

Minutes London Luton Airport Accessibility Forum (LLAAF)

Thursday, 29 September 2022 11:00 a.m.

Attendees	
Andy Wright - Committee Chair	Denise Hobbs - Accessibility Manager, LTN
Mark Hicks - Airport Services Director, Wilson James	Lauren Campbell - Ethos Farm
Dr Rita Egan - Luton Passenger Services Committee	Mary Doyle - Disability Etiquette trainer
Sandie Allen - Autism Bedfordshire	Jo Joy - Alzheimer's Society
Peta Barratt - Spinal Injuries Association	Samantha Leftwich - Thomas Pocklington Trust
Phil Rutter - Thomas Pocklington Trust	Chloe and Linda Walters - LTN Passengers
Apologies	
Libby Herbert - Colostomy UK	Jo Rising - Age UK
Emma Hotchkiss - RNID	

Welcome and introductions
<p>Andy welcomed attendees to the London Luton Airport Accessibility Forum (LLAAF), which was held in person for the first time in two years at Putteridge Bury Hall, close to the airport. Introductions were made and new attendees were introduced, and apologies read.</p> <p>Andy ran through the main action points from the previous meeting, which included an update on staff training at the airport. As well as further information being required from Wilson James about their operating procedures, especially as far as protection for mobility scooters and power wheelchairs in the rain were concerned. Also, how development of their passenger assistance app, <i>Purple Door</i>, was progressing.</p> <p>Both of these points were covered in more detail during the course of the meeting.</p>
LLA Operational Overview
<p>Denise then updated the Forum on recent traveller statistics from the preceding months. Current PRM numbers had only returned to approximately 66% of 2019 figures. Whilst the total number for all Departing passengers was currently trending at around 70%. Demonstrating that so far, PRM levels had not returned at the same rate post Covid and currently only represented 1.32% of all Departing passengers.</p> <p>Denise went on to confirm that airline pre-notification information had improved over the course of the year, following stronger collaboration between the airport, Wilson James and a couple of the main airlines. Who had provided data which highlighted certain routes known historically to have lower numbers of pre-notified passengers. These routes had now been specifically targeted and already, what had been a figure of 30% for un-notified passengers flying in January 2022, had now been reduced to around 23% by the end of August. With both July and August averaging 19%. Which has led to greater efficiency when allocating appropriate resources and helped to improve customer satisfaction.</p> <p>In addition, Denise explained how the airport is looking to introduce a new Sensory Area, designed for passengers whose children may have autism or other related conditions. As well as announcing plans to re-locate the Special Assistance lounge to a more prime location within the terminal. Which would include mobility aid charging points for example, amongst other things.</p> <p>Rita expressed concerns about Assistance staff demobilising her power chair without her supervision and guidance. Denise responded by confirming that any demobilisation should always be done in the presence of the owner and that both Wilson James and the Ground Handling Agent must always check that the electric mobility aid is demobilised, prior to handling and boarding onto the aircraft.</p>

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Rita then asked why she and other PRMs were often asked to stand up out of their wheelchairs when being boarded onto the Ambulift.

Denise confirmed that if a PRM is travelling in their own wheelchair they should not be asked to get out of it. As the PRM passenger would always be allowed to take their chair to the aircraft door if they chose to do so. Passengers seated in an airport wheelchair may be asked if they can stand. So that potentially more PRMs can travel in a single Ambulift, thereby reducing unnecessary waiting time and further delays to other passengers.

Rita also expressed concerns over the way in which she is sometimes addressed by Assistance staff at the airport. Saying how important she felt it was that a customer should be addressed by either their name or 'Sir/Madam', rather than informal casual terms such as 'petal', for example. **Denise** said that staff are trained to assess customers, with a view to helping the customer feel more at ease and relax. But appreciated that it is a very individual preference, and she would speak with both the staff and the airport trainers, to ensure that care is taken when first greeting a customer, so as not to appear too casual or informal.

Wilson James - Special Assistance performance update

Mark then introduced himself and explained to the Forum about the new Wilson James management structure at the airport. He went on to explain how the Wilson James Assistance Team had naturally faced a number of challenges, both during and following the Covid period. But he was pleased to say that service levels were now meeting expectation, as well as the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) ECAC targets for Departing passengers. Whilst improvements were still required for the airport's Arriving passengers. Which were still not where they should be, or where Wilson James or London Luton Airport would like them to be, all of the time.

