

Travelling

There are many different ways of getting to Paris which offer varying degrees of accessibility. There are flights from all over the world, including several UK airports. Travellers from other parts of mainland Europe can also fly, or they can come by car or train, while from the UK there are numerous ferry services and the invaluable tunnel.

Visitors who can be flexible as to when they travel can benefit from competitive fares on most routes, and can often get good value on tickets booked well in advance. When you travel, both the date chosen and time of day, is likely to have a major effect on cost. Flight prices and train and ferry tickets are all likely to go up around school holidays, half terms, and over Christmas and New Year. It is certainly advisable to avoid flying on Friday evenings, when it is more expensive, and the airports (and Eurostar) are more crowded as business people travel home. Budget airlines and charter planes often have the disadvantage of extremely limited legroom, and probably a lower level of service, but may offer good value if you can cope. The individual traveller has to balance the advantages of convenience against possible higher costs.

In this chapter we describe:

- **driving, and travelling by car or minibus**
- **ferry crossings from the UK**
- **le Shuttle (using the tunnel)**
- **using the train**
- **air travel from the UK, USA, Canada and Australia**
- **coach travel**

We are looking at travelling largely from the point of view of someone making their own plans and bookings. Remember that if you are arranging your trip through a tour operator or travel agent, it is essential that you make your needs and expectations clear and check that they can organise both the travelling and accommodation to meet your needs. The more ‘middle men’ who are involved the less likely it is that your needs will be clearly understood, and our experience booking six hotels in Paris through an agency (described in the chapter on *Accommodation*) is salutary. In making your expectations known, you need to try to anticipate what the barriers may be, particularly of the distances involved, and the extra time that you might require.

Even when making arrangements in the UK directly with the train company to go from Chiswick station to Waterloo to catch a Eurostar train it took us four different phone calls to arrive at a practical and satisfactory arrangement. We came across people in the company who didn't know the capabilities of their own trains and systems! While it all worked well in the end, our experience highlighted the need to check the arrangements thoroughly, to ensure that our needs were met at each transfer from train to train.

RADAR, (the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) have recently published a useful guide on travelling with disabilities, called *There and Back*. Their contact details are:

RADAR, 12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF.

Tel: 020 7250 3222 *Textphone:* 020 7250 4119 *Fax:* 020 7250 0212

website: www.radar.org.uk *e-mail:* radar@radar.org.uk

It includes a range of advice and information, with an extensive section on air travel, and on getting around by train and by road. There's even a section on coach travel. This is generally the least 'accessible' way of travelling, but the big companies are beginning to wake up to the needs of their potential disabled passengers.

Driving

For British drivers, the first and most obvious thing to remember is that in France, as elsewhere on mainland Europe, people drive on the right. This isn't as difficult as it sounds, and at Calais you're not much challenged when getting off the ferry as the road to Paris is clearly signed, initially on the A26 and then the main A1 motorway. However, when you get to Paris, you're likely to have to negotiate part of the (infamous) boulevard Périphérique, the ring road, and then to go into the city centre. The only difficult places where you really have to concentrate, are the roundabouts and large junctions. There are more extensive comments about driving in the chapter on *Getting around*. If you're driving into the city for the first time, our advice would be 'Don't do it in the dark'. Make sure that you arrive in daylight, as it's just so much easier.

Technical things to take into account are:

- the need for car insurance (essential)
- the advisability of taking out extra AA/RAC cover for a continental journey
- the need for headlamp beam adaptors (which can be purchased on the ferry or at the terminal)
- the need for a GB plate, together with red warning triangles, spare bulbs and a first aid kit and fire extinguisher.

You need to carry the car insurance certificate, and your vehicle log book with you in the car. Several of these things are legal requirements for driving in France, and we are advised that checks on cars with foreign number plates are more likely. While in Paris we were stopped three times and our log book/s and insurance were checked.

Motorways (autoroutes) are toll roads (péages) and the speed limit on motorways is 130km/h (80mph). Most of the motorway service stations, though not all, have a French-style disabled persons toilet, and step-free access to eating facilities.

Motorists from the UK wanting to drive to Paris can cross the channel by ferry or in the Eurotunnel train *Le Shuttle*. The Dover-Calais ferry crossing takes 75-90 minutes, Dover-Dunquerque takes about 105 minutes. The *Shuttle* train takes only some 35 minutes, and has the added advantage that you can stay in your car.

Getting to Dover for the ferries it is possible to use either the M2 and then the A2, or the M20. The M20 is better for the Folkestone Eurotunnel terminal, but both routes involve motorways and/or fast A roads.

Signposting is generally good. Traffic density is generally much greater on the British side of the channel than it is on the French side.

Your choice of a cross-channel route will be a compromise, in this case between cost, timing, convenience and ‘accessibility’, similar to the compromises you will need to make when choosing accommodation.

Further advice on driving outside the UK can be obtained from motoring organisations such as the AA and RAC. You can also check the French Government-run website: <http://www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr>

for information on potential traffic black spots. Part of the website is available in English, but it didn't seem to us to provide sufficient detail to be particularly useful.

