

Minutes London Luton Airport Accessibility Forum (LLAAF)

Date	Wednesday 20 th of January 2021 13:00
Location	The meeting was conducted online via Microsoft Teams due to the Covid crisis

Attendees	
Name	Company
Andy Wright	Committee Chair
Denise Hobbs	Accessibility Manager - London Luton Airport
Dr Rita Egan	Vice Chair Luton Passenger Services Committee
Milton Rae	Action on Hearing Loss
Libby Herbert	Colostomy UK
Siobhan Meade	Guide Dogs for the Blind
Helen Fleet	Guide Dogs for the Blind
Annlouise Taylor	Alzheimer's Society
Abigail Burrell-Rann	JDRF
Amy Gavin-Birch	Autism Bedfordshire
Peta Barrett	Spinal Injuries Association
Apologies	
Daniel Churchman	Disability Resource Centre
John Leonard	Spinal Injuries Association
Carol Barraclough	Spinal Injuries Association

1 - Welcome, Introductions and update on recent activities at the airport

Andy welcomed attendees to the **London Luton Airport Accessibility Forum (LLAAF)**, which was held online due to the ongoing Covid crisis. **Andy** provided a brief overview about the purpose and format of the airport forum for the benefit of new attendees.

Denise then provided the forum with a summary of actions that had been undertaking since the group last met on the 29th October 2020, as follows:

- Wilson James (WJ) has now officially been awarded the PRM special assistance contract at LLA (London Luton Airport), following the recent re-tender process. WJ is due to commence as of the 1st Feb 2021. Denise then explained that much work had taken place recently in supporting the transition from CCS (current special assistance provider) to WJ. The airport was looking forward to working with the new organisation who currently support passengers at both Gatwick and Heathrow airports. It is hoped that representatives from both WJ and DART (Direct Air-Rail Transit) will be able to join the March forum in order to answer questions from forum members.

Rita asked whether WJ was intending to introduce new wheelchairs with bigger wheels when they start the contract. As she believes they would be easier for staff to push in and around the airport. Rita was also keen to know whether WJ intended to provide better training and instruction to their staff with the assistance of PRM passengers. So as to allow PRMs more time to enjoy the airport facilities, such as duty-free for example.

Denise said she would be happy to take both points to WJ when she next meets with them and will report back to the forum at the March meeting.

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- **Denise** then advised the forum that LLA had received a 'Good' rating by the CAA for the 2019/20 period. The airport had been aiming to achieve a 'Very Good' for 2020/21, but unfortunately recently learnt that the CAA will now not be scoring this period due to the Covid crisis.
- **Denise** then explained that works to ensure the accessible toilet facilities are all of a superior consistent standard is still ongoing. But funds have now been set aside to enable these facilities to be upgraded and made *stoma* friendly, on receipt of a written business case. **Libby** said she was happy to provide help and support for this project.
- Also, LLA are now in the process of integrating a new alarm system within all the accessible toilet facilities. **Denise** explained the current method for alerting assistance if the emergency cord is pulled, and how the new system will enable a more direct and immediate alert to LLA personnel once installed. Signage will also be installed within the toilet, providing a number to call for help should a person be in difficulty and is not able to reach the pull cord. A number will also be available on the outside of the door, should another passenger hear the occupant in distress and want to call for help. The toilet location will also be printed on the signage.
Rita asked how a passenger could notify somebody from the airport if the toilets needed cleaning or needed to report a fault e.g. door closing mechanism. As she has experienced issues in the past. Also had the airport ever considered toilet seat raisers.
Denise said she would investigate previously reported toilet related faults and would ensure future airport signage included a contact number for reporting such issues. **Denise** said she would talk to **Andy** about the provision of a toilet seat raiser. **Siobhan** also wanted to know whether the airport plan to have any Braille signage on the accessible toilet door for blind passengers. **Denise** said she would be happy to raise this proposal to senior management. Along with the inclusion of exit signs on the back of the accessible toilet door, as raised by **Andy**, to support passengers with dementia.
- **Denise** then confirmed that the DOZ (Drop Off Zone) shelter will soon have Special Assistance signage on it and the Buggy turn area has already been painted in preparation for the airport buggy operation.
- **Denise** confirmed that the airport website had now been updated to show the 'Dog relief area' as a facility available for assistance animals. And the information regarding Assistance animals travelling abroad, now that the UK is no longer in the EU, had also been updated.
Amy complimented the level of information on the website as well as the layout, which she had found easy to navigate and felt would greatly help people with autism.
Denise then encouraged all charity representatives at the meeting to look at the airport website and advise if they noted any issues or felt any information needed updating.
- **Denise** then explained to **Rita**, who had previously raised the need for an area to lie down in for some disabled passengers within the airport, as well as the inclusion of Food & Drink vending machines in the assistance lounge. That the initial quotes from approved suppliers for this facility had been very high so far. And that vending machines would be considered post-Covid, once passenger numbers started to return to normal.
- **Denise** advised that she had now completed her *virtual* Dementia Friends training and was looking forward to future modules in support of general disability awareness training.
- **Denise** also confirmed that LLA have now donated 1,000 sunflower lanyards to various organisations within the local community.

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2 - Forum group discussion

Forum members were asked whether they were aware of a product called Roommate - a speaking assistance device installed into accessible toilets to support blind and visually impaired travellers. And if so, did they have any comments or feedback.

Siobhan and **Helen** said they were aware of the product and thought it was a good idea for the airport to trial. **Andy** was also aware of the product which is currently being utilised at a number of other UK airports and said he believed it had been well received. But it probably was not necessary to install one into every toilet at the airport. **Denise** was grateful for the feedback and would now look to organise a trial with Roommate.

Denise then asked forum members whether they, or their service users, would be prepared to participate in a future *mystery shopper* exercise at the airport in order to help evaluate the airport security process and procedures. She explained that she would like to have a selection of pan-disability volunteers to test the security process and feedback their experience. The request was well received, and forum members said they would be happy to support this initiative.

Denise and **Andy** then asked how members of the disabled community felt in general about flying again once government Covid restrictions had been lifted and more people had been vaccinated. And when they were prepared to fly again, would there be a preference for particular destinations for example.

Peta felt there was a considerable amount of pent-up frustration amongst her fellow wheelchair users and was confident that once people were able to fly safely again, they would be keen to start booking holidays.

Rita also confirmed that she was very keen to start flying again and as soon as she had received her second vaccination she would be looking to fly to France as soon as she could.

However, all agreed that an important consideration before making future holiday plans, would be to better understand the stability of the virus in the countries they planned to travel to before finally deciding.

3 - Actions and future LLAAF scheduled meeting dates

- If anybody is aware of existing examples of good practice currently being displayed at other airports or similar environments. Or learnings they feel the airport would benefit from, then please advise.
- Also, if there is anything specific you would like to know, or wish to be discussed, at the next meeting, again please advise.
- Future meeting dates:

Thursday 4 March 2021
Thursday, 2 September 2021