Airport Travel: Traveling with a Disability



Overview

- Know your rights
- Reservation Checklists
- Check in process + security screening
- Getting to and from the gate
- Getting on the plane
- In flight considerations
- De-boarding
- Equipment storage and protection
- Personal considerations



Know Your Rights

- Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA)
 - Prevents discrimination against passengers because of their disability
 - Requires training for transferring individuals and for safe handling of equipment
- Airlines must assist with boarding and deplaning
- Luggage carrying medical supplies is exempt from luggage fees and bag limitations
- Accessible lavatory is required on all twin-aisle aircraft
- Ventilators and respirators can be used on the plane
- <u>Service</u> animals must be accommodated and proper paperwork must be with you!
- Airlines must have a Complaint Resolution Officer that can assist with resolving issues

Airline Accessibility Information

Most Airlines provide on-line resources to identify what supports they
offer when traveling with a disability

Tips for Traveling with Disabilities (cheapflights.com)

United	Delta
American Airlines	US Airways
Air Canada	Southwest
JetBlue	Alaska Airlines
Hawaiian Airlines	WestJet
Porter	Spirit
Allegiant	Frontier
Alitalia	ANA
Cathay Pacific	Etihad Airways
Japan Airlines	KLM Royal Dutch Airlines
Qantas	Singapore Airlines
Turkish Airlines	Virgin Atlantic

United

When flying with United, call the airline's disability desk (800-228-2744) 48 hours in advance of travel if you'll be traveling with an assistive device so they can ensure your device can be used in-flight. Any special needs you have should be mentioned when you make your reservation so the airline staff can do their best to help you. This includes the need for assistance getting to your gate, boarding, getting to your seat, deplaning or connecting.

Wheelchairs are available for use at each airport United uses, but if you don't see one when you arrive you can ask a skycap or agent for help. Aisle wheelchairs for transferring non-ambulatory customers to and from their seats on the aircraft are also available, as are on-board wheelchairs in every aircraft with more than 60 seats. Some domestic and international airports may not have jet-bridges available for boarding, but in these cases, a passenger assist lift (PAL), mechanical lift, ramp or a stair chair may be used for boarding and deplaning.

In addition, certain seats on the aircraft are made available to passengers with a disability, but the request needs to be made at least 24 hours in advance of your scheduled flight. You can check your wheelchair or other assistive devices at the ticket counter or at the gate, and there is room for one collapsible wheelchair on board. If you want to use this space, request it when you identify yourself for pre-boarding. Finally, here are **United's disability policies**.

Booking the Flight

- When making the reservation specify exactly what you need
- ☐ Include the following information:
 - Wheelchair specifics including size, weight, and battery type
 - Attendant Service to get to/from the gate and through TSA
 - Assistance in boarding (Aisle Chair)
 - Aisle chairs are helpful if you require a wheelchair, walker, or other assistive device that is unable to fit down the aisle
 - Onboard aisle chair to reach the restroom
 - Special Service Request (SSR) codes are used by airlines to capture this information and report it to the transport companies prior to your flight



Booking the Flight



- Speak with an airline representative, do not make online reservations
- ☐ Schedule non-stop flights or allow > 1 ½ hours between connecting flights
- ☐ Try to travel earlier in the day
- ☐ Ask about reduced fares for a companion or caregiver if needed
- ☐ Ask about insurance for lost or damaged wheelchair or mobility aids. May need to plan for additional coverage

Booking the Flight- Seat Selection

- ☐ Request aisle seat, close to door, with a moveable arm rest
- ☐ If able to scoot, can take a window seat so people do not have to step over you.
- □ Bulkhead seating (seating immediately behind a wall) is released 24-48 hours before flights. You are entitled to the bulkhead only if you have a locked lower limb (leg can not bend) or use a service animal (armrests do not go up)





Seating charts and inflight amenities for airlines worldwide. www.seatguru.com

Reservation Checklist Prior to Airport Arrival



- ☐ Call the airline > 48 hours before the flight to ensure the airline has received your special service requests
- ☐ Mention your need for additional time to get through the airport
- ☐ Ensure a transport crew has been arranged to bring an aisle chair and assist with the transfer if needed
- ☐ If traveling with a service animal, inform the airline and inquire about what documents you may need to provide

