



COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM

Item No. 7a

BRIEFING ITEM

Date of Meeting October 22, 2019

DATE: September 12, 2019

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Heather Karch, Aviation Facilities and Infrastructure Manager - Architecture
Jeffrey Brown, Director of Aviation Facilities and Capital Programs

SUBJECT: Accessibility Improvements at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this briefing is to update the Commission on the accessibility improvements progress at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (STIA) since the Open Doors Organization (ODO) assessment was completed. In response to the Commission direction for Sea-Tac to be the most accessible airport in the United States, ODO a non-profit organization focused on improving accessible travel and tourism, was hired to evaluate STIA and produced the 2017 Open Doors Organization Accessibility Assessment Report.

The report included multiple recommendations that were prioritized by importance and proposed time frame. Aviation Facilities and Infrastructure (F&I) is responsible for advancing the implementation of the recommendations, as well as others identified internally, and developed a tracking system that aligns each item with the department responsible. Aviation staff has made progress on multiple recommendations in the subsequent 18 months. The progress has been summarized into five categories: (1) passenger amenities, (2) passenger information, (3) improved infrastructure, (4) staff training, and (5) engagement. The passenger experience has improved in many ways: through additional amenities such as Aira¹; improved content through the website, app, and signage for within STIA; improved accessibility within existing facilities at curbside and garage; additional accessibility focused customer service training; and increased engagement for accessibility initiatives through stakeholder meetings and conferences. In the next two years Aviation will continue to expand passenger amenities, provide additional information for passengers, expand accessible infrastructure, increase our number of Airport Volunteers, and expand community engagement. Progress to date is just the start of our ongoing commitment toward improving the accessibility of STIA for all passengers.

¹ **Aira** is an **app**-based service for individuals who are blind or have low vision. Powered by AT&T, **Aira** is a service that instantly connects individuals to highly trained, remotely-located agents who provide visual information on demand.

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ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

ODO evaluated the accessibility of the facility and programs at STIA. The development of the report included multiple stakeholder meetings and interviews with Port of Seattle Aviation staff, community stakeholder meetings, and multiple on-site physical evaluations of the facility. The resulting STIA Accessibility Assessment Report provided over 100 recommendations for accessibility improvements that were prioritized as high or low and then further subdivided into a two, five, or ten-year timeframe. A detailed tracking system was developed to identify the department responsible for implementation, priority, and timeframe to track progress. Meetings were conducted with multiple departments over the past 18 months to inform and develop strategies for how to address recommendations in the report. The progress has been summarized into five categories: (1) passenger amenities, (2) passenger information, (3) infrastructure updates, (4) staff training, and (5) engagement. Progress in any of these categories helps improve the experience of all passengers, not just those with disabilities, and brings STIA one step closer to becoming the most accessible airport in the United States.

Passenger Amenities:

Passenger amenities are services that STIA provides to improve the customer experience that are specifically geared towards the needs of the disabled community but often benefit all passengers. Current passenger amenities include:

- (1) Aira is an app-based amenity that can be used in conjunction with custom glasses that allows people with vision loss to have real time support from an Aira representative who can “see”, either through the glasses or through the phone camera, where the person is going. Innovation team led the effort to offer complementary Aira service for passengers to use while at STIA.
- (2) Hearing loop technology helps amplify sound for people with T-coil hearing aids, which can be helpful in areas where there is background noise, such as passenger seating and check-in areas. The Innovation team is currently piloting the use of portable hearing loops at three Alaska Airlines service counters. In October there will be additional portable hearing loops located in the following locations: Jet Blue ticket counter, Gate B15 seating area, Delta Service Centers on A and B Concourses, Delta accessible ticket counter, Airport Information Center by Checkpoint 4, Central Terminal information kiosk, and Baggage Claim information kiosk by carousel 15.
- (3) Sunflower lanyards were initially pioneered by Gatwick International Airport to help self-identify passengers and staff that have hidden disabilities, such as brain trauma or autism. F&I and Customer Service are promoting use of sunflower lanyards at STIA, the first US Airport to introduce the concept. We will be distributing lanyards to interested passengers as part of a press conference and Airport Volunteers or Pathfinders will have them for future distribution. Sunflower lanyards will be included in the Accessibility Awareness campaign in October. Additional engagement with staff and passengers will be needed to introduce this concept.
- (4) Customer Service team recently hired an Airport Volunteer Coordinator dedicated to recruiting, training, and expanding volunteers at STIA. The Volunteer Coordinator is also responsible for managing and expanding the therapy dog program and

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coordinating frontline summer interns. The goal is to increase the number of volunteers by 20% by end of Q4 2019.