PRM Passenger traffic statistics indicated that the most popular destination was still Spain, being 23% of all the passenger assistance requests Wilson James receives.

It had also been noted that following the bad press about the waiting times and queues at a number of UK airports earlier in the year, more customers had booked assistance in advance. Perhaps with a view to assuming this would increase their chances of not having to stand in queues or get through Security checks more quickly.

Denise corroborated this by confirming more customers had e-mailed the airport requesting a Sunflower lanyard in advance. As unfortunately the bad press had raised anxiety levels for some customers before they had even travelled, despite the fact that London Luton Airport was not as badly affected as many other airports at that time.

Mark went onto explain some of the main challenges the PRM operation had faced over the summer. Which included staffing and recruitment, inexperienced staff, as well as ground handling related issues. All of which had severely impacted the provision of assistance that Wilson James was able to deliver.

Mark continued by informing the Forum that Wilson James was still recruiting for staff, mainly focusing on drivers & Ambulift support staff. But additionally, the company was now also seeking 12 new staff to host the various Wilson James Assistance desks throughout the airport and add general support to the team. Which had now fortunately become less difficult due to a recently agreed increase to staff salaries.

Finally, **Mark** provided an overview of the new PRM Passenger Assistance App, *Purple Door*, as discussed at the previous Forum. Saying that further trials had taken place, with additional functionality having now been added. So, he hoped by the next time the Forum meet, he will be able to join the designers in presenting the *Purple Door* App officially to the Forum before it goes live.

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New staff training module - Ethos Farm

After lunch **Denise** provided an overview of the feedback the airport had received so far this year, in terms of Compliments vs Complaints. She explained the ratio of passenger feedback for 2022 had been split into 77.10% being complaints, as opposed to 22.90% being compliments. Which was an improvement on the 2019 statistics, which were 82.40% complaints versus 17.60% compliments.

Denise then broke down the type of complaints received and also shared details of some of the compliments, which had been received or tweeted to the airport.

The PRM survey responses from Jan 2022 - Aug 2022, showed a score of 4.0 for Departing passengers. Which is categorised as a 'very good' rating. With a score of 3.7 for Arriving passengers which fell within the 'good' rating of the CAA standards.

Denise then explained that having analysed the data to determine what the airport could learn from the findings. The Senior Management Team had decided to create a brand-new Disability Awareness & Confidence training pack, which they wanted to be delivered to all new, as well as existing, staff members.

Lauren from Ethos farm was then introduced to the Forum, as Ethos Farm had now been appointed by the airport to upgrade their current staff training modules.

Lauren started by providing more detail and reasoning behind the initial 5 questions, which had been e-mailed to all Forum attendees prior to the meeting. The answers to which had been intended to enrich and support the new content and style for the future training module.

The 5 questions asked were: -

1. What is your experience of travelling through London Luton Airport?
2. Are there any specific touchpoints throughout your airport journey, you find particularly challenging?
3. If there was one thing you could change about your experience at London Luton Airport, what would it be?
4. What do you want from staff at London Luton Airport?
5. What advice would you give to staff who may be nervous about offering you assistance?

All members then contributed, providing various suggestions along with numerous examples from service user feedback to the above questions, which had been sought prior to the meeting. **Denise** and **Lauren** thanked the forum members, saying that all comments had been collated and would be analysed. So that a storyboard could be completed, which would help shape the format and style of the training module.

AOB

There were no other topics for discussion or comments from Forum members, so the meeting was officially concluded. **Andy** and **Denise** thanked all the Forum members for their participation and continued support and advised that the next Forum will be in March 2023.

Actions:

- **Denise** to liaise with **Andy** and nominated Forum members, for further collaboration and input in support of the ongoing London Luton Airport staff training module.
- **Denise** to liaise with **Andy** and Forum members, once the new PRM Assistance Lounge relocation is approved, to seek guidance and advice on design and layout.
- **Andy** to liaise with **Mark** to schedule user evaluation volunteers for the *Purple Door* App and organise formal presentation of the product.

Next Forum scheduled for Thursday 16 March 2023