Ferry crossings from the UK

There are a considerable number of ferries operating across the channel offering a wide range of routes. There are many maps available online, and one of these can be found at:

<http://www.ferrycrossings-uk.co.uk/ferry-routes.htm>

We have concentrated on the short crossings from Dover-Calais and Dover-Dunkerque as many will find them to be the most convenient. If you are travelling from the north of Britain, you may wish to make use of the P&O service from Hull to Zeebrugge. This would save you driving down through England, and around London. Zeebrugge is only a few miles further away from Paris than Calais.

Our surveyors travelled using both P & O and SeaFrance for the Dover to Calais crossing. The Norfolk Line information was supplied to us by the company, as was that for the P & O Hull to Zeebrugge crossing, although with that one we had a very favourable report from a chair user who had used this route a couple of years ago.

Ferry ports

Dover

Tel: 01304-241427 *Fax:* 01304-203602

website: www.doverport.co.uk

e-mail: passengerservices@doverport.co.uk

The port is (predictably) enormous. It is well signed from either the M2 or M20, and you virtually bypass the town. Dover has both Eastern and Western Docks, but the main ferry companies all seem to use the Eastern Docks.

For the SeaFrance ferry, if the CP is crowded, there could be up to 100m to go from a parking spot to the Food Court (of which there were several, as the facilities are spread out over a large area). The Food Court we used had step free access from one end, and included a café, toilets and a small shop. The **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST80 SH49)** was clearly marked.

Calais

Tel: 03 21 96 31 20 *Fax:* 03 21 34 08 92 (for the Capitainerie du Port)
website: www.calais-port.com

Calais is much smaller than Dover, with more limited facilities. There is motorway access which bypasses the town, and it is well signed for getting both to and from Paris via the A26 and A1.

Dunquerque

Terminal Roulier du Port, Loon-Plage (Dunkerque), F-59279, France
for contact details see Norfolk Line.

We are told that the terminal has GF disabled persons toilets on both sides of passport/customs control, and that there's a lift to the first floor where there's another disabled persons toilet. The Port of Dunkirk, is the third largest in France after Le Havre and Marseille and the second French port for traffic with Great Britain. It is thus much bigger than Calais.

Ferry companies

SeaFrance Ferries

Tel: 08716632546

website: www.seafrance.com *e-mail:* enquiries@seafrance.com

All three ferries the Berlioz, Cezanne and Rodin have lifts and a wheelchair toilet. We travelled on the Berlioz, and discovered that if it's raining, and the car decks are wet they can become extremely slippery. One of our team slipped over when getting down from the minibus and fell quite nastily. The ship had three lifts (D90 W120 L160) which link the different decks to the car deck. The loading procedure was well organised, and we had told the marshalls that we had two chair users in our vehicle.

What was surprising was that although the ferry was almost brand new (it had been in service for only two months) there was only one **wheelchair toilet (D70+ ST70+)** which was in the middle of the ship on level 7. If several disabled people were travelling on the same crossing, this could be totally inadequate. Otherwise the facilities seemed to be fine, and the various lounges were reasonably spacious.

The limited toilet provision seems to be a typical example of where a provider has 'done the minimum' without thinking through the implications. We were interested to read, as well, that ships using UK ports are not (yet ?) subject to the requirements of the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act), although it is not clear that reference to the Act would necessarily result in more satisfactory provision.

P&O Ferries

Tel: 08716 645 645

website: www.poferries.com e-mail: help@poferries.com

Both ferries, the Pride of Canterbury and the Pride of Calais are large, well-equipped and modern vessels with three lifts along the decks. We travelled on the Pride of Canterbury, and the lift we measured was D90 W180 L250. There were three car decks and when you drive on board you need to remember *which* deck you are on, and which lift you need. The deck areas are colour-coded to help you remember.

On arrival at the check-in, we confirmed that the vehicle was carrying a wheelchair passenger. This meant that we were directed to a separate queue, and the staff were very efficient at placing the vehicle with easy access to the lift on board the ferry, leaving enough space behind for the ramp for when we disembarked.

The two main passenger decks were 7 and 8, and each had a **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST100+)**. To get up on the open-air deck (Deck 9) there are +8+8 steps and a major threshold [\pm 6cm]. The loos and lifts are marked reasonably clearly on the plans which are displayed in various places.

Norfolk Line

Kranenburgweg 180, 2583 ER The Hague, The Netherlands

Tel: +31 70 35 27 400 Fax: +31 70 35 27 435

Tel: +44 (0) 870 870 10 20 (booking & amendments, from the UK)

website: www.norfolkline.com e-mail: doverpax@norfolkline.com

Norfolk Line have three new ferries operating on the Dover-Dunquerque route and offering a potentially good value service. They are the Maersk Dover, Maersk Delft and Maersk Dunquerque. The crossing takes just under two hours, and their website says that 'all the vessels are equipped to carry disabled passengers, though we need to be advised at the time of making a booking'. We are told that there are on-board lifts, and a unisex disabled persons toilet on both the lower and upper decks.

