



# Report on Assisted Travel at Belfast City Airport

**Consumer Council for Northern Ireland**

**25 September 2025**

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# Executive Summary

Assimilated European Regulation (EC) 1107/2006 (the Regulation) provides rights for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility when travelling by air. This has been retained in United Kingdom (UK) law following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU).

The Consumer Council has been designated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to be the complaints handling body for the Regulation in relation to an airport in Northern Ireland or a flight departing from a Northern Ireland airport.

In 2014 the CAA issued guidance requiring airports to consult with passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. This report details the findings of a meeting on 25 September 2025 of Belfast City Airport's Accessibility Forum which involved a tour of the airport building. The Forum is made up of a range of organisations which represent consumers with a disability or reduced mobility.

The Forum was very positive about the airport's facilities. It was clear and appreciated that previous recommendations made by the Forum had been considered and taken forward, with others to be completed or under review. Participants made additional recommendations during this visit which focussed on:

- Accessibility in the car park and lack of seating at the car park assistance point.
- Provision of information on contacting assistance services.
- Awareness of free parking availability.
- Flight information screens.
- Consistent communication for those using assisted travel services.
- Consistency of signage being accessible for all.
- Accessibility within the Aspire Lounge.

The findings of the visit will be shared with the airport. An update on the progress made against the recommendations will be reported by the airport to the Accessibility Forum at its next meeting.

# Introduction

In 2006 European Regulations (European Regulation (EC) 1107/2006) came into place that require all airports and airlines in the EU to assist passengers with a disability or with a reduced mobility (PRM) when travelling. These have been retained and written in UK law since its exit from the EU (Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006, as amended by The Air Passenger Rights and Air Travel Organisers' Licencing (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019).

The Consumer Council has been designated by the CAA as the complaints handling body for the Regulation (The Civil Aviation (Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility) Regulations 2014) relating to an airport in Northern Ireland or a flight departing from a Northern Ireland airport. The Consumer Council works alongside the Northern Ireland airports to ensure that their services continue to meet passengers' needs.

In 2014 the CAA issued guidance requiring airports to consult with passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. This 'should, as much as possible, include practical inspections of airport services (generally using 'walk throughs'). Airports should also consider convening regular Forums containing representatives of disability groups and individuals.'

In 2018, the Consumer Council worked with Belfast City Airport to establish an Accessibility Forum at the airport. Membership of the Accessibility Forum consists of a range of organisations that represent consumers with a disability or reduced mobility including the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Guide Dogs for the Blind Association NI, Urostomy Association and Disability Action. The aim is to provide a Forum for users of the Airport's assistance services or their representatives to share their knowledge and experiences of services at the airport.

The intended outcome of this visit is for the Forum to continue to work with the airport in looking specifically at assisted travel to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by passengers using this service. In particular, it is intended to identify areas where it works well, and to implement suggestions made by Forum members to help make travel more convenient for those passengers. The airport will provide feedback on actions taken from the guidance and suggestions made at the next Forum meeting.

Belfast City Airport and the Consumer Council would like to thank those participants who took part on the day.

# Methodology

The Forum met at the airport on 25 September 2025. There were ten participants on the day from a range of organisations that represent older consumers and consumers with a disability or reduced mobility.

The forum was split into three groups and airport staff guided each group through the airport beginning at the check-in area and finishing in the arrival areas.

Staff from the Consumer Council took notes at the visit and recorded the suggestions that were made by the group.

## Findings

The following section provides a summary of the key discussion points that were recorded with corresponding suggestions. The findings are set out in the order of the various stages of moving through the airport, with an overall summary provided at Annex 1.

### Arrival at the airport/parking area

Signage to the car parks has been improved making it easier to navigate. The increase in Blue Badge parking bays in the short stay car park is notable and clearly signposted.

The footway where the electric vehicle charging bays are located (figure 1) reduces in width significantly without a dropped kerb. This can make this section of the footway inaccessible for wheelchair users and others.

