

Perth Airport Service Animal Relief Area

Guidance

Purpose	<p>The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and best practice examples for stakeholders aiming to introduce similar initiatives related to accessibility and assistance to persons with disabilities in an airport environment.</p> <p>The case study is not intended to endorse any technology or provider, but rather provide details of the key considerations as well as various implementation models which could be adopted.</p> <p>The intended audiences may include but are not limited to: Airports, Airlines, Technology Providers, and Regulatory Bodies.</p>
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Scope of this Guidance	<p>This guidance is provided as a source of information to help and support industry players to implement initiatives related to accessibility and assistance to persons with disabilities in and airport environment.</p>
The Case Study Template	<p>In some situations or jurisdictions, a prescribed case study template may be necessary that meets the local requirements of a particular business, organization, or regulatory body. For this guidance document, the following sections provide the general steps involved in developing a business case and/or case studies, including a brief explanation of their purpose, benefits, and considerations.</p>

CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND/BUSINESS NEEDS

The Perth Airport Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DIAP) provides a clear whole-of-business approach for fully accessible airport facilities and promotes a more inclusive environment for its passengers, staff, business partners, and the wider community it serves.

The construction of Service Animal Relief Areas (SARAs) in our Airport Central and Airport West precincts is consistent with Outcome 1 of the DIAP, which seeks to provide people with disabilities equal access to the passenger terminal buildings and other facilities at Perth Airport. It followed feedback from a visually impaired passenger who experienced difficulties with toileting his assistance animal when travelling.

The project scope involved the installation of two dedicated SARAs, one in Terminal 4 which services both Terminal 3 and Terminal 4, and the other in Terminal 1 (International), servicing Terminal 1D and Terminal 2. Both facilities were opened in July 2021.

The SARAs were constructed within the terminals themselves rather than in external areas, as observed at some other airports. This was very important for several reasons, principally to ensure easy, intuitive access to facilities for travellers and their assistance animals and, most importantly, to message that the user experience was an inclusive one by providing equitable amenities to all users. Access was also restricted to travellers with assistance animals as defined in the Australian Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

The facilities are located in the main check-in areas, as close to existing rest room facilities as possible. The main reason is to offer the service to as many travellers as possible, with the SARAs being accessible to both departing and arriving passengers. The benefit of a SARA in the main international departure lounge was also recognised during the concept design stage of the project. The intent is to construct an airside facility at some point in future.

The design of the facility was informed by a global review of existing SARAs and the US FAA guidance, in the absence of any Australian legislative requirement or design standards. Extensive input was sought and provided by members of the disabled community which materially informed the overall designed outcome. It was also recognised at an early stage that the facility needed to cater to users with a range of disabilities, not just those with visual impairments. The final design reflects this requirement.

The key project objectives are summarized as follows:

1. To provide in-terminal assistance animal respite facilities in the Airport West and Airport Central precincts.
2. To ensure the facilities are located in areas that are safe, secure, and easy to find by both visually impaired passengers and other persons with disabilities using assistance animals and airport staff, with minimal walking distances as far as reasonably practical.
3. To ensure that the designs are both fit for purpose and cost effective, recognising that the life of the T4 facility is likely to be 5-7 years.
4. To ensure that the facilities are designed for users with a wide range of potential disabilities, not just visually impaired travellers. Facilities have to be easy to locate and universally accessible, with equipment designed to be simple to operate. Care needs to be taken to mitigate risk of injury of protruding items in particular. They must meet all requirements of the Australian Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) as a minimum standard.
5. To ensure the facilities are low maintenance and easy to clean and maintain from both a user and airport cleaner perspective.
6. The facilities form a design benchmark for SARAs in Australia and internationally

BENEFITS

With an estimated population of 2.2 million, Perth is one of the most remote large cities on Earth, 2600 kms from the nearest large settlement. Just 600,000 people reside in the remainder of the state of Western Australia, which would be the tenth largest country in the world by landmass if it were an independent country.

Good quality international, interstate, and important intrastate air services are accessible to all. Therefore, this is critically important as almost all travellers arrive and depart by air, given the considerable distances involved. Flight sector lengths are also considerable, exceeding three hours for interstate domestic flights and considerably more for overseas trips.