Prior to Airport Arrival – Traveling with a Wheelchair

- ☐ Ensure the below wing crew is available get the chair, take it to the tarmac, lift onto the conveyor belt, get it through the cargo hatch, and secure it in the cargo hold
- ☐ If traveling with a power wheelchair or scooter, confirm with the reservation agent proper battery handling
 - -Dry cell/gel can stay attached to the chair if it is an approved battery. Confirm with the reservation agent
 - -Wet cell must be boxed separately in special air-tight container according to FAA hazardous material law

Service Animal

- ☐ Identify your service animal
 - Documentation and 48-hour notice may be required
 - Have the service animal wear an identifying vest or harness
 - If asked by TSA to remove the vest, decline and explain why
 - Bring health certificates and proof of vaccination
 - Check international requirements if traveling overseas
 - Best to relieve animal before going through security but there are designated locations to relieve the animal in the airport

Oxygen

- ☐ Identify yourself as an Oxygen user
 - Provide instructions and medical approval at the time of check in.
 Refer to airline website for specific policies and details



- Portable O2 Concentrator (POC)
 - You are allowed to use your own airline approved Oxygen concentrator
 - May be required to bring batteries that will last 150% of the estimated flight time



- Compressed Oxygen Tank
 - You can use your own tank supply while at the airport but must change to the airline's tank when boarding. Personal tanks must be emptied before checking / stowing on plane
 - Schedule for a full tank upon arrival at your destination



Packing List Carry On Bag

- ☐ Picture Identification (government issued)
- ☐ Medications: label the bag or containers
- ☐ Supplies: bladder management/extra catheters
- ☐ Change of clothing/clean up supplies
- ☐ Empty duffle bag for removeable wheelchair parts
- ☐ Bags/Plastic Roll/Duct Tape/Wire Tires to wrap up and protect the wheelchair
- ☐ Attach ID tag to all carry on and stowed items
- ☐ Don't forget your wheelchair charger!

Packing List

Traveling with your Wheelchair

- ☐ Prepare a handout for your wheelchair with the following info:
 - How to lock/unlock the wheelchair for manual pushing / operate the chair
 - Type of battery and how to remove the battery if needed
 - Wheelchairs should be stored upright so dry cell/gel batteries do not have to be removed
 - What parts are being removed from the chair
 - If the wheelchair can be folded down and put into tilt or reclined position
 - Helpful if they are trying to put into a smaller cargo hold
 - When multiple aircrafts are making the flight- choose the one with the largest cargo hatch door
 - Name and cell phone information
- ☐ Take pictures or videos of the front, back, and sides of the wheelchair before the flight and write down your serial number
- □Place stickers on the wheelchair to show where to safely lift the chair __

Power Wheelchair Sign

Example Information

- Weight of Wheelchair: 375 lbs
- Moving Instructions: Lift with 4 people, ONLY use blue lifting straps in lower corners. Push Wheelchair
- Unlock Wheelchair, lift levers up Located behind large tires marked with orange tape
- Do not use stairs, Elevator Transportation ONLY
- Type of Battery
- Passenger Information/ ID Tag- Cell phone
 - Make a note to contact you at your cell number prior to removing or adjusting anything on the chair!



Personal Touch: "Please be careful. This is my arms and legs."

Getting to the Airport

Check airport website for accessibility features

- Shuttle
- Parking
- Drop off Zones
- Get there EARLY aim for 2-3 hours flight time

Accessible Parking Options

Denver International Airport provides accessible parking spaces at all airport-owned parking facilities. In the East and West parking garages, these spaces are located next to entry doors into Jeppesen Terminal, on garage Levels 1, 2, 4 and 5 (no accessible parking is available on Level 3).

If using outlying parking options, such as economy or shuttle lots, accessible spaces are located near the pick-up/drop-off shelters in the Economy West and Economy East parking lots. All vans and buses serving these lots are lift-equipped. Wheelchair or electric cart service is available from your airline. For more information call (303) 342-4650.