**Figure 1: EV Charging Bays**



Telephone numbers have been added to signs located at Blue Badge bays and to the website. Participants suggested that it would be useful to provide a small card with the telephone number for assistance services. A text number could also be helpful for those who have difficulty with speech. Adding the telephone number for assistance services to parking tickets for those seeking further assistance from their vehicles or unable to benefit from intercoms could also be helpful.

Since April 2025 Blue Badge bays are now available across all car parks including short stay. The short stay car park is now designated for shorter visits while the long stay rate applies exclusively to the long stay car park. Previously Blue Badge holders could book long stay parking then request to change to short stay parking. Participants noted that this could cause confusion and suggested the need to raise awareness of this change.

Airport staff confirmed that assistance will be provided during instances where all Blue Badge bays are occupied. Airport staff also noted that Blue Badge holders can avail of two hours free parking, participants highlighted that they were unaware and recommended that this information should be more readily available for those travelling less frequently.

Participants noted the new assistance point (figure 2) is clearly visible within the carpark and is a significant improvement to the previous call point which was in the shelter. Staff confirmed the assistance point is always manned. Seating is not immediately available at the assistance point. The nearest seating is close by in the covered passenger waiting area (figure 3).

**Figure 2: Assistance point**



**Figure 3: Passenger waiting area**



The covered walkway to the entrance of the airport building has two benches, one of which does not have arm rests making it less accessible (figure 4).

**Figure 4: Bench at walkway to entrance**



There was some discussion around the passenger waiting area in the long-stay car park and whether this could be updated to provide better shelter during bad weather. The condition of the walkway from the long-stay car park to the airport building was also felt by some participants to be uneven which created particular issues for wheelchair users.

**Recommendations:**

- Consider how the footway at the electric vehicle charging bays in the short stay car park can be redesigned to ensure everyone has safe access navigating from the car park to the airport building entrance.
- Provision of a business type card with information, in a variety of different formats, on how to contact assistance services.
- Raise awareness of the change in parking policy for Blue Badge holders. Specifically, that booking long stay is no longer transferrable to short stay and the new arrangements.
- Consider how to increase awareness regarding two hours free parking for Blue Badge holders.
- Increase airport staff awareness of the parking options available to better inform consumers upon arrival.
- Consider installing a sheltered seating area at the assistance point.
- Add arm rests to the second bench (figure 4) in the covered walkway so both are easily accessible.
- Consider updating the assistance waiting area in the long-stay car park.
- Consider resurfacing the walkway from the long-stay car park to the airport building.

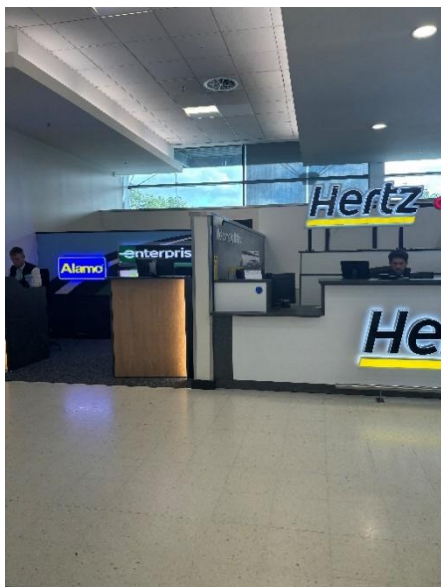
## **Entrance/check-in area**

Participants praised the clear and consistent signage throughout the airport and the effectiveness of black text on yellow background.

Participants noted the Disability Services desk is in a central location although there is a lack of permanent signage directing to it. The airport advised that the signage has been approved and would be installed as soon as possible. Regarding deaf awareness a book with a number of pictures to aid with communication is available from Disability Services.

The car hire desks have been refurbished to include low-level counters suitable for wheelchair users (figure 5). The only desk without a low-level counter has a wide opening between desks which improves access.