The provision of SARA facilities at Perth Airport both removes a potential barrier to travellers with assistance animals and also encourages them to travel more frequently. Given the lengthy flight times, the ability to toilet assistance animals before departure and on arrival is particularly important. Furthermore, intrastate services are used by passengers with disability to access specialized medical services only available in Perth, amplifying the importance of providing accessible facilities for this traveller cohort.

Qualitative benefits are measured by feedback from the Perth Airport Disability Access and Inclusion Customer Reference Group, disability groups, and comments provided by individual users of the SARAs. Due to COVID-related travel restrictions that significantly impacted international and interstate travel from the airport, we have not received specific feedback following the opening of the SARAs.

CONSTRAINTS

There are no existing regulatory requirements in Australia to provide SARAs in publicly accessible buildings, including airports. The design was developed following a review of similar facilities at other Australian and globally, with specific reference to facilities in the United States and the guidance provided in the [ACI Airports & Persons with Disabilities Handbook](#).

The project was consistent with Perth Airport's DIAP and strongly supported by the leadership team and, therefore, project funding was not a material constraint and did not inhibit its progression. That said, we still needed to develop a comprehensive business case and demonstrate how costs had been managed by the design and site location.

The key challenges were:

- Finding an available and accessible site within Terminals 1 and 4 that fully met the required design criteria. This proved to be very challenging with very few locations available that fully met the requirements.
- Ensuring that there were services proximate to the preferred sites, specifically a hot/cold water supply and sewer main, that could be utilized without incurring in excessive connection costs.
- The absence of any specific national design standards that we could follow. Our review of other SARAs highlighted the widely differing room configurations and features which potentially would create difficulties for users. We attempted to create a “best of breed” facility!
- The absence of an internationally recognized pictogram or common language for SARAs was also considered an additional challenge. We developed our own pictogram (see Pictures).
- Delivering the facilities at an affordable cost. The largest cost elements were the connections to utilities and not the construction and fit out of the facilities. For example, it was necessary to install a drain for liquid waste, the ability to wash down the toileting area, the ability for users to wash their hands and a tap for service animal drinking water. For these reasons, the SARA needed both a fresh water supply and drain to the sewer main.

The desk top review of existing facilities and the engagement with our Disability Access and Inclusion Customer Reference Group and local disability organizations, along with input from our architectural lead consultant and internal stakeholders, were key to a successful outcome.

TECHNOLOGY, PROCESS, AND INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED

The project did not require any specific new technology. However, a briefed requirement was the provision of a push button device that provided verbal instructions regarding the use of the facilities for visually impaired persons. This proved difficult to source; in addition, we needed to record a suitably worded message.

LESSONS LEARNED

We learnt a great deal on our SARA journey with the key lessons/ideas/suggestions for airports which might be considering similar facilities, as outlined below:

Business case establishment

- Consider developing a Disability Inclusion Access Plan or similar if you do not have any specific inclusion and access strategies in place. This will facilitate your business case as SARAs will be entirely consistent with agreed accessibility and inclusion outcomes.
- If funding is an issue, present your SARA project as a staged delivery prioritizing sites that deliver the best value for money.
- For terminal expansion and redevelopment projects, identify the need for SARAs at the earliest point in the process. This is to ensure the greatest chance of success rather than seeking to change the design further along the project timeline.

Prospective users and nomenclature

- A model layout design for a SARA, similar to that developed for changing facilities by the Changing Places project would be really helpful to airports.
- An internationally approved pictogram and recognized nomenclature for these facilities would also be really helpful for users to research and find SARAs at airports. We adopted “SARA” as it seemed to be the most widely used reference, but came across others, e.g., “pet relief”.
- Define specifically who can use the facility. We ensured that it was available only to those with accredited animals only to avoid it being used as a general relieve area for all kinds of animals.
- Recognize that SARAs are not just used by service animals for visually impaired travellers. Assistance animals are used by a wide range of persons with disabilities including but not limited to autism, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment, and mobility assistance. This understanding materially informed our design and specifically the need to ensure that the facilities catered for users in wheelchairs.

