

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Paving, Waiting For 'Notice To Proceed' From Government, Says It's Ready To Get To Work

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ST. CROIX -- Virgin Islands Paving (V.I.P.A.), established in 1981, told The Consortium on Tuesday that the company was up and running and has been ready to get on with paving roads on St. Croix for at least two weeks. The comments follow Governor Kenneth Mapp's statement [during his Monday hurricane recovery press briefing](#), held at the West Indian Company (W.I.C.O.) in St. Thomas, where the territory's leader -- responding to a question about the condition of the roads -- said all the paving companies in the USVI -- one in St. Thomas and two on St. Croix -- were damaged by the storms and, as of Monday, could not perform work on the worsening thoroughfares.

Residents were complaining about the poor state of many of the roads before Hurricanes Irma and Maria, but the situation got worse following the storms and the incessant rain, which has caused heavy erosion in some areas. On the east end of St. Croix, just past the Cheese Burgers in Paradise Restaurant and near the Chenay Bay entrance, a sink hole became so dangerous that the Department of Public Works (D.P.W.) had to reroute traffic.

"It's a matter of supply," the governor said at W.I.C.O., adding that he would speak with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials about the asphalt issue, suggesting that the commodity may need to be shipped to the USVI so that the roads can be paved. And he said the territory was declared a state of emergency by the Federal Highway Administration, which he said releases "a bevy of resources" to the islands.

Robert Schierloh, president of V.I.P.A., told The Consortium that the company was prepared to perform work, and has been waiting on the "notice to proceed" from the Department of Property and Procurement (P&P) for a project in Catherine's Rest. Mr. Schierloh said it was his company's understanding that P&P was ready to issue the notice to proceed once given the clear by D.P.W. V.I.P.A. then contacted D.P.W. informing the department that it was ready to move forward with work.

"Virgin Islands Paving is prepared to work. I think the best way to put it is, bring it on. Bring on the work; we're ready," Mr. Schierloh said. He said V.I.P.A. notified the government of its preparedness to proceed with the Catherine's Rest project two weeks ago. The work would see the overlaying of the entire Catherine's Rest area, and costs just below \$1 million, Mr. Schierloh said.

V.I.P.A. was also waiting on a notice to proceed from the government for an Estate Profit job; a larger, \$5 million project that is federally funded, Mr. Schierloh said.

The company did suffer damage following the passage of Hurricane Maria, and was down for about a month. "We got damage like everybody did. We had repairs to do but we're up and running now, and I know St. Thomas is up and running now," Mr. Schierloh said.

Why the governor said that none of the paving companies were ready to work isn't clear, but Mr. Schierloh stressed that the paving companies should not be faulted for the territory's worsening roads. "It's looking like the blame is being placed on the paving companies for the poor condition of these roads, and I think that that is the farthest from the truth," he said.

As for road paving in general, Mr. Schierloh said work had substantially decreased in the last three years, forcing V.I.P.A. to diversify its portfolio.

"In the last three years we've done about a third of what we normally do in road construction," he said. "We've had to diversify. Now we're doing water lines, we're doing sewer work, we're doing subdivision development, earth work -- that sort of thing -- to survive because we're not getting the construction work that we need to be able to do it full time."

Mr. Mapp has spoken for years about pending road projects territory-wide, but the talk hasn't yet translated into the substantial work that is expected. However, bidding for the

first major upcoming project on St. Croix, the first phase of the reconstruction of the Melvin Evans Highway, is expected to begin next week, and V.I.P.A. is hoping to be the winner. The job's first phase starts at Sunny Isle and ends at the Diageo Rum intersection.

"I believe that when [work] does come forth we will be plenty busy, but I haven't seen it and it looks like it's all going to come at one time," Mr. Schierloh said.

Feature Image: Virgin Islands Paving equipment at the company's headquarters on St. Croix.

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