
Minutes of the Leeds Bradford Airport® Accessibility Group Forum held at
Britannia Hotel, Leeds Road, Bramhope, Leeds LS16 9JJ.
Wednesday 23rd October 2024, 10:00-13:00 hours.

Attendees

Kay Atkin	Chairperson	KA
Bairbre McKendrick	Leeds City Council	BM
Miriam Watson-Pratt	Little hiccups	MW
Kim O'Connor	Leeds Diocese pilgrimage to Lourdes	KO
Joe Woollin	Otley action for older people	JW
Dan King	PRM Manager, LBA®	DK
Andy Leat	Customer Operations Manager, LBA®	AL
Ann-Marie Pearson	Customer Experience Development Manager, LBA®	AMP
Chris Wilkinson	Head of Customer Operations, LBA®	CW
Erica West-Padgett	Therapy Dogs	EW
Nigel Thompson	Customer, LBA®	NT
Pat Kilbane	Soroptimist International, Yorkshire	PK
Judith Parson	Soroptimist International, Yorkshire	JP
Michael Connolly	Skywise Solutions Ltd	MC
Everita Strelca	Skywise Solutions Ltd	ES
Rachel Hirst	William Merrit Centre	RH
Charlie Aldridge	Customer Care Team, LBA®	CA
Andrew Simister	Trustee, Disability Action Yorkshire	AS
Robert Kernaghan	Trustee, Disability Action Yorkshire	RK
Matt Talbot	Health and Safety Co-ordinator, LBA®	MT
Sally Warr	Ehler Danlos Support	SW
Christine Pearce	AVSED	CP
Carol Leat	Customer Experience Officer, LBA®	CL

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Ian Lawson	Chairman, North Yorkshire Accessible Transport Group	IL
Pete Hughes	Leeds Autism Services	PH

Apologies

Aniqa Mirza	William Merritt Disabled Living Centre
David Blyth	William Merritt Disabled Living Centre
Phil Chan	Leeds City Council & NHS Leeds
Liesje Dusauzay	Sparkles
Linda Morgan	Leeds Stoma Support Group
Catherine Greenwood	Otley action for older people

1. Introduction, Welcome & Apologies

The meeting was opened by DK and KA. KA welcomed everyone and nice to see increased numbers attending. New members were welcomed to the group and each member in attendance was asked to introduce themselves and provided information regarding the organisation represented or background for participation in the forum.

2. Previous Minutes review

Previous minutes were reviewed, no issues raised.

MC had picked up on a query in previous minutes regarding the changes to security processes and if previous human trafficking procedures could still be picked up. He noted that the new scanning processes still identified items hidden in underwear as an alert to staff, it is picked up slightly differently but those ways of flagging an issue to staff still work.

3. Quality Standards

LBA awarded Very Good in CAA report for 2023-2024

DK took the group through the outcome measures used by the CAA to assess the ratings.

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The percentage attainment for each area was shared in the meeting with the offer to share these following due to the amount of data they include.

Customer feedback is completed via the CAA survey. QR codes are given out to customers using the service. The last quarter resulted in 400 surveys completed.

LBA also have a fairly new customer care team, C has attended today. They are monitoring and gathering feedback and feeding this back in. This is in addition to the CAA survey. There has also been an increase in audits, from around 12 audits a year, to 122 audits completed this year. This helps make sure we are delivering the standards expected and everyone is safe.

4. Performance Review

The assistance service is getting busier. 1 April 23rd to the 31 March 24 The total number of customers we assisted was 71,927. Six months between April and September, we've assisted 57,562 customers There is around a 30% increase in passengers using the assisted travel service. The forecast had been around a 10% increase so demand has exceeded the forecast. From 2019 with 53000 customers to 2023 with 69374 passengers it has been big increase in demand.

Unfortunately, nine customers have missed flights this year so far. We do reflect and learn from these events.

One of the challenges is lots of planes arriving at the same time and allocating resources effectively.

One airline linked to most of the missed flights has a very tight turnaround time at 25 minutes. This can make it very challenging operationally to ensure passengers are boarded safely given the various disabilities and at times the number of assistance passengers on the same flight.

Another consideration is the number of non-notified passengers. Currently this is around 1 in every 6 assistance passengers. We are trying to work with airlines to improve pre notifications.

We are now using a lot more data to guide the service. This is mainly thanks to Charlie and his team. Each month we get feedback on compliments and complaints. There has been an introduction of power BI software which uses data to produce forecasting and allow easy viewing of the stats. This makes it easier to feed back to higher management about the current service.

