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## VIPA Faces Financial Questions on St. Croix Airport Expansion Costs

**During a VIPA board meeting, questions arise about how the Port Authority plans to secure the extra \$30 million needed for St. Croix airport terminal enhancements**

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### The Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix

“Show me how you pay the incremental amount.” That was Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte on Tuesday, seeking clarity on how the V.I. Port Authority expects to fund the additional approximately \$30 million that will be required to implement requested changes in the plan for a new airport on St. Croix.

Mr. Boschulte was speaking at a special VIPA board meeting, convened to approve the design presented for a new terminal at the Henry Rohlsen airport. His questions about VIPA's plans for funding the additional costs that are expected to be incurred, however, did not elicit a clear response.

VIPA Director of Engineering Preston Byer confirmed that the adjustment to the design was requested by the Port Authority. "We didn't issue a change order in so much as we requested that VI Ports Partners, as our partner, assess an alternative approach to the terminal development in St. Croix and what was initially proposed," he noted. However, the cost of that alternative approach was much more difficult to pin down.

"While we don't have an exact number," said VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe, "the mechanism that we will utilize, which was explained, is in three parts." Mr. Dowe said that the Federal Aviation Administration may support part of the cost of building the new airfield apron, while airlines which will use the new terminal are expected to make a contribution. "In terms of the structure, there will be some participation by the Port itself," Mr. Dowe continued. However, he noted that "it's clear that we can't know the final number until all these deals are in." Despite this, he argued that because "we wanted to think this structure differently from what was originally proposed, so we will have some responsibility to bear some of the cost."

Other board members were similarly wary of making a decision on something without full knowledge and understanding of what they were committing VIPA to financially. "I think it's really difficult for us as board members to make a decision like this, a yes or no vote...we don't have all of the information to make an informed decision," said Commissioner Derek Gabriel.

Responding to a plea from Mr. Dowe that the board not "kick the can down the road any further," Mr. Boschulte countered that his reticence was not because he desired to delay matters, but because of the lack of solid information on costs. "How do you build a house because you want the house and you need the house, but you don't know how to pay for it?"

Mr. Dowe pushed back, pointing out that VIPA could rely on FAA funds to cover at least part of the additional costs. "Some of these monies that we get, we list the priorities so we can determine that to do this apron over, this is one of the projects we want to do." The idea was not "some pie in the sky that we don't have no idea whatsoever, that's not how it works," he insisted. Mr. Dowe said that the board would ultimately decide how much money VIPA itself will invest into the project.?

Board members moved into executive session to discuss financial matters, ultimately deciding to [approve the new terminal concepts](#).