

Moving Ahead

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CANADIAN TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Every day, staff at the Canadian Transportation Agency respond to telephone and Internet enquiries and written requests for information. We provide information on accessible transportation to the public and the transportation industry. But most importantly, we also seek advice from these same people to find ways of improving access to the federal transportation system for persons with disabilities.

We actively consult our Accessibility Advisory Committee, made up of representatives from the community of persons with disabilities, the transportation industry and other interested parties. I can't stress enough the invaluable work the Committee does and, as such, in recognition of hard work, dedication and continued collaboration to achieve inclusive transportation services for all, we awarded Committee members a certificate of appreciation last year.

We try to take the pulse of the community by getting away from our offices and actively participating at conferences and trade shows. We also make presentations at seminars for interested travellers with disabilities. These venues go a long way to promoting accessible transportation and the work we do. They also help increase awareness and understanding of



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disability issues and trends, and mobilize support for practical action at all levels by, with and for persons with disabilities.

One such event in which the Agency recently participated, was the Air Transportation Association of Canada (ATAC) annual general meeting, held last November in Vancouver. It was there that I had the pleasure of presenting our most recent product: Accessibility guidelines for carriers operating aircraft with 29 and fewer seats. You can find excerpts from my speech at ATAC at page 3 and a related article on page 19 will provide you with more details on these guidelines.

The Agency has regulations in place for aircraft with 30 passengers or more. Recent changes in the airline industry have resulted in more routes in Canada being serviced by smaller aircraft. In our discussions it became obvious that small aircraft require a more flexible approach to accommodate persons with disabilities.

Development of the guidelines involved a lot of consultation with users and carriers in the air industry. We sought advice and now we are able to provide advice to carriers operating smaller aircraft on how they can better serve the needs of travellers with disabilities.

The guidelines explain in practical terms how small operators can best accommodate travellers with accessibility needs. They let industry know what the Agency expects and offers practical and functional solutions while adopting a common sense approach.

Many of the carriers are already doing much of what is included in these guidelines. When we all make efforts to meet or exceed these guidelines, as with any of the Agency's codes, this will translate into greater access to the federal transportation system for persons with disabilities. As well, this will provide assurance to these passengers that they will have access to predictable and uniform levels of service as they travel in Canada.

Marian L. Robson
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

Excerpts from an address by Marian Robson to the Air Transport Association of Canada Annual General Meeting held on November 15, 2004 on accessibility guidelines for air carriers operating small aircraft (29 and fewer passenger seats).

- It is a great pleasure for me to be here today at this Annual General Meeting with its evocative theme “Starting Over? Will there be a new approach to Air Policy?”. I am pleased that the Air Transport Association of Canada has given me some time on its busy agenda to make an important announcement on passenger service for persons with disabilities.
- As most of you probably know, the Canadian Transportation Agency is working to make it easier for persons with disabilities to travel in Canada.
- We work actively with consumers and industry to find ways to eliminate the barriers that prevent a number of Canadians from being able to travel.
- To that end, the Agency is very active and has introduced a number of initiatives to help service providers improve the level of accessibility of their network.
- That is why I am here today, to present our latest initiative – Accessibility Guidelines for Small Aircraft.
- Regulations already exist for aircraft with 30 seats or more, and the Agency could simply have decided to extend these regulations to smaller aircraft. We decided instead to proceed with Guidelines. This is a less intrusive process and we believe that it will be effective provided that the Guidelines receive your active support.



- This new tool, developed in consultation with representatives of the industry (notably the Air Transportation Association of Canada), consumers and other government departments, will help carriers to better serve the needs of persons with disabilities when travelling on small aircraft.
- In reading the Guidelines, you will notice that many of you are already doing much of what they include.
- That is why the Agency is confident that carriers will make every reasonable effort to follow them and, where possible, exceed them.
- The Guidelines include information on a number of topics, including what to discuss with persons with disabilities at the time of reservation, carriage of various aids and service animals, and tips on how to improve communication with persons with disabilities.
- The Guidelines offer practical and functional solutions while adopting a common sense approach. They also provide information on where you can get training material and lists organizations of and for persons with disabilities to help implement the Guidelines. Also included is information on the Agency's facilitation and mediation services.
- In closing, I would like to thank the Air Transport Association of Canada, and Warren Everson in particular, for your assistance in creating these Guidelines. I am certain that we all share a common goal: to make accessible transportation a reality here in Canada.