Hoverspeed Ferries used to offer a quick cheap channel crossing, but they ceased operations in November 2005.

The Hull-Zeebrugge route

This is operated by P&O Ferries, and their contact details are the same as those for the Dover-Calais crossing. It takes just over twelve hours, and the crossings in both directions are at night, leaving at around 19.00, so you will need a cabin.

The information on the P&O website is poor. They have a link about accessibility on the route, which doesn't, in fact, provide any information! We were told that there are four cabins for wheelchair users on each ferry. These need to be booked on the phone, rather than online, and you are only allowed to book them if you use a wheelchair. These cabins contain just two bunk beds, so a companion would have to sleep on the top one. They have an ensuite bathroom, which we are told is 'adapted'. They also have adapted/disabled persons toilets on all levels. For disabled walkers, they will try and give you a cabin near the lift, if you call them up, possibly on the same floor as the restaurants and bars (level 4) if that is what you want.

As with all ferry services, tell them what special requirements you have in advance, and be sure to arrive early, so they can place your vehicle near to a lift on the car deck.

We had a report some time back from a wheelchair user who was impressed with the facilities and the service.

le Shuttle (using the tunnel)

Eurotunnel Shuttle

Eurotunnel, UK Terminal, Ashford Road, Folkestone, CT18 8XX
(or Customer Relations Department, P.O. Box 2000, Folkestone, Kent CT18 8XY)

Tel: 08705 35 35 35 (ticket information and reservations)

website: www.eurotunnel.com

The *Shuttle* is a very convenient way to get yourself and your car across the channel. It has two major advantages. Both the loading and unloading procedures, and the crossing itself are quite quick, and usually take less than half the time involved in a ferry crossing. The tunnel goes from Folkestone in England (signposted from junction 11A on the M20), to Calais in France (Junction 42 on the A16).

The website has useful information, and can be used to book tickets. They do not ask you to specify whether you have a disabled passenger on booking, you need inform them when you check in. They ask you to arrive at least 45 minutes before departure to ensure you can be placed at the front of the train.

On check-in, all drivers are given a ticket to hang from the front mirror. Vehicles with a disabled driver or passenger will receive a different ticket,

for priority boarding. On our return journey, we had to wait for the next train so that we could be placed in the front section of that one.

From the motorway, follow signs to Channel Tunnel, which guide you to check-in. The terminal building is a short drive from here and has a large CP with thirteen BB spaces which are 20m from the entrance. There are toilets inside the entrance doors, with one adapted cubicle in each block (D80+ ST100). The building is step-free inside, with shops including money changing facilities, an AA shop (selling the requirements for driving in France). Food options include a bar which has a majority of low tables with removable seating, and fast food and sandwich outlets also with tables and removable seating. There were no adapted loos on the train, so it may be advisable to use the facilities in the terminal before boarding.

Announcements are made throughout the terminal and CP to inform you to move to the boarding area, at which time vehicles drive into lanes. The lanes for disabled vehicles are clearly marked, and staff will guide you into the correct lane to await boarding. From here you will drive straight onto the carriage. When you are on board, staff are present to ensure that you are correctly boarded. The gangways and toilets on the trains are really quite narrow. If you need the toilet by the end of the journey, there are service stations with adapted toilets on the motorways after leaving the tunnel.

At Calais you drive directly off the train, through passport control, and onto junction 42 of the A16, with signposting to Paris.

If you are returning by Eurotunnel, the system and the terminal facilities are much the same (and there's some rather good ice cream on sale!).

Using the train

The Eurostar service from London provides travel from city centre to city centre, and is a quick and convenient way to travel for many. There are, however, a number of limitations.

The carriages are an adaptation of those used by the TGV in France. They were designed long before access issues were thought of, and have not been updated. For chair users the basic arrangements are OK, but only when there are just two people travelling. For other disabled people who don't necessarily need to book a chair space, getting on

and more particularly off the train, can be a challenge. At the Paris end of the journey there are –3 steps to negotiate without any handrail. For an occasional chair user, it might be worth taking/using a chair, which simplifies the arrangements for getting on and off using a ramp (at St Pancras) or a mini-lift (at the Gare du Nord). You can then book in as a chair user.

The arrangements made for wheelchair users are that there are just two spaces, in the centre of the train in a first class compartment. You can book a chair space, and a seat for a companion for the cost of just one standard class fare, and there is no extra charge for the first class catering. However, the arrangement is inflexible, in that particularly for a group of three, what happens is that either one person has to spend the entire journey in a different (standard class) carriage, or you have to pay one first class fare, which makes the trip considerably more expensive. There is a strong case, particularly for a family group of three people, to extend the price reduction to standard class for a third person, especially as the chair user has no choice about where they sit.

Stations

St Pancras International

Pancras Road, London NW1 2PQ

Tel: 020 7843-4250

website: www.stpancras.com

St Pancras station fronts on to the Euston Road, and is built on two levels. It hosts the Eurostar services to Paris and Brussels.