Consultation

- Ensure that prospective users and relevant disability organizations are included and fully consulted when designing the facilities. They can offer a wealth of advice based on real life experience that might not be picked up by able bodied stakeholders and consultants tasked with designing and delivering SARAs, as well as lending legitimacy to the design and confidence it will fully meet requirements. Involving users really helped us and ensured that there was good buy in and no surprises when the SARAs were delivered

SARA location and site selection

- SARAs are ideally co-located with existing rest room facilities for a few key reasons:
 - Enables both service animals and their owners to use facilities prior to and following their journey which are easy and intuitive to find if grouped together.
 - Utilities and specifically wet service connections are likely to be the most significant project costs. They will be proximate and therefore economical to connect into if the SARA is located adjacent to an existing block.
- User consultation identified a landside location in the check-in area that was optimal and, ideally, close to the arrivals channel. Airside locations are generally not accessible to arriving passengers when service animals likely need to relieve themselves and drink after even a short flight. International services are the exception, with their longer dwell and sector lengths and where it can be very difficult to backtrack through security screening and emigration. These insights were gained from our consultations.

Facility design and universal access

General

- Ensure that a comprehensive project brief is developed with clear objectives and outcomes, and specific design outcomes and project risks are identified. While this may be obvious, it is often overlooked, or briefs lack detail with a consequential impact on cost time and quality when the project reaches the delivery stage.
- Design the facility for fully universal access, including those using wheelchairs. Ensure that access to the facilities fully complies with local universal access requirements.
- If more than one SARA is planned, as far as reasonably practical, ensure that they are identical or very similar in layout, in order that frequent users become accustomed to the arrangement of the room. Ideally, there should be a standardized international design to address this point.
- In brownfield sites, it might be difficult to achieve the drainage falls required in the existing floor. Specific consideration to this challenge should be made at the early stage of the design. This caused us headaches and almost ended up with a raised facility and the requirement for a ramped access which would have been costly and very undesirable.
- Just because the facility is for passengers with disabilities and might not be used as frequently as facilities for all other passengers does not mean the design needs to be of a lower standard. The addition of decals or contrasting tile finishes can create a visually pleasing facility. Design should be to the same standard as those facilities for passengers without a disability in order to be considered truly inclusive and equitable.
- Do not locate SARAs outside the terminal. External facilities can be difficult to find and convey the impression of a different (lower) level of service to passengers with disabilities. Their use during inclement weather would also result in a poor user experience.
- Develop a brief Concept of Operations for the facility identifying inspection and cleaning regime and response to distress calls, etc. involving operational staff in the process.

Specific recommended SARA features

- Specific requirements should be considered in view that the majority of users are likely to be visually impaired. Ideally, as many fixtures and fittings as possible should be recessed into the walls so that they do not present a protrusion hazard to users. When not possible, it should be ensured that all sharp edges are removed and that features contrast with the wall coverings. There are many examples of metal bins and white walls which have little visual contrast.
- A step-free, well-lit access route and entrance way with appropriate, inclusive signage.
- The entrance(s) should be wide enough and have sufficient turning radius inside the space for mobility aids/wheelchairs manoeuvring.
- The entrance(s) should ideally be a push button operating an electronic sliding door(s). Manually operated doors should be easy to operate for persons in wheelchairs. Doors do not require locks. Doors are recommended to avoid the risk of entry by small children and contamination by solid and liquid animal waste.
- The facility must be well drained to avoid standing water (slip risk). The floor finish must be designed to be highly slip resistant.
- A drinking bowl that can be emptied easily when water is not entirely consumed should be installed for the service animal. The tap must be easy to operate, preferably automated, with levers preferred to handles for dexterity-related disabilities. Service animals typically need to drink before and after their flight.
- The relief area:
 - should be able to be washed down after use, typically with an accessible hose and appropriate drainage;
 - should have a solid waste trap for the wash down area, preferably kept constantly wet to function properly;
 - does not need to be impregnated with pheromones if it has artificial grass; and
 - does not need a prop for the service animals (as featured in many SARAs). Users advised us that they are specifically trained to toilet on demand.
- A sink, preferably height adjustable, with a generous shelf for personal items.
- Recessed/contained plumbing beneath to minimize risk of knee strike by persons in wheelchairs.
- Paper towel dispenser (electric hand dryers are not recommended as sudden, high-volume noise can be distressing for persons with cognitive disabilities).

