

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Lawmakers Press VIPA as Airport P3 Negotiations Stretch Into Another Year

Senators sought clarity on when the long-negotiated public-private partnership with SkyCity will conclude, as board chair Willard John projected year-end negotiations but confirmed no definitive completion date.

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The Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

The proposed public-private partnership between the V.I. Port Authority and SkyCity to redevelop the territory's airports remains in negotiations, with no firm completion date — prompting growing concern from lawmakers over the pace of progress.

The issue surfaced during a recent meeting of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary, where three members of the VIPA Governing Board were seeking reappointment. Senator Milton Potter used the opportunity to question the timeline of the long-discussed P3 initiative.

"It seems like this P3 initiative has been in negotiation status forever," Sen. Potter said.

"I don't know if it's just my perception, or if this is reality," he continued, asking board members for clarity on where matters stand. According to the senator, the local community "embraced it wholeheartedly because of the things that will come with it," referencing promised airport upgrades, including sky bridges.

"Is there a time certain that we are going to see this matter finally come to conclusion?" he asked.

Willard John, chair of the VIPA board, responded that he is "expecting negotiations and so forth to finish by the end of this year." However, he acknowledged that he could not confirm a definitive completion date.

"So this could potentially go on for another year; the end of this full year?" Sen. Potter asked.

Mr. John replied yes, explaining that the negotiations are "not a simple process."

He noted that the board is "not involved in the day-to-day affairs" of the negotiations and therefore could not provide details about any sticking points. However, he assured lawmakers that "whatever that outcome is, they will bring it to us for approval, and then we will have a say."

During his testimony, Mr. John also stated that "this year, VIPA and SkyCity VI will finalize a lease agreement and plan to hold public engagement meetings to update the community and aviation stakeholders."

Committee Chair Senator Carla Joseph indicated that additional answers will be sought from VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe when he appears before the committee for a budget hearing.

"Because it cannot be that we have invested a lot of time, energy and money into the [P3] with the expectation that we are going to have very up-to-date, modernized airport facilities, and we aren't seeing any shovel in the ground," Sen. Joseph said.