Communication breakdown strands traveller with a disability, leads to revised Checklist for travel agents

by Lyne Giroux

A recent Agency decision highlights the importance of clear communication among persons booking flights, travel agents and carriers. It has led to the Agency issuing a revised Reservation Checklist to help travel agents better identify the specific needs of travellers with disabilities.

Decision no. 593-AT-A-2004, issued in November 2004, concerned the unfortunate experience of a person with an intellectual disability who was booked by a travel agent to fly on Air Canada between Williams Lake, BC, and Lethbridge, AB, and return, via Vancouver and Calgary in December 2001.

Because of a breakdown in communication at the time his reservations were made, services were ordered from Air Canada for



the individual that did not meet his needs. The individual, who got off the plane in Vancouver, spent a frightening night alone in the terminal when his connecting flight was delayed by bad weather.

When Air Canada became aware of the difficulties encountered by the individual, it amended the passenger's reservation file so the service that ought to have been ordered in the first place would be provided for the remaining leg of the trip. Air Canada also provided the traveller with \$150 in compensation and a travel voucher for \$150.

After assessing the complaint, filed by the traveller's mother, the Agency did not find Air Canada at fault. However, to help avoid similar situations, it urged the carrier to issue a general reminder to travel agents



and tour operators with which it deals setting out the disability-related services Air Canada offers, highlighting the 'adult unaccompanied minor service' for passengers with intellectual disabilities, and distinguishing it from 'meet and assist services' and 'wheelchair assistance'.

The Agency accepted that the travel agent was made aware of the passenger's intellectual disability at the time reservations were requested and that the travel agent failed to advise Air Canada of critical information in this regard. The Agency also found that the travel agent was unaware that Air Canada provides an 'adult unaccompanied minor service' at no charge, which ensures air carrier representatives are responsible for certain travellers during flights, at connection points and during prolonged delays.

The decision noted that, had the passenger's mother been made aware of all of the services that Air Canada offers to meet the needs of passengers with disabilities when she made the reservations on his behalf, she would have been better able to assess whether the arrangements suggested would ensure her son's travel needs would be met.

Agency jurisdiction does not extend to travel agencies, which are regulated by provinces and territories. Despite this lack of jurisdiction, the Agency recognizes the importance of travel agents to the accessibility of the federal transportation network. By providing them with tools such as the easy-to-use Reservation Checklist, it will not only help them identify specific needs of travellers with disabilities but also allow them to communicate these needs to carriers to help ensure the appropriate services are provided.

The Checklist sets out some 60 possible services regarding such matters as accessible seating, service animals (guide dogs), mobility and technical aids, and unaccompanied passengers. The Checklist, which was first issued in 2001 and re-issued in 2003, has been updated to deal with situations like the one described in this Decision and was mailed to the Canadian travel industry in December 2004.

The revised Checklist can be found on the Agency's Web site at www.cta.gc.ca and is included with this newsletter. ♦

The Agency recognizes the importance of the travel industry to the federal transportation network. As such, the Agency continues to focus efforts on enhancing communications among persons with disabilities, travel agents, tour operators and carriers to ensure that the necessary services are identified at the time of reservation and communicated to the carrier.

- A presentation, called the Art of Travel Facilitation, was made to the Travel Law Day Symposium in 2004. During this event which brought together hundreds of travel professionals from across Canada, the Agency took the opportunity to distribute the Agency's revised Reservation Checklist used by reservation agents to document the travel need of persons with disabilities.
- In 2004, the Agency offered assistance to the Canadian Institute of Travel Counsellors which was updating its travel agent certification training materials.
- The Agency also exhibited at four travel-industry shows in various Canadian cities.



Access for all at Edmonton International Airport www.edmontonairports.com

by Debbie Preece, Edmonton Airports

DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING

Since 1995, Disability Awareness Training has been a key part of Edmonton International Airport employee training – to date over 1300 employees at this airport have taken part. Edmonton Airports has maintained its strong commitment to offering all airport employees this innovative program at no charge. Front-line employees, including airport volunteers, taxi, limousine and sky shuttle drivers, airline and airport customer service staff are typical participants. The focus of the

program is to provide awareness in assisting travellers with disabilities. The Disability Awareness Training course is divided into four 2-hour modules: vision, seniors, physical mobility and hearing. One or two presenters host each module, which usually involves a short presentation and hands-on working session.

