

## Memorandum

Date: Aug. 8, 2016  
To: ACCESS Committee  
From: Lee Page  
Subject: Advocates' survey of disability stakeholders on accessible lavatories

In order to assist the DOT ACCESS Committee, PVA conducted a survey/poll to disability stakeholders asking them in 7 questions what would be their expectations for an accessible lavatory on a new single aisle aircraft. The poll was conducted over a three-week period via a survey monkey tool with final results being collected on August 1, 2016. In that time period, 931 respondents registered their opinions. See below for a summary of the results.

**Question 1: If you are unable to use the lavatory, is that reason enough for you not to fly? 99% Response Rate**

Of the 924 respondents, 618 or 67% said yes it was enough for them to stop flying, while 306 respondents 33% would continue to fly regardless if they had access to the lavatory or not

**Question 2: Type of assistance you need to get to the Accessible Lavatory from your seat. 93% Response Rate**

Of 871 respondents, approximately 532 indicated that an onboard wheelchair would be necessary to reach the lavatory. Of those who would need an onboard wheelchair, one respondent stated the need for a "high quality aisle chair." Other respondents stated that onboard wheelchairs are "humiliating and dangerous" and that airline personnel must be trained to properly use them.

Approximately 355 indicated that human assistance would be needed in reaching or using the lavatory. Those who needed human assistance with pushing the onboard wheelchair were not included in this total where it was clear that was the type of assistance needed. Two respondents noted the need for a Hoyer lift to transfer within the lavatory. Another respondent noted the small-size of current lavatories and stated that it might be necessary to "keep the door open for help" and stated that "a curtain for extra space for a helper" might be needed.

Approximately 53 respondents noted the need for crutches, canes, or walkers. Approximately 40 respondents indicated the need for grab bars or railings to get to and from the lavatory and/or to use within it. One respondent stated that hand holds on the top of the airline seats would help with navigating the aisle.

Approximately 117 indicated that they would not need assistance using an accessible lavatory. Some of these respondents may be in need of accessible features but use

other methods to address their lavatory-related needs. Approximately 19 respondents noted that they would be unable to use even an accessible lavatory.

Although numerous respondents indicated the need for an onboard wheelchair and/or human assistance, other accessibility features such as hand holds would increase access to current lavatories for passengers with disabilities who have limited mobility.

**Question 3: What following functions would you expect to be in an accessible lavatory on single aisle aircraft? 98% Response Rate**

Of the 912 respondents approximately 72 % expect a new single aisle lavatory to permit an independent transfer from an onboard wheelchair (OBW) to a toilet in a fully enclosed lavatory. Sixty-five percent believe the lavatory should permit a dependent or assisted transfer by personal care attendant from OBW to toilet in fully enclosed lavatory. Seventy-seven percent of respondents expect the management of bowel and bladder devices in a fully enclosed lavatory, and 75% need a level transfer from the OBW to the toilet and back. Whereas 40% of respondents would consider a two-step transfer, from the OBW to a fold down seat, then closure of the lavatory door and further transfer to the toilet, they see this done equally independent or with assistance. Fifty-three percent of respondents believe it could include a curtained area outside of the enclosed toilet area to provide additional maneuvering space and privacy. While 38% may need assistance from a service animal throughout the process.

**Question 4: Indicate the key features you EXPECT in an accessible lavatory on a single aisle aircraft, check all that apply. 97% Response Rate**

Eighty-nine percent of the respondents expect there to be assist handles for transfer on and off the toilet, and 80% expect a call button for aid. From sitting on the toilet, 76% respondents expect to access the flush control and 73% expect to have access to the towel dispenser. Eighty-one percent expect to be able to lock the door independently, with 60% wanting a solid door. Sixty-one percent need a sink large enough to accommodate their needs (washing more than their hands) with 56% wanting automatic faucets and 43% a mirror.

**Question 5: Lavatories on Twin Aisle Aircraft are required to be accessible. Have you ever used one and did it meet your expectations based on the previous questions? 83% Response Rate**

Of 771 respondents, approximately 107 indicated that they had used a lavatory on a twin aisle aircraft. Of those, approximately 35 indicated that the lavatory did not meet their expectations. Approximately seven indicated that the lavatory met some of their expectations. Approximately 24 indicated that the lavatory met their expectations.

