

Minutes: Bristol Airport Accessibility Forum (BRSFAF)

Thursday 21 March 2024 11:00 a.m.

Attendees:	
Andy Wright - Forum Chair	Richard Thomasson - Head of Customer Operations, BRS
Martyn Collings - Operational Support Manager, BRS	Verena Fuller - Customer Relations Manager, BRS
Jo Chase - Project Manager (Buildings), BRS	Kate Clover - Learning Development Manager, BRS
Sam Saunders - Head of Assisted Services, ABM	Marc Buckle - General Manager ABM, BRS
Gordon Richardson - Bristol Disability Equality Forum	Steve Ewens - Bristol Sight Loss Council
Lisa Dicker - Bristol Dementia Action Alliance	Jerry Angrave - Strategic Customer Experience Consultant
Jill Patch - Bristol Airport Consultative Committee	Libby Herbert - Colostomy UK
Peter Bungay - Guide Dogs for the Blind	Liz Kelly+ Sam Potter - Bridging the Gap (Autism support)
Jennifer Milner - Civil Aviation Authority	

Welcome and Introductions

Andy welcomed all attendees to the meeting, which was hosted in the Silver Zone meeting room within the airport. Introductions were made and new attendees were introduced, with apologies for those unable to attend shared with the group. **Andy** then provided an overview of the Accessibility Forum, its aims, and ambitions, for the benefit of the new attendees. Before running through the main action points from the previous meeting and sharing the format and agenda for the forthcoming meeting.

Andy started by advising the members that the airport's Senior Leadership Team had asked whether the original name chosen by the Forum members, the Bristol Inclusivity Forum (BIC), should now possibly be revised. As the airport had recently created a separate Diversity and Inclusion team within the airport, with its own members and meetings. Therefore, it may now be more appropriate to redefine the group as the Accessibility Forum. There were no objections from the Forum members, so **Andy** confirmed that with immediate effect the group would be referred to as the Bristol Airport Accessibility Forum or BRSFAF.

Andy followed by asking **Martyn** for an update on the PRM Assist App that the airport had agreed to trial. **Martyn** explained how the App was still being evaluated for its effectiveness as a booking and support tool for the airport's PRMs, as well as a potential management statistics tool. Continuing that whilst the airport had not actively promoted the App to new passengers. For those who were using it currently, the feedback had been mostly positive. Also, ABM, the airport's new *assisted travel* provider, said they were happy to continue supporting passengers and the airport, whilst the airport continued the evaluation process.

Andy went on to ask **Martyn** about the outcome of the PRM Assistance & Busing contracts, which were noted as actions from the previous meeting. **Martyn** responded saying that both contracts had now been awarded and further details would be discussed more fully later in the meeting.

Airport Business Overview

Richard then introduced himself to the group starting with a brief summary of the airport's current geographical reach, which helped to explain the notable increase in passenger numbers. Which in 2023 had reached 9.8 million passengers and was set to increase further in 2024 with projections in excess of 10.6 million passengers. Stating the airport was now gearing up for 12 million passengers per year in the near future. Making it the fourth largest regional airport in the country.

Richard then ran through Bristol airport's Strategic Priorities for 2024, sharing the vision 'To be everyone's favourite airport, delivering a future we can all be proud of'. Which included delivering a seamless customer journey through efficiency, investment, and innovation, whilst delivering a sustainable and greener future.

Richard then provided an overview of the plans for Summer 24, including projected passenger numbers for the principal airlines including EasyJet, Jet2 and Tui. Finishing his presentation with an introduction to a new airport initiative 'Operation SMILE' which was designed to drive up customer satisfaction across the airport. By encouraging staff to increase their focus on the passenger experience through each of the key airport journey touch points, such as airport Security, and to look at the varying ways to help improve this.

Gordon then asked whether the airport was aware if any of the airlines flying from Bristol had particular seating policies for PRMs and disabled passengers. As he was still being asked by some airlines to sit in a window seat rather than an aisle seat, which caused him great discomfort.

Richard answered by saying he was not aware of any particular seating policies within the airlines. But was conscious that EasyJet had made considerable progress to try and seat PRM passengers in seats of their choice. Which **Andy** confirmed to be the case from his own personal experience of the airport.