BARRIER FREE COMMITTEE

Edmonton Airports has chaired or hosted a very active Barrier Free Committee since 1991. The group is a governing board over all barrier

free aspects of Edmonton International Airport. Members meet formally twice a year at the airport but the work they do goes far beyond the two meetings a year. There is an ongoing exchange of knowledge between the areas they represent and Edmonton Airports. They are also consulted on any facility alterations and improvements made to passenger service at Edmonton International Airport. All enhancements are first passed by this committee to verify the barrier free aspects. Committee members have met with design engineers at Edmonton International Airport while certain areas are in the planning stages (e.g. unisex washrooms). This committee works together to determine the Barrier Free Capital projects. The most recent addition to Edmonton International Airport was the provision of a staff fitness facility. The washrooms, showers, etc., were all installed to barrier free standards.

The committee is made up of representatives from:

- Alberta Committee for Citizens with Disabilities
- Alberta Council on Aging

- Alberta Transportation
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind
- Canadian Paraplegic Association
- Edmonton Airports
- Muscular Dystrophy Association of Canada

RECOGNITION

- Percy Wickman Accessibility Award [Canadian Paraplegic Association (Alberta)] 2004
- City of Edmonton Mayor's Award for Accessible Service 2000
- White Cane Week Certificate of Merit 1996
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Certificate of Recognition 1996



ACCESS FOR ALL

Edmonton Airports has published a brochure titled "Access for All" that is specific to the needs of persons with disabilities.

OTHER

Other enhancements at Edmonton International Airport are:

- Accessible check-in and information counters
- Braille signage outside all washrooms, inside and outside of the elevators
- Closed-captioned televisions
- Curb cuts
- Doorless washroom entries
- Eye-level Flight Information Display Screens
- Infrared faucets in the public washrooms
- JustMobility lift for wheelchair passengers boarding a ground-loaded aircraft
- Life Call alarm button in the unisex washrooms
- Oversized revolving doors, with a slow motion button
- Tactile flooring
- TTY payphones and at the Hotel/Motel booking board
- Unisex washrooms
- Shuttle bus to parking equipped with wheelchair lift
- On-site accessible van for hire
- Video paging on Flight Information Display Screens
- Volume-controlled pay phones
- Web site with a link to the accessible services available at Edmonton International Airport www.edmontonairports.com/bins/content_page.asp?cid=11-78-83

The Next Big Challenge: An Aging Population Makes Disabilities Mainstream

By David Eadie

Reprinted with permission

Originally published in Flightplan, November 2004

Air Transportation Association of Canada

Have you heard enough about the baby boom generation yet? Fed up with hearing about how they changed the world in everything from music to politics? Well, their story is far from over. They dominated the sixties as teens, now they're continuing to swing their economic weight as they pass into their sixties – and beyond. Their influence is about to be felt, big-time, in the airline sector too.

Talk to Pat Raymaker, Chairperson for the National Advisory Council on Aging and she'll tell you that, "it's the largest age group in Canada and the world. They are a generation that has done fairly well financially and they're retiring earlier with a fair amount of disposable income."

By 2030 roughly 25% of the Canadian population will be sixty-five and, as the leading edge of that generation pauses on the brink of retirement, the big question seems to be where they are going to spend all the money they've been accumulating for the past forty-odd years.

Whatever their choices, chances are that they will involve travel. But they won't be quite like other travellers. First, they will be carrying with them a firm sense of their rights as paying passengers (and a lifetime of speaking up for themselves) and second, they will be aging physically. Many will suffer from ambulatory difficulties and many more will have trouble with vision, hearing and comprehension. It is not a stretch to say that for many seniors, their age-related infirmities will amount to a disability.



According to Statistics Canada, the disability rate gradually increases with age. From 3.3% among children aged 0 to 14, it rises to nearly 10% among adults aged 15 to 64 and climbs to more than 40% among persons aged 65 and over. In fact, more than half (53.3%) of persons 75 and over report having a disability, leaving the line between classically disabled persons protected by regulations and those with less severe difficulties blurred.

So how do carriers prepare for a rising number of these passengers? By learning from the passengers with disabilities we carry today.

Airlines have carried Canadians with disabilities since the earliest days of the air industry, but it wasn't until the mid-1980s that it became recognized that there needed to be standards developed to address the needs of travellers with disabilities. According to Stephen Little, past Chair of the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation to the Minister of Transport, the regulatory environment was, at first, voluntary. "Then with the advent of the

Canadian Transportation Agency, there began to be more standards to the point where, in the mid-90s there was a fairly comprehensive set of directives for how one should transport persons with disabilities."

