



**COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

Item No. 10d

ACTION ITEM

Date of Meeting November 14, 2023

DATE: October 9, 2023

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Heather Karch, Aviation Facilities and Infrastructure Manager - Architecture
Chelsea Rodriguez, Airport Volunteers & Customer Accessibility Manager
Pete Mills, Commission Strategic Advisor

SUBJECT: SEA Access Program 2023 Update and Order No. 2023-14

Amount of this request: \$0

Total estimated project cost: \$0

ACTION REQUESTED

The purpose of this item is to update the Port of Seattle Commission on the Accessibility Program at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA). Since the last Commission update, the travel industry has rebounded to pre-COVID levels. This summer was one of our busiest ever, with 15.3 million passengers, almost reaching 2019 numbers. SEA's busiest day ever was recorded on July 24 with 198,000 departing, arriving, and connecting travelers. During this peak period, SEA has accelerated our efforts to better serve travelers with disabilities. These improvements can be grouped in the interrelated categories of Facility, Customer Service, and Engagement.

Commission adoption of an Order is requested to provide policy direction on the Accessibility Program at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA). This order directs the executive to formally execute policy and action that the Port and our staff have been informally implementing over decades and codifies accessibility for the Port.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEA has a robust capital development program, Upgrade SEA, that includes updating existing facilities, building new large-scale projects, and signage updates throughout the facility. Recent construction improvements include improved accessibility at upper and lower curbside, new restroom amenities, new service animal relief area (SARA), and updates to existing facilities to meet new standards. Projects currently in design and construction include accessibility related amenities such as additional Sensory Rooms, Nursing Rooms, Adult Changing Tables, and Service Animal Relief Areas. The signage and wayfinding team supports passengers by updating signage to address ongoing operational and/or construction changes as well as researching innovative digital solutions to address disability related passenger needs that will benefit

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everyone. These improvements, along with other projects within Upgrade SEA, will benefit our region for many years and significantly improve the airport experience for travelers with disabilities. Reducing barriers along the passenger journey benefits all travelers, not just those with disabilities.

SEA has also invested in our customer service to better serve travelers with disabilities. Highlights include partnering with disability organizations and businesses to lead customer service trainings; creating physical materials that promote SEA's accessibility program for frontline customer service use; updating our website in accordance with accessibility standards; expanding the impact of our frontline volunteer program – including increasing SEA Pups Animal Therapy team coverage; and investing in technology resources that will serve a broader audience.

The third pillar of SEA's Accessibility program is engagement. This includes engagement within the larger disability community and the aviation industry. SEA is known as a leader in accessibility among our peers. This is reflected in staff invitations to present at national and international conferences, including Passenger Terminal Expo, IATA, and the Airport Customer Experience Symposium. SEA has positively impacted the aviation industry through tirelessly advocating for accessibility.

We recognize that forming authentic relationships with the disability community and travelers with disabilities is paramount as we strive to take a 'nothing about us without us' approach. Strategies we employ to ensure this engagement spirit is actualized include regularly meeting with disability community members and working with our SEA AAC (SEA Accessibility Advisory Committee) to provide information and receive honest feedback. Travelers and community members consistently report they are unaware of the breadth of SEA's accessibility offerings.

To help improve awareness, and aligned with other comparable airport programs, we developed a brand identity for SEA's Accessibility Program. The program is now known as *SEA Access*, which fits under the larger SEA brand umbrella. Our website, public-facing information materials, signage, and more will soon be updated to reflect this. With the support of our External Relations team, we plan to widely promote *SEA Access* both within the airport and in our community. SEA's brand promise is to create an elevated travel experience, and this is a promise to all travelers, including people with disabilities. We can achieve this promise through taking a holistic perspective towards our Facilities, Customer Service, and Engagement.

FACILITY UPDATES

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

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Exit Ramps and Curbside

The Curbside Accessibility and Safety Project completed major accessibility improvements to the upper and lower drive by adding wheelchair loading zones every 100' on the upper drive and a zero-curb condition at the lower drive. The existing ramp access between baggage claim and lower drive will be updated as part of the SEA Gateway project. The updated ramps are designed to provide a shallower slope with landings at the top and bottom. The new ramps are highlighted with a more prominent entrance and updated signage for improved wayfinding. Implementing these types of features helps ensure our drives are accessible for travelers who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids and the zero curb embodies universal design principles.