It also provides an interchange with a variety of domestic services, including:

- East Midlands trains to and from Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield
- First Capital Connect (incorporating the old Kings Cross Thameslink services) to and from Brighton, Bedford, Luton and Wimbledon (which is an ‘accessible’ station in south London)
- new fast services to and from Kent, with stops in Stratford and Ebbsfleet as well as Ashford and Dover. These are due to start at the end of 2009.

In addition St Pancras is close to another major London terminus, Kings Cross, with trains from Edinburgh, Newcastle, York, Peterborough and Cambridge.



It is the intention of Transport for London that all the tube lines from the station will be ‘accessible’ by lift, but there are still relatively few stations where you can get off (see *Access in London*). Most taxis are wheelchair accessible, as are the buses. Handling your luggage on public transport can cause a few problems.

At St Pancras there is an undercroft, lower level, with nearly all the main facilities. These include the ticket office (with a nearby disabled persons toilet), and a taxi/car drop-off point on the east side (on Pancras Road) while the taxi rank/pick-up point is on the west side (on Midland Road). There is a second disabled persons toilet, reasonably well signed, near Pancras Road and up towards where the Midland trains go from. There’s a third disabled persons toilet under the Eurostar platforms but past Passport Control. There are no toilets at platform level.

For Eurostar departures, there is an International Departures Concourse, part-way down Pancras Road, and the administrative area with Passport Control is immediately to the right. There are lifts leading up to each platform, as well as inclined moving walkways (travelators). The Eurostar trains with their eighteen carriages are some quarter of a mile long, and while at St Pancras you get on to the platform part way down, at the Gare du Nord in Paris you have to get off at the far (front) end. To minimise walking, coaches F or G are preferred.

Ebbfleet International station is near Dartford, close to Junction 2 of the M25 and the M20, M2 and A2 routes, and Bluewater shopping centre. The station will offer park-and-ride facilities for up to 9,000 vehicles, and should be fully ‘accessible’ with a portable ramp to facilitate getting on the train if you need it. It may be more convenient than St Pancras for some.

Trains

Eurostar

Eurostar House, Waterloo Station, London SE1 8SE

Tel: 08705 186 186 or 01233 617 575 (*booking*) 020 7922 6180 (*head office*) or 01777 77 78 78 if you have trouble with the website booking.

Tel: 01777 777 879 (*customer relations*)

website: www.eurostar.com *e-mail:* new.comments@eurostar.co.uk

Eurostar operates high speed trains from St Pancras International in London to the centre of Paris at Gare du Nord. Around twenty trains leave

London for Paris every day and check-in is at least 30 minutes before departure, although disabled passengers are advised to allow rather more time. Eurostar also has a direct train to Disneyland Paris every morning. All the trains have two wheelchair spaces in the 1st class area, which are available to a wheelchair user for the price of a second class ticket, with a free ticket for a companion.

There is +1 step to get on to the train in London, and there's a portable ramp if you ask for it. There is one wheelchair space per carriage in first class, located at the end of the carriage near to the doors, next to a fixed seat for a companion. The journey takes less than two and a half hours), and it was very pleasant, with all the perks of first class travel. The nearest toilet to the wheelchair space/s is adapted, but offers minimal room for manoeuvre. The cubicle is 125cm wide in total, with D85 and ST100 (approx.); you have to turn through a right angle to reach side transfer space, which can be tricky, as there is not very much room. It is also tight to get into the cubicle, with corridor 82cm, and space in front of toilet door 110cm. We have had reports from several wheelchair users who have found that the size of the toilet made it difficult to use.

On arrival at Paris Gare du Nord, a mobile mechanical ramp is used to bypass the -3 steps (no handrail) to the platform, then it is step-free to concourse. There is a wheelchair toilet in the station, though not well signposted. (See the **Gare du Nord** write up in the *Getting around* chapter under SNCF stations).

Travelling by air

Flying makes it possible to get to Paris from almost anywhere in the world. Over the years, flying has become easier and less expensive, and airlines and airports were amongst the first transport organisations to make provisions for disabled travellers. Not that they're perfect, but there is no question that air travel has become more normal, and that many disabled people fly around the world.

Long haul flying brings its own challenges, particularly in terms of dealing with the lack of access to a toilet for long periods, and the discussion here deals with this. In the guide our main focus is on travellers from the UK, and flying may well be the easiest way to get to

Paris for people starting from Northern Ireland, from Scotland, and maybe from parts of the north of England.

Other travellers will come from Canada and the USA, and even from as far afield as Australia or New Zealand (or from a huge range of places like China, India or Japan). However, as we cannot possibly cover all the possible starting points around the world, we just include a few, to illustrate the kind of basic information you may want to have when planning and booking your trip. There is a comprehensive *A-Z World Airports Guide* available on: www.azworldairports.com which may be a helpful starting point if you want to find out more about a particular airport.

One positive piece of information is that most airports around the world provide toilets for disabled passengers, and these are usually on both sides of the security check. Bear in mind that because of the inaccessibility of on-board toilets, it's almost certainly a good idea to go to the loo shortly before boarding.