- Clear written use instructions in an accessible format on the outside of the facility and a push button device to provide audible instructions adjacent to the wash down facility.
- A call button connected to the Airport Control Centre for the user to summon assistance, if required.
- While there is no specific design code for SARAs in Australia, specific elements of the Federal Disability Discrimination Act did apply and had to be incorporated into the design, e.g., door widths. Note that specific requirements are typically minimal standards and that where feasible we sought to exceed these to improve accessibly, making them easier and more convenient to use.

Publicity and promotion

- Ensure that the availability of SARAs is widely publicized. Perth Airport launched its SARAs on local TV and media, as well as on social media and, most importantly, communicating with disability groups. The airport web site is a very important resource for persons with disabilities; therefore, it should be ensured that information on SARAs is available and easy to access.

PICTURES

Note the recessed fittings



Pictogram developed by Perth Airport in absence of a standardized image



Perth Airport General Arrangement showing SARA locations servicing the terminals



RELEASES

International Airport Review – Designing for All

<https://www.internationalairportreview.com/article/177500/designing-for-all-perth-airport/>

Media Release - Paw-fect improvements at Perth Airport (file attached)

Media release

29 July 2021

Paw-fect improvements at Perth Airport

Two new Service Animal Relief Areas, one in Terminal 1 and one in Terminal 4, are now making it easier for passengers travelling with an assistance animal through Perth Airport.

Perth Airport's Chief Commercial Officer Kate Holsgrove said Perth Airport was committed to making travel more accessible for all passengers and that these new facilities would improve their travel experience significantly.

"We're continually looking at opportunities to improve access for people travelling with a disability and the new facilities are part of our commitment to making our airport more accessible for all.

"When people with service animals travel, they are obviously keen to ensure that their animal is cared for in the best possible way, whether that be pre or post flight.

The locations of the new facilities have been chosen to allow quick and easy access, particularly while waiting on baggage or following the check-in process," Ms Holsgrove said.

Since 2016, Perth Airport's Access and Inclusion Working Group has provided valuable feedback and advice on the travel experience and suggested improvements could be made to infrastructure and operations at Perth Airport.

"The purpose of the Perth Airport Access and Inclusion Working Group is to advocate for accessibility, discuss barriers to inclusion and improve the customer experience for people with disabilities.

"The group has allowed us to work together to create a more inclusive airport for Western Australia We thank everyone involved who have helped us with this project, in particular Visibility and Blind Citizens WA", continued Kate.

We are committed to continuing these consultative forums to discuss the issues and barriers that people with disability experience while travelling," Ms Holsgrove said.

Visibility [Spokespersons name] said that the new areas provide passengers with service animals a more private and fit for purpose facility which will improve the travel experience for people with disability. It is a great initiative from Perth Airport.

"It has been great working with the Perth Airport team on this initiative and we look forward to participating in other future projects to improve access for all at our airport," said XX.

The following organisations are represented on the Access and Inclusion Advisory Group:

- Department of Communities
- National Disability Services
- VisAbility
- Muscular Dystrophy WA
- People With Disabilities (WA)
- Blind Citizens WA
- Autism WA
- Council on the Ageing

The design elements of the new service animal relief areas include:

- Wall mounted water bowl
- Signage (including braille)
- Distress assistance/ cleaning assistance call button connected to the Airport Control Centre
- Paper towel dispenser and waste receptacle
- Accessible wash basin with shroud and mixer
- Wall mounted soap dispenser
- Audio instructions activated by a push button
- Surface mounted waste receptacle
- Wall mounted dog waste bag dispenser
- Non-slip, removable astro-turf
- Slip resistance floor finish
- Retractable wall mounted hose unit.

- ENDS -

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