



Pre-notification guidance

for supporting passengers with a disability or reduced mobility



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Introduction

Under European law, (Regulation 1107/2006) all passengers who are disabled or have difficulty moving around can receive assistance when they fly, free of charge. With this in mind, in 2008, the Department for Transport (DfT) published a Code of Practice detailing the requirements of the legislation on providing assistance to disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility. The CAA has since carried out a review with stakeholders on how the legislation has been implemented.

A central principle of the law is that passengers should advise on their needs before they travel ("pre-notification").

Through working together, the CAA, ABTA and ABTA's Pre-notification Working Group¹ agreed that improvements to the pre-notification process could benefit passengers and ensure they received a better service.

The number of disabled and persons with reduced mobility (PRM) passengers who are pre-booking assistance has increased since the introduction of the legislation.

However, the number varies significantly across airlines and on specific flight routes. There are also problems with the accuracy of the information that is collected and transferred and this impacts on the airports' ability to plan resources accordingly.

As a result, this guidance has been produced to support all involved when serving disabled passengers and persons with reduced mobility in providing a comprehensive service to their customers, and encouraging them to identify any specific assistance needs when making a booking.

This guidance supplements that included within the DfT Code of Practice and is based on experience of how the system works in practice.



Booking process

1. The booking process provides an important way of capturing information from consumers about their assistance needs and any mobility equipment that they wish to take with them.

Journey planning

2. All passengers should be able to access information about the airport layout to assist in planning their journey. Airport signage within the departure lounge often provides information on the expected walking distances to the gate, but this information is not always published on airport websites. Providing information about the range of walking distances within each terminal may help passengers to plan their journey and consider the level of assistance they feel necessary.
3. Operators could inform passengers that they can check the airport layout before travel and consumer groups could also provide accessible information about how passengers can best plan their journey.

Information about passenger rights

4. The wording below can be used by airlines, tour operators or travel agents to explain passenger rights and the responsibility to pre-notify. This wording can be tailored to the individual business's requirements.

Under European law, if you are disabled or have difficulty moving around, you can receive assistance when you fly. This free service is available to anyone with mobility problems, for example, because of their disability, age or a temporary injury. To take full advantage of the service you need to pre-book 48 hours in advance of your flight.

You can book assistance and find out more via our (*website/telephone number*)

¹ The group includes representatives from travel agents, tour operators, airlines, airports, PRM service providers, an independent disability representative, the DfT and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Booking websites

5. Section 3 of the DfT Code of Practice sets out the legal requirements for airlines, tour operators and travel agents to ensure passengers can book assistance on the telephone or online. It also outlines that easily accessible links should be made available on the homepage of websites and any other pages dedicated to disabled or reduced mobility passengers. Websites should clearly indicate to the user how they should record and notify their requests for assistance.
6. In addition to providing a link to the PRM information on the homepage, airlines, tour operators and travel agents should also consider providing links during the booking process or on completion of the booking. Providing several links acts as a helpful reminder to passengers of the need to pre-book assistance.
7. It is important that the language used to highlight links to the information is relevant to the people that may require assistance. Terms such as 'PRMs' are unlikely to attract attention. Using several different terms can help overcome this problem and encourage more people to click on the link. Suggested terminology that can be used includes:
 - Special assistance
 - Mobility assistance
 - Disability assistance
 - Passenger assistance.

Telephone bookings

8. Airlines, tour operators and travel agents need to ensure that when passengers make a booking on the telephone they are asked if anyone in their party requires assistance. Automated messages are widely used within the industry while passengers are waiting for their call to be answered. Including a simple message about the available assistance and importance to pre-notify would assist in promoting this message. The following wording is provided as an example:

If anyone in your party is disabled or has difficulty in walking more than 500 metres we can help you to book free airport assistance. Please let us know what you require.

Travel brochures

9. Brochures should encourage passengers to provide information about their assistance needs. They should also set out clearly where consumers can find out more information about their rights and how they can pre-book assistance.

Travel agencies

10. ABTA's Checklist for Disabled and Less Mobile Passengers is a valuable document and travel agencies should ensure it is covered in staff training and that agency staff understand the importance of asking passengers whether they have any assistance needs. Agents can also provide the checklist to passengers and encourage them to complete it themselves.