- (5) Customer Service team has options for passengers to communicate directly with an airport customer service representative during business hours through social media via Seattle-Tacoma International Airport Facebook messenger app or Twitter.
- (6) Customer Service Frontline staff are equipped with electronic tablets with Language Link app to provide additional communication options for passengers. Language Link provides real time translation services for multiple languages with a live person including sign language.
- (7) Airport Dining and Retail tenants have recently been directed to have at least one copy of their menu available in braille. Airport Dining and Retail tenants have also been asked to keep closed captioning on for televisions within their space to accommodate passengers with hearing loss.

Passenger Information:

Passenger information is related to the information STIA makes available to all passengers through website, apps, or print resources. Current passenger information available includes:

- (1) Improved quantity and quality of website content related to accessibility at STIA and is available within two clicks from the Port of Seattle homepage. A dedicated email address was created for the ADA Coordinator, available on the website, for passengers who have accessibility related concerns and a grievance form has been added to comply with Title II requirements.
- (2) STIA mobile app development includes multiple features related to accessibility including the option to choose an accessible path for wayfinding that navigates to elevators versus escalators.
- (3) Signage at elevator banks in baggage claim will be updated to include additional information regarding passenger assistance services.
- (4) To assist passengers needing wheelchair assistance, information is included in a rotating spot on the digital screens located above baggage claim carousels. We are in the process of updating directories to reference the Port of Seattle Accessibility website that provides additional information on how to arrange for wheelchair service with the airlines.
- (5) In October 2019 Port of Seattle is launching an Accessibility Awareness Campaign within STIA with promotional signage to highlight current initiatives, promote the Wings for Autism Event with Alaska Airlines, promote the sunflower lanyards, and a press conference with representatives from the local disability community.
- (6) Moving forward with the support of External Relations, there will be ongoing efforts to promote important accessibility services at STIA to increase awareness and usage of resources and amenities. The airport accessibility communications plan includes systematic management of the Port webpages dedicated to accessibility and all proactive moments will be amplified on social media and in the public e-newsletter, Connections.

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Infrastructure Updates:

Infrastructure updates are related to the physical infrastructure systems of STIA, including signage, that is available for all passengers. Current infrastructure improvements include:

- (1) Upper and lower curbs are being updated to meet current code requirements for accessibility including additional curb cuts or eliminating the curb altogether. Estimated completion is expected in 2021. Signage has been added at baggage claim level to direct passengers to the available accessible entrances.
- (2) Garage elevator vestibules and lobbies are being updated to improve accessibility and additional identification graphics will be added.
- (3) New lighting standards are being developed and will address concerns of fluorescent lighting and uneven lighting levels.
- (4) Signage master plan will address multiple recommendations such as appropriate use of floor graphics, walking times, and location and height of the Flight Information Display System and directories throughout the terminal and garage.
- (5) Unlawful Discrimination Signage is being updated throughout STIA with current contact information for Port Counsel and ADA Coordinator.
- (6) Recently renovated North Satellite includes an adult changing table in the family restroom. Additional adult changing tables are included in future projects such as IAF and the restroom renovation project.
- (7) Expansion of the Employee Resource Center will displace the existing meditation room. Updated design and location for meditation space will also include a dedicated sensory space to accommodate passengers with sensory processing issues or autism.
- (8) The need for additional seating throughout STIA is being addressed through new purchases or by repositioning seating from areas that are under construction. New gate seating has power integrated into seating assembly.
- (9) North Satellite phase 1 and Concourse D Annex installed Flight Information Display Screens, FIDS, at lower height and incorporated additional visual paging capabilities within the FIDS screen bank.
- (10) Emergency Preparedness has purchased additional evacuation chairs for stairwells.
- (11) Updated areas of rescue assistance signage throughout STIA.
- (12) Project has been proposed to update baggage claim level ramps to lower curbside to meet current code requirements.