So with ten years experience of agreed upon standards, Canadian airlines should be entirely familiar with the needs of travellers with disabilities and well positioned to handle the coming increase of aging boomers. So, how are we doing? Are disabled passengers satisfied? The short answer is that it all depends on who you talk to. The community of persons with disabilities is far from a homogenous one. Even people who share a common disability often don't agree on the issue.

Mr. Little, who uses a wheelchair to get around, says that although there are service-related flashpoints and frustrations, "nine out of ten times things go along pretty good. I've experienced great service and lousy service where the lousy service was at least compensated by staff who went over and above to try and reduce the negative impressions that

were happening through no fault of their own. I've also experienced good service only because I chose to look on it as good service, but it wasn't helped by the fact that I had a sort of snarky flight attendant."

Pat Danforth, who is chair of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (Transportation Committee), says that it depends on the day. She, too, uses a wheelchair and says, "probably 98% of the time that I fly – even though I've made sure and confirmed that I've made all the appropriate arrangements – something (either minor or major) will go wrong and it can create a lot of frustration." There seems to be a significant difference in the flying experience, and yet both Danforth and Little identified many of the same frustrations.

Danforth's biggest frustration is the matter of lift-able armrests. "Because I don't walk, I always request the most accessible seat and I specifically say that I require an armrest that raises. I've had it confirmed that the arm of my seat is lift-able and arrive on the aircraft only to find that it isn't...and that's frustrating. It's

more than frustrating because, being a paraplegic, I have no sensation and sitting on a hard plastic armrest while I transfer into my seat can cause me an injury." She explains that it could also cause injury to the attendant who assists her over the non-lifting armrest, which can be of very real concern, especially when lack of training compounds the problem. In addition, many customers say that cabin crew often don't know where the lift-able armrests are located.

Kevin Rogers' most recent experience at Toronto's then-unfinished Terminal One, very nearly came to disaster when he found he had to board from the tarmac. "When it was time to get pre-boarding assistance two very petite ladies came and wanted to transfer me from my chair into the Washington Chair and I say 'there's no way that you two can safely transfer me into that aisle chair.' They said 'Can you not walk a bit?' and I said 'No, I can't. I haven't walked for the past 21 years and I don't think I'm about to start now.'"



The challenge increases though, when a disability isn't so apparent. "Eighty per cent of vision impairment is not obvious," says Francis Cutler, who is the past Chair of the Board of Directors of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and full time advocacy advisor. She says that her blindness, "is certainly not obvious to the person at airline security or at check-in and, on the whole, they don't understand that this person who looks perfectly normal can't see the signs."

Signs are a big issue with Fran Cutler. Cutler also has trouble reading the monitors showing arrivals and departures. "They're placed far too high, out of visual range," she says.

The next challenge for Cutler is finding her seat. She suggests that, "the next time you travel, just look at the contrast and size of the seat numbers." It's not much. She continues that "staff are generally very helpful, but I wish they'd ask what they can do instead of assuming that they know what the individual's needs are. I can't tell you the number of times I've said

'I'd like to borrow your eyes for thirty seconds to find my seat,' and they just grab me and try to take me there," when in fact all she wanted was to be told which seat was hers.

Once she gets to her seat, the rest of the trip is a breeze. Not so for Colin Cantlie, of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association. This Association is growing every year – hearing loss is a common ailment with an aging population. Understanding announcements in air terminals can be difficult even with two good ears, and Cantlie explains that, before he even gets as far as the security gate, he worries that he might have missed an important announcement that affects his flight. "I have been very close to missing flights and I know other travellers who have missed their flights altogether because they sit down and read a book and they missed the announcement about a gate change."

Security screening is particularly tough. Cantlie says that getting through is no easy feat when you can't hear what people are directing you to do. Security can be daunting, even for the travel savvy, but not being able to hear what personnel want you to do can increase anxiety ten-fold.

Once on board and seated, the difficulties don't end. "I have been flying for 40 years and I have probably received maybe less than half a dozen pre-flight briefings on board the aircraft even after identifying that I am hard of hearing," he says, "Also, in the past twenty-two years since I went hard of hearing, I've had one flight attendant write down the pilot's announcement to me so that I knew what the pilot had said."

It's not so much an issue for Colin Cantlie. He worked in the air industry for years and knows the procedures well. But for somebody who is hard of hearing and an infrequent flyer, it becomes a very real safety issue.