Elevators

- · Elevators can be found in all high-traffic areas of the airport, near the escalators
- · All public elevators are ADA accessible

Ground Transportation

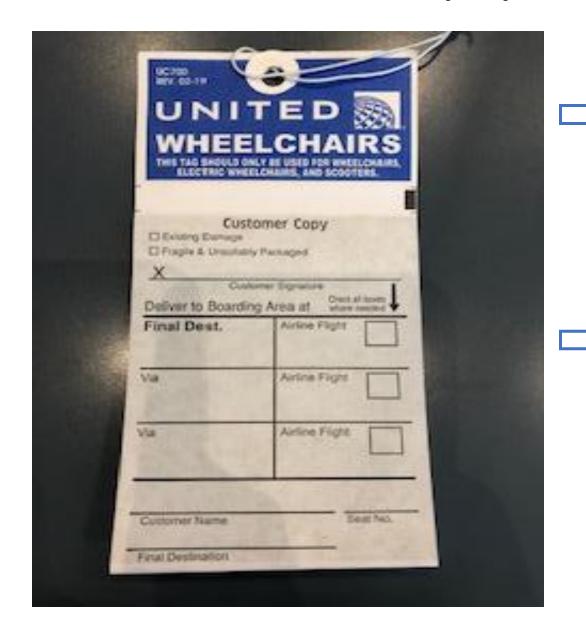
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires all ground transportation companies to provide wheelchair-accessible vehicles
- The following ground transportation companies pick up disabled passengers at curbside on Level 5, west-side of Jeppesen Terminal
 - Dashabout: 2 day advance notice required: (800) 720-3274
 - Metro Cab: (303) 333-3333
 - Mobility Plus (Yellow Cab): 24 hour on-demand wheelchair accessible service: (3°3) 777-7777
 - Mobility Transport Service: 24 hour advance notice required: (303) 295-3900
 - RTD access-a-Ride: (303) 292-6560

1. Ticket Agent / Luggage Counter

- If you have reserved any type of assistance, check in at ticket / luggage counter to confirm SSR (special service requests)
 - Ticket Agent will summon Attendant Service to verify SSR
- You do not need to check your wheelchair here. Stay in your personal wheelchair until you are ready to board the plane.
- You may obtain a gate pass for someone who accompanies you but is not traveling with you.
- Obtain proper gate tags for all items including your wheelchair



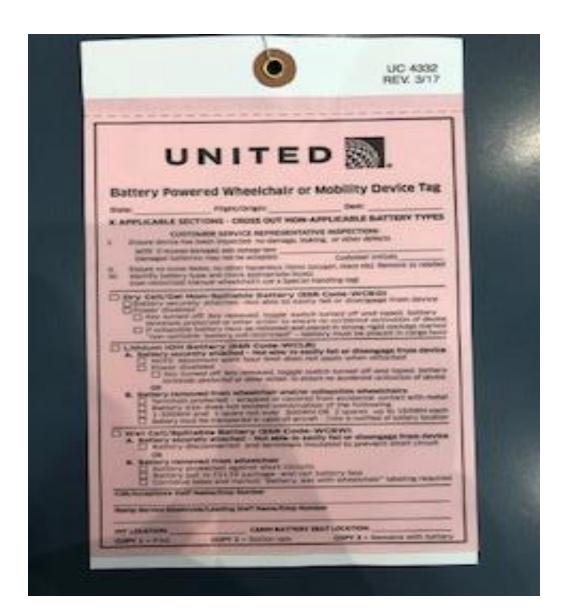
Equipment Tags



Used for Manual and Power Wheelchairs

If you have connecting flights, place a check mark in the box to request your wheelchair be delivered to the gate between flights. If you want your wheelchair to be delivered directly to your final destination, do not check the box.

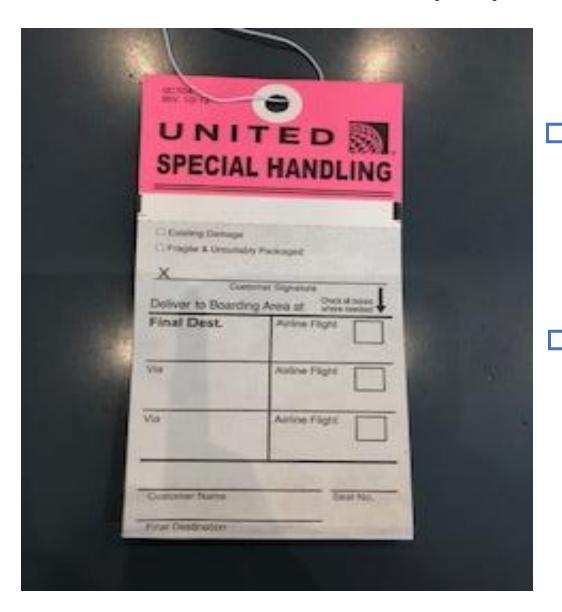
Equipment Tags





If traveling with a power wheelchair, you may receive an additional tag to indicate specifics regarding your wheelchair battery.

