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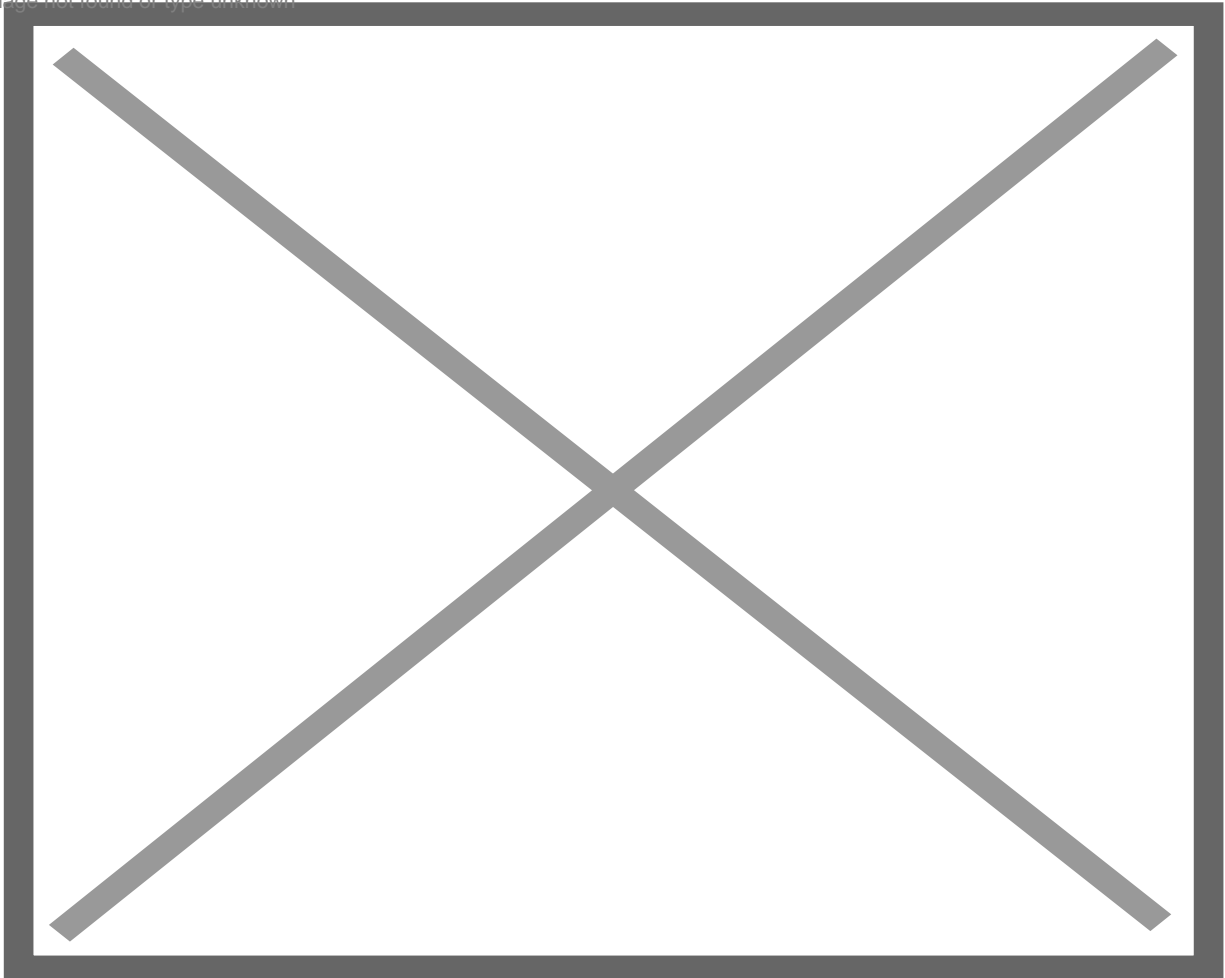
Governor Bryan Takes the Wheel of St. Croix's First Electric VITRAN

Inaugural ride showcases territory's shift to sustainable transportation

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Janeke Simon **March 14, 2024**

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The territory's first electric VITRAN in downtown Christiansted, St. Croix

When Governor Albert Bryan Jr. began streaming live on social media on Wednesday, viewers saw him in an unfamiliar role – one of chauffeur. The governor was seen behind the wheel of the territory's first electric van, sharing his excitement at the development while taking several cabinet officials out for a spin along the streets of St. Croix.

Along for the ride was Public Works Commissioner Derek Gabriel, who said that the van would first be put into service on fixed routes to give the public an opportunity to experience the ride, following which the fully accessible bus, complete with lift, will be utilized for VITRAN+, the

territory's paratransit service.

Mr. Gabriel noted that the electric bus was acquired using funds from a Department of Interior Grant that was awarded to the VI Energy Office. "Director Kyle Fleming was actually really instrumental in securing funding for these vans," he said, noting that "these are the first two of our new EV fleet."

The inaugural EV van for St. Thomas will be on the roadways in the very near future, said Mr. Gabriel. "We're getting it wrapped right now," he disclosed.

Mr. Fleming noted that the acquisition of electric vehicles for government use is a legal requirement. "There's already legislation in place that mandates that the GIV procure electric vehicles or alternative fuel vehicles wherever reasonable." The challenge, according to Mr. Fleming, has been in actually getting those vehicles into the territory. The federal grants being utilized for the purpose, Mr. Fleming said, has begun "driving supply chain; this is going to make it easier to then ensure that whether it be a passenger vehicle, a commercial vehicle, a pickup truck, even a waste hauler...that we in the territory are taking advantage and making these investments."

Mr. Fleming informed viewers that seven charging stations would soon be installed on St. Croix, "going from Frederiksted all the way east." Additional charging options will be installed later this year, using money from a multimillion dollar federal grant.

Initially, using the charging stations will be free, but "eventually, in the ideal world, this becomes an additional revenue source for the utility," said Mr. Fleming, noting that "every electric vehicle represents a new customer."

Electric vehicles were a good fit for the island of St. Croix, said Mr. Fleming, given its small size. A 200 mile range between charges would be good for about 78 round trips between Frederiksted and Christiansted before an electric car battery will need to be recharged, he estimated. That efficiency can lead to significant savings when compared to petrol vehicles, he said, noting a 2022 study which found that replacing the GVI fleet with electric vehicles could result in savings of almost 20 percent, even when paying full WAPA rates for electricity.

Maintenance costs would also decrease, since "these cars really eliminate most of the mechanical features" of a traditional petrol vehicle, Mr. Fleming said.

As he drove St. Croix's first electric van around town, Governor Bryan could not contain his excitement over the newest development in the fulfillment of his administration's sustainable energy policy. "You gotta get on the bus," he told residents. "You gotta get on the energy bus."