

Marion Fellows MP

Member of Parliament for Motherwell & Wishaw
SNP Spokesperson for Disabilities | SNP Whip | Post
Office APPG Chair

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Cc

Secretary of State for Transport

Minister for Disabled People

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: Greater powers for the Civil Aviation Authority to combat recurring accessibility issues for Disabled passengers on aircrafts.

We, the undersigned, write to you calling for legislation to empower the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to impose fines on airlines and/or other actors who:

- (a) damage wheelchairs or essential mobility devices,
- (b) leave disabled passengers on flights for a prolonged period once the flight has landed,
- (c) fail to provide adequate assistance despite prior knowledge of Disabled passengers' needs.

The CAA's current regime of oversight for accessible air travel is limited and ineffective in holding airlines and/or other actors to account when such issues arise, charters and codes of conduct would not work. Whilst

the Disabled community have a real and immediate need for aircrafts to be redesigned, the industry sees this as more of a long-term strategy. In the meantime, the empowerment of the CAA to impose fines is a tangible short-term goal to combat the persistent failures of airlines and other actors in the aviation industry. We understand that last year's Aviation Consumer Policy Reform consultation has considered granting additional powers to the CAA, including fines, however, the Disabled community cannot wait any longer as we have reached crisis point.

Over the past year, the issue has been in the spotlight in the media with high-profile cases, such as those of Sophie Morgan, Tanni Grey-Thompson and Frank Gardner, where Disabled passengers have had their mobility devices damaged, or been left stranded on an aircraft. These publicised cases merely constitute the tip of the iceberg, and these issues are endemic within the aviation industry, with Disabled passengers regularly suffering degrading substandard treatment at the hands of airlines or other actors. Such instances have a huge human impact on the dignity of Disabled passengers and severely impact their confidence when travelling by air, meaning that many passengers with assistance needs will, in many cases, avoid travelling on airlines altogether.

This Government has made a worthy commitment to "make sure that they (Disabled people) are able to travel easily, confidently and without extra cost" as outlined within the Inclusive Transport Strategy. However, in the aviation industry, Disabled passengers are unable to travel with ease or confidence and regularly face additional costs. Globally, states are reviewing air travel for accessibility, and the UK must not trail behind the global pacesetters such as the US.

Noting the precedent set during the pandemic, when the CAA was empowered to impose fines on airlines that did not comply with obligations relating to Covid-19 passenger travel documents. It is imperative that the Government arms the CAA with similar effective mechanisms to hold airlines and/or other actors to account when they fail in their obligations to Disabled passengers.

We, the undersigned, call on the Government to act now to demonstrate their commitment to inclusive air travel for all.

Yours sincerely,

Marion Fellows MP