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## Air Travel for Winter Season Appears to be Back to Pre-Storm Levels, Tourism Officials Say

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Airline travel to the Virgin Islands has exceeded 2017 pre-storm levels in St. Croix, Department of Tourism (D.O.T.) Assistant Commissioner Elizabeth Hansen Watley told Senators on Thursday.

Meanwhile, seat capacity to St. Thomas is projected to approach 90 percent of the pre-storm levels, she said.

D.O.T. and representatives of the West Indian Company Ltd. appeared before the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Regulations and Agriculture, chaired by Sen. Allison L. DeGazon.

Ms. Hansen said American Airlines will operate three daily flights between Miami and St. Croix market for the Thanksgiving holiday.

American has also extended the Charlotte to St. Croix flights from Saturday only to daily during the peak Christmas period, Ms. Watley told the committee.

St. Thomas is a step behind air capacity levels of two years ago, before Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Ms. Watley said JetBlue Airways from Boston is currently serving St. Thomas with weekly nonstop Saturday flights through February 9, 2020, and will operate a daily nonstop service between February 13 and April 28, 2020, during the peak travel season.

American has also announced weekly year-round Saturday service to St. Thomas from Dallas-Fort Worth, and seasonal Saturday service from Chicago, beginning December 21, 2019. The carrier will also add a third daily flight between Miami and St. Thomas from December 18, 2019.

In his testimony, Anthony Ottley, Interim President of WICO, said one of WICO's biggest challenges is accommodating the ever-growing size of cruise ships.

The WICO dock at Havensight is already at its full capacity and cannot extend beyond the current 3,300-foot footprint, said Mr. Ottley.

Economic Development committee members met Thursday in the Virgin Islands Cardiac Center on St. Croix. Ms. DeGazon said D.O.T. and WICO play key roles in steering economic growth in the territory. Committee hearings help ensure openness and transparency by public entities.

But WICO, Ms. DeGazon said, has been known to be “a very closed entity,” and that “we need to break that perception.”