**Figure 5: Car Hire Desks**



**Recommendation:**

- Provide a low level QR code (which allows passengers to provide feedback on assisted travel) on the wall of the assisted travel seating area beside Disability Services which would be helpful for those seated and wheelchair users. This will complement the current QR code at eye level of someone standing.

## Security area

Passengers requiring assistance could avail of a fast-track lane through security.

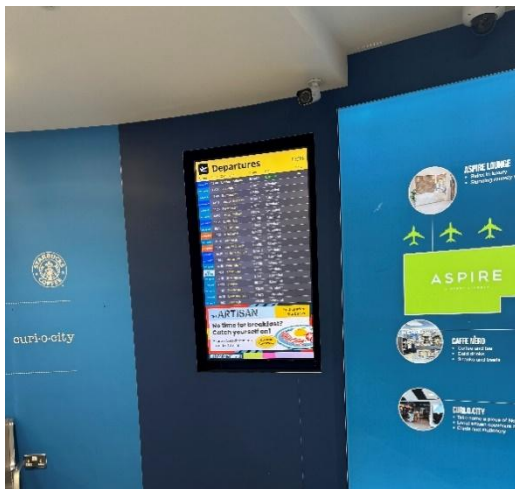
Forum members emphasised that a passenger's stoma bag would appear in the scanner and welcomed the private room available for anyone who requires a private body search. Airport staff informed a dignity drape is now provided for passengers who wish to use it whilst going through security procedures.

A radar key is now also held by security staff.

The elevator from the security area is small and may present difficulties for those using larger wheelchairs or buggies. The availability of an alternative route to the departure lounge after security is welcome especially for passengers with sensory needs who wish to bypass the busy shopping area.

Some flight information screens were small and difficult to read for example (figure 6) at top of stairs from security. However there are some good examples such as the information screen just through security.

**Figure 6: Screen at top of stairs after security area**



**Recommendations:**

- Address accessibility of elevators during next phase of refurbishment.
- Consider increasing the number of larger size flight information screens.

## Departures area

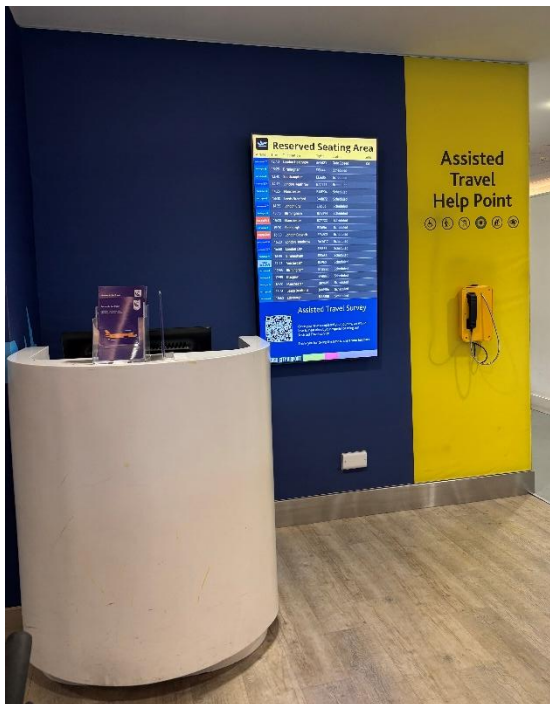
Airport staff noted changes in this area based on recommendations from the previous visit. Accessible toilets now include shelves and additional hooks for passengers with stoma bags which was particularly welcomed by participants from the Urostomy Association.

Participants praised the assisted travel area and provision of hard copies of the Consumer Council's "Access to Air" publication, however, suggested that wheelchair users may find it difficult to reach the booklets on the counter. Forum members also suggested that a small black backdrop be placed around the telephone allowing the telephone to stand out (figure 7).

It was raised that a blind or partially sighted person using the assisted travel area would need to be informed of the location of the telephone and desk should they need to call staff for assistance whilst waiting.