What we have done in the guide is to provide some appropriate information points where you can learn more, some discussion about the practicalities of flying, largely based on our own experiences, and some outline information and contact points for key airports. Unfortunately every airline has its own policies and procedures for dealing with disabled passengers, so we haven't tried to tackle this issue. Fortunately most airlines these days have become more disabled-friendly, as they have come to understand better what is needed.

While most large airports have step-free routes to the gates where you board your aircraft, not all have enough passenger boarding bridges (sometimes called airbridges or jetways) to facilitate getting on board without further steps. Even at big airports like Gatwick, for some flights you may still have to go down to tarmac level, and then climb up the 20 to 30 steps up to the aircraft door. Chair users and other disabled passengers will be offered the alternative of using what is commonly called an Ambulift which will take them up to the aircraft door using a hydraulic lift.

During our research we happened to come across a remarkable clear and concise document entitled *Airport voluntary commitment on air passenger service* available from:

<http://www.exeter-airport.co.uk/assets/148.doc>. This was compiled by

Stephen Ayres, and not only outlines a constructive approach to the issues involved in helping disabled passengers to ‘get through the system’ but also (effectively) provides a useful check list for intending passengers.

Airport parking

Most airports only allow parking in designated short- and long-term CPs. The short-term CPs are expensive, but may be more convenient. For most long-term CPs you need to be able to get on a bus in order to transfer to the terminal. The drop-off or pick-up of passengers is normally allowed outside the terminal itself, but a vehicle cannot stay there for long, and your BB offers no special privileges. There are sometimes Help points located near BB spaces in the CPs in case you need help with baggage or a wheelchair push

Many of the airports advise calling up in advance to book a place and will arrange accessible transfer from the long-term CP to the terminal for you if necessary. If you wish to park in a BB space but take your badge abroad, it’s worth checking with the CP operator whether they’ll let you use a photocopy displayed in your car. Some CPs want you to use their own alternative permit instead of a photocopy. It is also worth checking what the height limitation is in the CP, if it’s an issue.

Advice on flying

Top PHSP tips for airline travellers

- make sure that the airline has been notified that it is carrying a passenger with special needs. If you book on the internet, be sure to phone them up and let them know of your needs and preferably have written confirmation with you, either from your travel agent or airline. There are special procedures for carrying an electric chair, and those are best checked directly with the airline. Airlines may be unable to carry some batteries, and if that is the case you will need to organise a replacement to be available at your destination
- in particular, if you find walking long distances and/or standing in queues is a problem, you can request the use of an airport wheelchair (and you’ll get an escort/pusher as well). This will take you from check-in, through security and right on to the gate, and finally to the aircraft door
- get hold of the tickets in time and check them. It could also be worth checking your flight details a day or two before the

flight, in case they have been changed. Note that most airlines now use e-tickets with a reference number, and these days it is particularly important that the name on your ticket is the same as that on your passport

- arrive in good time, and make sure your needs are known at the check-in desk. Ask what the procedure will be. Beware that there can be large distances involved in airports, so leave plenty of time to get to your gate. Disabled walkers are advised to make use of the motorised buggies available or of an airport wheelchair
- if there is any doubt, carry a doctor's note saying you are fit to fly. Make sure you keep any medications you might need in your hand luggage, and check whether they will require a doctors note (eg syringes/injection pens must be accompanied by a medical note)
- travel light, and take an absolute minimum of hand luggage. Check what the limits are on size of hand luggage: at the time of writing, any liquids must be in bottles of less than 100ml. If you are taking a connecting flight, beware that any bottles you buy in duty free on the first flight will be confiscated at the security checks before you board the second flight
- if you have a wheelchair put a label and luggage tag on it before you travel, and remove anything which will come off, such as arms, footplates and cushions. Bring a soft empty bag to put these in
- sometimes passengers are required to walk up a flight of steps onto the plane, and there may well be some randomness on the day in allocating planes to embarkation gates. Most airports have 'Ambulifts', or other ways of transferring you onto the aircraft if stairs are unsuitable
- on arrival, check your wheelchair for any damage in the luggage handling system - and if there is, make sure it is reported and recorded at the airport. Keep a copy of the record and relevant reference number

In the UK **DPTAC** are the body who advise government on policy development. They provide a free publication *Access to air* travel which provides specific and very detailed advice to travellers. It can be downloaded from their website, or if you can't do that, they will send it to you. There are sixty pages of advice!

DPTAC (Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee)

zone 4/24, Great Minster Street, 76 Marsham St, London SW1P 4DR

Tel: 020 7944 8011 Textphone: 020 7944 3277 Fax: 020 7944 6998

website: www.dptac.gov.uk e-mail: dptac@dft.gsi.gov.uk

RADAR provide the general travel publication *There and Back* (referred to earlier in the chapter).