Free pre-booking service

11. PRM passengers must not be charged for pre-booking assistance. If passengers book their assistance by telephone there should be a freephone number or call back option.

After the booking is made

Providing confirmation of booking

12. The DfT Code notes that it is good practice for tour operators and airlines to provide confirmation to passengers that their request for assistance has been received and to keep records to demonstrate that requests have been transmitted.
13. Taking steps to improve the confirmation information provided to passengers is likely to have an important benefit in promoting passenger confidence. It will also make it easier for the industry to audit problems that may have occurred in the way information was transferred.
14. PRM passengers who pre-book assistance should, if possible, be provided with written confirmation that their request has been recorded. At this stage it would also be helpful to provide details of where passengers should go on arrival at the airport. This would assist passengers to demonstrate that they had pre-notified and provide clarity on where to go on arrival at the airport.
15. Some operators already provide written confirmation to passengers of the type of assistance that has been booked and others are taking steps to do so. There are a range of documents that could be used to provide confirmation, including:
 - Itineraries
 - E-tickets
 - Online boarding passes
 - Specific emails or letters
 - Confirmation invoices.

Sending out reminders

16. Airlines, tour operators and travel agents send out a range of documents and reminders to passengers after the booking has been completed. This includes travel documents such as invoices and tickets and reminders to complete advanced passenger information, pay the balance of the holiday, check-in online etc. When sending out this information, businesses should consider including a short sentence about PRM assistance and a link to more information. The following wording is provided as an example:

If you have a disability or mobility problem and require assistance at the airport please contact us on xxxxx as soon as possible to discuss your requirements.

OR

If you have a disability or mobility problem and require assistance at the airport please click here for more information and to tell us about your requirements.

Airline frequent flyer schemes

17. Where an airline has an existing frequent flyer scheme and plans to update their system, they should provide the ability to record information on PRM assistance within the scheme.
18. Some airport service providers are recording the assistance needs of repeat travellers through that airport. This allows them to record more detailed information than the IATA codes provide for (see below) and ensures this process can provide a better customer service.

Transferring information

Coding assistance requirements

19. IATA has a set of codes to categorise the types of assistance required by passengers. The codes cover a broad range of assistance and Annex A sets out the range under each code. When assessing assistance requirements operators should check with the passenger that they have accurately recorded their needs. Operators may also wish to publish the information so that passengers can consider how they would categorise their own needs.

Transferring information between airlines

20. Where more than one flight is involved on a single ticket ('through tickets') – whether it is within one airline, within one alliance, between code share partners or between any other airlines – it is essential that assistance requirements are transferred between the airlines and airports involved in the journey. In particular to factor in any disruptions due to delays or similar.



Reviewing data

21. Airports are encouraged to review the data provided to them by airlines and tour operators and to share with them any areas of concern. This could include providing feedback on the level of pre-notification by individual operators and identifying any areas where the information about the required assistance has been incorrect.

Electric mobility aids

22. There is a British Healthcare Trade Association log that provides the requisite information on a number of electric mobility devices. This log is available at <http://bhta.net/bhta-advice/air-transportation.aspx>. If a device is not listed, the airport and airline will need details of size, weight, battery type where available and instructions for inhibiting circuits. Most scooters have a key which can be switched to the off position, removed and given to the passenger for safe keeping. However, most power chairs are switched on and off with a push-button which could be re-activated in flight by the inadvertent movement of baggage or cargo. Accordingly, further steps are required to inhibit the circuits of such devices, for example, disconnecting electric cable plugs or connectors, or inserting an inhibiting plug (such as the Airsafe™) into the charging socket of the device.



At the airport

Check-in

23. If a PRM passenger arrives at the departure airport and has not pre-notified, the check-in agent should update the airline records to note that assistance is required on board and at the destination airport. They should also ensure that information is recorded about the inbound journey and is transferred to both the airline and all airports involved in the journey. Training for check-in agents should include this requirement.
24. PRM service providers should also update inbound records to ensure they can better plan resources when the passenger arrives back in the UK.