Assistance Performance Update

Martyn continued by providing an update on the airport's recently renegotiated Special Assistance and Busing contract. Saying that following a series of presentations, both contracts had now been awarded to ABM in December 23. Which had already resulted in new investment into a new Ambu-Lift, with a further three new minibuses and an additional 60 Staxi airport wheelchairs, now being added to airport support equipment inventory.

Martyn then summarised the Special Assistance department's recent ECAC scores, which the Civil Aviation Authority use to help gauge airports *Accessibility* standards and performance against. Which were mostly favourable and had seen continuous improvements since October 2023.

Verena then provided an update to the Forum on recent PRM passenger feedback since the members last met in November 23. Demonstrating overall, that in 2023 the airport had seen a 100%+ increase in the number of compliments received, which was very encouraging. But the airport had also unfortunately recorded a 70% increase in the number of complaints. Which had now been broken down into categories to better understand the nature of the principal complaints and to see what learnings could be taken from them.

Andy commented on the disproportionately higher number of complaints relating to passengers who had received Special Assistance, compared to those who were un-assisted, and asked Verena why she thought this might be.

Verena said unfortunately she didn't have any details of specific complaints with her at the meeting. But would investigate further to try and determine if any pattern existed and would report back with her findings at the next meeting.

ABM Introduction

Sam Saunders, ABM then introduced herself to the Forum members providing details about ABM, their history and information about the other airports, both UK and overseas, where they provide services.

Sam went on to talk about ABM's in-house Disability Awareness staff training package, which included modules on hidden disabilities, and had been certified recently by a leading UK charity, Disability Rights UK.

Marc Buckle, ABM, then introduced himself. Sharing details about his experience and background and how he had helped manage the transition from the former Assistance provider, OCS, to ABM.

Marc said he had been very happy with the transfer which he felt had gone smoothly, with over a 170 staff being transferred across to ABM when the contract changed hands.

Summarising the immediate priorities for ABM now included continuing to fully incorporate the new staff members, so that they could become quickly immersed in the ABM culture. As well as presenting them with a brand-new uniform, upgraded terms and conditions, and up-skilling them utilising the ABM elevated training modules.

All of which were designed to ensure that Bristol Airport's Assisted passengers would be aided and fully supported during the anticipated busy summer period ahead.

Following which further conversation would be had with Bristol Airport, about future investment into assistive technology such as buggies, in order to help improve the PRM passenger experience at the airport.

Airport Development Update

Jo Chase then delivered a presentation sharing designs for the new PRM Assistance Lounge, which should be completed by late Summer 24, as part of the airport's ongoing expansion plans. She explained that as the plan is being rolled out in varying stages, the initial Assistance Lounge will only be temporary. Before it is followed by a larger more elaborate replacement in the future, as the airport continues to expand.

Jo advised the Forum members that the initial Assistance Lounge will be designed to accommodate up to 30 wheelchair spaces, with storage for a further 25 wheelchairs. Along with a seated area for up to 54 passengers including wider and variable seating options. This area will be located in close proximity to the existing accessible toilets, include a Sensory room, as well as various vending machines, a coffee machine, and a water dispenser.

Libby asked about the number of accessible toilets within the initial Assistance Lounge. **Jo** explained that at this stage there will only be one. Accepting this was not ideal but insisted that going forward it will improve.

Libby asked about when and how to provide feedback and guidance in relation to creating *stoma friendly* toilets.

Jo said she would circulate a more detailed pack with the Forum in order to provide more detail and to enable the design team to seek Forum member feedback prior to the creation of the future Assistance Lounge. Which is planned to incorporate Quiet zones with variable seating and sufficient space within to enable work areas. As well as tables and chairs for food and beverages to be ordered and delivered directly. This new area will also incorporate an increased space capacity of 33%, allowing for 80 seats and 40+ wheelchairs. It will also incorporate a Changing Places facility, accessible toilets, and wheelchair charging points.

Peter asked about facilities for guide dogs and was the airport looking into this as part of the development project. Giving examples of other airports doing well in providing such facilities, such as Brisbane or Fuerteventura. Compared to those who were not as good, such as Heathrow.

Jo moved on to provide an update on another of the airport's future projects, being the Multi Story Car Park 2 (MSCP2) and the Passenger Transfer Interchange (PTI), which she demonstrated utilising PowerPoint slides.

