



# **Report on Special Assistance at City of Derry Airport**

**December 2021**

## **CONTENTS**

<b>1.</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>NEXT STEPS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Annex 1</b>	<b>Summary of Recommendations</b>	<b>10</b>

## 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 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 3 November 2021 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 positive about the airport's facilities and, in particular, the special assistance services that are provided to passengers. There were a number of suggestions made by participants. These focussed on:
- Signage;
  - Car Park Call points;
  - Flight Display Boards;
  - Hand Sanitisers;
  - Toilet access.
- 1.5 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.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In 2006 European Regulations<sup>1</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>2</sup> when travelling. These have been retained and written in UK law since its exit from the EU<sup>3</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>4</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*

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<sup>1</sup> European Regulation (EC) 1107/2006

<sup>2</sup> People of Restricted Mobility (PRM)

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 (as amended by The Air Passenger Rights and Air Travel Organisers' Licencing (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Civil Aviation (Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/1895)

*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>5</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 first meeting of the Accessibility Forum took place on 19 March 2019 and involved a tour of the airport facilities. Forum members provided feedback on the facilities and services and identified possible changes that could further assist air passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. The airport has since implemented a number of recommendations made by participants on the day.
- 2.6 Due to COVID-19 restrictions, no meeting of the Accessibility Forum took place in 2020.
- 2.7 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, 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.
- 2.8 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 3 November 2021. There were nine participants on the day from a range of organisations that represent consumers with a disability or reduced mobility.
- 3.2 The Forum began with an introduction from the Consumer Council and airport, 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.

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<sup>5</sup> IMTAC, Alzheimer’s Society, The Cedar Foundation, Glen Oaks Day Care Centre, North West Forum of People with Disabilities, Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

### Arrival at the airport/parking area

- 4.2 Participants were satisfied with the amount of disabled parking bays available and the amount of space provided to get to and from the vehicle; there was ample room for a person with a wheelchair to exit their car comfortably.
- 4.3 A notice below the disabled parking signs currently states “if you require assistance please report to the Customer Service Desk” (see figure 1). Participants noted that it would be useful to have the telephone number on this notice so it is readily available should they need to contact the airport on arrival. It was also suggested that the notice could be made clearer – at present, it was felt that it blends into the background and it is hard to spot.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Provide telephone number for Customer Services on the notice below the “Blue Badge Holders Only” signs.
- Make this notice bigger with a more contrasting background to improve visibility.



Figure 1: Photograph of disabled parking signs

- 4.4 Call points are provided should additional assistance be required on arrival at the airport (see figure 2). In answer to a query about how this would work for a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, it was stated that airport staff will always come out to the parking area immediately once the button is pressed. Participants felt that these needed to be more visible, and with additional signage provided. It should also be ensured that the height of the button suits all vehicle heights.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure that, once the call point is activated, the voice system is loud and clear enough for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- Consider changing the call point sign from a white background to neon colour to make it more visible.
- Provide additional signage to call points.
- Consider checking if the height of call point buttons suits all vehicle heights to ensure that all airport visitors can reach the button comfortably.



Figure 2: Photograph of call point

- 4.5 Participants noted with satisfaction that the airport provided temporary blue badges for their stay in the car park should they need to travel with the blue badge.

#### Entrance to the airport

- 4.6 It was noted that the height of the sanitising station immediately by the entrance (and at other locations in the airport) was too high for wheelchair users. Whilst it was pointed out that there are portable sanitising bottles at a lower height further into the airport, this was not immediately apparent and, in any case, passengers would prefer these to be available at the earliest entry point.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Consider lowering the height of the current hand sanitising stations where these are available throughout the airport, or providing an additional hand sanitising station at a lower height.

- 4.7 Participants noted that the entrance door to the airport is not clearly marked with advertisements dominating them, rather than having a “Welcome” or “Entrance” sign. It was felt this may make it difficult for people to know where to go.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Ensure that the automatic doors into the main airport terminal are clearly marked with “Entrance” signs.

