

Accessibility Forum Minutes

Date	Thursday, 30 November 2023 at 15:30
Location	via Microsoft Teams

Attendees	
Name	Company
Una McKeown	Belfast International Airport
Niall McElkearney	Belfast International Airport
Deborah Harris	Belfast International Airport
	Belfast International Airport
Michelle Kelly	The Consumer Council
Susan Croy	The Cedar Foundation
Kiely Lawlor	Autism NI
Greta Gurklyte	Disability Action
Hannah Lyons	Guide Dogs NI
Apologies	
Elaine Manson	RNIB
Dubheasa McGrinder	Alzheimer's Society
Michael Lorimer	IMTAC
Representative	Age Friendly NI Network
Lisa Stewart	RNID

1-Introductions

Forum members all introduced themselves and the organisation they were representing.

2-Airport Operational Update

BIA outlined recent operational developments. The month of October had been the busiest on record, and a number of new routes had recently been announced. Additional carparking spaces were now in place.

Renovations to extend the terminal were progressing well and were expected to be complete in Summer 2024.

3- Special Assistance Update

OCS remains the airport's PRM provider and recruitment is ongoing but staff retention is good.

PRM targets set by the CAA continue to be met and exceeded by the airport, with it achieving the highest rate possible. Passenger feedback is very positive – this is mostly received through the airport's own feedback mechanism on the website. CAA also carry out their own survey and the airport are working with OCS to increase participation levels in the CAA survey.

OCS have committed to expand the special assistance information area in the check in hall and to ensure the desk is manned 24/7. This is expected to be in place by March/April 2024.

Numbers of passengers not pre-booking special assistance was highlighted. Whilst staff would always assist passengers in these circumstances the airport would appreciate assistance in raising awareness of the importance of pre-booking.

4-Update on Recommendations from the Site Visit

The airport took Forum members through a detailed update on their response to the recommendations provided in the report of the site visit in June 2023. This is provided in Appendix 1.

A number of other measures had also been undertaken:

- Covered walkways from a number of stands from the airport building to aircraft are in the later stages of planning.
- Some airlines have been reluctant to utilise the airbridge as it increases turnaround time. However there have been positive discussions around

the use of the airbridge by a number of charter airlines in Summer 2024 and discussions with other airlines will continue.

Forum members praised the actions taken following the report and the airport's proactive approach to improving accessibility measures. Further input will be provided at the next site visit into items which are being progressed as part of the expansion works.

5 - Next Steps

The Forum agreed that the next meeting will be a site visit to the airport, date to be arranged for summer 2024.

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Appendix 1 Response to recommendations from site visit

	Parking
1	Make clear on the website that it is advisable for passengers requiring special assistance to pre-book parking spaces.
	Parking information for passengers requiring special assistance is set out in the relevant section of the website, accessible via a tab at the top of the home page. Forum members agreed to review the information provided and to share with users.
2	Publicise the five-stage process for booking car parking that allows passengers requiring special assistance to avail of car parking in the short stay car park at the cheapest car parking rate – for example a short video. This should emphasise the importance of displaying a copy of the blue badge if passengers need to travel with the original.
	There are short videos on the website directing passengers on how to get to each carpark. A separate video is being planned to outline the overall five-stage booking process with additional social media posts to publicise.
3	Currently pre-booking must take place by telephone. Prioritise developing an online option.
	This option is still being explored.
4	Publicise the availability of accessible bus transport from the long-stay car park. It is helpful to know that this option is available particularly at very busy times.
	There is signage in place. An intercom option is currently not working and will require significant works to make it operational, however this remains under review.

5	Additional signage in the long stay car park should make clear that passengers should make their way to the bus shelter to call for the bus service.
	Signage is in place.
6	Consider implementing a covered walkway from the long stay car park to the main terminal building.
	This is not currently being progressed but will be kept under review.
7	Work with other stakeholders to explore potential penalties for misuse of blue badge parking and publicise these.
	This is ongoing and recommendations from stakeholders are welcome. It was noted that whilst there had been capacity issues additional parking was now in place including 17 new blue badge bays in the new premium carpark.
	Website
8	Consider how the “chat bot” could be further developed to cover voice recognition so that all passengers have the opportunity to use.
	This had been investigated but not an option with the current provider. Research into alternative possibilities is continuing.
	Assistance dog toileting areas
9	Guidance on assistance dog spending areas to be forwarded to airport (note this was subsequently done).
	A specific spending area had been incorporated into the new expansion. A provisional area is in place until the new terminal opens in summer 2024.
	Ramp to exit/arrivals
10	Consider installing handrails along the ramp to arrivals/exit and additional seating in the arrivals area.
	Handrails are currently being installed. An additional 16 seats are now available in International Arrivals and 12 in Domestic Arrivals.

Signage	
11	More prominent signage and announcements at check-in.
	This is being incorporated into the new terminal with continued removal of non-directional signage. New signage will be clear, concise and uniform. A Terminal Standards document has also been developed with third parties needing permission from the airport regarding their own signage.
12	Update and enlarge signage for quiet area in departures area.
	Large easily identifiable signage (painted on wall) planned and will soon be in place.
13	Additional signage alongside Baggage Reclaim signs clearly stating that this is also the way to Exit the terminal.
	Large easily identifiable signage (painted on wall) planned and will soon be in place.
14	Additional signage in the area towards the lift to baggage reclaim making clear that it is around the corner, not directly ahead.
	Planned in accordance with Point 13.
Toilets	
15	Cubicles should have suitable waste disposal facilities for stoma bags.
	Facilities in place in all accessible toilets, however airport staff to ensure that these are specifically for sensitive waste.
16	Consider putting a form of automatic door in place for special assistance toilets so that passengers who may be travelling alone can more easily access.
	This will be kept under review.
17	Ensure hand dryers in all accessible toilets are suitably placed.
	An audit of placement of handdryers will be undertaken – preferable that these should be beside the sink, not behind.
18	Consider converting the shower facility within the baggage reclaim hall into an additional Changing Places toilet.
	This is not in the pipeline but will be kept under review. Staff will always assist passengers flying into the airport to take to the Changing Places

	toilet landside. The Forum expressed the importance of all passengers being able to access toilet facilities.
	Quiet route
19	Consider an alternative “quiet” route to the departures lounge after security.
	A “decompression zone”, after passengers pass through security, is being planned for the new terminal and it is anticipated that this can be tied in with creating an additional quiet area.
	Training
20	Look at ways of enhancing customer service training for airport staff. Participant organisations in the visit are happy to work with the airport on additional training and access to online resources.
	Various actions being taken including renewal of partnership with Autism NI – this will include the training of all frontline staff and creation of autism champions. The Terminal Operations Manager also meets with security staff to raise awareness of how they can support people with disabilities and reduced mobility, particularly focussing on hidden disabilities.
	Seating
21	Install special assistance seating in the baggage reclaim hall.
	Special assistance seating has been installed in the International Arrivals baggage reclaim hall.
	Sunflower Lanyards
22	Consider ways to raise awareness of the airport’s “1 plus 1” policy.
	Discussions are ongoing.
	Pre-notification
23	Consumer Council to follow up on pre-notification issues with respective airlines and consider ways to help raise consumer awareness of the benefits of pre-notifying requirements.
	The Consumer Council will be launching a survey into use of airport/airline special assistance services and pre-notification will be covered. Airport and forum members agreed to promote participation in the survey.



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