Airport/Airline provisions for disabled travellers

Airports and airline operators are generally used to dealing with chair users and other travellers with special needs, but the procedures adopted vary from airline to airline. Ultimately, what happens depends on who is on duty. If you need help to get on or off the plane, you may have to wait awhile. This aspect of ‘handling’ is normally the responsibility of the airport and not the airline staff. In recent years it has become much easier and more routine, but there will still be some glitches, and you may need to be patient..

Most airports provide motorised buggies for disabled walkers to reduce the distance you need to walk. Most airports also have people who can help you with carrying your baggage from where you are dropped off into the check-in area, although you may have to pay for this facility. To bypass the check-in queue (if you need to do this) speak to a member of the airline staff, and you’re much more likely get a helpful response if you’ve made prior arrangements.

Some airports have specialist groups that offer assistance to disabled passengers, and it’s worth finding out how to get in touch with them well before you arrive. Assistance can usually be summoned from help-points in the CP or terminal buildings, but you cannot always rely on these to be working!

The volume of air traffic is so great that many airports cannot really cope at certain times, and places like Heathrow and Gatwick get very congested during peak periods. Any hiccup in the system causes disproportionate disruption. In spite of that, you’ll probably have a smooth flight, though be prepared for the odd glitch. Take a good book or magazine with you!

Medical Problems

If you cannot get to the toilet, and the flight time is likely to be a problem, again, talk to your doctor. You may be in the aircraft for at least an hour to an hour and a half more than the advertised flight time to allow for

getting on and off. Flight times to Paris are about an hour from London, and up to twelve hours from destinations in the USA/Canada. There are simple precautions like not drinking anything before the journey, but your doctor may suggest the use of incontinence aids or medical inhibitors. It is essential to get proper medical advice. A good precaution is to visit the toilet before boarding the plane, and make sure that the staff give you time to do this. Unisex toilets are provided at most airports, so that your spouse or companion can accompany you if necessary, but it's a good idea to check on whether there is one near your departure gate. There are other possible issues that may arise from a medical point of view, for example if you need oxygen during the flight. Talk to both your doctor and the airline. Most things are possible.

The International Air Travel Association (IATA) has produced a **standard medical information form (MEDIF)** on which to define the help required. In some situations, for example if you have a chest condition or if you're recovering from an operation, medical clearance is required, and your doctor will need to complete the necessary form. The Forms should be available from either your travel agent or directly from the airline. Some airlines issue a standard **Frequent Travellers Medical Card (FREMEC)** to people with a stable condition who travel by air. This reduces administrative hassle, although you must still inform your airline of your needs when you book.

The **Aerospace Medical Association** in the USA has published a list of general tips on flying, which gives advice about flying with certain medical conditions. It was published in 2002 and is available from: http://www.asma.org/pdf/publications/tips_for_travelers.pdf.

Paris airports

website: www.aeroportsdeparis.fr/ADP/en-GB/Passagers

Paris has four airports: the main two are Roissy Charles De Gaulle (CDG) and Orly, which are served by the main airlines (BA, Air France and many more). There are two smaller airports, Le Bourget which is used solely by private and business flights, and Beauvais Tille, which is about 80 km north of Paris, and handles several of the budget airlines. CDG is by far the largest airport, and handles most international flights while Orly provides facilities for most domestic flights. However, Orly remains the home of up to thirty airlines with international links.

There's a good plan on this website of the facilities for disabled

passengers at both Orly and CDG airports. It can be found on the page with Plans, under the heading *Localiser les services accessibles aux personnes B mobilité réduite*. The maps can be picked up at the airport, or, if you don't have access to the web, you can probably write in and get an advanced copy. When travelling to and from Paris by air we have used CDG airport, but for the Orly information we are relying entirely on what they publish on their website.

Roissy, Charles de Gaulle (CDG) airport

BP 20101, 95711, Roissy Charles de Gaulle, France

Tel: 01 48 62 22 80 or 01 70 36 39 50 (*information*)

An alternative website www.paris-cdg.com has useful information about the airport, but not much on accessibility.

CDG airport is some 23km northeast of Paris, and has three terminals. The newest (terminal 2) is massive, in that it is about 3km long, with bus links to take you to different areas if needed. Terminal 1 is circular, with four floors, while Terminal 3 is a converted hangar used by charter flights and Easyjet. There are lifts and disabled persons toilets throughout both the main terminals, and for details of the provisions get hold of the plans referred to above under Paris airports.

The RER line B has stations at both terminals 1 and 2, with lift access, and if you ask at the information desk/ticket office, the staff can put down a ramp to help you get onto the train. They may also be able to check for you whether the lifts are working at the station you want to get off at (see *Getting around*).

Orly airport

Orly Sud 103, 94396 Orly Aerogare

Tel: 01 49 75 15 15 Fax: 01 49 75 58 78

website: www.adp.fr

Orly is about 14km south of Paris. It has two terminals. Terminal West (Ouest) which houses only seven airlines, with the older Terminal South (Sud) handling most of the long haul routes. In addition to handling the bulk of French domestic flights and much of its charter traffic, Orly is still used by more than 30 airlines with medium and long haul schedules.

UK airports

Flying can be the easiest way to get to Paris, particularly if it's too complicated and too far to get down to London and use the Eurostar train, and if you're not going to drive.