Yet the hard of hearing community has very divided feelings on the matter of self-identification. Like many of our elderly friends and family who don't like to draw attention to their limitations, people who are hard of hearing sometimes prefer to remain anonymous. Even so, Cantlie takes the view that, "if a passenger hasn't identified their needs then they really have no right to complain." However, he doesn't absolve the airline personnel of their responsibility. "If they see that a person isn't responding appropriately, they should check with the passenger to see that everything is all right." The poor record flight attendants have had in giving Cantlie special briefings, even after he has self-identified, suggests a need for increased training for airline personnel.

Nevertheless, every federally regulated airline currently has a training regimen in place. Flight attendants coming into the industry are obliged to take instruction on identifying and assisting passengers with disabilities. The courses are primarily given by



instructors who have disabilities and refresher courses are part of a flight attendants' annual requirements. For this reason, some people, including Pat Danforth, prefer newer flight attendants because they "at least know how to operate the equipment."

Cantlie feels that training should be extended to all airline and airport staff including airport security staff. Our interviewees said insensitive security procedures and personnel were perhaps the major source of frustration for them. Airlines are not responsible for security, but Colin Cantlie says "most passengers don't make the distinction between the airlines and the airport authorities. So, to improve service, the role airport and security staff play cannot be overlooked".

"The legislation of the Canadian Transportation Agency says that anybody in frontline customer service must have awareness and sensitivity training within 60 days of being hired," says Colin Cantlie.

So, customers with disabilities generally agree that air travel is getting better...perhaps too slowly for some, but it is getting better. But the complaints they do have – special requests that don't get to the crew on duty, lack of training staff, insensitive security screening and infrastructure that's poorly designed for hearing and seeing, are critical issues to note as the grey wave looms over our industry. ♦

Cliff Mackay, Air Transport Association of Canada's President gets a crash course on disabilities

Reprinted with permission

*Originally published in Flightplan, November 2004,
Air Transportation Association of Canada*

Cliff Mackay is what you might call a seasoned traveller. For the past 30 years or so his career path has landed him at 25,000 feet more than a few times. Like so many others whose jobs regularly take them from place to place to place, air travel is almost second nature. "You just go to the airport, get in the airplane and off you go and you don't think too much about it," he says. Make that 'didn't think about it' – past tense. Earlier this year he fell off a ladder, broke his right heel in three places and found himself on crutches for the better part of five months. He's been having to think about it ever since.

It was just a matter of cast and crutches so he was well enough to do his job. He still had to attend meetings and such across the country, but the familiar ease with which he negotiated his life from waking at

home in Ottawa to turning out the light in, say, Vancouver was, at least temporarily, gone. "The first thing I learned is that when you're on crutches essentially you have no hands – you can't carry anything. You have to rely on others to help." There were other lessons to come.

As President and CEO of the Air Transport Association of Canada he, of course, was well aware of the difficulties that Canadians with ambulatory disabilities have to deal with when they travel by air, but now it was different. "We work on those sorts of issues routinely with people from the disabled community, the government and our own carriers so obviously, from a professional point of view I was certainly aware of the issues but I really didn't have the same sort of feeling for them."



The second lesson he learned is that everything took a lot longer than it used to. "I never really realized before what a distance it was from the airport entrance to the ticket counter and then security and then to the gate." Even when he opted to take a wheelchair instead of making his way on crutches, the time it took to get from place to place meant that he had to be a lot more careful than he was used to. "I had to think about everything I did ahead of time because it's extremely inconvenient to backtrack. You have to be much, much more disciplined about what you do than you ever realized before."

Thankfully, Cliff didn't have to learn about uncooperative airline staff the hard way. "My personal experiences so far have been very pleasant. Everybody has been prepared to help." Mind you Cliff Mackay is not exactly a shrinking violet. "I'm naturally quite gregarious," he says, "and when I need something I'm quite prepared to verbalize it." Though his personal experience has been a good one, he can see how things can go off track. "I think what tends to happen is that airline staff have procedures and they think they know what they're supposed to do and so they

just go off and do it and sometimes they don't think to check to see how passengers prefer to be helped."

One of the keys to avoiding difficulties and one of the issues near the top of his personal agenda is training. "Obviously people have run into extreme situations from time to time and I'm not saying that regulations are not necessary – they certainly are needed but I think that, in terms of improving service for our customers, you'd probably get more progress by promoting a helpful attitude and by building awareness and by training airline personnel to be more sensitive."