Airport staff provided information on the policy under which passengers could be left at, and collected from the bar, restaurant or café if they preferred this to waiting in the designated seating area. Participants welcomed that passengers availing of assistance have this choice.

**Figure 7: Assisted travel help point**



**Recommendations:**

- Addition of leaflet brackets to aid those using wheelchairs gaining access to information booklets.
- Consider adding a black backdrop around telephone to enhance visibility of its location.
- Ensure staff are trained to advise a blind or partially sighted person the location of the telephone and desk in the assisted travel area.

Airport staff noted the removal of ribbon cordons and the addition of panels outlining the Assisted Travel Reserved Seating area (figure 8). The forum praised this change but also recognised the importance ensuring they are not occupied by passengers who do not require them.

**Figure 8: Assisted travel seating area**



### Recommendation:

- Consider provision of a quiet area. Given space limitations this could be considered in future refurbishment.

## Toilets

Participants noted that accessible toilets throughout the airport offered left-hand transfer or right-hand transfer. Having different options available were very helpful although it was felt that a small "map" noting location of these different options would be beneficial. It was subsequently noted that this information is available on the "Access Able" website.

Forum members advised that it was sometimes difficult to see if the accessible toilet was occupied as the "engaged" sign was very small. It was also noted that there is no Braille on the door of the accessible toilet next to the ladies' toilets (figure 9).

**Figure 9: Accessible Toilets**



Participants noted there is no toilet access at gate areas meaning passengers would have to return to the lounge area.

A frequent suggestion throughout the tour noted the feedback traffic light buttons in the accessible toilets. Often the devices were installed within standing eyeline on the walls within or outside the bathrooms making it difficult for wheelchair users to use.

### Recommendations:

- Add Braille to the accessible toilet door next to the ladies' toilets. (figure 9).
- Provide an information leaflet outlining locations of amenities within bathrooms.
- Enhance the size of the vacant/occupied sign on toilet doors or provide alternative indicators to increase visibility.
- Consider addressing provision of toilet access at gate areas in future refurbishment.
- Amend positioning of feedback devices to a height accessible for all.

## Aspire Lounge

Forum members noted that the information screens in the Aspire Lounge area were difficult to read. Additionally, it was advised that the private booths were very small and carpeted which is not ideal for wheelchair users (figure 10).

**Figure 10: Aspire Lounge area**



The Aspire Lounge bar area (figure 11) is built for independent access to glasses and drinks however, participants considered the height of the countertops makes it out of reach for wheelchair users. Alternatively, table service is available for those who require it. An accessible area to the right of the main bar, currently containing a single coffee machine and a fridge with milks on a lower bench, could be more effectively utilised.

**Figure 11: Aspire Lounge bar area**



### Recommendations:

- Consider larger information screens/text in Aspire Lounge.
- Increasing accessibility to booths by adding tactile flooring.
- Accessible reserved booths for those who require it.
- Expand the amenities in the accessible area to provide more independent access for passengers.

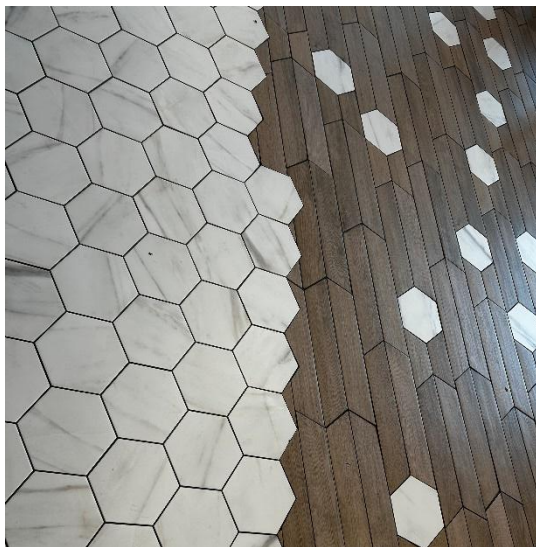
Participants also considered improvements could be made to the accessible toilet in this area.