The British Airports Authority (BAA)

130 Wilton Road, London SW1V 1LQ

Tel: 020 8745 9800 (*head office*) 0870 850 2825 or 0121 410 5105
(*information lines*)

website: www.baa.com

The BAA runs most of the main airports in the UK.

London airports

We describe here, briefly:

- Heathrow
- Gatwick
- Stanstead, and
- Luton

Heathrow airport (BAA)

234 Bath Road, Hayes, Middlesex, UB3 5AP

Tel: Special needs enquiries via main switchboard on 0870 000 0123

Textphone: 020 8745 7950

website: www.heathrowairport.com

Heathrow is a huge complex with several terminals on different sites. It is being extensively redeveloped. Terminal 5 opened early in 2008, and there are firm plans to replace Terminals 1 and 2 with a new Heathrow East terminal. The first phase of this is planned to be finished in time for the Olympics in 2012.

There are several ways of getting to and from Heathrow, including the Piccadilly line underground which is ‘accessible’ at Heathrow, but there are few places where you can get off without encountering serious barriers. The Heathrow Express ‘accessible’ train service runs to and from Paddington, and there is discussion about a future service to and from Waterloo. ‘Accessible’ buses run into central London, and **all the cabs at the airport are, in principle, wheelchair accessible**. There is a more detailed discussion of London’s ‘accessible’ transport system in *Access in London* (another Access Project/PHSP publication).

There is free assistance for people with reduced mobility with help phones throughout the CPs, station, and airport itself, or assistance with luggage can be booked in advance with Skycaps Tel: 020 8745 6011/5727.

Travel-care is a very useful organisation who can provide information, advice and help for passengers with special needs, and we have used them several times when travelling.

Tel: 020 8745-7495 *Textphone:* 020 8745-7565 *Fax:* 020 8745-4161
e-mail: heathrow_travel_care@baa.com

Gatwick airport (BAA)

West Sussex, RH6 0NP

Tel: 0870 000 2468 (*general enquiries*) *Textphone:* 01293 513 179
website: www.gatwickairport.com

Gatwick Airport has two terminals, North and South which are linked by an accessible mini-train. Both terminals are large. Gatwick can be reached by an 'accessible' rail link from Victoria. All the taxis are conventional cars and are therefore not wheelchair accessible.

Travel-Care offers advice to all Gatwick passengers who may need extra help on their journey. *Tel:* 01293 504 283 or you can find their office in Gatwick Village, South Terminal.

Stansted airport (BAA)

Enterprise House, Bassingbourne Road, Essex CM24 1QW

Tel: 0870 000 0303 (*general enquiries regarding special needs*)
Textphone: 01279 663 725

website: www.stanstedairport.com

Stansted has just one terminal, and is relatively compact compared with Heathrow and Gatwick. There's an internal accessible transit train to take passengers to the satellites where the gates are for boarding. If your aircraft is not linked to a satellite, your airline or their handling agent will arrange your transfer. Let them know of your requirements at the time of check-in and check whether this service is included within your ticket price.

The 'accessible' Stansted Express train takes approximately 45 minutes to and from London Liverpool Street station. Train access for wheelchair users is via a portable ramp and assistance will be provided by staff. They advise pre-booking this assistance, by calling the WAGN helpline on *Tel:* 08457 22 66 88.

Luton airport

Luton, Bedfordshire, LU2 9LY

Tel: 01582 395484

website: www.london-luton.co.uk *e-mail:* disabledfacilities@ltn.aero

Luton has just one terminal building, and mainly handles charter flights. There's no 'accessible' transport link to and from London.

Other UK airports

Belfast International airport

Belfast, BT29 4AB

Tel: 028 9448 4848

website: www.belfastairport.com *e-mail:* infodesk@bfs.aero,

This airport has one terminal. They have an Ambulift which can be prebooked to help wheelchair users and disabled walkers get onto the planes.

Manchester International airport

Manchester, M90 1QX

Tel: 08712 710 711 *Fax:* 0161 489 3813

For access info *Tel:* 0871 310 2200

website: www.manchesterairport.co.uk

Manchester has three terminals. Special vehicles (including Ambulift and wheelchairs) are available to transfer passengers with restricted mobility, plus a companion, from the terminal buildings to the aircraft.

Birmingham International airport

Birmingham, B26 3QJ

Tel: 08707 335511 *Fax:* 0121 782 8802 *Textphone:* 0121 767 8084

Special Assistance Reception Desk *Tel:* 0121 767 7878

website: www.bhx.co.uk

Birmingham has two terminal buildings. The Special Assistance Reception Desk is located on the ground floor of Terminal 1, and help should be requested from this point or from the help points at the CP entrances. There does not appear to be accessible transport between the CPs and the terminals unless you specifically ask for it.

