preferable payment option.

4.19 A number of charging points were available throughout the departures area. A charger was also available for use from the shop for passengers who required it in an emergency.

4.20 Participants viewed the Changing Places toilet, installed following a recommendation made on a previous visit and which was now fully registered on the official [Changing Places website](#) (Figure 7). It was noted because of the location of the toilet it could be used by anyone and not just people flying out of the airport.

The group praised this as an example of the commitment to special assistance services by the airport and evidence of what can be achieved if organisations commit to making improvements.



Figure 7: Changing Places toilet

4.21 The group had a discussion about how to feed back any experiences to the airport and how this could be made as straightforward as possible.

### **Recommendations:**

- Consider generating a QR code to directly link to a feedback form. This could be automatically scanned by passengers at the airport.

- The Consumer Council will forward current feedback arrangements to all participants.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 Participants welcomed the opportunity to tour the airport and expressed satisfaction throughout at the processes and the number and extent of changes that had been implemented, arising from previous recommendations, to improve the experience for passengers requiring special assistance. A number of further suggestions were made including staff training, improvements to seating arrangements, and raising awareness of airport facilities.

## **6 NEXT STEPS**

- 6.1 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 suggestions will be shared with the Airport's Accessibility Forum at its next meeting.

## Annex 1 Summary of Recommendations

	<b>Parking</b>
1	Ensure that the opportunity to avail of free parking is clearly highlighted on the website and consider how to emphasise this at the airport.
2	Consider introducing a small number of “age friendly” parking spaces at the airport.
	<b>Bus drop off point</b>
3	Ensure kerbs at the bus drop off point are painted in bright, contrasting colours to highlight presence to consumers with visual impairments.
4	Staff to liaise with Translink to ensure that buses serving the airport are all fully accessible vehicles.
5	Consider adding armrests and backs to the benches by the bus drop off point to help people with mobility impairments to sit down, balance and manoeuvre on and off the seating.
	<b>Entrance / check-in area</b>
6	Consider adding the Entrance sign on the side door to above it to assist signposting.
7	Add safety markings to the entrance doors.
8	Carry out a review of glass doors throughout the airport to ensure the glazing is marked sufficiently to let people know it is there and prevent them from walking into it.
9	Review placement of flight information screens and consider an additional screen with an increased size similar to current advertising screens. This also applies to the flight information screens in the departures area (after security).
10	Consider lowering the main group of signage by the check-in area.
11	Ensure that the new Changing Places toilet is highlighted on the website and on signage at prominent points throughout the airport.
12	The airport should consider <a href="#">guidelines on stoma-friendly toilets</a> and investigate how it can update toilet facilities accordingly.
13	Liaise with RNID to check loop system.
	<b>Security area</b>
14	Consider refresher training for security staff on customer service skills. Organisations involved in this visit would also be happy to arrange additional training.

15	Consider signage outside the security zone, or have a member of staff available during busy periods, to advise passengers on the current rules surrounding liquids so that they can better prepare before entering the area.
16	Increase the number of chairs available for passengers to avail of as they wait to pass through security.
17	Consideration should also be given to the number of chairs available for passengers after they pass through security and as they get their bags together.
	<b>Quiet area</b>
18	Set out the arrangement with the “ASpace2” centre on the airport website – there is a link to their Facebook page but it would be useful to provide additional information on the benefits for passengers using the airport.
	<b>Departures area</b>
19	Consider removing a small number of seats within the departures area – this will create space to accommodate wheelchair users.
	<b>Café (operated by Mount Charles)</b>
20	Place a sign by the main bar area to indicate an accessible service area is available to the left hand side.
21	In addition, provide a notice to state that table service is available in this area.
22	Flag with Mount Charles that, particularly for some older people and people with sight loss, that cash is a preferable payment option.
	<b>Feedback arrangements</b>
23	Consider generating a QR code to directly link to a feedback form. This could be automatically scanned by passengers at the airport.
24	The Consumer Council will forward current feedback arrangements to all participants.





## The Consumer Council

Seatem House, Floor 3  
28 - 32 Alfred Street  
Belfast, BT2 8EN

T: 028 9025 1600  
F: 028 9025 1663  
E: [info@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:info@consumercouncil.org.uk)  
W: [www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)