By the time you read this article, Cliff Mackay's heel will have mended. While he's under no illusions that his temporary condition made him an instant expert, he has gotten a first person taste of what air travel is like for many Canadians. It's an aspect of his outgoing nature that he sees his recent experience in a positive light. "Frankly, I now have a much better understanding of the frustrations Canadians with disabilities encounter," he says, "I hope that in the future this experience will help make me sure that our association and our carriers provide the best possible service." ♦

Guidelines on Services to be Provided to Persons with Disabilities Travelling on Small Aircraft

by Diane Mainville

The Canadian Transportation Agency has created Accessibility Guidelines for Small Aircraft with 29 and fewer passenger seats to assist carriers in better meeting the needs of persons with disabilities using their services. The Guidelines were developed in cooperation with representatives of the industry, consumers and other government departments.

Who should use the Guidelines?

The Guidelines were developed for use by air carriers operating small aircraft in Canada.



Why were the Guidelines developed?

Recent changes in the airline industry have resulted in more routes in Canada being served by smaller aircraft. In keeping with the Government of Canada's approach to finding alternatives to

regulation, the Agency has created these Guidelines to provide assistance to carriers on how they can better serve the needs of persons with disabilities when travelling on small aircraft. The Guidelines also let the industry and the public know what the Agency expects of operators of small aircraft when serving persons with disabilities.



What is in the Guidelines?

The Guidelines set out minimum services which carriers using small aircraft should strive to provide. They offer information on what to discuss with persons with disabilities at the time of reservation, and make recommendations on the carriage of various aids and service animals. They also suggest what to do if a person's mobility aid is damaged or lost, and provide tips on how to improve communication with persons with disabilities.

Some of the services often requested by persons with disabilities include assistance at check-in, assistance to reach the boarding area, assistance to board and deplane, assistance with baggage, and assistance to transfer from a mobility aid to a passenger seat and vice versa.

Among other things, the Guidelines state:

- transportation cannot be refused solely on the basis of a disability. If it is not possible to carry a passenger with a disability, provide a clear explanation of the reason for the refusal, and offer to provide a written explanation for the refusal;
- at the time of reservation, describe and discuss the equipment and services available to accommodate persons with disabilities and note, and offer to confirm in writing, services to be provided;
- board and deplane persons with disabilities with specialized equipment whenever possible and, only, as a last recourse and if the person agrees, carry a person with a disability by hand;

- have an open dialogue with the person to determine which is the most accessible seat on the aircraft to meet his/her needs;
- carry in the cabin, wherever possible, mobility aids such as wheelchairs and walkers. If a mobility aid is damaged during flight or is not available upon arrival, provide a suitable replacement or assist in finding a temporary replacement; and
- permit a service animal to accompany a person with a disability on-board when it is required for disability-related needs.

The Guidelines also advise operators of small aircraft where they can get training material, free of charge, and provide a list of organizations of and for persons with disabilities to help implement the Guidelines. Information on the Agency's facilitation and mediation services is also provided to help resolve potential issues between persons with disabilities and carriers.

If you would like a copy of the Guidelines (including multiple formats), or if you require more information, please contact the Canadian Transportation Agency. ♦





Terminal Accessibility Standards – An unmet need whose time has come for action

by Diane Mainville

The Canadian Transportation Agency believes that the time is right to create a “Best Practices in Terminal Accessibility” Code of Practice. The development of this Code is important because it would let the industry know what amenities and terminal related services make travel easier for all, including persons with disabilities.

Canadian transportation terminal operators have developed many innovative solutions to resolve accessibility challenges and enhance the travel experience of persons with disabilities. The Agency now wants to document best practices in accessible terminal operation so that these transportation facilities can identify and implement practical service standards. This would also showcase Canada’s accomplishments to the world.



Earlier efforts to create this Code have not been successful because the technological solutions were not known. However, today the expertise exists that could make this Code a reality.

Previous work on terminal accessibility standards dates back to 1983. In the mid-eighties, Transport Canada prepared documentation and consulted on Barrier-Free Design Standards for Terminals. The standards work was moved to the jurisdiction of the Agency in July 1988; at that time, the National Transportation Act was amended to give the Agency responsibility for setting standards which would ensure safe and accessible transportation services for travellers with disabilities. In 1991, the focus shifted from regulating terminals and equipment to regulating services for persons with

disabilities. As such the Personnel Training Regulations and the Terms and Conditions Regulations became the priority projects.