Start of the year Jan-March more compliments than complaints, but as the service got busy in the summer May-July the complaint level raised. This was seen across the airport not just in assistance. The main area of concern raised was travelling groups having to be split at boarding mainly linked to capacity of ambulift.

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Q: JW asked if the survey can be accessed in any format bar electronically.

The LBA team will accept feedback in any format and then respond to it in the format received. They note people do write in and they would then respond in letter form. This is an area that will be considered further to alternative feedback formats for those unable to complete electronically.

5. Skywise Aviation Equipment – Seat to Seat Transfer

Skywise trainers MC and ES demonstrated and explained the commonly used transfers for a full assistance passenger who can't transfer themselves to the aircraft seat.

KA noted this area was end focus of her PhD as was highlighted as one of the top issues and a big barrier to accessing air travel.

MC and ES demonstrated the manual lift, followed by ProMove sling. They also showed the AbleMove sling, Buckingham glide board and transfer board.

They noted staff will always ask what assistance is needed, this is for the customers benefit. Although some customers become annoyed at repetition of questions this is done due to the varying nature of individual needs to ensure the staff know what is required at that particular point of time.

Manual lift – very hands on, quite intrusive due to positioning. Some people and some staff can find it uncomfortable because of the close proximity. Explanation of how the lift was carried out and the reasons for certain hand positions and holds was explained to the group.

ProMove sling – simple, stable and comfortable for the passenger. It allows weight to be spread throughout the full sling area and not just the contact areas as per the manual lift.

Q's:

Query about when the slings are moved and if they stay with the passenger: The ProMove sling will stay with passenger from transfer from their wheelchair, to the aircraft seat. They don't travel with it.

Some passengers will attend in their own sling. Or there are slings such as the AbleMove that can be rented or purchased that would remain with the passenger and they would travel in that sling for the entire journey.

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Query around how many slings are available at Leeds Bradford: Leeds Bradford have seven slings, one in each of the six ambulift and one on the airbridge.

Query about why the manual lift is used given it is banned in healthcare:

KA – my PhD research shows the use of the slings is much safer, however currently there appears to be barriers to it being the primary method. Time is often stated as a factor however this was negligible within the study, but there was a significant difference in posture risk scores and exertion. There hasn't been previous research looking at the handling in this environment, it's a very space restricted environment making it different for transfers.

MC&ES – In aviation there is no regulation around lifting as such, There is only the Netherlands that are looking to introduce specific legislation around manual handling and lifting. Some airlines have been reluctant to allow slings on board due to time, however when we have demonstrated we can do it quickly as we are used to the environment, so training is key.

Query about location of passengers in aircraft and why assisted passengers cant be located in more roomier areas of the aircraft:

ES - Safety is the main reason, the front rows have to assist evacuation. Sometimes there may be bulkhead seats, but if there is higher class seating then someone would not be upgraded due to being an assisted passenger.

Query around need to be in a window seat:

ES – Safety again, if the plane isn't full or your travelling with other members in your party who are happy for you to sit at the aisle then this would be ok, but you cant sit in the aisle as it can impede other passengers exit in an emergency

Query about small aircraft:

The passenger is boarded last on the small aircraft due to the access to the aircraft. Due to weight distribution to prevent tipping they have to be filled from the front and assistance passengers would be at the rear of the plane nearest the entrance. A stair climber is used to board as there isn't any vehicles that can connect to the entrance.

Query about hoists:

There are a couple of hoists on the market. Availability in airports is limited. The eagle hoist is limited to which aircraft it can service and is limited to the right side seats D&E. The newer hoist can service more aircraft and all seats. The hoists are also expensive to purchase which also limited the

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number available, plus have additional ongoing costs with the training and maintenance required. Despite this more airports are starting to purchase the hoists.

Hoists do take longer to complete transfers so this will be an issue for shorter turn around times. Availability of hoists when there are multiple passengers requiring is also an issue.

The ideal would be that every assistant passenger was boarded, that needed lift was boarded with a hoist. Because it removes the handling, it reduces the risk. Passengers report that they prefer it's more comfortable, they feel more confident, but there's massive challenges operationally around it still, which are going to have to be further addressed.

6. Assisted Travel Awareness Week

Last year was our first assisted travel awareness week. It was extremely successful. The idea of the assistive travel awareness week was to work with our airport partners.

On Monday we had different groups attended and had stalls set up in the check in area, this increased awareness. The assistance dogs were very popular. Along with the cakes made by Ann-Marie.

