

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Ferryboat Delayed Because Of Coast Guard Requirements; Still Expected To Set Sail This Year

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ST. CROIX -- News that a new Ferryboat would set sail in June of this year between this island and St. Thomas [sent the Internet into a frenzy](#), with residents expressing excitement that cheaper inter-island travel would become a reality. But months have passed and Warren Mosler's ferryboat, dubbed QE4 -- with two successful sea trials and work all but complete -- has yet to set sail between the islands.

The Consortium sought out the ferryboat's builder, the lauded Gold Coast Yachts, seeking answers.

On Wednesday, we met with one of the firm's vice presidents, Jeffrey Bisson, who spoke extensively about the hurdles, which he assured were not major, but rather technicalities that Coast Guard requested to ensure the safety of passengers.

"It's not anything extraordinary that they're asking for; it's just a matter of proving everything out, because what we have is an unusual craft," Mr. Bisson said, noting that no one has ever built a ferryboat quite like Mr. Mosler's design. "Because of that, they're asking for proof of concept, so the next phase, which is going to happen next week, is we're taking the boat out for an instrumented sea trial."

He explained that the trial would include the installation of string gauges and accelerometers on the boat, and also putting drums of water on it to test for correct passenger weight. They would then run the boat at maximum allowed conditions as well as regular conditions.

"When we do all that, we're going to be collecting data from sensors that we'll install on the boat, and at that point, the data will allow us to prove that the structure is strong enough, the G forces are acceptable for people, where we'll be able say these are the ride qualities. It's one thing to take people out for a ride on the boat, but it's another thing to say what is happening to the structure, so that we could put in and make sure that we've dealt with the safety factors for passengers."

Mr. Bisson pointed out that part of the Coast Guard's mission is safety of life at sea, so the federal agency's is assuring that if a new ferry wants to provide inter-island travel, that the durability of the craft is tried and proven.

Once Tuesday's trial is complete, the results will be sent to the Coast Guard, whose engineers will then examine the results and make a determination to approve or deny. Mr. Bisson is confident that the results will be satisfactory.

As for the other approvals, "It's the standard approval process: How do people get in and out when there is a fire, where are the fire pumps, where is this, where is that, how big are the doors -- all the normal approval process and we're working through all of that, but obviously proving to them that the boat has met the operational requirements structurally, that's the big thing we're working through right now," he said.

Gold Coast Yachts has an impeccable reputation to uphold. They've been building yachts here for 31 years, with the QE4 being boat number 170. The company has built three boats that are on this island, fourteen in St. Thomas, four in St. John and all through the Caribbean, the mainland U.S. and Hawaii. To date, all the boats they've built are still in operation, bar one that was damaged by a storm, and not a single vessel is up for sale; a testament to the quality of the company's work, says Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Bisson said the ferry will seat approximately 54 passengers inside, with some standing room on the outside to the boat's rear. Mr. Mosler plans on offering two round trips daily, with ticket cost being \$50 one-way.

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