**Recommendations:**

- An automatic door would be beneficial to access toilets.
- The grip handle should be lowered on the accessible toilet door.
- Consider making the accessible toilet larger to accommodate a wheelchair comfortably.

Participants commented on the sporadic white tiling in the lounge area (figure 12). It was noted that this may be difficult to interpret for this with loss of sight and may be a tripping hazard.

**Figure 12: Aspire Lounge Flooring**



**Recommendation:**

- Consider removing single white tiles ensuring a visibly consistent walkway throughout the lounge.

## Conclusion

Participants recognised the many improvements recently made by the airport to improve accessibility throughout the site and within assisted travel services. Through the visit participants identified further areas for improvement based on their experiences and knowledge of some of the barriers passengers may face. These include availability of information about assistance services and free parking for blue badge holders, the narrow footway beside the electric car charging bays, accessibility within the Aspire Lounge and small changes to improve the assisted travel reserved seating area.

## Next Steps

The comments made by participants will be presented to the airport through this report. The Consumer Council will work with the airport as it implements the changes to ensure that services continue to meet passengers' needs. An update on the progress made against the recommendations will be shared with the Airport's Accessibility Forum at its next meeting.

# Annex 1 Summary of Recommendations

## Arrival at the airport/parking area

1. Consider how the footway at the electric vehicle charging bays in the short stay car park can be redesigned to ensure everyone has safe access navigating from the car park to the airport building entrance.
2. Provision of a business type card with information, in a variety of formats, on how to contact assistance services.
3. Raise awareness to the change in parking policy for Blue Badge holders. Specifically, that booking long stay is no longer transferrable to short stay and the new arrangements.
4. Consider how to increase awareness regarding two hours free parking for Blue Badge holders.
5. Increase airport staff awareness of the parking options available to better inform consumers upon arrival.
6. Consider installing a sheltered seating area at the assistance point.
7. Add arm rests to the second bench (figure 4) in the covered walkway so both are easily accessible.
8. Consider updating the assistance waiting area in the long-stay car park.
9. Consider resurfacing the walkway from the long-stay car park to the airport building.

## Disability Services

10. Provide a low level QR code (which allows passengers to provide feedback on assisted travel) on the wall of the assisted travel seating area beside Disability Services which would be helpful for those seated and wheelchair users. This will complement the current QR code at eye level of someone standing.

## Security area

11. Address accessibility of elevators during next phase of refurbishment.
12. Consider increasing the number of larger size flight information screens.

## Departures Area/Assisted Travel Seated Area

13. Addition of leaflet brackets to aid those using wheelchairs gaining access to information booklets.
14. Consider adding a black backdrop around telephone to enhance visibility of its location.
15. Ensure staff are trained to advise a blind or partially sighted person the location of the telephone and desk in the assisted travel area.
16. Consider provision of a quiet area. Given space limitations this could be considered in future refurbishment.

## Toilets

17. Add Braille to the accessible toilet door next to the ladies' toilets (figure 9).
18. Provide an information leaflet outlining locations of amenities within bathrooms.

19. Enhance the size of the vacant/occupied sign on toilet doors or provide alternative indicators to increase visibility.
20. Consider addressing provision of toilet access at gate areas in future refurbishment.
21. Amend positioning of feedback devices to a height accessible for all.

## **Aspire Lounge**

22. Consider larger information screens/text in Aspire Lounge.
23. Increasing accessibility to booths by adding tactile flooring.
24. Accessible reserved booths for those who require it.
25. Expand the amenities in the accessible area to provide more independent access for passengers.
26. An automatic door would be beneficial to access toilets.
27. The grip handle should be lowered on the accessible toilet door.
28. Consider making the accessible toilet larger to accommodate a wheelchair comfortably.
29. Consider removing single white tiles ensuring a visibly consistent walkway throughout the lounge.

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