Sensory Room

C Concourse Expansion project will include a Sensory Room, adjacent to an interfaith prayer and meditation room. Based on feedback from the SEA AAC we located a family restroom including an adult changing table, adjacent to the Sensory Room. This second Sensory Room will expand available options for passengers during the travel journey.

Service Animal Relief Areas (SARA)

In 2023 a new landside SARA was opened outside of door 00 at the south end of the lower drive to support our passengers traveling with service animals. Looking ahead, phase 5 of the Restroom Renovation project will build a SARA in D Concourse and C Concourse Expansion will build a SARA. We continue to look for opportunities to deliver fully plumbed SARAs throughout the airport.

Adult and Baby Changing Tables

Adult changing tables are a relatively new amenity provided at SEA and fulfil an important need for a wide range of passengers that require additional restroom support. Significant progress has been made in the number of adult changing tables being integrated into the terminal. IAF, which opened in 2022, added an adult changing table at the baggage claim level. C Concourse Expansion will provide adult changing tables on Concourse level and level 3. Phase 5 of the Restroom Renovation Project will add adult changing tables in both C and D Concourses.

In 2023 an additional six baby changing tables were installed in the IAF to provide appropriate amenities to support families with young children.

All Gender Restroom

SEA opened our first multi-user all gender restroom in 2023 in D Concourse as part of phase 4 of the Restroom Renovation Project. The restroom features ten fully enclosed individual stalls, two wheelchair accessible stalls, a separate urinal room, baby changing tables, and shared handwashing station. The objective was to create a restroom facility that is inclusive and accessible to people of all identities, abilities, and circumstances. It provides an additional option for people with disabilities to always stay with their caregiver or family member.

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The Airline Realignment project will include SEA's first ramp level multi-user all gender restroom for staff use. Restroom Renovation Project, C Concourse Expansion, and SEA Gateway include multi-user gendered restrooms designed to be able to easily convert to multi-user all gender restrooms in the future.

Nursing Rooms

Nursing rooms and suites provide a dedicated space for families with young children to nurse or pump. We currently have multiple types of nursing spaces throughout the airport with a goal of more integrated spaces versus modular options. IAF added a nursing room at mezzanine level. The existing Nursing Suite adjacent to the Children's Play Area on A Concourse will be refreshed with new furniture and interior wall finishes. The Restroom Renovation Project, C Concourse Expansion, and SEA Gateway projects, include additional nursing spaces.

Facility Self-Audits

In 2022 the Port conducted self-led audits of the main terminal, baggage claim, and Concourses A-D, and level 3 and 4 of the parking garage that included external stakeholders from the disability community. In 2023, the remainder of the parking garage levels will be audited. Conducting periodic facility audits are part of the ADA regulatory requirements and support additional engagement with the community. In response to these audits, multiple small projects have been identified. Examples are adding cane rail detection at select drinking fountains and adding contrasting color to stair nosing to improve visibility for circulation.

Aviation Facility Program Manager

A full-time position was created in 2023 to fulfill the responsibilities of the ADA Coordinator Role for SEA as well as support Maritime and EDD divisions of the Port of Seattle. Creation of this position reflects the commitment to improving accessibility by Port of Seattle leadership. This position will be a dedicated resource for the Port of Seattle to build upon the precedent of innovation and collaboration in the aviation industry.

Signage

Signage is paramount to a successful passenger experience. The sign department supported accessibility related improvements over the past year throughout the passenger experience from garage to the hold room. The signage team is always adapting to ongoing construction impacts. The in-house design and installation expertise allows for a customized response to our operational and facility needs. Moving forward the signage team continues to integrate digital technology into the wayfinding program and has started research and project planning for Talk-to-Text translations in gate hold rooms as well as improved sign standards development focusing on accessibility within signage and wayfinding. Below are examples of accomplishments:

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1. Garage:

- a. Designed and installed new accessible EV parking signage at select dedicated stalls.
- b. Improved automated parking guidance system digital signage to direct passengers to accessible parking stalls.
- c. Improved signage at the Link Light Rail Shuttle to highlight passengers with mobility challenges take priority.

