

Date, July 23, 2016

I am legally blind with a hearing loss, (Deaf-blind). I always travel with a registered guide dog. I travel mostly on Via Rail and air.

I do not like Via Rail new cars where 50% of the seats are backwards. The main problem is the table that is now put in the four-seater. It doesn't allow enough room for two blind people to sit with their guide dogs. Also the table does not have a groove to keep a cup from sliding around. There is a cup holder, but you can only access that when the table edge is lifted up. When eating it is down, and covers the cup holder. This is dangerous and I feel seats with the gray on the side should be installed in the four-seater.

I would like to feel braille above each seat to locate my seat myself. I find service staff are too busy to help in a timely way and it seems less staff are on the train now. Either that or more people are travelling. Via Rail should be a nut-free environment, as a lot of families travel by train and nuts shouldn't be allowed to be served on any travel modes.

I would like the online option to book my flight or train travel, but I can't make arrangements for my guide dog using online booking.

The medical desk and/or airline reservation clerks at Air Canada and WestJet, consistently ask for the same innumerable details about my guide dog, including his registration number, training centre, age, breed, height, length, width etc. It seems to me that identification could be requested at check in, rather than subject customers to this excessive interrogation. They don't seem to understand that guide dogs for the blind are not lap dogs which can be stowed beneath a seat. There is no getting around the fact that these dogs are of a minimally large size and need the space of the second seat in order to be safe and comfortable.

I always travel alone, and would appreciate some sort of consistent "meet and assist" service to ensure that I can have sighted guide to get from arrival at the airport to the check in counter, then to security, and the gate for all legs of the journey. This service seems to be radically inconsistent, depending on the airport and airline. Sometimes there are long waits for staff to appear once the plane has landed. This is not humane after a long flight when my guide dog is bursting to get outside to relieve himself. Given the lengthy pre-flight arrival times at airports mandated by the airline, especially for someone with a particular request (i.e. person with a disability and service dog), it can make for very long days of travel. People travelling with service dogs should have shorter pre-check in times.

Overbooking seems to be rampant, especially with Air Canada. More than once, I have been asked to give up the second seat allowing space for my guide dog, because the flight was overbooked and they want to squeeze someone on and stick them in the seat next to me. Sometimes they convince someone to get off the flight to open a seat (giving away a travel coupon). But sometimes there is absolutely nothing to do when the flight attendant digs in and suggests to me that the plane can't leave until I cede the seat. Not only are other passengers (who do not understand the 2 seat 1 fare policy) annoyed with me, but I and my dog (and the poor shmuck passenger who got stuck in the extra seat) all have an uncomfortable flight.

Those people who fly with a guide dog have the need for their service dog to have relief areas near the departure area of the airport. This means there is no time to consider bringing the dog outside to relieve them between flights, especially with the need to go through security again when re-entering. The relieving area should be smoke-free so we don't have to be subjected to smokers. Ideally the relief area should be an Indoor relief area.

Sincerely

Penny Leclair