

2020 Accessibility Improvements at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport

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Overview

- Guiding Principles
- Background and Progress
- Facility Updates
- Customer Service Updates
- Engagement Updates
- Conclusion



Guiding Principles

- **Goals:**
 - SEA most accessible airport in the USA
 - Exceed accessibility requirements
 - Innovative leader in aviation accessibility
 - Align with SEA brand promise of an elevated customer experience
- **Areas of Focus**
 - Facilities
 - Customer Service
 - Engagement



Accessibility is Continuous Improvement Process

- 2018 ODO Report issued
- Inter-departmental effort led by F&I and Customer Service
- Ongoing discussions with SEA Accessibility Advisory Committee to prioritize remaining items
- **65% of recommendations are complete or in progress (70/108)**



FACILITY UPDATES

SEA's First Sensory Room

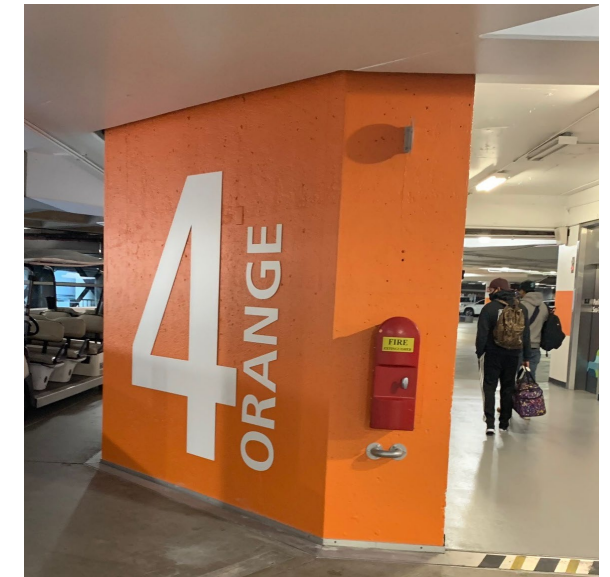
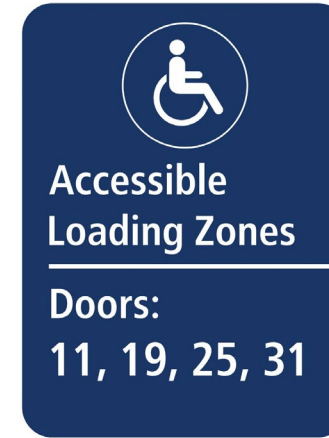
- Opening February 2021
- Provides restorative space for passengers with autism and sensory processing disorders
- Design process included expanded stakeholder involvement



Improved Signage in Terminal



Improved Signage at Garage and Curbside

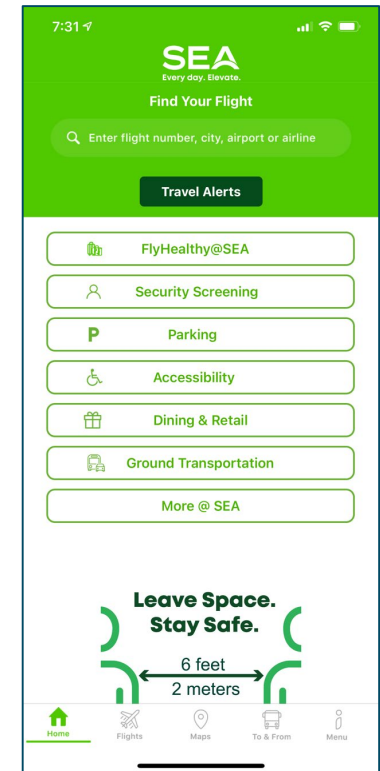
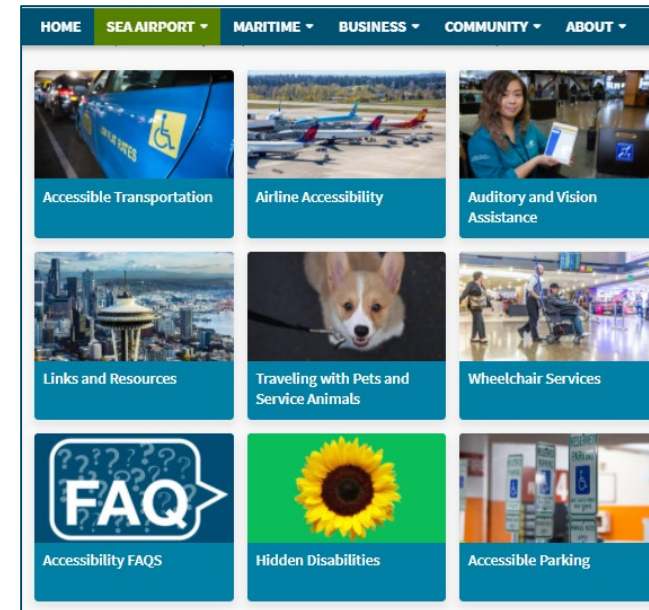




CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATES

Digital Communication Strategies

- **Website + SEA App Enhancements**
 - Fine-tuned language
 - Expanded FAQs/Helpful Links
 - Highlighting Accessibility
 - Social story
- **Text for Assistance Feature Added**
 - Customer Service staff can communicate via live chat during business hours



SEA's First Social Story

- **COVID-19 Social Story**
 - Pre-travel resources were needed to better serve the autism community
 - Arc of King County + Washington Autism Alliance & Advocacy stakeholders
 - Includes current photos, simple sentences that explain travel journey, sensory icons, COVID-19 signage, and more



Hidden Disabilities Leader

- **Sunflower Lanyard Growth**
 - SEA 1st in US to offer
 - Discreet signal to staff of a passenger's hidden disability
 - 2020 national growth and increased momentum
 - SEA champion of program within aviation community



Map from [Hidden Disabilities website](#)

Training Staff for Success

- **Customer Service Standards Manual Created**
 - Brings standards across SEA into 1 document
 - Accessibility integrated
- **Expanded Training**
 - *Excellent Customer Service for People with Disabilities* e-learning
- **Volunteer Program Enhancements**
 - Program adjustments to better meet the needs of passengers with disabilities





ENGAGEMENT UPDATES

SEA Accessibility Advisory Committee

- Launched a revised Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Constructive platform for discussing accessibility related initiatives, challenges, and opportunities
- Quarterly meetings with additional project specific meetings or tours



Image Source: <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/worksource-dekalb-host-disability-awareness-forum-recruiting-event/pBUIZxtL269yeX4HQqERN/>

Engaging with a Wider Audience



Lanyards Heighten Awareness of Passengers With Hidden Disabilities BY KATHIE NELSON

When customers roll up to a ticketing counter in a wheelchair or navigate through the concourse taking a white cane on the floor, airport employees know that they might want extra assistance. It's far more difficult, however, to identify customers with conditions that are less apparent such as hearing difficulties, mental health issues or learning impairments.

To help remedy this situation, a growing number of U.S. airports offer customers with hidden disabilities specially designed lanyards that let staff know they may need additional support and consideration. Bright green lanyards splashed with yellow polka dots are currently being used by a handful of airports coast-to-coast to discreetly notify personnel that the person wearing the lanyard or someone in their traveling party has a condition that might not be obvious. And the movement is gaining momentum.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 13% of the U.S. population is currently affected by "invisible" developmental disabilities ranging from autism spectrum disorder to rheumatoid arthritis.

Naturally, the statistics vary by region. Heather Karch, architecture manager for the facilities and infrastructure group at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA), notes that the Pacific Northwest has a higher rate of autism and sensory processing disorders than other areas of the country.

"Based on personal accounts I've heard from people—both in the medical profession and just socially—passengers with hidden disabilities often get very dirty looks and experience subtle discrimination because that disability isn't visible. And they get a lot of negativity when they do ask for more help," Karch relates. "Or, if their child with autism is having a complete meltdown, other people might think that that child is just misbehaving, when really there's a lot more happening."

With this demographic in mind, SEA became the first U.S. airport to begin using sunflower lanyards to help individuals with hidden disabilities have a better experience at the airport. The program, launched last October, has been very well received, receiving praise from staff and customers alike.

SEA Sets the Standard

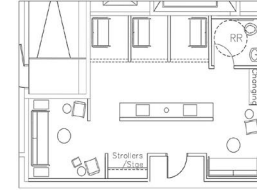
The sunflower lanyard program debuted at London's Gatwick Airport in 2016, and has since been adopted by 2 million businesses and individuals worldwide.

"We looked to the U.K. experience and saw how successful it had been throughout all of the U.K. and into Europe, and we just went with the positive attitude that it would be accepted here in the U.S. as well," says Karch.

She reports that it took little seed money to get the sunflower lanyard program up and running at SEA. In 2019, the airport purchased 1,200 lanyards for about \$300. Based on the current rate of distribution, Karch expects SEA's initial supply to last about one year, or possibly longer. She notes that the airport's upgraded standard lanyards with hanging tags, so nonverbal customers can write their name and/or disability on the back if they choose.

To introduce the new visual aid, Port of Seattle Aviation Director Lance Lytle sent an email with information about the lanyards to SEA staff. Educational meetings followed for front-line personnel—including airline, TSA and airport staff—to include the passengers' customer service/operational needs team

Nursing Suite



Additional Amenities:

- Decorative/Dimmable Lighting
- Sink and bottle cleaning
- Calming Artwork/Decor
- Radio/Calm Music
- Comfortable seating
- Baby Changing Table
- Occupancy indicators



Image courtesy of Johanna Orster



For more information on Hackathon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMs273QIQfQ> & <https://youtu.be/EMasruj6NqE>

Conclusion and Next Steps

- Ongoing commitment to achieving most accessible airport experience in USA
- Looking forward in 2021:
 - Opening Sensory Room
 - Launching new staff training
 - Enhancing digital communication content and access
 - Further engaging with SEA Accessibility Advisory Committee

