

News Release: 21 September 2007:

A Chair for the Air - DPTAC launches new standard for wheelchairs used on planes

The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) today launched its specification for the design of wheelchairs for use on board commercial passenger aircraft.

DPTAC Chair Neil Betteridge said:

“More passengers with mobility impairments than ever before are flying for business and pleasure. Too often there is inadequate provision for wheelchair assistance on board, and even where there is, passengers are confronted by a huge range of wheelchair designs that vary widely in comfort, safety and usability.

“The aviation industry and the government wanted us to develop a specification so that aircraft operators would know what features to ask wheelchair manufacturers to include in their on board wheelchairs.

“Any manufacturer that keeps to the DPTAC specification will know that they are providing a chair that offers a comfortable, dignified and safe mobility aid for the vast majority of passengers who would otherwise have difficulty moving around on board an aircraft.”

DPTAC Aviation Working Group Chair Keith Richards added “I would like to acknowledge the huge support and assistance that we have received from the aviation industry in developing and testing this specification with real disabled people in actual aircraft. Industry and disabled people have worked together to deliver a tool with the potential to make aviation more accessible to a growing number of people”

Neil Betteridge concluded:

“This specification is part of a larger picture. We are developing a specification for accessible onboard toilets and also working with the government and industry to update the Air Access Code and bring it into line with the new rights for disabled air passengers that come into force over the coming year.”

Notes for editors:

1. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) was set up under the Transport Act 1985 to advise the Government and industry on the transport needs of disabled people. The Committee has a maximum of 20 members (of whom at least half must be disabled people), representing a wide range of transport interests. Members are appointed by Ministers and are unpaid.
2. DPTAC is also about to publish an accessibility specification for toilets on aircraft. The onboard wheelchair specification will dovetail with this, in order to ensure a safe and comfortable means for mobility impaired passengers to transfer within the aircraft.
3. DPTAC specifications are not statutory requirements. Their purpose is to promote best practice in meeting the needs of disabled people. Regulators, providers and operators, such as airlines, will decide whether to adopt the DPTAC specification for themselves. Experience with DPTAC specifications for other modes of transport strongly suggests that there will be progressive introduction of DPTAC specifications as a basis for tendering, resulting in vehicles and aircraft offering both improved access and better travelling conditions.
4. It is now unlawful for transport operators to discriminate against disabled people using land based transport, and operators also need to make reasonable adjustments to their services so that disabled people can use them. DPTAC has asked Ministers to use the powers Parliament has given them to lift the exemption that air travel currently has from this provision.
5. DPTAC's specification "*Design Specification for On-Board Wheelchair for Commercial Passenger Aircraft*" is available on the DPTAC website at: **[Insert web link]** Hard copies and copies in other formats are available from PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7NB, tel 0870 1226 236, fax 0870 1226 237, quoting reference DPTAC 13.

6. For further information on DPTAC's aviation work please contact:

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