Staff Training:

Staff training addresses our internal efforts to provide accessibility specific training to Port of Seattle airport staff and non-Port of Seattle personnel. Current training initiatives include:

- (1) WE ARE SEA training has a dedicated section related to passengers with disabilities including a handout specifically focused on appropriate communication skills and best practices.

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- (2) Training department is currently developing a new online training course for all airport employees that will focus on customer service and awareness related to passengers with disabilities.
- (3) Multiple meetings have been conducted with Port of Seattle staff to review recommendations in the report and strategize next steps towards implementation.
- (4) In 2019 F&I staff participated in a three-day workshop - Accommodating Passengers with Disabilities, led by Open Doors Organization, to increase knowledge of airport related accessibility regulations and requirements.
- (5) Emergency Preparedness (EP) has developed an Airport Mass Evacuation Plan that is incorporated into the Learning Management System for badged employees. EP is also actively developing a mass notification system for STIA, IPAWS, to be able to quickly alert people of an emergency at STIA through mobile phone alerts.

Engagement:

Engagement includes our efforts to engage with both the professional and passenger focused community to increase our overall knowledge, interact with stakeholders, and promote STIA's current efforts. Recent engagement includes:

- (1) In 2018 F&I Staff were invited to participate in a panel at the Universal Access in Airports Conference to discuss the improvements made to the website. The conference was an opportunity for staff to connect with other STIA personnel, learn about other accessibility initiatives, and promote the efforts underway at STIA.
- (2) In 2019 F&I Staff were invited to participate in a panel at the FAA Civil Rights Conference to discuss the accessibility services that STIA provides. During the conference STIA was referenced several times by other attendees as a leading airport for accessibility.
- (3) On July 25, 2019 F&I, Innovation, and External Relations staff met with Larry Watkinson, WASHDOT ADA Coordinator and person with vision loss, to participate in a mock walk through from check-in to a gate using Aira. Larry used Aira through his phone app along with his vision assistance dog.
- (4) In May 2019 F&I and Customer Service organized the first meeting of the Seattle-Tacoma Accessibility Advisory Committee (STAAC) which included stakeholders who had participated in the original Open Doors stakeholder meetings in 2017. The purpose was to partner with external stakeholders to increase communications about accessibility issues.
- (5)

Conclusion and Next Steps:

Aviation staff are committed to making STIA the most accessible airport in the country with a coordinated interdepartmental effort over multiple years. The progress we have made to date has already improved the reputation of STIA within the aviation community as an organization committed to improving accessibility. The goal is an ongoing commitment to accessibility, integrated within all the efforts and projects to date and in the future. While many efforts can

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be implemented quickly such as information updates on the website, other projects such as major infrastructure changes or major signage changes require significant investment and time to complete. In 2020 F&I will hire a full time ADA Coordinator to address the Title II requirements at our Aviation and Maritime Facilities. The responsibilities of the ADA Coordinator, both administrative and project management related, have increased as we implement more recommendations, receive additional passenger feedback, and address Title II requirements. Multiple initiatives will continue to move forward in 2020, including but not limited to the following. F&I will continue to address the recommendations in the report and perform a comprehensive self-audit to identify new opportunities for improvements needed as STIA continues to expand and redevelop its facilities. The training and development team, in coordination with F&I, will continue to develop accessibility focused online and in person training. The STIA app and website are ongoing projects, being updated regularly as new information is available or to address new needs. The website will be evaluated for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) v 2.1 compliance and text maps will be added to improve wayfinding for passengers with vision loss. In partnership with External relationships we will identify new, deeper opportunities for community engagement with ADA advocacy groups and disabilities organizations as well as accessibility travel sites and local destination marketing organizations and public agencies. Improving the customer service experience for passengers with disabilities will improve the experience for all whether it is through thoughtful interaction with an Airport Volunteer or providing relevant, easy to access information on the STIA app and website. A focus on accessibility is a commitment to ensuring a world class experience for all passengers and staff.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING

- (1) Presentation slides

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

None