In 1997, the Communication Barriers Report was published. This report examined the barriers to communication facing persons with disabilities who travel by air. During consultations on communication barriers, quite a number of suggestions were made to modify some physical accessibility features of airports to improve the communication of information to travellers with disabilities. These included:

- improving and simplifying signage;
- lowering flight information monitors and increasing the print size and improving the contrast;
- improving public announcement systems;
- installing phone systems that have up-to-date information; and
- installing auditory way-finding systems and visual alarms.

The final report contained only one recommendation to terminal operators pertaining to the physical accessibility features to improve communication. That is, that no new flight monitors be installed above eye level. Further, new monitors should have significant colour contrast, large print or audio-echo technology.

The reason that no other recommendations were made at the time regarding physical features of terminals was because the Agency believed that the physical features should be dealt with in a comprehensive and global policy on terminal accessibility.

Having said that, there were recommendations in the report pertaining to communications applicable to terminal buildings most of which are now found in the Agency's new *Code of Practice: Removing Communication Barriers for Travellers with Disabilities* released in June 2004. Although the 1997 Communications Barrier report dealt with air travel only, with the new Communications Code the Agency took a systemic approach to the implementation of the recommendations made in that report and expanded their application



from air-only to rail and ferry services under federal jurisdiction. Communications seems to have been covered; however, there are still many other areas which would need to be considered in terminal accessibility standards.

Terminal accessibility is therefore now back on the radar screen and Accessible Transportation Directorate staff have taken every opportunity to visit terminals through which they had to travel.

During recent terminal visits, a number of innovative changes were noted, for instance:

- At St. John's International Airport, arrival and departure screens are at eye level, the signs are easy to read and there is a lowered counter for use by passengers in wheelchairs.
- At the Halifax International Airport there are drop-off and pick-up spaces at the front of the terminal with the disability parking symbol. Accessible tables are provided in the food court and infrequent travellers with disabilities can take advantage of a program designed to familiarize them with airport procedures.
- The Vancouver International Airport has assistive listening devices at check-in counters and tactile way-finding markings to assist persons who are blind.
- Accessibility features at the new Macdonald-Cartier International Airport in Ottawa include tile patterns that assist people with visual impairments, textured or slightly elevated flooring to indicate the location of an escalator, and four elevators large enough to easily accommodate passengers with wheelchairs.

Agency staff will continue to visit transportation terminals and identify best practices in barrier-free design to assist in the development of terminal accessibility standards.

A review of complaints pertaining to terminal accessibility filed with the Agency since 1989 focused on complaints which resulted in an Agency finding that there was an undue obstacle. There were 12 such cases. They included issues pertaining primarily to ground transportation, the physical accessibility of the terminal building or its facilities and boarding devices. Interestingly, the most common complaint from air travellers was in regard to the ground transportation and primarily focused on the lack of accessible taxis. The most common complaint by rail travellers was the physical accessibility of the stations or the facilities. There was an even split with respect to boarding issues in both rail and air travel.

There are also many other excellent sources of information to which the Agency can refer in its development work. A few of these are:

- The National Transportation Agency's Report from 1994 on the Inquiry into the Accessibility of Ground Transportation Services at Canadian Airports;

- The CSA B651 standard for barrier-free design of buildings and other facilities; and
- The Agency's Air Travel Accessibility Report from May 2001 which summarizes responses to questions pertaining to airport accessibility including communications, access to main areas of the terminal, check-in, boarding and ground transportation.

The Transportation Development Centre has also done some work on way-finding and reported its findings in a publication entitled "Going Places" produced by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

At the international level, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has standards and recommended practices to make airports more accessible to persons with disabilities. As a signatory to the Chicago Convention, Canada has a contractual obligation to meet the standards and recommended practices, so these too can be reviewed and included in a Canadian standard.



Last year, the Airports Council International (ACI), the representative industry body of the world's airports whose membership is made up of 554 airport authorities operating over 1,500 airports across 169 countries and territories, published an updated version of Airports & Persons with Disabilities – A Handbook for Airport Operators which is an excellent reference.

Although ICAO standards and the ACI material, as well as some of the Agency's reports deal specifically with airports, most can be adjusted to terminals in other modes as well.

There is also a lot of information available on barrier-free design and universal access design including regulations, standards, recommended practices, best practices, handbooks, codes, guidance material, and guidelines from other countries which we can use to guide us.

