
Mayor's Disability Council



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San Francisco International Airport (SFO)
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Dear SFO Leadership Team,

The Mayor's Disability Council (MDC) appreciates San Francisco International Airport's continued leadership in advancing accessibility and universal design. We are writing to share recommendations that would enhance the experience of blind, low vision, senior, and mobility impaired travelers navigating SFO. These suggestions draw upon community feedback as well as accessibility practices implemented in other major airports.

Flight Information Access for Blind and Low-Vision Travelers

Blind and low-vision community members have difficulty accessing real-time flight information from electronic display boards. To expand independent access and reduce traveler stress, we respectfully recommend the following:

- Install a brightly colored, easy-to-locate phone next to each flight information board, connecting travelers to an automated system where they can speak their flight number.

- The automated attendant would provide:
 - Scheduled departure time and flight status
 - Gate number
 - Plain language wayfinding directions (e.g., “Continue straight for 200 feet, then turn right; your gate will be on the left.”)
- Offer an option to request in-person assistance when preferred or needed. These improvements reflect approaches already in place at other airports. For example, Rome’s Fiumicino Airport uses Be My Eyes to provide live visual interpretation, and over 50 U.S. airports provide Aira to support travelers in reading signs and navigating terminals. Airports such as Portland (PDX), Louisville (SDF), and Westchester (HPN) also use GoodMaps for precise indoor audio navigation. These programs show the feasibility and benefits of enhancing independent access to flight information.

Accessibility Considerations for Mobility Impaired Travelers

Community members have shared several observations regarding restroom access and the experience of travelers who temporarily rely on loaner chairs during delays or tight connections. We respectfully request that SFO consider the following improvements:

- Conduct regular checks to ensure that all accessible and standalone companion care restrooms are fully ADA compliant, easy to locate, and maintained in proper working order.
- Improve restroom usability by ensuring that doors to accessible and companion care restrooms are automatic or activated by a hand sensor, as many travelers using mobility devices report difficulty opening or closing certain doors independently.

In addition, we want to highlight a challenge frequently experienced by power wheelchair users making tight connections. When passengers check their power wheelchairs with the airline, they are often transferred into an airport chair and may remain in that chair for extended periods—especially if a connecting flight is

delayed or if their own wheelchair is damaged and awaiting repair. Airlines and their contractors, such as Prime Flight, already manage complex mobility related liability issues, including physically transferring passengers and coordinating urgent repairs. As part of this ecosystem, it may be helpful for SFO to be aware of local disability organizations such as the San Francisco Independent Living Resource Center (SFILRC) and the Center for Independent Living (CIL), which have expertise in supporting travelers with mobility related needs.

One possible approach—consistent with current airline and contractor practices—could involve SFO or its partners coordinating with organizations like SFILRC/CIL when assistance is needed. These resources could help verify compatible chargers and batteries via phone or video, or to support passengers whose mobility devices require attention. This would not require SFO to take on equipment-related liability. It would ensure that airport staff and contractors know where to turn when specialized support is needed.

Conclusion

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations and explore additional strategies to strengthen accessibility across all SFO operations. Thank you for your attention to these important issues and for your continued efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming airport environment for all members of our community.

Sincerely,

Mayor's Disability Council

cc. Eli Gelardin, ODA