Report on Assisted Travel at Belfast City Airport

Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

09 September 2026

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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 09 September 2026 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 welcomed the progress made in implementing recommendations from the previous year with others to be completed or under consideration. The Forum appreciates future plans for Belfast City Airport with the Master Plan 2040 which will provide opportunities for further investment and improvements in accessibility. Participants made additional recommendations during this visit which focussed on:

- Distinguishing electric vehicle car parking bays from disabled bays.
- Car park pricing information.
- Security staff communication with disabled passengers.
- Accessibility within disabled toilets.
- 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

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, Disability Action, Deafblind UK, Shop Mobility and the Alzheimer's Society and researchers in Autism from Queen's University Belfast. 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 09 September 2026. There were 14 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

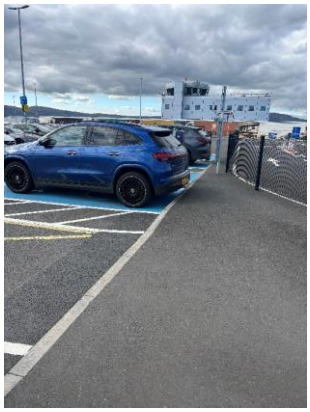
Pricing for the short stay car park is provided on a digital board at the entry barrier. Participants thought it would be useful for people to know how much they will be expected to pay before arriving at the car park.

The electric vehicle charging bays in the short stay car park are marked out in blue and white (Figure 1). This is the same colour scheme used to denote blue badge parking bays which can be confusing. The group considered that green is a commonly recognised colour for electric vehicle charging bays.

Recommendation:

- Consider providing car park pricing as displayed at the entry barrier before this point, for example online.
- Change the colour of electric vehicle parking bays to green to differentiate them from blue badge bays.

Figure 1: Electric Vehicle Charging Bays





Security area

It is important that security staff are effectively trained to understand the needs of disabled passengers and how to assist them during security screening processes. During the visit a participant with sight loss, approaching the scanner was given instructions to "stand there". It is important that staff give clear instructions to all passengers particularly when being instructed on where to stand in the security scanner. Directions given by staff should be clear and specific for example "step forward and turn to your left".

The availability of an alternative route to the departure lounge is beneficial especially for passengers with sensory needs who wish to bypass the shopping area. Passengers can speak to security or assistance staff if they require this. Participants considered awareness of this service could be increased.

The top and bottom steps on the staircase from security to the shopping area and departures would benefit from having markers added to improve visibility. Adding a yellow strip would be consistent with other staircases throughout the airport (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Yellow Strip on Staircase



Recommendations:

- Enhance disability awareness training and ensure refresher training for airport security staff including sight loss awareness and sighted guide training.
- Consider how to increase knowledge of the availability of an alternative route to departures to those who would find it most beneficial.
- Ensure there is a yellow strip at the top and bottom of the staircase from the security area.

Departures and assisted travel area

The airport actively seeks to raise awareness of the assisted travel survey. Signage providing information about accessing the assisted travel survey was clearly visible in the assisted travel area (Figure 3). In addition, staff can add email contacts of service users in the new system CCS use for assisted travel services internal booking procedures which generates an automatic email inviting responses to the survey.

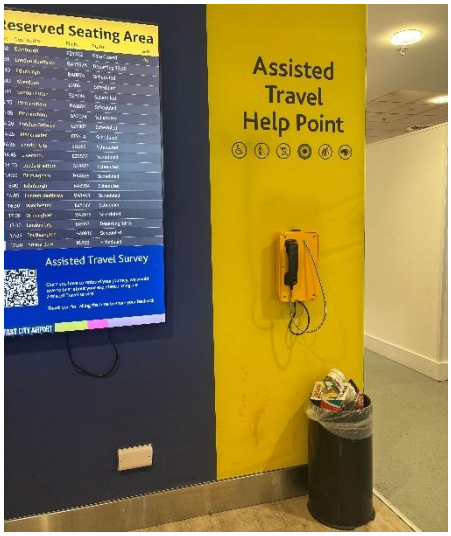
Figure 3: Assisted Travel Survey Sign



Staff informed members that the assisted travel area can be extended during busier periods such as Christmas. The airport also ensure this area is manned during busy periods whenever possible.

