

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Liat's Departure From USVI Is 'Blow To Territory,' Senator Says

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Jean Forde in a release issued Thursday expressed his displeasure at the recent announcement by LIAT Airlines that it will be terminating its routes to and from the Virgin Islands in March.

"This is a blow to the territory," said the second-term senator. "Many of our residents, including myself, have historically depended on LIAT to visit their families and to move products back and forth. The removal of this transportation linkage makes travel to other Caribbean islands more difficult and expensive, and it ultimately weakens the social and economic bonds between the Virgin Islands and our neighbors," Mr. Forde said.

The senator said he was particularly incensed at the lack of communication with Virgin Islands tourism officials and policymakers. '

"To the best of my knowledge, no attempt to sit down with the Department of Tourism to discuss difficulties they may have been having with the routes and work out possible solutions," Mr. Forde noted. "My staff and I wrote and called LIAT Corporate Headquarters last month to seek clarification when we learned that tickets were no longer being sold for flights beyond March 1st. To date neither calls or emails have been answered."

Mr. Forde said he would certainly like to see LIAT resume flights to the territory, and will work with other interested parties to reach out again to the airline.

"I will not be discouraged by the lack of an initial response, but will continue to work towards reestablishing this important link to other islands in the Caribbean," the senator concluded.

Liat announced [earlier this week](#) that it would cease flights to and from the Virgin Islands; St. Croix flights will cease March 1 while St. Thomas flights end June 14.

According to the company, the decision to suspend operation of the mentioned routes was made "to achieve greater profitability and improve efficiency."

"These moves are intended to help stabilize the airline's flight schedule and network," the company said.

The action follows a company-wide review of operations, with an end goal of ensuring that Liat only operate in commercially viable routes. Liat Chief Commercial Officer Lloyd Carswell said the change means more time added to schedules at airports throughout the region, while eliminating the underperforming routes.

While Liat left little hope for reinstating its St. Croix flights, Mr. Carswell said once the company makes up for its losses in the axed routes, it may consider flights to St. Thomas on a seasonal basis.

Liat's next meeting with regional trade unions and the company's management happens on Friday. Among topics to be discussed is the airline's plan to reorganize routes of operation in its bid to maximize profits.