As the Agency moves forward, we will ask for your help. Please send us your comments about best practices. Let us know what works well and what could work better. Information should be sent to the Accessible Transportation Directorate at the address in this newsletter. ♦

HOW TO CONTACT US

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Reservation Checklist

A step-by-step guide for meeting the needs of travellers with disabilities

Client _____ Date of travel _____

Nature of disability _____ File/locator no. _____

Phone/Email _____ Carrier(s) _____

| ACCESSIBLE SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES | Date Requested | Date Carrier Notified | Date Carrier Confirmed |
|--|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1) Carrier advised of the nature of the person's disability | | | |
| 2) Information in alternate formats on: <input type="checkbox"/> itinerary <input type="checkbox"/> rates <input type="checkbox"/> disability-related services (specify): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify): _____ • alternate format(s) <input type="checkbox"/> audio <input type="checkbox"/> electronic <input type="checkbox"/> braille <input type="checkbox"/> large print | | | |
| 3) Provision of a seat that meets the person's needs (except in emergency EXIT rows) <input type="checkbox"/> movable aisle arm rest <input type="checkbox"/> near entrance <input type="checkbox"/> additional leg room <input type="checkbox"/> near washroom <input type="checkbox"/> next to attendant <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify): _____ | | | |
| 4) Attendant(s)* – medical info required by carrier(s) <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no (specify): _____ | | | |
| 5) Carriage of a mobility aid * • specify type of mobility aid <input type="checkbox"/> manual wheelchair <input type="checkbox"/> manual folding wheelchair <input type="checkbox"/> scooter <input type="checkbox"/> electric wheelchair <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ • note dimensions: _____ • type of batteries: <input type="checkbox"/> wet/acid <input type="checkbox"/> gel <input type="checkbox"/> dry • special tool(s)/instructions needed to disassemble/assemble wheelchair/battery (specify): _____ • tool(s)/instructions to be provided by: <input type="checkbox"/> carrier <input type="checkbox"/> traveller | | | |
| 6) Use of oxygen on board and/or in terminals * <input type="checkbox"/> carrier provided <input type="checkbox"/> passenger provided | | | |
| 7) Verify with terminal operator(s) that accessible ground transportation is available to/from terminal <input type="checkbox"/> taxi <input type="checkbox"/> shuttle <input type="checkbox"/> city bus <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify): _____ | | | |

| ACCESSIBLE SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES | Date Requested | Date Carrier Notified | Date Carrier Confirmed |
|--|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 8) “Unaccompanied-passenger” services – a higher level of assistance for individuals such as persons who have cognitive or intellectual disabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (specify contact name/tel. no.) Dep. _____ /Arr. _____ • (specify services required in terminal(s) prior to departure, during connections, and/or upon arrival): _____ • (specify services required on board): | | | |
| 9) Assistance with registration at check-in counter | | | |
| 10) <u>On departure</u> , assistance to transfer the person from a passenger mobility aid <input type="checkbox"/> at registration counter <input type="checkbox"/> at departure gate <input type="checkbox"/> at aircraft door * <u>On arrival</u> , assistance to transfer the person to a passenger mobility aid <input type="checkbox"/> at aircraft door <input type="checkbox"/> at arrival gate <input type="checkbox"/> at baggage carousel * | | | |
| 11) Assistance to get to the boarding gate (specify): | | | |
| 12) Assistance to board/deboard (specify): | | | |
| 13) Assistance to transfer the person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> between a mobility aid and a passenger seat (on departure) <input type="checkbox"/> between a passenger seat and a mobility aid (on arrival) | | | |
| 14) Assistance to store and retrieve carry-on baggage | | | |
| 15) Provide meal-related services onboard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> special meal (specify): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> opening packages <input type="checkbox"/> identifying items <input type="checkbox"/> cutting large portions | | | |
| 16) Assistance to move to/from the onboard washroom (except by carrying) | | | |
| 17) Assistance to get to a representative of another carrier in the same terminal (specify): | | | |
| 18) Assistance to retrieve checked baggage | | | |
| 19) Assistance to get to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> the general public area <input type="checkbox"/> a service animal relief area | | | |
| 20) Carriage – free of charge – of a trained, certified and harnessed service animal at the person’s seat (specify): | | | |
| 21) Carrier issuing ticket to notify connecting carrier(s) of services requested to be provided | | | |
| 22) Written confirmation of services to be provided by the carrier | | | |

* There may be conditions or restrictions applicable to this service that should be discussed with the person with a disability.