

EAST MIDLANDS AIRPORT ACCESSIBILITY FORUM NOTES

13 April 2022

PRESENT

Meeting Chair - Christiane Link, Ortegalink Ltd (CL)

ORGANISATIONS

Derby City Council Equality Lead - Ann Webster (AW)

Spinal Injuries Association – Chris Etches (CE)

British Deaf Association – Robin Ash (RA)

East Midlands Airport – Chris Drury, Interim Customer Services Manager (CD)

East Midlands Airport – Harry Winter, Passenger Services Team Leader (HW)

Apologies

None received.

1. Welcomes and Introductions

CL thanked all members for attending today's Accessibility Forum, which was rescheduled from March-22. CL gave members an account of her trip to East Midlands Airport on 4th March. CL was pleased to see several of the new Assisted Travel initiatives in use and some of the actions on the tracker having been completed. CL highlighted that in the current business climate she wasn't expecting finances to have been made available to deliver some of the larger infrastructure works being completed to improve accessibility – including the landside disabled toilet – but welcomes these funds. CL had the opportunity to speak with Mike Grimmes, Customer Service and Security Director, which she recalled as a positive meeting. CL stated that she had been invited to represent the Accessibility Forum on an interview panel for the new Customer Services Manager role. This is the first time CL has been invited as the Chair of an Accessibility Forum to sit on the recruitment panel for an operational role and welcomed the opportunity. *Interviews for this role were carried out on 22nd April 2022.*

2. East Midlands Airport Update

HW introduced himself to members of the forum who were unable to attend the last meeting. HW is the new Passenger Services Team Leader and will be supporting with the administration of the Accessibility Forum moving forward.

HW took members through the new organisation structure within the Customer Services and Security Directorate, highlighting that moving forward the Assisted Travel Team will sit within a newly formed 'Customer Services' department. Also in this department, there will be a newly formed team of Customer Services Ambassadors. HW indicated that all Ambassadors would receive Assisted Travel Training. CD highlighted that having this roaming position in the terminal will allow the airport to provide a greater service for those using the Assisted Travel service, as Ambassadors will be tasked with hosting the Assisted Travel Seating Area and

supporting passengers who wish to utilise the retail and catering provisions whilst waiting for their gate to be announced.

HW and CD took members through the WhatsApp messaging service which has been rolled out across the entire airport estate. This messaging service allows those requiring assistance the ability to message a member of the Assisted Travel Team from anywhere on site. HW confirmed the roll out has been a success and that take-up was incredibly strong. As part of the trial, temporary signage has been installed promoting the new service at key touch points throughout the passenger journey – including at car park barriers, bus and coach interchange, quiet rooms etc. CD informed members that we are also seeing passengers from outside the Assisted Travel scheme using this new initiative to ask questions.

CD invited RA to give his input as the member of the Accessibility Forum who suggested such a scheme. RA highlighted that to date he hasn't been to the airport to trial the initiative himself. Until he has done this, RA believed it is difficult to say whether this new system of communication works as for him it's all about the language being used. RA highlighted that the deaf community often struggle with automatic messaging systems. AW reiterated this statement, stating that often companies feel putting communication into text form is the solution for the deaf community, when in reality it isn't. RA also raised a concern about the signing symbol being used on the signage if a trained colleague in BSL (British Sign Language) wasn't available. RA also raised the need for videos to be developed to support communication of this new tool. CD reassured members that this messaging service was not automated and that the communications was with an actual member of the Assisted Travel Team on-duty at that time. CD also highlighted that the signage in use currently was only temporary and thanked members for their input. HW stated that new signage was being ordered to replace the temporary signage and we would share the wording of this with the accessibility forum.

Action – Arrange for RA to attend the Airport for familiarisation.