- 4.8 An automatic temperature check is taken when passengers arrive. This was widely praised by participants as being unintrusive and particularly welcome for autistic passengers as no interaction was required. It also prevented queues from building up at the entrance.
- 4.9 The first airport information screens on arrival were felt to be too high for many passengers to view clearly. It was noted that there were further screens in the terminal at a lower height. Participants also asked if delayed/cancelled flights could be flagged in a different colour to make them stand out.

**Recommendations:**

- Consider lowering the first display screen on arrival at the airport – eye level height has been suggested as good practice.<sup>6</sup>
- Consider highlighting delayed/cancelled flights in a contrasting colour.

Check-in area

- 4.10 Participants complimented the high levels of customer service available at the main desk. Loop system availability for deaf or hard of hearing passengers was clearly signposted. Staff also explained that passengers did not need to provide any proof of disabilities to avail of airport assistance. Sunflower lanyards are available and assistance would be made available for passengers requiring assistance through check in.
- 4.11 Reference was made to the amount of signs in the airport; it was noted that these made several walls quite “busy” and there was a danger of information overload.

**Recommendation:**

- Review airport signage and consider removing/re-placing unnecessary signs.

- 4.12 The signage for check in/bag drop and for departures is grey on a white background (see figures 3 & 4). Participants commented that this did not stand out and could be clearer. It was contrasted with other signs at Security and the exit which were thought to be much clearer (black on a yellow background). It was noted that clear signage was particularly important for passengers who wished to remain independent rather than ask for assistance.

**Recommendation:**

- Review airport signage for clarity and ensure these are in highly contrasting colours.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friendly-communities/organisations/dementia-friendly-environment-checklist>



Figure 3: Photograph of Check In sign



Figure 4: Photograph of Departures sign

- 4.13 The toilet sign was felt to be too high with the material causing a glare, making it difficult to see.

**Recommendation:**

- Consider moving the location of the toilet sign to the toilets and changing the paint used to a matt finish to make it easier for passengers to locate.

- 4.14 Participants noted the small font on airport information screens. Staff explained that this had also been raised at a previous visit and the possibility of making changes had been fully investigated; however this had not proved possible.

- 4.15 One participant felt that the accessible toilet was not of an acceptable standard. There was no hoist and the toilet should be placed in the middle of the wall, not the side. The space was tight, even for a small electric wheelchair. They also felt the sticker on the door stating that it was wheelchair accessible, and support holds, were the absolute minimum that should be expected.

**Recommendation:**

- Consider implementing a “Changing Places” toilet at the airport.

- 4.16 It was noted that there were several queue grids for check-in but there was signage on only two – this may prove to be confusing for passengers, particularly if the airport is very busy.

**Recommendation:**

- Provide additional signage indicating where to queue for check-in.

- 4.17 Airport staff stated that for airlines which charged high fees for checking in at the airport, passengers requiring assistance and who did not have access to the internet could phone ahead and they would arrange for boarding passes to be collected at the airport, to avoid paying the additional fees. Participants again complimented this as evidence of the high customer service levels provided.

**Recommendation:**

- Ensure passengers who require assistance with printing out their boarding passes are aware of this service provided at the airport.



## Security

- 4.18 It should be noted that, due to three participants not being in possession of a valid driving licence or passport, they were not able to go through security and participate in the tour of the departure area.
- 4.19 Participants complimented passing through security as a smooth process and noted that trays were sanitised after each use. There was also a separate packing area for passengers requiring assistance. One participant queried whether there was a loop system in this area, as background noise could make it difficult for deaf or hard of hearing passengers.

### **ACTION:**

- Airport staff to confirm if there is loop access in the security area.

## Departure area (after security)

- 4.20 The café is managed under a contract by an outside company. It was noted that additional measures had been implemented due to COVID-19, such as additional space between tables. It was felt that this had improved access for wheelchairs. It was also noted that food/drinks were at a satisfactory height for wheelchair users.
- 4.21 It was also noted here that, as it is a small airport, staff are all trained in different functions and locations within the airport. This staff overview of airport services helps queries to be resolved quickly.
- 4.22 Participants highlighted the size of corridors and toilet doors were also very good for wheelchair access; and the toilet seats were in different colours. A contrasting toilet seat makes the toilet recognisable for people with dementia.
- 4.23 Participants noted that the area was “busy” with advertising signage as it is above every seat on the dividers put in place for COVID-19.