Equipment Tags



Used for other medical device equipment (i.e. walker, crutches, etc)

If you have connecting flights, place a check mark in the box to request your medical device be delivered to the gate between flights. If you want your wheelchair to be delivered directly to your final destination, do not check the box.

2. Security (TSA)

- Can request a Passenger Support Specialist for TSA on the spot assistance
- Notify TSA of any medical implants
- Use the restroom/empty your leg bag before going through security
- All Military, Veterans, and people with a disability can use the Restricted Access lane for improved ease
- You DON'T have to transfer out of your wheelchair
- If unable to walk unassisted through security or are seated in a wheelchair, security will perform a pat down
 - Can request the pat down occur in a private location
- You should not have to remove your shoes. If you prefer to keep your shoes on, let TSA know

2. Security (TSA) Cont.

- If traveling with tools for your medical equipment that are longer than 7", let TSA know why they are needed.
- Blades > 2.3" must be checked. This includes adaptive, metal knives
- Some TSAs will allow you to bring one bottle of water through if you identify it is for medicinal purposes. Any liquids/gels bigger than 3.4 ounces will require additional screening steps
- If you don't feel comfortable with something or are receiving push-back on traveling with your medical equipment, ask to speak with a supervisor
- TSA / Screening process varies from airport to airport
- Key Take Away: Anything that you need for medical reasons, you can have. Just need to specify the reason why.

2. TSA Cares Program

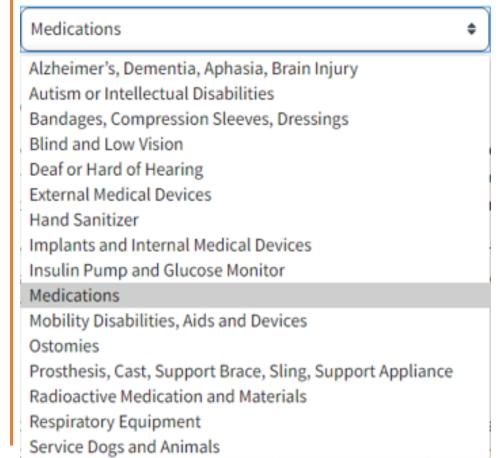
Provides travelers with additional assistance during the security screening process

- On-line if prior to 72 hours before your flight: https://www.tsa.gov/contact-center/form/cares
- Call if flight is less than 72 hours away: (855) 787-2227

Visit TSA.gov to obtain additional specific information related to your needs

TSA.Gov -> Special Procedures -> Disabilities and Medical Conditions

Please choose a situation to see more information. *



DIA Specific – Trains



- Wait for the train car to stop rocking before the threshold onto the train is flush with the floor
- The middle cars tend to be less crowded than the end cars
- Wait for a new train to arrive so you are one of the first to board
- Remain sideways on airport train cars (don't face forward or backward) – this will help with stability
- Power Chairs: turn off power for the train ride (avoids someone else bumping your joystick)
- Manual Chairs: lock your brakes

3. Gate Agent

- Identify yourself and service requests again at the gate
- Obtain any equipment tags needed that were not received at Check-In
- Gate agent coordinates the air transfer team
 - Assists you in getting onto the plane, stowing your wheelchair/equipment, booking Attendant service at arrival destination, getting you off the plane
- If deaf or hard of hearing, request agent to notify you for any changes in flight plans
- If using an aisle chair, provide your height and the gate agent so they have the appropriate manpower



Transport To and From the Gate:

Attendant Service

- Required to take you to the restrooms, but not into the restroom
- Required to stop to pick up fast food (time permitting)
- Required to assist with carry-on items
- May provide simultaneous assistance to another passenger who has requested attendant service
- May assist with helping you board the plane
- Attendants are usually a separate provider who do not work for the airline.
- While not required, it is customary to tip \$7-\$10 based on time spent and level of service



Prior to Boarding



- Get to gate approximately 1 hour before departure
- Perform bladder management before boarding
- Station yourself near the entrance to minimize congestion when boarding
- Stay in your wheelchair until you are sitting in front of open airplane door
 - Ensure all items are properly tagged in a location that won't fall off
 - Instruct person taking your chair to use the elevator to transport your power chair or scooter to the cargo area. This will help avoid damage to your chair from lifting and carrying it