The Forum members were generally happy with the plans and work that had been carried out to date.

But **Gordon** did ask the airport to consider the issues around car parking for disabled passengers with different models of adapted cars and vans, with alternative access points, when designing parking and drop-off spaces.

Disability Awareness Training Workshop

Andy then advised the Forum members that he wanted to have an open discussion about the level and detail of staff training that was currently being carried out at the airport. To see whether there were any gaps or areas where enhancements could be offered, with support from the Forum member organisations.

This included how training is currently delivered, be it face-to-face, or e-learning, or both, nature of the content and how it had been created. Was there input from persons with lived experience for example, and what were the qualifications of the persons delivering the training. Saying that he was aware that this was now a particular area of focus for the Civil Aviation Authority, who would be in the months ahead independently validating each airport's staff training modules, especially Disability Awareness (DA) training.

Andy started by asking **Kate Clover**, Bristol Airport's Learning & Development Manager, did the airport currently offer a DA training module to its own employees, as opposed to the third party subcontracted employees, and if so, how was it delivered.

Kate said the airport did offer its own DA module, via an e-learning platform, but was aware that it needed to be refreshed and updated. Continuing that she had chosen to adopt an approach that could cover all areas and departments within the airport, incorporating the varying shift patterns.

Adding that she had already started to reach out directly to most of the third-party companies contracted by the airport, in roles such as Security - currently operated by ICTS - Ground Handling, including Check-in staff, Border Force etc. Who all operate as separate autonomous companies under the Bristol Airport banner, whilst delivering their own different training modules.

Kate said she wanted to better understand the varying levels of DA content that was being delivered to the various stakeholders at the airport before deciding on how best to proceed.

Sam then talked about the content within ABM's DA training module, which had been created in conjunction with, and supported by, persons with lived experience and included videos of them discussing their anxieties when travelling by air.

Andy then asked the Forum members representing charities and disability organisations, whether they could support Bristol Airport with enhancing their DA staff training.

Libby said that Colostomy UK would be happy to support the airport, by providing suitable information which she could share with **Kate**. And described how she had previously worked with Andy on improving stoma awareness to members of the Manchester Airport's Security team, which had been very successful.

Both **Liz** and **Lisa** said their organisations had training material and indeed could offer autism and dementia awareness training to airport employees. Advising that most of their awareness training courses were normally between two hours and half a day but were sure they could adapt accordingly to fit in with the airport's requirements.

Steve added Thomas Pocklington also offered training which was delivered by people with lived experience of being blind and visually impaired.

Peter, Guide Dogs, added his organisation could also support the airport with sighted guide training etc.

Andy then asked for views on what should be expected from a trainer in terms of official qualifications and 'lived experience of disability', when delivering DA training courses to staff.

Generally, the members felt that DA training material needed to be created in collaboration with people with lived experience, and ideally supported by them in the delivery of the training. Be that in person or via a video. But didn't necessarily feel that the trainers themselves needed to be disabled or indeed certified trainers. Preferring trainers who were empathetic and adept at conveying the anxieties experienced by many disabled travellers when they fly.

Jerry added that he would also be interested to know whether existing training modules included guidance and support for staff on how they could help to improve passengers airport and flying experience. Saying that he would be happy to support this if required.

Andy concluded this discussion by saying he would talk further with both Kate and the CAA, using the feedback from the Forum members. To continue looking at ways to spread and increase quality DA training to all appropriate airport staff, given their varying roles and hours of operation.

Sam Potter, a guest with autism, from Bridging the Gap, then shared some details from his recent flying experience from Bristol Airport. Which the Forum members found interesting and were grateful to hear about first hand.

AOB

There were no further questions or points raised by the forum members.

Andy thanked the members for their attendance and contributions to what had been a very thorough and beneficial discussion, especially about staff training. Saying that all the comments and feedback would be taken on board and shared with the CAA.

Actions

Martyn to provide PRM Assist update.

Verena to provide clarity on disproportionately high number of PRM complaints and why, as per feedback data.

Andy/Kate to provide Forum members with an update on staff training progress and seek further support from Forum member organisations going forward.

Jo to provide Forum members with an update on ongoing Terminal Infrastructure progress.

Next meeting Tuesday, 5 November 2024