### **Recommendation:**

- Review advertising signage and consider removing/re-placing unnecessary signs.
- 4.24 The Amelia Earhart lounge has been designated a quiet area that passengers requiring assistance can book free of charge. However it was noted that the area can be booked out by other passengers for a charge; in this case there was another room upstairs which passengers could use. Individuals with a disability have access to a quiet room in the airport free of charge. This can either be booked in advance to guarantee access or requested on arrival.
- 4.25 It was noted that any passenger requiring assistance from the aircraft would be accompanied straight through to passport control.
- 4.26 Participants also were impressed at the amount of seating provided at luggage carousels for those who required it.
- 4.27 Participants complimented the fact that familiarisation visits were available for anyone who wanted to check out the airport facilities prior to flying.

## Travelling to/from the airport

- 4.28 Whilst not strictly part of the audit, Consumer Council staff took the opportunity to review the experience of travelling to the airport by public transport. They travelled by train from Belfast Lanyon Place – Derry/Londonderry train station. They walked to the bus station and took a 234 service to Coleraine, which stopped directly outside the airport.
- 4.29 It was noted that the bus (a single deck Goldliner) had a clear “special assistance” sign on the side. However, the driver explained that it would take about 20 minutes to load a wheelchair. He advised that passengers should contact the station at least 24 hours in advance so they could ensure that a double deck Goldliner, with low floor front door access, could be made available.
- 4.30 This is at odds with the recent advice from Translink that “from Monday 26th July, wheelchair-users using Translink Goldliner services will no longer need to book 24 hours in advance of their travel”.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the bus may have been technically “accessible”, the length of time taken to board may make a wheelchair user feel uncomfortable. The Consumer Council will raise this issue with Translink at our next bi-monthly meeting.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 Participants welcomed the opportunity to tour the airport and expressed satisfaction throughout at the processes and the changes that had been implemented already to improve the experience for passengers requiring special assistance. Participants were able to ask questions throughout the visit and make suggestions based on their experiences and knowledge of some of the barriers that passengers may face. A number of suggestions were made around signage, positioning of hand sanitisers, flight display boards and toilet access.

## **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.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.translink.co.uk/usingtranslink/accessibility>

## Annex 1 Summary of Recommendations

	<b>Signage</b>
1	Provide telephone number for Customer Services on the notice below the “Blue Badge Holders Only” signs.
2	Make the notice with the telephone number bigger with a more contrasting background to facilitate visibility.
3	Consider changing the call point sign from a white background to neon colour to make it more visible.
4	Provide additional signage to call points in airport car park.
5	Ensure that the automatic doors into the main airport terminal are clearly marked with “Entrance” signs.
6	Review airport signage and consider removing/re-placing unnecessary signs.
7	Review airport signage for clarity and ensure these are in highly contrasting colours.
8	Consider moving the location of the toilet sign to the toilets and changing the paint used to a matt finish to make it easier for passengers to locate.
9	Provide additional signage indicating where to queue for check-in.
10	Review advertising signage and consider removing/re-placing unnecessary signs.
	<b>Flight Display Boards</b>
11	Consider lowering the first display screen on arrival at the airport – eye level height has been suggested as good practice.
12	Consider highlighting delayed/cancelled flights in a contrasting colour.
	<b>Call points in airport car park</b>
13	Consider checking if the height of call point buttons suits all vehicle heights to ensure that all airport visitors can reach the button comfortably.
14	Ensure that, once the call point is activated, the voice system is loud and clear enough for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
	<b>Hand Sanitisers</b>
15	Consider lowering the height of the current hand sanitising stations where these are available throughout the airport, or providing an additional hand sanitising station at a lower height.
	<b>Toilets</b>
16	Consider implementing a “Changing Places” toilet at the airport.
	<b>Boarding Passes</b>
17	Ensure passengers who require assistance with printing out their boarding passes are aware that they can be printed out and collected at the airport.