2. Terminal:

- a. Ongoing temporary wayfinding updates to address elevators and accessible routes around construction barricades.
- b. Designed and installed improved accessible loading zone signs on the upper and lower drives.
- c. Created new adult changing table symbol to support communication to non-English speaking passengers.
- d. Designed and installed improved signage for the wheelchair waiting areas highlighting the passenger process for engagement with airlines for wheelchair access.
- e. Improved signage for employee accessible entrances at the Airport Office Building and IAF.
- f. Developed digital graphics highlighting wheelchair lanes and sunflower lanyard in the IAF.

CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATES

Customer Service updates are related to the service travelers receive from our frontline staff, as well as the resources SEA provides to better serve the public. Customer Service highlights include:

Programs + Services

We created a physical Accessibility brochure to better inform the public of our suite of resources. This brochure is available at our information desks and within our Sensory Room. We provide Braille versions with tactile maps for travelers who are blind. The brochure includes an airport accessibility map, information on technology resources, and details on how to connect with SEA's Customer Care team. Plans are in the works for an updated version that is available at expanded locations inside and outside SEA. Examples of SEA programs and services highlighted within the brochure include:

- (1) **American Sign Language:** The SEA Pathfinder Customer Service team have tablets with access to live American Sign Language interpreters, and 240+ other languages. The service is known as Video Remote Interpretation within the Deaf community. Pathfinders are located at key locations throughout the terminal, including SEA's two main Information desks.

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- (2) **Sunflower Lanyard program:** SEA was the first U.S. airport to participate in the Sunflower Lanyard program, which started at Gatwick Airport. The Sunflower Lanyard discreetly signals to airport staff that the wearer may need additional support, guidance, or patience. The optional lanyards are free to travelers with invisible disabilities and available at our information desk. The lanyards are packaged in kits that include a bookmark to explain the program and SEA sticker. The lanyard is now recognized at 200+ airports, 100+ within the United States.
- (3) **TSA Cares:** The Customer Service team is increasing collaboration with TSA at the national and local level through the National TSA Disabilities Working Group. The SEA website has been updated to better inform passengers about the TSA Cares program.

Staff Training

Investing in frontline staff who are the face of SEA to our customers is a cornerstone of SEA's accessibility approach. This past year, SEA's customer service department hosted Deaf-Friendly CONSULTING and The Arc of King County to lead customer service workshops open to all SEA airport workers. The Deaf-Friendly workshops focused on learning about Deaf people, Deaf culture, and barriers frequently experienced as travelers. The workshop was led by Deaf trainers with ASL interpreters and was widely well-received. An additional workshop is scheduled for this fall. The Arc of King County workshops were led by trainers with developmental disabilities and reviewed foundational information about developmental disabilities, models of disability, and strategies for better serving travelers with developmental disabilities. Additional workshops are scheduled this fall. SEA will continue the approach of working with disability owned business and disability non-profits to lead customer service focused workshops.

Volunteer Program

An important arm of SEA's Customer Service staffing model is our community of volunteers. Volunteers are focused on enhancing the customer experience, extending the reach of our Pathfinder customer service employees, and acting as ambassadors for both the airport and region. Supporting travelers with disabilities is a considerable program focus. Whether it is giving directions to a Service Animal Relief Area, distributing a Sunflower Lanyard, or helping secure a wheelchair, our volunteers are here to help.

The SEA Pups Animal Therapy Program is a dedicated team within the Volunteer Program. Our animal therapy dog volunteers, and their human handlers, focus on putting travelers at ease by offering pets, cuddles, and a chance to destress. All SEA Pups are required to be rated 'complex' through Pet Partners, a national animal therapy organization. We know from traveler feedback that the SEA Pups can bring remarkable comfort to all travelers, in particular travelers with disabilities. Considerable efforts are underway to expand both the SEA Pups and general Volunteer Program. In 2023, our volunteer hours have increased approximately 35% compared to 2022. We strive for a similar increase in 2024.

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Customer Communication

We are providing subject matter expertise, and facilitating accessibility community feedback, on the Port's website accessibility update. This effort, led by External Relations, is making improvements in the areas not currently meeting the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). To support this effort, pertinent staff have been trained on how to produce accessible web content, image tags and headlines have been optimized to support assistive device users, and there are plans to update the website's color palette to maximize accessibility and contrast. This work is ongoing as standards continue to evolve. We recognize that the website is a valuable pre-travel resource, and it needs to be accessible to all.