Boarding Assistance

- □ Verify boarding bridge versus outside boarding
 - Outside boarding by stairs may require a request for a power lift or ramp. Airlines are not allowed to carry a person up a stairway
 - Take note that some boarding bridges can be steep with no handrails



Stowing Equipment

Manual Wheelchairs

- ☐ Remove all moveable pieces before stowing
 - i.e. armrests, leg rests, cushion, accessories (water bottle or phone holder)
- ☐Place in a carry-on duffle bag with ID tag
- Tag with appropriate gate/ID tags and request your
- chair be returned to you upon landing at the gate
- ☐ Use a strap to keep the wheelchair folded
- ☐ There are commercially available wheelchair protectors for folding and rigid wheelchairs
- Attach your instruction tip sheet for handling your personal chair and keep it attached to seat back

Stowing Equipment

Power Wheelchairs

☐ Explain how to change the chair from locked to unlocked position ☐ Pack all moveable parts in a carry-on duffle bag(s) i.e. seat cushion, footrests, joy sticks, tray tables, sip & puff, neck supports, etc ☐ Adhere proper gate tags and ID tags and request your chair be returned to you upon landing at the gate ☐ Adhere to airline packing procedure for batteries ☐ Can request to speak to Head Baggage Agent ☐ Remove or protect the joystick ☐ Use a protective covering (such as a plastic wrap) - this can protect it from damage and the elements. Be sure to protect the control box too! ☐ Attach your instruction tip sheet for handling your personal chair and keep it attached to seat back

Stowing Equipment

Scooters

- Explain how to change the chair from locked to unlocked position
- ☐ Turn key and pull out to deactivate. Keep key with you
- ☐ Attach your instruction tip sheet for handling your personal chair and keep it attached to seat back



Stowing Equipment Other Medical Devices

Walkers

 Adhere proper gate tags and ID tags and hand off to ramp agent if unable to stow on board



Stow in overhead luggage

Medical Devices

If on a ventilator, may be required to travel
with a personal care assistance. Special arrangements
must be made directly with the airline





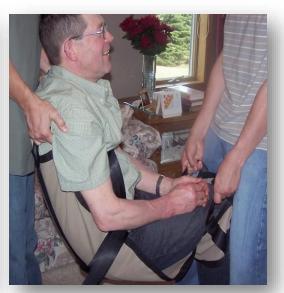


Staxi Chair





Aisle Chair



Comfort Carrier Travel Sling

Boarding the Plane

- Airline staff or Attendant will assist with transfer to/from the aisle chair and airline seat
 - May require a transfer to a standard wheelchair or a Staxi Chair first to get down the boarding bridge (plan for 2 transfers)
 - Request 2-person assistance
 - Instruct staff on how to perform the transfer or Independent Transfer. A video can be helpful to show instructions
 - Comfort Carrier Travel Sling great option for more dependent transfers



On Board / In Flight

- Before departing, ask flight attendant to check with baggage handlers that your wheelchair / device has been loaded
- Notify flight attendant of your in-flight service requests (i.e., transfer assistance to aisle chair for restroom use)

• Communicate any concerns regarding connecting flights (such as need to change plan for wheelchair equipment in stowage)

- Identify assistance needed upon landing, i.e., help getting off plane, retrieval of stowed wheelchair oxygen, escort to baggage.
- If hard of hearing, request agent personally notify you any changes in flight plans
- Flight attendants can assist with opening food packaging but not with consumption

On Board / In Flight

- Bladder Management
 - Complete bladder management before boarding the plane
 - Consider using an external catheter during travel
 - Blanket, Mountain Dew Bottle, Blanket, Urine bag- gel if needing to complete in your seat
 - Some folks reduce food and liquid intake prior to flying
 - Avoid foods that may have a negative impact on your bowels
 - Some planes have a curtain that can be pulled to allow privacy near the restroom without having to enter
 - Consider a brief for the flight
- Flight Attendants will:
 - Assist to/from the in-flight restroom via onboard aisle chair (no assistance with toileting)







