

Minutes: Bristol Airport Accessibility Forum (BRSAF)

Tuesday 05 November 2024 Lulsgate House 10:30 a.m.

Attendees:	
Andy Wright - Forum Chair	Richard Thomasson - Head of Customer Operations, BRS
Cherie Marchant - People Director, BRS	Martyn Collings - Operational Support Manager, BRS
Richard Tomlinson - Learning & Development, BRS	James Power - Security Compliance Manager, BRS
Emma Thomas - Customer Relations, BRS	Seana Parr - Customer Relations, BRS
Jo Chase - Project Manager (Buildings), BRS	Amy Cook - Resourcing Business Partner, BRS
Sam Saunders - Head of Assisted Services, ABM	Samrye Aden-Dirie - General Manager ABM, BRS
Jerry Angrave - Customer Experience Consultant	Gordon Richardson MBE - Bristol Disability Equality Forum
Tony Hall - Bristol Dementia Action Alliance	Lisa Dicker - Bristol Dementia Action Alliance
Jill Patch - Bristol Airport Consultative Committee	Libby Herbert - Colostomy UK
Steve Ewens - Bristol Sight Loss Council	Liz Kelly - Bridging the Gap (Autism support)
Emily Kilby - Civil Aviation Authority	Apologies: Peter Bungay - Guide dogs for the blind

Welcome and Introductions

Andy welcomed the attendees to the meeting, which was hosted in Lulsgate House at the airport. Introductions were made with apologies for those unable to attend shared with the group. **Andy** then provided an overview of the Accessibility Forum's ambitions, before running through the action points from the previous meeting and sharing the agenda for the day.

Airport Business Overview

Andy then introduced **Richard Thomasson**, who started his presentation by sharing the airport's future vision statement *'To be everyone's favourite airport, delivering a future we can all be proud of'*. Before highlighting the airport's considerable growth in passenger numbers in recent years. Rising from 6 million in 2014 to what is expected to exceed 11 million by the end of 2025. Much of this growth had been attributed to an increase in the leisure market and the increasing desire to visit friends and family abroad. Consequently, the airport had encountered a number of challenges during the summer as a result of the considerable unexpected growth in passenger numbers. Especially those requiring some form of assistance to navigate the airport and embark/disembark their aircraft. However, **Richard** explained how ABM (the new assistance provider recently contracted by BRS) had managed the operation well despite the additional stresses and strains put on the airport by the dramatic increase in numbers, as well as additional challenges posed by A38 approach road. Which has resulted in contingency plans being explored by the airport, to consider moving aircraft cabin crew initially, and thereafter passengers, more effectively from north to south of the runway.

Richard completed his introduction by notifying the forum of the airport's future ambitions to continue to grow, whilst investing into the customer journey in a sustainable and responsible way.

Andy asked whether the airport had decided as yet to rename the passenger assistance service from *Special Assistance* to *Assisted Travel*, in line with other UK airports and various sources of passenger feedback.

Martyn replied saying that this was something that was still being considered by the airport.

Steve was keen to better understand if the various categories used by the airport to denote types of assistance required by passengers, had varied greatly since last year. In other words, were there now more passengers travelling with hidden conditions for example?

Andy added that due to the number of people now awaiting support from or on rising NHS waiting lists, could some of these now account for the airport's unexpected demand in passengers now requiring assistance when they fly from the airport.

Following which a broader discussion took place around better ways to try to support those passengers who wanted to self-mobilise through the airport, perhaps only requiring assistance to board or even navigate Security for example. Continuing with discussions about the potential risk of abuse by some passengers trying to find a quicker way to navigate the airport by requesting a Sunflower lanyard to do so.

This in turn raised various questions from the members as to why the airport provided Sunflower lanyards to anyone who requested them. Without challenging certain passengers as to legitimate reason for requesting a lanyard.

Gordon said, as did many forum members, that he had no problem with being asked why he may require assistance at the airport. But referenced a number of the younger generation, who he felt seemed less likely to want to disclose the nature of their disability, and hence the legitimate reason for requesting the use of a lanyard.

Liz was keen to see more information published on the airport's website for example, such as the Sensory room. As well as videos to better explain the processes and procedures at the airport for those people requiring assistance. As she felt that many of her service users were unaware of the Sensory facility and would benefit greatly from more information in advance to help them plan their journey.

Martyn agreed saying he was very keen to conduct a website review next year to include such information, which he would like forum members to support.

Customer Relations Update

Emma Thomas and **Seana Parr** then introduced themselves to the forum and provided a summary of the customer feedback the airport had received so far this year. Explaining that complaints and compliments now received had been subdivided into two categories being *Accessibility* and *Special Assistance*. Where feedback received that was directly connected with the airport, ground agents, or BRS's airlines, would be collated under the *Accessibility* category. And that being directly attributable to ABMs performance, would be collated within the *Special Assistance* category. This procedure had helped to identify the root cause of the complaint and in turn the corrective actions necessary.

It had been noted by the airport that the main source of *Accessibility* complaints had referred to Airport Security, followed by Car Parks and then the Airport Environment in general. Given the considerable infrastructure changes currently taking place at the airport due to the expansion, whilst regrettable, it was understood that the level of these complaints would hopefully only be short-term. However, as many of the Security related complaints involved passengers either with a stoma or were passengers with Type 1 diabetes. It was concluded that the new Next-Generation Security equipment the airport had recently deployed, was now more sensitive and better equipped to identify any anomalies on the body. Which particularly affected those passengers wearing prosthetic medical devices or continuous glucose monitors. Hence an improvement to Security staff procedures, and disability awareness and etiquette training was now more essential than ever.