Later this year, airport customers will gain access to a new tool called *SEA Customer Care Connect* while in the terminal. This "facetime" style feature enables a customer to use their smart phone with a QR code that connects them to a live customer service staff member. A SEA call center has been established to enable both video and phone calls to be handled in a quiet environment. The primary goal is to establish a single SEA information number - rather than a separate information number for services like parking - and continually enhanced video capabilities.

These broadened customer service phone and video capabilities will augment the in-person assistance offered by Pathfinders and Volunteers and will include voice-to-text capabilities with real-time language translations of up to 60 languages. *SEA Customer Care Connect* also includes a texting feature, which would be beneficial to travelers who are Deaf or who cannot speak. We also respond to customer inquiries regarding accessibility issues through direct customer service chat, through social media, responding to e-mails and assisting with formal ADA complaints.

Future planned enhancements (2025 budget permitting) will include adding physical video kiosks inside SEA. Kiosks will be designed to accommodate SEA customers with disabilities. They will be equipped to engage with customers who have varying needs, using the newest tools and techniques that the disability community would expect from SEA.

ENGAGEMENT UPDATES

Engagement includes our work to engage with the disability community, broaden awareness about SEA's Accessibility work, and our Aviation industry advocacy efforts. Recent engagement highlights include:

Disability Community Engagement

A cornerstone of SEA's engagement efforts is the SEA Accessibility Advisory Committee. The advisory committee is composed of a cross-section of disability community members, airline partners, and Port of Seattle staff. We have been fortunate to engage with both local and national disability organizations, including: the Open Doors Organization, NW ADA Center, Paralyzed Veterans of America – WA Chapter, MS Society – WA Chapter, The Arc of King County

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and more. Committee members provide important advice on customer service and facilities related topics – all to improve the experience for travelers with disabilities.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is just one vehicle for disability engagement. SEA staff regularly meet with disability community members, disability organizations, and participate on committees, such as the TSA Disability Working Group and WA Community of Practice network for ADA Coordinators. These meetings and engagement efforts are an opportunity to hear from disability community members about their travel experience, as well as to influence the aviation industry.

Aviation Industry Advocacy

Staff regularly participate on panels related to aviation accessibility. Recent examples include panel participation at the 2022 Universal Access in Aviation Conference, 2023 Passenger Terminal Expo *Neurodiversity Design and Airports* presentation, and the Customer Experience Symposium *Walking the Talk: Accessibility at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport* presentation. We will each be participating on separate accessibility-related research panels for the Airport Cooperative Research Program. These presentations and panels are an opportunity to both share more about accessibility initiatives at SEA, to influence the aviation industry, and to further develop our relationships with other airports and organizations in the field. While the aviation industry is very competitive, the accessibility advocacy community is very collaborative. SEA is often approached for guidance by other organizations just as we learn from and are inspired by others.

Community Promotions + Outreach

In partnership with the External Relations department, there have been increased efforts to better inform the public of SEA accessibility amenities through blogs, terminal overhead announcements, and Checking-in videos. This year, SEA accessibility was also a key pillar of the Port's paid advertising efforts. These ads were on local television, social media (Instagram, Facebook), digital banner ads and YouTube with a goal of continuing to increase awareness of accessible services at SEA. Finalizing the *SEA Access* program name and logo was an important milestone. It provides a more cohesive look and feel as well as a renewed energy to expand the promotion of the program.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

SEA is entering an exciting, but challenging period. Travel volumes have rebounded to pre-COVID levels, and the airport is in the midst of multiple complex construction projects. During this period of transition, we will continue the holistic approach of focusing on our facilities, customer service, and engagement to advance accessibility. We remain committed to improving the status quo and striving to be innovative leaders. In 2024 there are opportunities to share the *SEA Access* program both within the airport and the broader community.

We are happy to announce that the Open Doors Organization has chosen to host the 2024 *Universal Access in Aviation* conference in Seattle. SEA and Alaska Airlines are major sponsors

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of this industry event, which will be a tremendous opportunity to highlight the *SEA Access* program to the larger disability community. As we continue to engage with the disability community, the design community, and the larger aviation industry we are providing an example for others and learning along the way. Each initiative provides the opportunity to expand our knowledge and perspective of this rapidly evolving field.

ATTACHMENTS

- (1) Order No. 2023-14
- (2) Presentation slides

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

March 22, 2022 – SEA Accessibility Program 2022 Update

January 26, 2021 – 2020 Accessibility Improvements at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport

October 22, 2019 – Accessibility Improvements at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport