

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Government Ferry Between STX And STT Delayed Because Of Funds; Work On Paul E. Joseph Stadium Pushed To March

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ST. CROIX -- On July 5, 2015, 31st Legislature senators who made up the Committee on Housing, Public Works and Waste Management [favorably voted](#) on bill [No. 31-0137](#) — an act establishing the Virgin Islands Ferryboat Fund as a separate and distinct fund in the Treasury of the Virgin Islands.

The idea was to secure funds to procure at least two top-of-the-line ferryboats for inter-island travel between St. Thomas and St. Croix, which was halted in 2011 after the sole ferry was damaged.

Back then, Department of Public Works Commissioner Gustav James said the government had already secured \$7.5 million to purchase three vessels costing between \$8-\$10 million each. Mr. James said the process of searching for the first vessels had already commenced since the Mapp administration intended to purchase the ferryboats as funding became available, instead of waiting until after all the funds were secured.

Former At-Large Sen. Almando Liburd said at the time that he would've have liked to see the project come online because it would finally unite residents of the territory, although it would be a costly venture.

"I think this is an excellent idea, but I just want to caution people that this is not a cheap idea," said the At-Large senator in 2015.

But during a hearing in the same committee on Wednesday, Mr. James said there was only \$4 million that the government can use, while the ferryboats cost \$10 million each.

"So we do not have enough funds to actually purchase the vessels that will be able to service that route," Mr. James said, referring to the St. Thomas-St. Croix route in response to a question posed by Senator Novelle Francis.

Asked about \$7 million that was initially placed in an account for the ferries, Mr. James said, "The only \$7 million that I know of was what was spent on the two ferries that we have." Mr. James was referring to government ferries servicing the St. Thomas-St. John route. "We spent \$7 million on two ferries that run between St. Thomas and St. John. I don't know of another \$7 million." It was unclear whether Mr. James was referring to the actual purchase of the two St. Thomas-St. John ferries with the \$7 million.

Whether or not the government makes progress on its ferry operation, Warren Mosler, who [recently announced](#) his bid for governor of the Virgin Islands in the 2018 gubernatorial race, said his [ferryboat was just about ready to set sail](#), and is [currently awaiting U.S. Coast Guard clearance](#).

Mr. Francis, who used his time to get updates on projects the Mapp administration has been talking about from the beginning of its term, but none of which have been completed, also queried Mr. James about the Paul E. Joseph stadium, reminding the commissioner that Mr. Mapp announced that he'd [given clearance](#) for construction just before the governor's State of the Territory Address.

Groundbreaking for construction of the original project occurred in [December 2014](#), but Mr. Mapp delayed the project, which was awarded to St. Croix-based GEC, LLC, stating that it was hastily put together and was approved and signed by former Governor John P. de Jongh even while the contractor did not have a single design to show.

"The Paul E. Joseph project in Frederiksted, which is a \$20 million project, I have directed for that project to be frozen," the governor said. "I visited the project on Sunday. As many of you know, that project was put together in haste."

There's been numerous developments since, with Mr. Mapp recently announcing that work would commence in January; keeping in line with what both the governor and Mr. James [told The Consortium](#) late last year.

On Wednesday, however, Mr. James moved the commencement of work to March, explaining that "pricing is now being negotiated;" which he said was hindered because of design setbacks.

"Again these are situations where we are in the third year of the Mapp/Potter administration, and we're hoping that we can see some movements in these projects. It's important that we get these things going," Mr. Francis said. Mr. Francis said he passes by the work site whenever he's working at the Fritz E. Lawaetz Legislative Building in hopes of seeing the commencement of work, but has been disappointed every time.