

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VITRAN Will Now Operate On Weekends And Holidays As Mapp Signs Bill Into Law

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp signed bill No. 31-0133 -- an Act requiring the commissioner of Public Works to provide VITRAN bus services on weekends and holidays -- into law earlier this month, a move that many in the community have called for.

The measure, sponsored by Democrat Sen. Marvin Blyden, had faced opposition from senators who questioned the bill's necessity, and from Public Works Commissioner Gustav James, who said while the implementation of VITRAN bus runs on weekends and holidays was a good idea, funding for the initiative would be problematic because of the fiscal challenges the territory is currently facing.

James said the weekend and holiday service would further impact the operation's bottom line as seniors travel free of charge, however it's a hurdle he'd like DPW to overcome through subsidies provided by the federal government. James also said that while DPW had not been able to adequately assess the added cost of the weekend and holiday service because it would be based on the amount of runs and routes DPW approves, an assessment would be carried out before the extra services start.

To do so, lawmakers here suggested implementing a test run in this district, however Sen. Novelle Francis, St. Croix Democrat, bucked.

"One of my colleagues suggested that we try a trial route in the district of St. Thomas/St. John, [but] I want to say that any trial being done should be done in all three islands because certainly St. Croix is hurting, and they depend on the VITRAN buses a lot as well. We have the highest unemployment over there and people are reliant on VITRAN, so let's try the entire Virgin Islands."

Sen. Kurt Violet questioned the measure's viability, thinking aloud whether it would impede DPW as it relates to flexibility in relation to hours and holiday runs. He also questioned whether the program could be implemented without legislation.

"We don't need to legislate [the VITRAN weekend service] because it's part of our intentions," James said. "The fact that it's legislated would make it mandatory and therefore will put some burden on [the Senate] in the sense that you would then be required to work with us to make it happen. [And] in the sense that we may need to come back and say we need additional funds."

James added that while the legislation mandates weekends and holidays, it also says DPW can determine its schedule, so while there may not be a day that there would be no service, "say we run two, three or tens trips, that's apparently within our purview."