

EAST MIDLANDS AIRPORT ACCESSIBILITY FORUM NOTES

28 June 2021

PRESENT

Meeting Chair - Christiane Link, Ortegalink Ltd (CL)

ORGANISATIONS

Accessibility and Inclusion - Sarah Rennie (SR)

British Deaf Association - Robin Ash (RA)

Derby City Council Equality Lead - Ann Webster (AW)

Spinal Injuries Association – Chris Etches (CE)

East Midlands Airport - Usman Khalid, Head of Terminal Operations (UK)

East Midlands Airport – Chris Drury, Passenger Services Team Leader (CD)

East Midlands Airport – Ateeq Syed, Passenger Services Team Leader (AS)

APOLOGIES

Blind/Partially Sighted Community Representative - Pat Taylor (PT)

1. Welcomes and Introductions

CL welcomed all members after a lengthy time since the last forum, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

CD welcomed all members and highlights that it is fantastic to be able to hold the forum again amidst a backdrop of a slowly improving picture for the aviation industry. Flights and passengers are beginning to return to the airport, after what has been a very quiet 15 months.

All members of the forum introduce themselves and their backgrounds. This includes our new member CE.

RA highlights an issue he has experienced in relation to joining the forum this afternoon, as it required the use of intercom systems in the car parks and upon arrival, which he is unable to interact with. UK acknowledges the issue, and members agree to discuss this in detail after the airport update.

2. Airport Update

CD gives an update on the Passenger Services department. This includes information on team structure changes and job cuts as a result of the pandemic. There has been a 39% reduction in FTE colleagues, against a 91% reduction in Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRMs) last financial year.

CD goes on to explain that the department has maximised the use of the Government's furlough scheme by upskilling remaining colleagues in key operational areas in order to be able to scale up the operation again when the time comes.

CD updates the forum on the Covid-19 measures introduced to facilitate safe travel for PRMs in the current environment. Fundamentally the service remains unchanged, with no

additional burdens or barrier introduced. Instead, measures focus on appropriate PPE items, with requirements varying dependent on the latest government advice, and the category of assistance being provided. For example, face shields may be used as an alternative to a face mask for passengers who would benefit from lip-reading. All equipment, including wheelchairs, vehicle seats, PPE etc are replaced or cleaned after every use. A virtual 360 degree Try Before You Fly tour is now available on the airport website.

CD updates the forum that the airport retained the highest possible Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) rating of 'Very Good' for last year. Notably, the CAA has reduced the requirements for the airport to report on our progress and on meeting the usual service level agreements (SLAs). The airport has chosen to continue to provide all data, and continues to meet all the SLAs previously required.

The CAA has also removed the requirement for consultation with the Independent Accessibility Forum, but the airport has again decided to resume consultation in a covid compliant manner, so that the advice from the forum can be collated, such that it has maximum impact on decision-making now, for when changes begin to commence in the future.

CL remarks that it is great to see the airport continue to hold themselves to the same high standards as they have done in the past, despite the requirements of the CAA being reduced or removed. In a recent discussion with representatives at the CAA, East Midlands Airport was mentioned first as an example of an airport that is providing an excellent service, and this is reflected particularly in PRM satisfaction scores.

All forum members are invited to spend 10 minutes reviewing the actions tracker.

3. Actions Tracker and Q&A

RA discusses his difficulties with intercom systems in more detail and highlights concerns that feedback he has previously given may have been lost amongst personnel changes at the airport. RA gives some examples of what may work well as an alternative, ranging from a simple text service with signage at each intercom, to a scheme that RA says is being operated by Transport for Wales involving a video sign language interpreter via smartphone. Derby Royal are also said to be trialling a new system.

In addition, RA explains an issue he experienced in Security where he was grabbed by an officer. CD queries if RA is aware of the green lanyard system. RA's personal preference is not to use the green lanyard scheme as he wishes to be able to transit the airport in the same way as any other passenger.

UK assures that the airport will put something in place very soon as a trial based on RA's feedback. A timescale is not yet possible to give, but a basic text service at car park barriers with signage can be in place in a matter of a week or two. – **Action EMA.**

CD explains how the actions tracker has been preserved from previous owners and that this is treated as a live document, so as items are completed they are removed from the list so hopefully if items are no longer present it is because they were actioned. CD also

acknowledges that it is possible some items were lost, as data kept in certain locations is wiped when individuals leave the business, which it has not been possible to retrieve due to the timescales involved with the entire department remaining on furlough for most of last year.