Action – Share draft WhatsApp messaging signage with Accessibility Forum

HW and CD informed members of an incident which occurred onboard an ambulift in November-21. Following the incident all the ambulifts within the fleet were pulled from operation to undergo safety inspection. The Airport Leadership Team has released funds to allow the department to refurbish the entire ambulift fleet. HW confirmed this included: two current ambulifts which are with the manufacturers for a complete refurb, the purchasing of a New Bulmor SideBull Ambulift which allows for ground level boarding and disembarking, alongside the purchasing of two new refurbished ambulifts.

HW informed members that the training programme previously shared with the group has now been pulled. HW recognised the forums desire at the last meeting to ensure a set of core values were embedded into the training. HW presented a set of core values – Respect, Empathises, Ask & Listen which have been embedded into the current training – these have been taken directly from the Department for Transport (DfT) Accessibility Training Programme. CL stated that she is aware of this DfT training and has seen the railway version, CL believes the training is superficial and doesn't go anywhere near deep enough. AW was disappointed to understand that CL hadn't been involved in the development of the new

training. In response, CD stated that following a conversation with the CAA, they stated that it potentially could be a conflict of interest if the Chair of the Accessibility Forum was to deliver or design the training provision. AW and CL strongly disagreed with this verdict. CL asked to see the communication from the CAA. RA sits on the Highways England Accessibility Forum and has delivered training for them previously and believes there has not been a conflict of interest before. CL states that there needs to be lived experience embedded into the training coupled with the right messaging. HW reassured members that the airports intension is to complete a comprehensive re-design of the entire Assisted Travel Training. CD expanded on this, informing members that the department has recently appointed a new trainer who is in post now. Their background is primarily from the Cruise Industry, having previously held senior training posts with major international brand, including Disney Cruise Line. Anthony is clear on the expectation to completely overhaul the current training programme and will be looking to members of the Accessibility Forum to support / guide him through this process

Action – Send CL email from CAA.

Action – Send CL, AW and RA DfT Training Programme.

HW took members through the updated fleet of assistance chairs now in the fleet, this includes the below: complete refurbishments of the Staxi chairs, the introduction of self-propelling wheelchairs (5x Enigma XS Self Propel Wheelchairs) which are now available to passengers both landside and airside, the introduction of new Staxi and Colombia Aisle chairs and an AAT Stair climber for additional resilience. HW also confirmed that following suggestions from members at the last meeting, headrests and armrests have been purchased for the aisle chairs, so passengers have the option to have these additional features if helpful. AW raised concerns about the AAT Stair Climber, explaining from past experience they are incredibly uncomfortable. HW and CD reassured members that the AAT Stair Climber had been purchased purely from an emergency resilience point of view, to completely remove the need for manual carries in the future, for example in extremely high winds when the ambulifts can no longer operate. CL reiterated AW point and was pleased to hear it was purchased for emergency situations only.

Action – Reaffirm with colleagues the AAT Stair Climber is for emergency situations only.

HW then took members through some of the workstreams which have been completed since the last forum meeting, which included: Data Verification Improvements for Time Stamping, Summer 2022 Recruitment, Feedback given on CAA's draft CAP1228A, Quiet Room refurbishment.

It was agreed by member to review progress on the action tracker independently, if any members have any questions about the progress made, these can be directed to HW.

3. Closing Remarks & AOB

HW and CD informed members that in line with best practice and because of the airports desire to utilise the Accessibility Forums more moving forward, after consultation with CL, the

decision has been taken to pay members £50 for their attendance at each meeting. HW recognised that some members were present on a consultancy basis, with others representing both charity and local authorities, therefore depending on individual circumstances the payment can be made to a company, or alternatively a charity of their choice. HW confirmed he will work with each member to process these payments.

AW asked if the airport could confirm the requirement for airlines to have aisle chairs accessible for passengers during the flight. HW will ask the based airlines what their policy is and report back to the Accessibility Forum at the next meeting.

Action – HW to speak with based airlines about access to aisle chairs onboard.

CL closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. It was agreed the next Accessibility Forum will be held in July – 2022. Date and Time to be confirmed.