Glasgow airport (BAA)

Glasgow Airport, Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland, PA3 2SW

Tel: 0870 040 0008 *Fax:* 0141 848 4769 *Textphone:* 0141 585 6161

website: www.glasgowairport.com

Glasgow Airport has a main terminal building and an additional check-in facility in terminal 2. There are accessible buses between the airport and Glasgow City Centre. Paisley train station is two miles away where you can prebook ramps for getting on and off the trains. Adapted taxis can be booked with Cabfly *Tel:* 0141 848 4588.

Unity (a local charity) *Tel:* 0141 842 7568, *e-mail:* unity@baa.com offers free assistance to passengers with reduced mobility. They ask you to let them know of your needs 48 hours in advance.

Edinburgh airport (BAA)

Edinburgh, Scotland, EH12 9DN

Tel: 0870 040 0007 *Fax:* 0131 344 3470 *Textphone:* 0141 585 6161

website: www.edinburghairport.com

Edinburgh has one terminal. All buses that operate on routes to and from the airport are ‘accessible’. Edinburgh’s main railway station (Waverley) in the city centre is ‘accessible’, and can be reached by taxi or bus. Most airport taxis are accessible to wheelchair users.

Some free assistance is available throughout the airport. To find out more about this *Tel:* 0131 344 3486

“Servisair/GlobeGround” provide a paying service called Helping Hand to help you through the airport for a fee. *Tel:* 0131 344 3478 or *e-mail:* helpinghand@servisair.com

US airports

New York JFK airport

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Building 14, Jamaica, New York 11430

Tel: (718) 244-4444 *Fax:* (718) 244-3536

website: <http://www.panynj.gov/CommutingTravel/airports/html/kennedy.html>

JFK airport has nine terminals and at present, Air France fly from terminal 1. The terminals are located around a circular road, so distances can be huge. There is an accessible Airtrain which links all the terminals, and also connects to the long stay CP, and to Howard Beach and Jamaica stations on the New York subway. Disabled passengers can get assistance from **TravelAid** *Tel:* (718) 656-4870. Information on public transport for disabled people into New York is available on *Tel:* (718) 330-1234. More access information can be found at the JFK website.

Chicago O'Hare airport

1190 West, Chicago Illinois 60666

Tel: (773) 686-2200 *Teletypewriter:* (773) 601-8333

Tel: (773) 894-2427 (*Travelers Aid for disabled passengers*)

website: www.ohare.com

There are four terminals, confusingly called terminals 1, 2, 3 and 5. Most international flights go from T5. A wheelchair accessible train links all the terminals and also parking lot E. The Blue line train service into the city is fully accessible at the airport. This does not, however, seem to link directly to the airport train system. You may be able to get more information from *Tel:* (312) 836-7000 *Textphone:* (312) 836-4949. The O'Hare Visitors Guide can be downloaded from the website, with information about the airport and its accessibility.

Los Angeles airport

1 World Way, Los Angeles, CA 90045

Tel: (310) 646-5252 *Teletypewriter:* (310) 665-0370

Tel: (310) 646-2270 (*Travelers Aid for disabled passengers*)

website: <http://www.lawa.org/lax>

The airport is huge, with nine terminals. Air France flies from Terminal 2. **Travelers Aid** have booths by the baggage conveyors in the arrivals hall of each terminal.

The Free bus, LAX shuttle "A", runs continuously between the terminals, and has a wheelchair lift. A guide for people with disabilities can be downloaded from the website, or ordered from the Public Relations Division *Tel:* (310) 646-5260 or *Teletypewriter:* (310) 644-0370.

Canadian airports

Montreal Trudeau airport

Montréal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport

975, Roméo-Vachon Blvd, North, Dorval, Quebec, Canada

Tel: (514) 394-7377 or 1 800 465-1213

website: <http://www.admtl.com/passager/home.aspx>

This is a fairly small airport with just one terminal. An electric-car shuttle service is available free of charge on the departures and arrivals levels within the international and transborder jetties. The website has good information about parking, but not much else for people with reduced mobility.

Toronto Pearson airport

P.O. Box 6031, 3111 Convair Drive. Toronto AMF, Ontario, Canada L5P 1B2

Tel: (416) 247-7678 (*Terminal 1*) or (416) 776-5100 (*Terminal 3*)

Teletypewriter: (416) 776-3843 (*for both*)

website: <http://www.gtaa.com/>

There are two terminals: called terminals 1 and 3 since terminal 2 was closed.

The website has maps, and more information about facilities for people with special needs. Help can be arranged through the Airport Customer Assistance Program (ACAP) *Tel:* (416) 776-2227 or you can fill out a request form on the airport's website.

Australia

Sydney airport

Locked Bag 5000, Sydney International Terminal, NSW 2020

Tel: 02 9667 9111 *Fax:* 02 9667 1592

website: www.sydneyairport.com.au

Sydney Airport has three terminals. T1 is for many international flights, although Qantas go from T3. You will be involved in at least one stopover en route at somewhere like Singapore if you're flying to Paris. You may want to ensure that you don't have to change planes.

The website has little information on facilities for disabled people, although they have an interesting scheme called Gold Ambassador Volunteers. Their main function is to provide information, but whether they will also willing to do other things is not entirely clear.