RA proposes that he meet CD on a future date for a walkthrough of the terminal to check on progress, see if the trial system for the intercoms is working well, and to suggest new actions. CD agrees that this would be very beneficial once local restrictions are removed on who is permitted to be in the terminal. – **Action EMA.**

CL and AW propose that all members of the forum are brought in to advise on the intercom trial, and perhaps other members can also attend for walkthroughs also. RA agrees as the trial may prove to benefit other groups than just the hearing-impaired community. AS suggests that it is also something that could be used throughout the airport journey, not just at intercoms.

In relation to bringing all members of the forum together to advise on certain topics, CD highlights that an action from the previous forum has been unable to be completed so far because all members of the department were furloughed almost immediately after the last forum. This action was in relation to the sharing of training materials used to train Assisted Travel and Security staff. CD confirms that these materials will be shared with the group in the near future in order to receive feedback and points to improve. – **Action EMA.**

RA queries how the assistance function is funded. UK explains that the airport is privately owned by Manchester Airports Group, and that in general the airport is funded via passenger, cargo and aviation revenue streams. In amongst the fees charged to airlines, there is a PRM charge which is intended to fund the PRM service, which comes from the airline, directly to the airport for that purpose. However, infrastructure changes will typically involve capital investment from the airport.

CL highlights that the number one item on the tracker was number one for a reason, and this relates to the accessibility of some of the toilets, in particular the one in the check-in hall. CD acknowledges that the funds that were previously set aside for work on all toilets was withdrawn at the beginning of the pandemic, as funds for all projects were unilaterally withdrawn from every project across the airport. UK agrees that it is an important issue that must be addressed, and explains that this whole area of the terminal is due to be redesigned in the next year or two to accommodate a change in Security Search Area layout due to new equipment requirements. It may therefore be possible to get the required changes made at the same time as part of the redesign. This will be raised with airport Directors to highlight the issue. – **Action EMA.**

RA asks what covid measures are in place more generally around the terminal. For example, what is done to stop overcrowding? Can lessons be learned from some large events operators such as Wimbledon or Football Events? UK explains that the airports approach has remained fluid depending on the latest government advice, with compliance being maintained throughout with Public Health England guidelines. East Midlands Airport along with London Heathrow Airport were the very first two airports to be signed off as Covid Compliant by

independent health experts in the UK. Passenger numbers are currently such that there are no issues with overcrowding, and signage is in place encouraging social distancing and mandating the use of face masks. A large festival- type event was recently held locally and EMA will get the opportunity to de- brief with the management there to assess its success.

AW queries what the wording is on the face masks signage, and what the policy is for enforcing it. UK clarifies that face masks are mandated unless exempt, and that the green lanyard scheme has been made available for that purpose, although individual airlines will have different rules and requirements. All entrances to the terminal have been monitored throughout the pandemic to monitor mask compliance, and this is now being managed generally by all staff throughout the terminal. UK leaves the room to check the exact wording of the signage, and returns to confirm that there is not a stipulation for wearing a mask 'if you are able', and acknowledges that this is something that could be improved.

CE explains that as a new service user, some of the items being discussed are still very new to him, and feels as though he would benefit from a walkthrough with a focus on spinal injuries in particular. CD agrees that this can certainly be accommodated once restrictions on who is able to be in the terminal are lifted. – **Action EMA.**

4. Other Business

CD asks if any forum members have any knowledge or experience with Companion Canes. CL, AW and SR have some knowledge on what they are and their purpose. It is agreed that the purchase and provision of companion canes by the airport may be seen to be quite a strong statement, and may come across as though they are being forced onto users.

CD raised an item from the previous meeting, which was deferred to this next meeting so that SR can have input. This was in relation to the use of mechanical hoists for boarding and disembarking aircraft. SR states that she does not have personal experience of using a hoist for this purpose, but that it sounds like a good idea in principle. SR requests that further information is sent through to her about the different products available and asks if it might be possible to get a demonstration of the product, where she does not mind trialling the product for the airport. CD agrees to send the documents through, and based on that will look to arrange a product demonstration with one or more suppliers. Forum members agree that it would be good to participate in agreeing a selection criteria matrix if there are multiple available products. - **Action EMA.**

CD raises that an action from the previous forum was to seek an airline representative to join the next forum meeting. It was not possible to accommodate this due to covid restrictions, but it would be explored for the next meeting.- **Action EMA.**

All forum members are given the opportunity to ask any further questions.

All forum members will be sent a link to give anonymous online feedback in relation to this forum and all documentation and minutes will be sent out to forum members at a later date.

Date of next meeting: TBC in November 2021.