

# Barrier-free air travel for persons with severe physical disabilities

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—Based on interviews with disabled passengers

## Q What is the total aviation cost for people with severe physical disabilities and limitations on mobility?

### Vanilla Air incident in 2017

Persons with disabilities using wheelchairs may be denied boarding simply because they cannot walk on their own.

Compared to train and bus companies, airlines may be less concerned with serving the needs of passengers with disabilities.

Is barrier-free air travel possible for people with severe disabilities and limited mobility?

### Purpose of research

This study explored the concept of an inclusive society by highlighting the problem of barrier-free air travel for people with severe physical disabilities and limited mobility.

### Research method

By interviewing three people with severe disabilities and various limitations on mobility who have had considerable experience boarding airplanes<sup>1</sup> and investigating the actual situation of barrier-free aviation, we documented the current state of the burden on each interviewee.

### Results

The survey results are organized in the following table: "Burdens of air travel and reasonable accommodations for people with severe physical disabilities and limited mobility."



Basic information		Burdens of air travel	Reasonable accommodation <sup>2</sup>
Name • Affiliation	Disability / illness		
<b>Mr. Hideto Kijima</b> Representative of Hideto Kijima Barrier-free Research Institute	Lower body paralysis due to a spinal cord injury  Wheelchair user; does not require assistance	<b>Mental burden, physical burden, adjustment cost</b> • Anxiety that boarding may be refused or other last minute difficulties at the gate. • I must always check whether airports and aircraft are equipped with adequate facilities to assist the disabled.	• Airlines should not refuse to allow boarding.
<b>Daisuke Tenbata</b> JSPS Research Fellow PD / Chuo University	Swallowing difficulties, language disabilities, visual disabilities, wheelchair users; requires assistance	<b>Physical burden, economic burden, adjustment cost</b> • Scissors are required to chop meals, but inflight utensils are limited for eating and drinking are limited due to safety regulations. • When traveling to France, the assistants' reservations could not be changed, only canceled and rebooked, resulting in double fees and a large economic burden. • Troublesome negotiations for necessary accommodations (seat selection at the wheelchair window, wheelchair information / state of disability FAX, schedule adjustment of accompanying assistants (3 to 4 persons), safety confirmation when boarding, etc.).	• Especially when traveling abroad, it should be possible to change the ticket information if there is a change of assistant after the reservation has been made.
<b>Mr. Hiroki Okabe</b> Beyond the NPO boundary, President/ Former President of Japan ALS Association	ALS <sup>3</sup> (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis)  Wheelchair / Ventilator user; requires assistance	<b>Physical and economic burdens</b> • Long flights are in business class (2 seats) due to the physical burden, but the partitioning hinders the assistants' work. • When traveling to Ireland, the cost for 4 accompanying assistants was 3 million yen, which is a heavy economic burden. • Depending on the aircraft model, it may be necessary cross through the partition when boarding.  <b>Adjustment cost</b> • One assistant must manage all of the coordination negotiations because these negotiations are too complicated for a second person to take over partial responsibility. ① Request a medical certificate from the doctor. ② Schedule adjustments for the accompanying assistants (4-5 people). ③ Call the airline to inform them in advance that the passenger uses a wheelchair / respirator. ④ Providing documents (respiratory / aspirator / battery / wheelchair information, medical certificate) by FAX. ⑤ Seat assignments, securing seats for the assistants to sit next to and behind the disabled person. Negotiate with adjacent passengers on board. ⑥ Negotiate whether the disabled person can lie back with the reclining seat lowered during takeoff and landing. ⑦ Domestic: Since the respirator's battery is lead, it cannot pass through the standard x-ray inspection, and the instruction manual must be presented whenever requested. Overseas: Checking of purified water / catheter / gastric fistula requires an explanation / negotiation at each inspection point. ⑧ Further explanation: It is necessary to repeatedly explain and negotiate at each transfer point due to the lack of communication between the airline staff and sites along the subsequent route.	• There is a need for a helper discount. • Reduce the burden caused by coordination negotiations. • Deployment of an assistance space on board. • Strengthen communication with sites along the route.

### «Burdens common to all three interviewees»

#### ● Adjustment cost

It is doubtful whether some of the documents requested by the airline or airport staff are actually needed.

#### ● Physical burden

Since the aisle is narrow and difficult for the disabled person to go to the toilet, each person has made their own arrangements regarding excretion. Use a urine bottle in the seat, refrain from drinking water, endure changing diapers, etc.

**pick up! Adjustment cost<sup>4</sup>**

Considerable time and effort is spent on the various negotiations that occur because of the passenger's disabilities. A wider range of adjustments must be made for passengers with disabilities and their caregivers.

(Ex. Caregiver's physical strength and consideration for working hours during long flights)

## A ① For people with severe physical disabilities and mobility problems, air travel causes four types of burdens (mental, physical, economic and adjustment).

### ② Economic burden and adjustment costs vary depending on the extent of disability.

Economic burden: If an assistant is needed, the disabled person will need to travel business class, which is more expensive.

Adjustment cost: The burden is greater if an attendant or a ventilator is required.

### ③ Persons with severe physical disabilities who need a ventilator have not only a greater economic burden but also significant adjustment costs.

Society is designed for the convenience of healthy people, while individuals with disabilities are pressured to pay additional fees for necessary services. In order to realize an inclusive society, it is necessary for healthy persons and those with disabilities to share the adjustment costs. For example, airlines must take the initiative to save records at the support desk and to provide information regarding physical barriers for each aircraft model. It is also considered necessary to provide seamless support such as assigning a CA to facilitate the flight from check-in to arrival, especially when obstacles are severe.

I would like to express my deep appreciation and thanks to Ritsumeikan University's Institute for Survival Studies, which paid the travel expenses of the authors.

1 Interviews were conducted on July 30, 2019 Hideto Kijima (has successfully flown to more than 170 countries around the world); August 16, 2019 Daisuke Tenbata (has successfully flown to more than 100 domestic and international destinations, August 14, 2019, Mr. Hiroki Okabe (has successfully flown to 60 domestic and 7 international destinations since he began to require a ventilator).

2 "Reasonable consideration" is detailed in Satoshi Kawashima et al. (2016). (Satoshi Kawashima, Yuriko Iino, Miki Nishikura, Ryoji Hoshika, 2016, "Rational Consideration: Opening and Opening Dialogues" Yuhikaku.)

3 With ALS, the limbs, throat, tongue, and muscles necessary for breathing gradually fade along with sensory perception. However, intelligence, vision, hearing and visceral function are commonly maintained. (Intractable Disease Information Center, 2015, "Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Designated Intractable Disease 2", Intractable Disease Information Center website (acquired August 15, 2019, <http://www.nanbyou.or.jp/entry/52>)

4 See "Tenbata et al." (2013) for "adjustment costs". (Daisuke Tenbata, Keiichi Murata, Takuro Shimada, Eriko Inoue, 2013, "Skype use by severely disabled people with speech disabilities: Towards a society with choices", "Ritsumeikan Human Science Research" 28, 13- 26.)