Of those who had used the lavatory, the most frequent comment related to the size of the lavatory. Commenters noted that the space is still small and makes it difficult to redress, orient oneself for transfer, or use the sink. Other respondents noted problems with the door, flushing the toilet, and using the sink. At least one respondent also

expressed concerns about the onboard wheelchair not having brakes which meant that a transfer to the toilet was not possible.

In sum, most respondents had no experience with an accessible lavatory on a twin aisle plane. Based on some of the comments, it appears that there is lack of knowledge about the presence of accessible onboard lavatories and wheelchairs. For those with experience who provided an opinion, over half of respondents indicated that the lavatory failed to meet some or all of their expectations.

**Question 6: What key functions or features make current lavatories on single aisle aircraft inaccessible for you? 78% Response Rate**

After a preliminary review, there were 725 respondents to this question with the majority, over 500, saying that size and space (design) of the lavatory was the biggest hindrance. “They’re too small ...door to lavatory too narrow ... no way for an attendant to fit in that space with me.” This included the need for and/or lack of grab bars to assist the passenger, the narrowness of the doorway and threshold to enter the lavatory, and lack of room on the inside to maneuver.

Over 60 respondents said the inability to transfer from the onboard wheelchair to the toilet was a major problem and another 45 specifically mentioned the need to have an attendant in the lavatory to assist. Another 30 mentioned the inability to lock the door and said privacy was an issue. The other major hindrance was the passengers’ inability to get to the lavatory, over 150 respondents specifically mentioned the need for an onboard wheelchair but not having access to one or knowledge that they were available. “Door is too narrow, can’t get the on-board wheelchair (if one exists) through to get close to toilet to transfer.” This also included constant remarks of how inaccessible the aisle (width) to get back to the lavatory is, with nothing to hold onto if walking except seatbacks. “I leave the wheelchair and walk with crutches, but the aisle is too narrow.”

**Question 7: Please Comment on your overall expectations for an accessible lavatory. Is there an area we did not ask you about in the survey that you would like to comment on? 52% Response Rate**

After review, there are 486 responses to this question, with the largest comment around the design (100 +) of the lavatory and the need for more space inside the lavatory. “Accessible lavatory needs room for the aisle chair and caregiver and be able to close the door.” Some respondents thought if they could access the lavatory in their personal wheelchair (28) it would better accommodate them. The other issue is how I can get to the lavatory. Many respondents didn’t know about the onboard wheelchair. Many respondents also mentioned the need for training (25): “teach flight attendants how to use an aisle chair”. And some respondents talked about seat assignment, as they try to sit closer to the lavatory. “Please make seats closer to lavatory handicap accessible! During my flight I was too far to reach the lavatory!!”

Overall, the survey shows that passengers with disabilities who fly prepare by using the lavatory in the airport before getting on the plane. Ten or more mentioned that they dehydrate themselves before the flight and others talk about just flying on short segments in order to avoid having to use the lavatory. "This is a basic need, I'm tired of flying in fear AND not having any liquid." It is an issue that causes anxiety with all respondents, knowing that they are putting themselves in a situation where they don't have access to a lavatory which could result in an embarrassing situation that draws further attention to their disability and themselves.

There is also a large segment that have given up flying all together, because they cannot access the lavatory. "The lavatory should be accessible to ALL people with and without disabilities. I no longer travel by air because of this and instead have to travel by other transportation means that are more accommodating."

### **Summary**

Passengers with disabilities expect access to lavatories on single aisle aircraft. The inability to access a lavatory results in people with disabilities being forced to find alternative transportation options. However, airlines and manufactures can take immediate steps to improve accessibility for some passengers with disabilities while equipping planes with the accessibility features needed to provide full access to people with disabilities in the near future. In addition, the travel path to the lavatory whether it includes an onboard wheelchair or other assistance is crucial in providing access to lavatories and must be included in any discussion about improving accessibility. Furthermore, airline personnel must be trained to use accessibility features and educate passengers about those features.