

Minutes London Luton Airport Accessibility Forum (LLAAF)

Tuesday 10 September 2024, Terminal building, Luton Airport, 11:00

| Attendees | |
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| Andy Wright - LLAAF Committee Chair | Denise Hobbs - Accessibility Manager, LTN |
| Clare Armstrong - Head of Guest Experience, LTN | Tom Howlett-Smith - Security Operations Manager, LTN |
| Mark Hicks - Passenger Director, Wilson James | Wallis Harvey - Accessibility Specialist, EasyJet airlines |
| Emily Kilby - Civil Aviation Authority | Mary Doyle - Disability Etiquette trainer |
| Libby Herbert - Colostomy UK | Jo Joy - Alzheimer's Society |
| Leslie Jordan - JDRF (Type 1 Diabetes support) | Andy Buckle - JDRF (Type 1 Diabetes support) |
| Samantha Leftwich - Thomas Pocklington | Phil Rutter & Marion Burchell - Sigh Loss Council |
| Peta Barratt - Spinal Injuries Association | |
| Apologies | |
| Nicole Gudgin - Autism Bedfordshire | Lauren Cox - Luton Council |

| Welcome and Introductions |
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| <p>Andy and Denise welcomed attendees at the Luton Airport information desk, just inside the terminal, where the forum members gathered prior to an airport inspection visit. As the intention was to gather feedback from the attendees on their experience moving through the new Next-Generation Security operation, which was close to completion. Before visiting the recently constructed <i>Airside Assisted Travel</i> lounge, prior to it being furnished and fully equipped, before completion.</p> |
| Airport Security Familiarisation Tour |
| <p>The members then undertook the Security process making observations and taking notes accordingly. Denise showed members that following their feedback provided in November 2023, when the group reviewed the first next-gen lanes, it was raised that the anti-fatigue matting was soft under foot, that for all remaining lanes constructed after this feedback, the anti-fatigue matting had been amended down the middle of all the remaining lanes making the flooring more solid under foot.</p> <p>In the main part feedback from the members was good, although some comments suggested that there were levels of inconsistency in terms of Security staff behaviour and suggested that perhaps some members of staff would benefit from refresher training. In addition, it was noted that an improvement to wayfinding and signage would help the process, supported by additional information posters. Or even the inclusion of a short video prior to Security, to help advise passengers how to better prepare for the process ahead.</p> <p>Following the Security observations, the forum members were then escorted into the International Departure Lounge before heading to the recently constructed <i>Assisted Travel</i> lounge. Members were pleasantly surprised by the sizeable space and the amount of natural daylight projected into the room. Which had numerous artist impressions displayed on the walls to enable members to view various design layouts being considered by the airport management team, prior to completion. Alongside the specification 'wish-list' originally submitted by the forum members.</p> <p>Also, a prototype <i>Assistance</i> Help Point was available in the room for members to view and interact with. In order to assess its look and feel, as well as its functionality, prior to the completed version being installed throughout the airport in the weeks ahead.</p> <p>Following inspection, the forum members were then led to an airport meeting room where they took a break for lunch.</p> |

| Airport Business Update |
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| <p>Following lunch, Andy then provided an overview of the afternoon's agenda, before introducing Clare Armstrong, Head of Guest Experience for London Luton Airport.</p> <p>Clare then shared the airport's plans and aspirations for the months ahead. Which included news that the airport had now received official approval for a capacity growth of up to 19 million passengers and are in the process of applying for 32 million passengers. If awarded the 32 million passenger cap, the airport will inevitably require a second terminal to be built in due course. Which was currently being considered by the senior leadership team. Clare also confirmed that the</p> |

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Next Generation Security Hall would be fully operational in the weeks ahead, having successfully completed its trial period. Following which, the airport will then be collaborating with Border Force in a project to look at ways to improve the Arrivals process making it more efficient.

Clare completed her presentation by thanking the forum members for their valuable input in helping to create the *Assisted Travel* lounge, along with the features that will soon be installed. As well as their comments and suggestions to enrich the quality of the Disability Awareness staff training module called 'How may I best assist you?', of which, 80% of the airport staff have now successfully completed. 'How may I best assist you?' has now also been rolled out to the subcontracted third-party stakeholders working at the airport as well.

Wilson James Operational Update

Mark Hicks, Wilson James (the company subcontracted by Luton airport to provide the Special Assistance service, soon to be called the *Assisted Travel* service, to the airport's passengers) started his presentation by summarising the year's performance to date. Highlighting an ever-increasing number of passengers now requiring some form of assistance in order to either be guided through the airport terminal, as well as embark their aircraft. Noting that September traditionally is one of the busiest times of the year for *assisted* passengers, and this year has already seen a 25% increase in demand on the previous year.

