



Consumer and Markets Group

UK Civil Aviation Authority

CAP 2374 – Additional guidance on the assistance service at UK airports

CAP2241 (Interpretative Guidelines on the application of Regulation (EC) N° 1107/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility (PRM) when travelling by air) states that *“appropriate assistance” within Article 7(7) of the Regulation means that the service provider needs to adapt the assistance to the individual requirements of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility. Such assistance should be proportionate whilst allowing disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility to move at the airport to take their flight.*

The CAA’s view is that where a disabled person or a person with reduced mobility has requested assistance, the service provided should be appropriate to the specific needs of the passenger. In delivering this service, the CAA considers that it would be useful if it provided examples of where, in its view, assistance might want to be adapted for the benefit of passengers.

The CAA’s view is that it is in the interest of airports and airlines to be flexible in the way assistance is provided to disabled and less mobile passengers so that it is effective, whilst encouraging independence for passengers. We would always encourage assistance staff to discuss with passengers using the service what their needs are, and how best they can be met. There may be occasions where such a conversation identifies that the passenger does not need some parts of the assistance service because the person has needs that can be best met in another way by the airport or airline.

Limiting accompanying persons

Airport staff should communicate to passengers that the service is generally available to passengers who require assistance and to any accompanying person who is needed to provide support, either physical or non-physical. In general, it would be expected that one person should accompany a passenger requiring assistance, although there will be occasions where it would be appropriate for more people to accompany, such as a family group with children or where a passenger has more complex needs. This could also be communicated to passengers through notices displayed in assistance areas. An airport might also set up an area in baggage reclaim or the arrivals hall where family and friends could be reunited. This should not apply to departing or transit passengers if there is a risk any member of a group could miss a flight.

Assistance by family members and friends

Airports should ensure that passengers are aware that assistance could be provided by friends or family if this is the preferred option of the passenger. Agents should explain that being assisted by friends or family might make it easier for a passenger to visit shops and restaurants, provide them with more independence and be quicker. Passengers should still be able to access other facilities such as a separate security lane. Before doing so staff should ensure passengers are made aware of walking distances, and facilities and infrastructure of interest to PRMs (for example, seating ramps and lifts). They should also ensure that passengers are aware of any safety or health matters. This option should only be used if passengers are in full agreement.

Airports could leave wheelchairs at certain points around the airport for passengers to use. Notices attached to distribution hubs could include messages on walking distances, facilities and infrastructure of interest to PRMs, and health and safety matters.

Short distances

Some passengers may not want to be assisted for some parts of the passenger journey. Airports should ensure that passengers are aware that they may be able to make their own way at some parts of the passenger journey, especially short distances. Agents should discuss options for assistance with the passenger and if the passenger agrees, there may be a part of the journey where assistance might not be needed. For arrivals, this might include, for example, the area before Border, through baggage reclaim and into the arrivals hall, although assisting with a passenger's baggage must be considered. For departures, it might include, for example, from landside to airside special assistance areas and through security. It is our understanding that staff moving to landside from airside greatly affects operational efficiency as such staff need to go through staff search to reach airside again.

Enhanced communication between agent and passenger about how best an individual's needs can be met is key. It is important that passengers are not given information that might underestimate their ability to walk short distances. It is also important that passengers are always given mobility assistance should they require it at any stage of their journey.

Queue combing

Some passengers may request assistance because they are concerned about, for example, standing for long periods, or a lack of access to facilities, while waiting in security and Border queues. This is understandable and assistance should be provided if necessary. But the passenger might not want to be assisted for other parts of the passenger journey. Some passengers may only wish to be brought to the front of queues to avoid excessive queuing. This could be achieved by better queue combing (in a similar way to the approach often taken at Border for people with young children). We acknowledge there is a risk that this might lead to overuse of assistance lanes at security and at Border, but we consider that the freeing up of resource as result may balance this risk. Further, there could be ways of mitigating potential abuse of this option, for example by requiring passengers to produce a discrete way of identifying themselves to access special assistance lanes. An identifier could be distributed at special assistance desks or by agents. This may also act as a means of reassuring passengers that they will be allowed to use a separate lane. An alternative could be for passengers to show their boarding passes which generally have PRM codes stated on them.

Airports should provide facilities and infrastructure which might not require passengers with invisible disabilities to be accompanied by a staff member; for example, separate security lanes.

Pre-notification

Good pre-notification is key to providing an effective assistance service and to ensuring that the assistance provided meets the needs of each individual. It is the CAA's view that there are areas in the processes that could be improved, and we will address the issues through our airline accessibility framework, to be consulted on later this year. But airlines can immediately take steps to improve notification by reviewing procedures for collecting requests. This would not just be to ensure that passengers can easily make a request but to support passengers to make a request that better meets their individual needs (loosely through 'PRM codes'). Airlines should also take steps to ensure that when flights are disrupted assistance requests are transferred with the passenger to the new flight. Airports could also be more proactive in amending requests when a person 'checks in' for assistance where conversations with a passenger identify specific needs. Airport staff should ensure that the assistance offered meets the individual needs of each passenger.

CAP1228 provides different standards for notified and non-notified passengers. These different standards are reflective of the practical additional time taken to assist a passenger for whom no pre-notification has been received. Staff should explain to passengers who have not pre-notified that they may have to wait longer for assistance (whilst being mindful that on occasion a passenger may have booked assistance, but their requests might not have reached the airport). This will encourage pre-notification. Airports might wish to advertise this through notices in special assistance areas.

Information for consumers about airport assistance services

Airlines could review the information provided on their websites about general assistance options at airports. The information should include details of what assistance is available, making it clear that assistance is always available should a passenger need it.

Airports could review their own information available to passengers. As with airlines, this would provide further information on the assistance options available. Airports could also provide more information on the layouts of their airports to help improve information to passengers, so they are in a better position to decide about their assistance needs. This might be done through mapping passenger journeys and including information on walking distances. It might also include information on facilities and infrastructure of particular importance to disabled and less mobile passengers; for example, seating, lifts, and ramps. Links to this information could be published on the CAA website. Airports could also improve information available in airports, particularly at special assistance areas.