Arrivals experience

25. On landing, there is often confusion around priorities for disembarking PRM passengers on arriving flights. Although ECAC guidance provides for service level agreements to have longer waiting times for non-notified passengers, in practice it can be difficult to provide different levels of service to notified and non-notified passengers. This can result in pre-notified passengers seeing little benefit in taking the time to book their assistance and limits the impact on changing the behaviour of passengers who do not pre-notify.
26. Developing a short leaflet or wallet sized card that can be handed out to non-notified passengers at all UK airports could assist in explaining the need to pre-notify and the reasons for a slightly longer wait. The following wording is an example that could be used and branded by operators as appropriate.

European legislation provides rights to passengers with a disability or reduced mobility due to age or injury (e.g. broken limbs). You should book this assistance at least 48 hours before your first flight departs and ideally when you make your booking. Your travel agent, tour operator or airline can help you to book.

At a UK airport, staff will provide assistance to or from your flight and through the airport. If you have not pre-booked, you can expect to wait slightly longer for this service. The airport will be able to help you once it has assisted passengers who have booked assistance.

Please remember to pre-book next time you fly. You can find out more information at www.caa.co.uk/prms or by asking your travel agent, tour operator or airline.

Annex A

Making the IATA codes passenger friendly

Airline systems transmit information about assistance needs by using four letter codes. Each code can cover quite a broad range of assistance and the following information sets out the different types of assistance that is covered. These can be used by travel agents in determining the correct codes and can be provided to consumers so they can check the code that has been used. In some cases more than one code may be required; for example if a wheelchair user also has a visual impairment.

PRMs taking electric mobility aids will also need to provide information on its size and weight and the type of battery installed. The PRM service provider (or whoever else the airport contracts) will also need to isolate the battery prior to loading in the hold.

Wheelchair passengers

WCHR

Passengers are able to ascend and descend steps and make own way to and from their cabin seat but they require a wheelchair or, if appropriate, a buggy for travelling to and from the aircraft and throughout the terminal. Information on whether the passenger has their own wheelchair, and if they will need it immediately on disembarkation, should also be provided.

WCHS

Passengers are not able to ascend or descend steps but can make their own way to and from their cabin seat. They may require assistance to move throughout the airport and to the aircraft doors. They may, however, require an airport wheelchair to reach the aircraft. If so, this should also be provided.

WCHC

Passengers must be carried up and down steps and to and from an aircraft cabin seat or may need a special cabin lifting chair. They may require an airport wheelchair and assistance to and from the aircraft and throughout the terminal. A buggy may not be appropriate and two agents may be required to assist. Passengers will often travel with their own wheelchair, often adapted to their specific needs and may need it immediately after disembarkation. If so, this should be provided.

Where a passenger will be travelling with an electric mobility aid (e.g. power chair or scooter) the appropriate IATA wheelchair code should be provided in addition to the assistance code. The IATA Airport Handling Manual details three codes for identifying electric mobility aids based upon the type of batteries installed. These are: WCBD – non-spillable batteries, WCBW – wet cell batteries, WCLB – lithium ion batteries.

Other passengers

BLND

Blind or visually impaired passenger. The passenger may require sighted assistance to move through airport terminals, to and from the aircraft and may need assistance up and down the aircraft steps. BLND passengers may be travelling with a service animal (e.g. recognised assistance dog/guide dog) – this should be specified by using the PETC code (see below). BLND passenger will require a cabin safety briefing.

DEAF

Deaf or hearing and/or speech impaired passenger. The passenger does not require wheelchair or assistance to move through the terminals unless specified. They may not be able to hear terminal announcements. A DEAF passenger may be travelling with a service hearing assistance animal – this should be specified by using the PETC code (see below). A DEAF passenger will require a cabin safety briefing.

DEAF/BLND

A deaf or blind (or visually and hearing/speech impaired) passenger who can only move around with the help of an accompanying person.

DPNA

A passenger with an intellectual disability who understands and can respond to the safety briefing and does not require a personal care attendant. The passenger may require assistance to move through the airport.

PETC (Pet in cabin)

A passenger travelling with a recognised/registered assistance dog or guide dog.