

Airlines

I have faced many issues when trying to travel with an approved assistance dog.

When I had proved it was a genuine assistance dog allowed to travel, I was told I had to pay a fee for a seat space for it. When I asked to speak to a manager I was told that was not possible. When I told them that was illegal, she said she needed to speak to someone else. She came back and said on this ONE OFF occasion we will waive the fee, but you will in future need to pay a fee to take your assistance dog on board our flights. She had raised her voice when she said the words 'one off'. I did lodge a complaint online and was given a written apology, but it should not have occurred.

On another occasion I thought since I had been formally booked into seats for both me and the dog it was all fine and when I checked them carefully 4 hours before the flight I discovered they had issued the dog a seat space some 15 rows back from me!! I thought the dog was for me, not another passenger!!

On multiple occasions I have been forced to undergo a full pat down search not because I beeped when going through the walk through scanner, but because policy states that is how all assistance dog users are to be searched. I have a legal right to be searched by the least intrusive means possible. While there are some people who cannot walk and hence need to undergo a pat down search, others with implants that also require a pat down search that should not occur based on characteristics unrelated to the physical reason why the person cannot walk through a metal detector. You would not say everyone with blond hair had to be patted down, so why everyone with an assistance dog.

Assistance dog toileting areas are an area of concern and stupidity. Would be helpful to look at what has occurred overseas, before making things that are destined to fail. Dogs are TRAINED to toilet OUTSIDE on NATURAL surfaces. Dogs do not choose a toilet based on looks, but based on smell. That choice is based on the place they toileted the most between the ages of 7-10 weeks of age. This is a physiological thing that ALL dogs regardless of training acquire. Artificial grass smells of plastic as do many lino and other floor surfaces, even many carpets. Within the US after dogs were being toileted inside on so many occasions many began having accidents inside when out generally because they no longer understood what an appropriate toilet spot was, we had untrained it from them. ALL airports were required to remove any indoor toileting facilities and place them ALL outdoors. My dog (guide dog) was trained to toilet on command without her harness on by her puppy raiser and even before that. That does not mean she has never toileted at other times. She has had urinary tract infections, which only ever resulted in her toileting on grass while in harness. Even when she had diarrhoea she got herself to grass. If I try to take her into the inside toilets at most airports she looks at me as if to say why I would go here, this is not a toilet. Do you seriously want us to start training all assistance dogs to toilet inside??

Within Europe airlines pay an additional fee to airports and airports are responsible for all accessibility requirements during time spent in the airport and also to board the aircraft, and to disembark. Airlines have to simply support them in the air!! This has many benefits. For passengers with physical disabilities that require lifting into the plane the use of the Eagle Hoists/lifters is based on the size of the airport and the numbers of passengers travelling through it – not on the type of

carrier. Because the airport operates them then they can be moved between carriers. So it makes them available at many more airports and for all carriers.

Within the UK as the airport provides assistance in the terminal, ground crew come to collect a person with an assistance dog about 30 minutes before a flight and take them outside to toileting spaces. When international flights land, people with assistance dogs are met at the aircraft door and after checking that the dog is legally allowed in, they are escorted to an outside toileting area and then taken back into the airport to continue on through the airport for baggage collection, quarantine, immigration and the like. Even with an increase in the numbers of assistance dogs there are not that many, equally it does not need to occur for short flights, if the dog cannot hold for the period of time taken to fly and move through airports between Melbourne and Sydney for example it should not be working. We still need places close to the check in counter outside that can be used, which are grass or a similar natural surface.

Trains

I have experienced multiple times in which I was not allowed an extra seat space for my dog on long distance train rides. When I questioned that with management via complaints I was told it was a mistake and was policy to allocate an extra seat as in aircrafts. Yet the next time I tried to travel with the same train company the same thing occurred. When I complained I was told the policy was right so it was not there problem. They are required to make sure staff are trained in the policies, not simply have them in existence!!

I then had one occasion when they did provide a seat for the dog, but somehow managed to book the dogs seat space into a different carriage??!!

Road Coaches/Long distance buses

When travelling on these they are always tried to force me into the front row of seats and I have had to extremely firmly refuse. The first few rows of seats are on an angle, and sloping downwards and incredibly hard for my dog to lay in. While they always allocated me a seat space for the dog without issue, would not be possible to put a dog anywhere else without that, it was always difficult. I also found the first row was against a partition/wall and hence there was less room for the dog – but when further back it had space to lie under seats in front and behind, which was essential. The need to be able to choose my own seat was essential.