

Interchange Matters Blog - Luton Airport

Introduction

Luton Airport is located two miles from Luton and a mile from Luton Airport Parkway station. In 2016, over 14.6 million passengers passed through the airport, a record total for Luton making it the fifth busiest airport in the UK. It is the fourth-largest airport serving the London area after Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, and is one of London's six international airports along with London City and Southend. The vast majority of the routes served are within Europe, although there are some charter and scheduled routes to destinations in Northern Africa and Asia.

The airport is undergoing a building programme that looks well towards completion. When we visited there was a temporary arrangement for the shuttle bus from the rail station.

Luton Airport is served by frequent (up to every 10 minutes) shuttle buses from Luton Airport parkway station which is six minutes bus journey away. In turn the station is served by East Midlands trains from London St Pancras and Bedford and Thameslink trains 24/7 from a variety of stations in London and the South East. This route map will change when the full Thameslink service is introduced over the coming few years.



Figure 1 Thameslink services to and from Luton Airport Parkway station.

There are National Express coach services from London and other key destinations including Northampton, High Wycombe, Oxford, Leicester, Nottingham, Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Stansted Airport, Heathrow Airport and Gatwick Airport. Green Line operates two services from London to Luton Airport.

Stagecoach operates buses to Milton Keynes, stops include Luton Station, Luton town centre, Central Milton Keynes and Milton Keynes rail station. Busway guided bus service A runs to Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Luton Station and Vauxhall. Local bus services connect the Airport with surrounding areas: Luton town centre, St Albans, Milton Keynes, Stevenage, Hitchin, Leighton Buzzard, Harpenden and Dunstable.

The airport can also be reached by road and has both short stay/drop off and long stay car parking facilities with bus shuttle connections where necessary.

Layout and accessibility

Both the station and bus services are generally step-free

On arrival at the airport for departures it is clear where one must go and the various services are well signed inside and outside.

Inbound passengers also have a well signed, simple route that takes them past car hire, coach and train operator information and ticket desks. When you emerge from the terminal the various bus stops are well laid out directly in front of the terminal. That said the number and arrangement of the various coach and bus stops are bewildering. A map similar to the example inside the terminal placed on the forecourt of the expansive coach and bus station would assist passengers.



Figure 2 This is a useful map inside the arrivals area. A duplicate in front of the bus station would assist passengers

However, the bus stopping arrangements at Luton Airport Parkway station are not designed to allow step-free access because the 18 metre long bendy-buses cannot pull up parallel and close to the kerb. This means there is a substantial step off of the bus and down to the tarmac. The bus could be manoeuvred to allow the wheelchair ramps to operate, but this is not very satisfactory. Passengers with baggage have a high step to climb.



Figure 3 The bus stopping arrangement at Luton Parkway station is problematic because the bus cannot reach the kerb properly.

Ticketing for onward journeys

Tickets for train services are available either at a counter or from a ticket machine as one leaves the arrivals terminal. Assistance is provided at the ticket machine. Similarly coach tickets are available from a ticket office. Car hire is also available and taxi customers are directed to an office in the car park area.



Figure 4 Tickets and advice for onward travel are located where one would expect beyond the arrivals terminal

This arrangement is fine if passengers know which mode they wish to travel on and which operator they wish to travel with to central London. However it is unclear how local journeys are catered for and what range of travel is possible. Luton Airport should consider a one-stop arrangement for onward travel and offer passengers advice and tickets about the whole range of travel options in one location, retailed by one operation on behalf of the various transport operators.

Signage and information

At the airport the signage is large, clear and at appropriate locations.

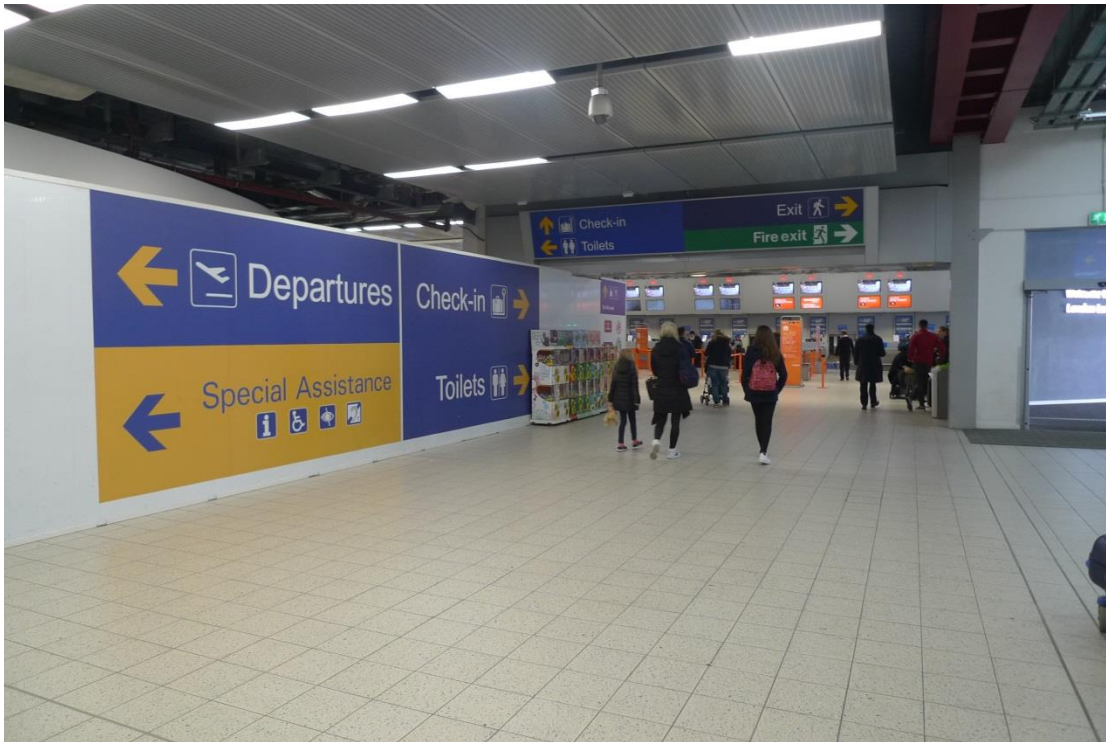


Figure 5 Passenger signs are large and clear and at appropriate locations

There were no PA announcements.

Facilities

At both Luton Airport Parkway station and the airport itself there are toilets, seating and some appropriate retailing. All are well signed. Taxis are available at both locations and there appears to be plentiful car parking available. Local bus services operate from both station and airport. Cycle parking is available at the Parkway station.

Conclusions

Overall, both Luton Airport and the Parkway station offer good interchange and should be awarded four out of five stars. The airport is of a size and layout that can easily be navigated with the help of appropriate signs. There are the facilities one would expect. Advice and ticketing is available for onward journeys.

However, there are a few improvements that could be made to make it a five star interchange. These are outlined below.

- The shuttle bus arrangements for boarding and alighting passengers at Luton Airport station needs addressing so that the bus can pull up close and parallel to the kerb at all times.
- A schematic of the bus and coach bays located in front of the bus and coach stopping area would assist passengers.
- Luton Airport and the transport operators (rail, bus and coach) should consider a one-stop shop for onward travel advice and ticketing.