Then the rest of the week we took different airport staff through the assisted travel process, in wheelchair, blindfolds, headphones with white noise to mimic the experience of our passengers. We also did the seat-to-seat transfer.

We are looking to hold this again this year the week 18th-21st November. If anyone wants to get involved please contact Ann-Marie as it would be good to get as many people here as possible.

7. X25 Update

The new build is in progress, it's now 6 months and 9 days until it goes live. Currently the concern is how to get in and out of the new building, then how we get on and off the airplane into the building. We still at this point do not have all the answers but the bigger issues around accessibility are likely to be as we move into phase 2 which is redesigning and upgrading the existing building. This poses more challenges than a new build which isn't operational.

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We are investing heavily in this improvement. We are planning ahead for how we signpost and implement the changes. There are still ongoing changes so we do not have the full final design completed. We expect that there will be changes that need making once we go live. There will be eleven stands once opening. There is also further future plans beyond this current build. We are using the data provided now to help guide what we do, so when we open we plan to identify which flights require the aviramps given levels of assistance passengers and can organise the stands accordingly.

CW brought some photos and plans with me so if anyone wants to discuss further we can go through over lunch.

Phase 2 expected to run from may 25 to dec 26.

Question was raised from group about consulting with group around developments. Explained there were meetings during the initial development, will look to arrange further consultation as progress towards phase 2. Phase 1 is underway so limited ability to change that now, but phase 2 will arrange meetings as we approach to consult.

8. Open Forum

New equipment – two ambulifts arrived in march, but there is an order for another ambulift due dec 25 and two aviramps due may/June 25. The aviramps look to allow a step free journey. The ones ordered will have a roof unlike the one pictured given the airport location for the weather.

We are looking to change to sustainable fuel with a switch to using HVO vegetable oil fuel in our diesel vehicles.

Security Training – security have organised some training following some problems with the new body scanners and autistic passengers. This is due to be carried out on 18th November.

Easy Read Info Revision – Discussion to revise the easy read information which is sent out the passengers. Its several years old and Pete who wrote the original guide is keen to assist an update as there has been a lot of progress around making information accessible for neurodivergent people.

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There was also an update that some progress has been made with marketing team about production of a video.

Pets 4 Therapy – LBA now registered with the Pet Therapy scheme as an approved location, this has occurred in the past week. Now need to get the risk assessments and security clearance completed.

Representation at Meetings – It was raised especially given the changes occurring at the airport there needs to be representation from hearing and visual impaired groups. Requested if anyone has specific contacts as invites have been sent out to these groups but with no response.

Discussion around use of BSL in meetings, and within airport as has been implemented by train stations recently. LBA have looked at a mobile app sign live, which will convert live conversation into BSL as one option.

Non-Notified Passengers – discussion about passengers that don't do online bookings so may fall outside the prompts for assistance during booking to access booking assistance. Is there ways that groups can do this on behalf of individuals travelling. DK agreed to arrange a meeting to go through how notifications work and ways users can be educated around the process with J.

It was queried if there was a higher proportion of non-notified passengers for airlines that cap the assistance passengers per flight. LBA doesn't specifically monitor this but does get passengers turn up for assistance for flights which are at capacity for assistance passengers.

It was also flagged sometimes people don't book assistance as they worry it may impact travel insurance, or they fail to recognise they need to assistance in advance.

It was noted concern around some airlines failing to pass on prebooking of assistance and no option to arrange with airport in advance. It was explained that assistance requests are booked via airline to ensure each airport in travel journey is informed. There is work ongoing with the airlines to try and improve pre-notifications. The airport will always do there best to assist all assistance passengers even where not pre notified.

Human Trafficking Awareness Posters – work has been ongoing since last meeting and has involved a multi agency approach, great interaction between west Yorkshire police, border force and the airport along with Soroptimist International. The aim is by next summer there will be a small poster

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on how to get help if being forced to travel on the back of every toilet door. We are also investigating the use of the 'Ask for Angela' scheme with the airlines.

Gender Neutral Toilets – it was raised whether the new build would be in line with the new part T regulations. It was confirmed that there would be male, female and a toilet for all. Concern was raised that by not having a separate gender-neutral toilet it may impact the accessible toilets, or prevent some users feeling safe. Inclusivity should be considered alongside accessibility.

MC/ES noted having seen family toilets, but no specific gender-neutral toilets at any airport they have travelled through. CW will take the feedback back to planners.

9. Q&A

Meeting was closed by KA