

Written evidence: Accessible seating for disabled air passengers

Submitted for consideration in connection with the Civil Aviation (Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform) Bill

Submitted by: Tobiasz Dabioch, disabled air passenger, United Kingdom

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1. Summary

This submission asks Parliament to consider the gap between airport assistance and accessible seating on board commercial aircraft. Some disabled passengers need both additional knee clearance and sufficient usable seat width, yet may be unable to occupy emergency exit rows for safety reasons. A suitable alternative may not be available, even where airlines sell extra-legroom seating.

I ask the Committee to consider stronger requirements for individual seating assessments, transparent seat specifications, suitable non-exit seating and regulatory oversight, while preserving essential aviation safety rules.

2. Personal experience

I live with arthritis, bilateral lymphovenous oedema and severe obesity, which affect my mobility and ability to sit comfortably. I have travelled with airlines including Ryanair, Wizz Air, Jet2 and easyJet. In standard economy seating, my knees press against the seat in front, restricting my ability to reposition my legs. Limited seat width creates a separate difficulty.

I always travel with my carer. I normally sit by the window and he sits in the middle seat. We raise the armrest between us to provide more room. This does not address the limited knee clearance. On some aircraft the armrest beside the window cannot be raised, making the seating arrangement even more restrictive.

My concern is not a preference for a premium product. It is whether a disabled passenger can be accommodated in a seat that meets their physical needs during the journey.

3. The accessibility gap

Additional-legroom seats are frequently located at emergency exits. Passengers with reduced mobility may be ineligible to sit in those rows because of evacuation requirements. Front-row or bulkhead seats are not necessarily an adequate alternative: some have fixed armrests, and their suitability depends on the aircraft and the passenger's needs.

The availability of wheelchair assistance, priority boarding or seating beside a carer does not, by itself, ensure that a passenger can sit safely and reasonably comfortably throughout a flight. Aircraft seating accessibility should be considered alongside access to the airport and boarding process.

4. Measures requested

- 1. Individual assessments.** Require airlines to consider combined needs for knee clearance, usable seat width, armrest configuration and assistance, rather than relying solely on standard assistance categories.
- 2. Suitable non-exit options.** Examine whether airlines should be required to make appropriate seating available outside emergency exit rows, subject to aircraft design and safety constraints.
- 3. Fair charging.** Clarify when disability-related seating needs must be accommodated without additional charges, while recognising that the law does not necessarily require a free cabin upgrade or extra seat.
- 4. Transparent information.** Require accurate, accessible pre-booking information on seat pitch, usable seat width, fixed armrests and relevant seating restrictions.
- 5. Independent review.** Commission research into the effects of high-density cabin configurations on disabled passengers with mobility restrictions, joint conditions, swelling or larger body dimensions.
- 6. Oversight and remedies.** Ensure the Civil Aviation Authority has clear means to examine systemic accessibility barriers, publish findings and take proportionate enforcement action.

5. Questions for the Government and regulator

- Do existing rules adequately address passengers who need both more knee clearance and more usable seat width but cannot occupy exit rows?
- What evidence is being collected about seat dimensions, fixed armrests and the availability of suitable non-exit seating?
- Could future regulations or CAA guidance establish clearer, enforceable expectations for individual seating assessments and accessible seat information?

6. Request to the Committee

I respectfully ask the Committee to consider this evidence when scrutinising the Bill, seek the Department for Transport's view on the identified gap, and consider whether further regulations, guidance or an independent review are warranted. I recognise that aviation safety is paramount. My request is for workable accessible alternatives, not exemptions from evacuation safety requirements.

This evidence reflects my personal experience and raises a wider public-interest concern. I would welcome confirmation of receipt and information about whether it can be considered as part of the Committee's evidence process.

Many thanks,

Tobiasz Dabioch