

Airlines forgetting disabled travellers

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ACCESS to air travel for people with disabilities has deteriorated over the past five years, a report commissioned by the federal government says.

In contrast trains, buses and ferries have become easier to use. There are also more wheelchair accessible taxis, although long response times are still a problem.

The Review Of The Disability Standards For Accessible Public Transport by the Allen Consulting Group was released in Canberra yesterday.

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It shows airlines have been the worst performers since the introduction of transport standards five years ago designed to improve access to public transport.

"Unlike other modes of public transport ... the general level of accessibility [for air travel] has declined over the last five years," it said.

Customers with impaired mobility who previously had been allowed to travel independently with airline companies were now being told they could not travel without a carer. New low-cost airlines, in particular, were imposing restrictions, the report noted.

As well, some airlines had imposed a quota on the number of people with disabilities on a flight and refused extra customers the right to travel at the check-in desk.

Other complaints included the inability of airline information systems to record the special needs of passengers at the time of booking, and inadequately trained staff.

Airlines - even within the same group, such as Qantas and Jetstar - also imposed different rules on the size and height of wheelchairs they would carry, and would not guarantee that it would travel on the same flight.

The report cited a study by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre in NSW, which analysed 110 complaints and found that increased competition in the airline industry was not making it easier for people with disabilities to travel by air.

Poor experiences included a boy with a crippling degenerative disorder having to cancel a Make-a-Wish foundation holiday because airline engineers refused to allow use of a special car seat.

Source:

<http://www.smh.com.au/travel/travel-news/airlines-forgetting-disabled-travellers-20110603-1fkyh.html>