However, despite such an increase in *assisted* passengers, fortunately delays had been less this year and the prenotification rate had greatly improved, primarily attributed to better educating many of the airport's airlines.

Mark provided a breakdown of the varying levels of assistance his staff had been able to offer Luton Airport's *assisted* passengers so far in 2024. Concluding that overall, despite the increase in passengers requiring assistance, 99.25% had been assisted in a timely manner. Which according to Civil Aviation Authority's guidelines sees Luton airport on track to deliver a 'Very Good' service for 2024/2025.

Easyjet Operational Performance

Wallis Harvey, EasyJet's Accessibility Specialist, then provided an overview on the airport's operational performance from an airline's perspective.

She started by highlighting the notable increase in passengers now requiring the services provided by the Assistance team and the impact this was having on the airline's cabin crew and in turn on-time performance. With a considerable increase of up to 30%, not to mention additional issues caused by insufficient numbers at times of ground handling agents and failures with their equipment. Which had resulted in disappointing customer feedback scores, being lower than in previous years.

However, the airline was constantly looking at ways to improve and enhance the *assisted* passenger service. Which included a review of the seating policy, allowing *assisted* travel passengers now to be seated in any seat of their choosing, provided it meets with health and safety regulations. Often this is at no extra cost, if the passenger's needs require them to be sat in a particular part of the aircraft.

Wallis then went on to talk about the airline's next steps for improvement, which included partnering with the sunflower lanyard scheme, updating assistance dog policies, and improvements to be made with training and accompanying manuals, for those passengers who require moving and handling support whilst on board.

Q&A: Security process and procedures for *Assisted Travel* guests

Tom Howlett-Smith, the airport's Security manager, supported by **Nicola Jessen**, then introduced themselves before taking questions from the forum members following their observational walk-through Security earlier that day.

Lesley wanted to know more about the policies for passengers who are either diabetics or have pacemakers or prosthetic limbs etc, especially if required to walk through the archway at Security. **Lesley** stated that it is vital that the security scanner **MUST** be **TURNED OFF** (or rather not turned on) when people with diabetes go through them wearing diabetes-related devices

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Nicola answered by saying that it was perfectly safe for those passengers mentioned to walk through the archway, as until the Security staff press the control pad button it is inactive and safe to cross.

Sam asked why the archway alarms go off when you walk through them.

Nicola said that this is only to alert the Security staff that someone had passed through the scanner.

Peta and **Mary** both noted as wheelchair users, how they felt they had been searched differently. Which appeared to demonstrate inconsistencies with the airport's policy on how to search wheelchair users.

Tom agreed that this was irregular, so he would take a look at the camera footage from that morning after the meeting and talk to the respective Security officers involved about their inconsistent conduct.

Jo felt that for those passengers who are entitled to and therefore choose to wear a Sunflower lanyard. It can make a significant difference to the way airport staff provide assistance to a passenger with any additional needs. But was also keen to understand what medication could be put through the x-ray machine.

Tom said that liquid medication is allowed if it is prescription medication with the appropriate label displayed, or can be validated by the passengers own NHS app.

Sam commented that the Security staff seemed unsure as to what to do with her assistance dog, when she had travelled through.

Tom said that all the Security staff receive full training before working in the airport. But he would ensure the document for procedures with guide dogs would be updated.

Libby said that for many passengers who wear a stoma bag, some were unaware that they should be afforded an opportunity for a private search.

Nicole emphasised that staff are trained to ask if guests feel uncomfortable, they must be advised they are entitled to a private search should they want one. But again, she would ensure this is emphasised in all new starter and refresher training.

CAA report & airport *Special Assistance* update

Denise rounded up with a summary presentation, highlighting the airport's operational performance as far as passenger assistance was concerned. Which given the widely discussed heavy increase in the number of passengers now looking to be supported when travelling through the airport and onto their aircraft, had been very effectively managed. Resulting in the Civil Aviation Authority grading Luton Airport as 'Good' in their end of year airport Accessibility report 2023/2024, and overall feedback from the airports guests as also being good.

Denise said that further information about the airport's performance, updates to the Security facility, the soon to be installed new Help Points, new *Assisted Travel* lounge and the official rebranding to *Assisted Travel* from *Special Assistance*, would follow in a separate PowerPoint presentation.

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There were no further points raised or questions asked by Forum members. Other than a desire at future meetings for forum members to hear more from other stakeholders working at the airport, like Border Force, other airlines, as well as some Ground Handling Agents.

Andy and **Denise** then thanked the members for their attendance and contributions to what had been a very thorough and beneficial discussion, especially about the airport's new Next-Generation Security facility. Saying that all the comments and feedback would be taken on board and shared with the CAA.

Dates for next year's meetings are detailed below...

2025 LLAAF meeting dates

Tuesday, 4 March 2025

Wednesday 10 September 2025

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