On Board / In Flight

- Skin Protection
 - Place your wheelchair cushion or a travel cushion on the airplane seat
 - Have support to put under feet when cushion raises seat height
 - If air cushion is used, consider the changes in air pressure and release air during the trip
 - Incorporate changing positions / Pressure relief techniques
 - Complete more frequently when on the plane
 - Compression socks for management of swelling
- Stability in Seat
 - Slight recline
 - Chest Support (body point Universal elastic strap, etc) or quad pads to protect skin
 - Consider a cervical collar for support if you have a high tetra injury

De-boarding and Getting to Baggage Area

- Stay on the aircraft until the wheelchair is delivered to the jetway –
 will be the last to leave the plane
- Remind flight attendant of your service requests (i.e. transfer assistance to aisle chair, retrieval of stowed wheelchair, walking device, or O2 tank, escort to baggage) approx. 30 min before landing
 - Airport transfer team will assist with these tasks
- Have a companion do a quick check to make sure no damage before transferring to your chair or transfer a do a quick check yourself. If there is any damage notify an airline agent immediately
- Attendant service will accompany you to baggage

Prior to Leaving the Airport

- Get settled in wheelchair and do a more thorough visual check of your wheelchair for damage
- Complete bladder management
- Pick up your luggage and all equipment
- If problem with anything take pictures and go to your air lines baggage claim to file paperwork
- Notify CRO for any problems or inconveniences
 - Expert on disability related issued and has the authority to resolve complaints on behalf of the airline. Every airline must have a CRO available either by telephone or in person during operating hours.

Personal Considerations

- Pace yourself— Be mindful of your travel distance and endurance
- Be patient
- Be assertive, but try not to be aggressive/angry
- Don't assume anything
- Incorporate travel time to the airport
- Plan for restroom breaks (family restrooms)
- Plan for snack / beverage breaks
- Plan for animal assistance breaks
- Identify medical support areas via airport information booths



Personal Considerations

- Be mindful of your travel time
 - Sitting tolerance/ Skin Protection
 - Endurance
 - Bladder Management
 - Swelling- compression stockings
- On the Plane
 - Incorporate changing positions, Pressure relief technique
 - Plan for use of the restroom or a method to relieve yourself
 - Stability in Seat
- From the airport to your destination
 - Anticipate distance to baggage claim
 - Prearrange ground transportation



Wheelchair Damage Reimbursement

- USA and Canadian Airlines will reimburse complete replacement
- If damage contact the CRO to file a complaint
- U.S. carriers must provide repair or replacement.
- Most airlines will only have a standard manual wheelchair to offer which is usually inadequate.
- Airlines have contracts with companies like the Global Repair Group which will match the traveler with a wheelchair suppliers in the area of the airport and attempt to get a proper loaner wheelchair while the user's wheelchair is being repaired

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjkb7VabsJ0&feature=emblogo.

Some Resources

- Flying With A Wheelchair: Guide To Air Travel For People With Disabilities (wheelchairtravel.org)
- Airline Travel Craig Hospital
- Air Travel Tips for People with Disabilities | Shirley Ryan AbilityLab (sralab.org)
- Wheelchair Travel Wheelchair Accessible Travel Blog by John Morris
- Welcome Curb Free with Cory Lee: A Wheelchair Travel Blog
- Traveling With A Disability United Spinal Association
- Tips for Traveling with Disabilities (cheapflights.com)
- www.seatguru.com
- Airplane Cargo Hold Dimensions for Wheelchairs WheelchairTravel.org
- ACAA: http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/publications/HorizonsPrintable.doc
- TSA Information: <u>www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/index.shtm</u>
- Downloadable Wheelchair Tag: nrrts.org/downloads/

Videos to Watch

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r0GeaZJ4gw
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PasQHVplqs0&t=2s

Questions?

References

- Cichowski, K.C., LippAir, E. (reviewed 2020). Travel Tips for People with Disabilities. Shirley Ryan AbilityLab (formerly Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago). Henry B. Betts LIFE Center. Retrieved from https://www.sralab.org/lifecenter.
- Pedersen, J.P., Shea, M. (2017). Air travel using a wheelchair: what seating and mobility experts should know [PowerPoint slides].
- Pedersen, J.P. (2019). Protecting the Wheelchair on a commercial flight. *Direction* 2019(2), 27.
- Travel Tips. Easy Access Chicago. Retrieved from https://easyaccesschicago.org/information/tips.php
- Wheelchair User's Guide to Air Travel. Retrieved from <u>Flying With A Wheelchair: Guide To Air Travel For People With Disabilities</u> (wheelchairtravel.org)