The bin below the telephone at the Assisted Travel Help Point (Figure 4) should be relocated to improve accessibility.

Figure 4: Assisted Travel Help Point



Recommendations:

- Relocate bin from below the telephone at the Assisted Travel Help Point.

Toilets

Participants noted that the red pull cord in one of the disabled toilets was too short to be reached by someone on the floor.

There were various examples throughout the airport of obstructions in accessible toilets such as bins and wet floor signs (Figure 5). These are barriers for a wheelchair user transferring to the toilet. It was proposed that providing a means to fix the bin in a suitable location and reminding cleaning staff of correct bin placement could help.

Figure 5: Accessible Toilet



In the Changing Places facility the assistance rail attached to the wash hand basin protrudes which prevents a wheelchair user from manoeuvring into place beside the toilet (Figure 6). Members noted not everyone transfers from the same side of the toilet. Potential solutions proposed included moving the rail to the other side of the wash hand basin or installing an adjustable assistance rail which could be raised against the wall. In addition signage indicating the transfer side such as that shown in Figure 7 would be helpful.

Figure 6: Changing Places Facility



Figure 7: Toilet door sign indicating transfer side



Participants expressed a view that the family toilet facility and baby change in departures (Figure 8) adjacent to the reserved seating area could potentially also serve as an alternative disabled toilet if the door and screening beside the toilet was removed.

Figure 8: Family toilet / baby change



Recommendations:

- Ensure all emergency pull cords in toilets meet current standards (BS 8300 Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment - Buildings).
- Ensure bins and other items such as wet floor signs do not obstruct access to the toilet.
- Relocate the assistance rail beside the wash hand basin in the Changing Places facility to the other side or install one which is adjustable.
- Consider adding signage on accessible toilet doors to indicate transfer side for wheelchair users.
- Consider the possibility of making adjustments within the family toilet in departures so that it could serve as a flexible disabled/family/baby change facility.

Aspire Lounge

As during previous visits members considered changes in the Aspire Lounge which could improve accessibility. This included issues with flooring, seating and toilet facilities.

Recommendation:

- Engage with the Accessibility Forum at the earliest opportunity in future refurbishment of the Aspire Lounge.

Conclusion

Participants recognised efforts the airport has made to improve accessibility in the current infrastructure in the context of significant opportunity in future plans through the Belfast City Airport Master Plan 2040 vision for the future. During the visit participants identified several further improvements which could be made based on their experiences and knowledge of barriers passengers may face. These include clear distinction in the short stay car park between electric vehicle bays and disabled bays, car park pricing information, improving security staff communication with disabled passengers, toilet accessibility issues and engagement with the Forum in future refurbishment of the Aspire lounge.

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 providing car park pricing as displayed at the entry barrier before this point, for example online.
2. Change the colour of electric vehicle parking bays to green to differentiate them from blue badge bays.

Security area

3. Enhance disability awareness training and ensure refresher training for airport security staff including sight loss awareness and sighted guide training.
4. Consider how to increase knowledge of the availability of an alternative route to departures to those who would find it most beneficial.
5. Ensure there is a yellow strip at the top and bottom of the staircase from the security area.

Departures Area/Assisted Travel

6. Relocate bin from below the telephone at the Assisted Travel Help Point.

Toilets

7. Ensure all emergency pull cords in toilets meet current standards (BS 8300 Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment - Buildings).
8. Ensure bins and other items such as wet floor signs do not obstruct access to the toilet.
9. Relocate the assistance rail beside the wash hand basin in the Changing Places facility to the other side or install one which is adjustable.
10. Consider adding signage on accessible toilet doors to indicate transfer side for wheelchair users.
11. Consider the possibility of making adjustments within the family toilet in departures so that it could serve as a flexible disabled/family/baby change facility.

Aspire Lounge

12. Engage with the Accessibility Forum at the earliest opportunity in future refurbishment of the Aspire Lounge.

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