Andy felt that the new subcategories to better identify assistance related complaints was a good idea and would be a better way to measure progress going forward with year-on-year comparisons.

Gordon mentioned the frequency of complaints he receives regarding disabled passengers damaged wheelchairs. So felt that it would be good for the airport to collate these statistics and report their findings to the forum.

Andy summarised by saying that the improvements to the collation of customer feedback were welcomed. But would like to see samples of actual complaints at future meetings, to enable more detailed discussions.

Security Update

James Power then introduced himself to the forum members and proceeded to give an update on the recently installed Next-Generation Security equipment. Which had been designed to simplify the overall passenger experience, by reducing the need to remove electrical items and fluids from passengers' hand luggage. So far, the airport had received positive feedback about the process, confirming that it was more efficient and simpler. But at the same time identified certain issues for some passengers, as described above.

James then shared a number of slides showing the layout of the new machines in situ within Security, as well as the high-resolution imagery that can be observed by Security officers when scanning hand luggage. A summary of the positives/negatives of the new design equipment versus the old were shared. More information can be found in the accompanying PowerPoint presentation.

For those passengers unable to be screened using a security scanner, such as a wheelchair user or somebody wearing a medical device on the body. Then permission would be sought from the passenger by a Security officer to conduct a personalised search accompanied with swabbing. It was pointed out that when an officer determines a passenger maybe wearing a colostomy bag for example, then a private search must then be offered.

Gordon expressed concerns about the extent of a Security officer's search requirements when searching a wheelchair user. Explaining that he felt there was opportunity for a disabled passenger to potentially carry concealed goods within their wheelchair cushion for example.

Libby was keen to understand what learnings the airport had taken from the initial feedback from those passengers wearing medical devices or with a stoma.

James responded saying that due to the number of recent complaints the airport had received, a supervisor is now called for any passenger with a medical device. To ensure the correct process is followed and the matter is treated sensitively at all times. And to ensure that the offer for private search, when required, is accommodated.

Staff Training & HR Update

Cherie Marchant then introduced herself and colleagues, **Richard Tomlinson** and **Amy Cook**, from the airport's HR and training department. Starting her presentation with a slide highlighting the airport's 3 primary ambitions in support of airport staff. Being to conduct Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's), provide disability confidence training for all of the airport's personnel, and to seek a Disability Confident Employer accreditation.

Cherie explained how EIA's had been introduced to the airport in April 2023, to help avoid direct/indirect discrimination. Also, to better understand the effects of the airport's policies, working practices, and environment, to see what impact they may have on others and to help break down any barriers to equality.

Cherie then continued by discussing how the current accessibility plans and activities will merge into the Workforce Inclusion Network that had recently been set up to focus on the overall inclusion culture across the airport. Adding how she now wanted to review the Inclusion Strategy and plans and ways of working, to be able to share development progress and obtain input from the Accessibility Forum members going forward.

Amy continued by advising the forum that in July Bristol airport had obtained a Level 1, as part of the Disability Confident Employer scheme and was now keen to seek official Disability Confident Committed Employee status. By committing to a number of commitments. Such as ensuring the airport's recruitment process is fair and accessible, ensuring employment positions are advertised appropriately, and with interviews being offered to disabled people who may require adjustments to be made to the working environment, to enable them to be fully supported whilst at work.

Richard then followed by sharing a copy of the airport's Disability Awareness Toolbox Talk which had been created with support from ABM and Andy Wright. As an initial discussion document to help educate staff about the perceptions and types of disability, so as to provide appropriate support more confidently. It had been designed to engage and be interactive, in order to draw out the airport staff's understanding of disability through questioning and personal experience. It was hoped that the next stages of development would include an e-learning module and quiz, to help the airport's People Team understand the further training needs of all staff at the airport.

Richard added that there was a preference for a person with lived experience of disability to support this training module, to dispel any myths and to encourage staff to feel more comfortable when asking disability related questions.

Infrastructure Development Update

Jo Chase then introduced herself to the forum members to give a progress report on the airport's infrastructure development project so far. Starting with a summary of the work to be carried out to the South Gates, which will include the creation of 3 new contact boarding gates. Providing complete level access to and from the aircraft, as well as the creation of a new multifaith room and customer smoking area. She followed by showing a few slides highlighting the proposed plans for the new Transport Interchange and Multi-Storey Car Park 2. Concluding with an update on the Terminal Transformation plans, which included specifications for the new Assistance Lounge and Escape Lounge.

Andy raised concerns on behalf of a number of passengers who had commented about the route from the aircraft into the terminal building, saying that it was unsightly and not very welcoming due to the nature of the temporary construction boarding.

Jo responded saying she would look into it and ensure that this area was made to look more presentable whilst the building work was being conducted in and around it.

AOB

Libby was keen to offer her support with further guidance and training for the airport Security team, to help improve the experience for passengers with a stoma. **Andy** added that he could make contact with JDRF, a charity supporting people with Type I diabetes, as he was sure they would also like to offer their support as well.

Liz emphasised the need for improvements with content on the airport's website such as the Sensory room.

Lisa felt improvements should be made with signage and communication, especially relating to Security. To help passengers better prepare for the journey ahead. This could include a 'BRS Airport Journey' video for example.

All forum members agreed they were keen to support the airport with its disability awareness staff training ambitions, as well as the equality programme.

Andy then closed the meeting thanking 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 by the airport management team.

Actions

Andy, Cherie & Richard to finalise dates for Forum members to input into staff training and equality programme.

Andy & James to discuss dates for Colostomy UK and JDRF to help support Security staff.

Andy & Martyn to discuss next steps for airport passenger journey video with possible website enhancements.

Forum meeting for 2025:
Tuesday, 8 April
Tuesday, 28 October