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WICO Reports Sharp Rise in Cruise Calls and Passengers, but Port Can't Fully Meet Demand

Joseph Boschulte said calls are up by nearly one-third and passenger volume by 28 percent in the first half of 2026, but warned that limited berthing capacity continues to prevent WICO from handling all the cruise demand for St. Thomas.

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The West Indian Company Dock in St. Thomas. CEO Joseph Boschulte says cruise calls and passenger volume are up in 2026, but limited berthing remains a major constraint on future growth. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Cruise traffic at the West Indian Company is running well ahead of last year's pace, with both ship calls and passenger numbers rising in the first half of 2026 compared with the same period in

2025. But even as WICO benefits from that growth and positions itself to capture more business if global conditions push additional ships into the Caribbean, company CEO Joseph Boschulte told directors Friday that St. Thomas still faces a major structural limit: the port does not have enough berthing capacity to handle the level of demand cruise lines are showing.

Speaking during a board meeting, Mr. Boschulte said WICO is “significantly ahead” of where it was a year ago in both passengers and ship calls.

“We are significantly ahead of where we were year to year in terms of passengers and calls to WICO, and that’s not only a good sign for WICO, but that’s a good sign for the territory as a whole, and of course for St. Thomas,” he said.

According to Mr. Boschulte, port calls were up by almost one-third, while passenger volume had risen by 28 percent compared with the first half of fiscal year 2025.

He said that growth could accelerate further depending on how long the current geopolitical situation continues.

“It is our belief in my conversations with some of the cruise executives that if the war continues to drag on, and as the price of oil continues to go up, we will see more repositioning of the ships...to the Caribbean. So we are definitely watching.”

Mr. Boschulte said WICO has already been preparing for that possibility by staying in contact with cruise partners and making clear that space is available if additional ships are repositioned into the region.

“We have let them know that we have space available if need be,” he said. “We are actually pushing in our conversations with the lines to let them know that there’s a berth available at WICO for them if they choose to reposition ships.”

At the same time, he cautioned that any near-term benefit from repositioning could eventually be offset by broader economic pressure if higher oil prices continue to weigh on consumers.

“As I just reported before, our numbers are up and ships are coming in full, but...people book cruises almost two years out, and it’s very difficult to get out of a cruise once you’ve bought it,” he said, suggesting that the strong current numbers reflect decisions travelers made well before recent global tensions.

“Most people, at least for the foreseeable future, will continue to travel. But we need to be prepared to monitor that,” Mr. Boschulte added.

Even with the increase in calls and passenger volume, Mr. Boschulte said port infrastructure remains a major obstacle to further growth.

“We are the only major cruise port that I can think of that can only take one Oasis-class ship,” he said. “Every one of our major competitors have invested in at least taking two...some three.”

He urged the board to again consider the need for additional berthing, warning that WICO already faces recurring scheduling conflicts because it cannot accommodate three large ships on certain days.

“As it stands, we will have conflicts this season. We had conflicts last season, we will have conflicts next season and the next season, with days that we cannot take three large ships in our facility.”

Still, he said expanding capacity would not be simple because of the physical limits of the site.

“You have 3300 feet of concrete, and there’s no more room to extend because you’re in channel. So that’s a major limitation for us.”

Despite that constraint, Mr. Boschulte said cruise line interest remains strong if WICO can find a way to expand capacity.

“The other lines that don’t have berthing agreements with us want to come to St. Thomas, and they want to call at WICO.”