

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Administration Meets With Top U.S. Airport Officials

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp led a government delegation to the Denver International Airport (D.E.N.) this week, the sixth busiest airport in the U.S., whose attendees included senior officials and the leadership of the Virgin Islands Port Authority, and featured the sharing of intelligence and best practices by the executive team of D.E.N., Government House announced on Friday.

In addition to a tour of the airfield and control tower, officials spent an entire day focused on the multiple processes that help the airport deliver more than \$26 billion in economic benefits to the state of Colorado. Described by its CEO, Kim Day, as a “complex organism,” the airport processes close to 60 million passengers a year, has 35,000

badged employees, and is responsible for 115,000 indirect jobs.

The USVI team learned how Denver officials continually invest in the passenger experience, including shopping and dining, technology and entertainment. Denver officials also shared details of their capital improvement program to accommodate year-over-year growth, as well as elements of their legal and procurement processes. Improving safety and security, enhancing operational efficiency, upgrading aging systems and transforming the passenger experience were priorities.

Mr. Mapp said the “tremendous learning experience” went beyond his expectations - from discovering how the Denver airport handles issues with its own neighboring landfill, to mitigating the challenges faced by bird strikes, to dealing with regulatory issues and leveraging public-private partnerships.

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Earlier in the week in Atlanta, the Virgin Islands team, which included additional representatives from the Waste Management Authority, met with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to discuss the decades-old regulatory issue concerning the landfill near St. Croix’s airport. “We were heartened to note the similarity of a landfill coexisting within Denver’s airport and the regulatory solution which was arrived at with the FAA. This is an issue the USVI has been trying to resolve since 1983. It has cost us millions of dollars in direct spend and millions more in the suspension of federal funds for airport improvements,” Mr. Mapp said.

The governor noted that Denver International Airport’s focus on “rebuilding the new, replacing the old and caring for the current” resonated well with his team as they prepare to holistically elevate the passenger experience at USVI airports. He added that “moving the Virgin Islands airports to the next level by becoming a real, exceptional experience for visitors” should no longer be a concept. “We must act, and act strategically.”

Kim Day, CEO of Denver International Airport, saw this visit as the first step in leveraging synergies between her office and the USVI. “The world is becoming smaller, in the way we all think about it. Millennials think nothing about getting on a plane and going to Europe for the weekend. ... So, as the world becomes smaller, smaller airports have a great opportunity to raise their flag and be recognized as a great place to go. Plus, I’ve got to say, you (are) recognized as an unbelievable place to visit. You’re already on this list of everybody’s bucket list. If we can help you improve your airport, that’ll help you get the capacity to be ready for all those great visitors that are going to be coming to you in the next few years.”

George Merritt, Senior Vice President of Government and Community Affairs with Denver International Airport, lauded the insight of the USVI team to visit Denver.

“There’s no substitute for actually visiting a place, really doing a deep dive with the people who have gone through an experience and getting their lessons learned ... there is no substitute for actually getting on the ground and seeing a project that you want to model after. We did that as part of our project. I took our City Council, we went to Europe and saw Heathrow and saw the Amsterdam airport. So the value that your team gets out of it is to sit down here, have a day to really study and not have any distractions and

learn about this - and see it in a concrete way," Mr. Merritt said.

A highlight for the USVI delegation, Mr. Mapp added, was learning of the strong demand for nonstop flights between Denver and the territory, and how tourism officials can work with airlines and the airport to increase airlift to the destination.

The territory's leader said a taskforce would now be formed to develop a formal partnership between VIPA and the Denver International Airport.

"We have a good path forward - Ms. Day has offered, and I have accepted, an exchange of managers and directors from the Virgin Islands Port Authority to come to Denver to get on-the-ground training and experience ... and she is prepared to send her managers to spend a week or two working with our teams in the territory," he said.