

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'Roads Will Get Worse Before They Get Better,' Mapp Says

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Ernice Gilbert **December 05, 2017**



Governor Kenneth Mapp told the territory that the already horrendous condition of many of the USVI's roads will get worse before they get better, reminding at his Monday hurricane recovery press briefing held at Government House on St. Croix, that the territory was pummeled by two Cat 5 storms and incessant rain.

Exacerbating the situation, he said, is the limited dollars currently available to fix the roads. "We have limited dollars at the current moment to do road repairs," Mr. Mapp said. The governor expects that by the end of December, some funds will become available to perform roadwork, although not enough to rebuild the roads altogether, but rather to execute patchwork jobs.

He said about \$16 million will become available to patch the roads, however his goal is for more permanent construction, and the governor said he has been lobbying Congress for funds that would see roads being built with the durability to withstand the kinds of hurricanes the territory experienced this year.

"I don't want you to believe that I'm not aware of how bad the roads are. I am aware and they will be addressed," the governor said.

Some road projects previously scheduled will soon commence in St. Thomas and St. Croix, the governor made known. The neighborhood of Catherine's Rest on St. Croix, he said, will see their roads being repaved, not patched.

But while the governor has expressed frustration with the amount of dollars that he said is currently available for road repairs, there's nearly \$100 million of [GARVEE bond funds](#) waiting to be spent on the reconstruction of roads -- a measure passed since 2015. Senator Kurt Violet recently took issue with the current condition of the roads, and said the Legislature had done all it could to assure that funds are available to the government for the purpose of rebuilding the territory's thoroughfares.

"The Virgin Islands Legislature has passed over 100 million dollars for road construction, for over one year now! Those monies are sitting in the coffers of the PFA [Public Finance Authority]," Mr. Violet wrote [on Facebook on Sunday](#). "Additionally, monies were also passed to purchase equipment for Public Works for road repairs. Senators have tirelessly asked Government House to fast-track road repairs using the funds sitting in the government's coffers."

In August 2016, Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, sponsor of the GARVEE bond measure, [assailed the administration](#) for failing to use some \$144 million in capital improvement funds, \$91 million of which was set aside for road projects.

"There are millions sitting in the P.F.A. [Public Finance Authority] account for capital improvement projects that have been authorized by this body on three islands, and not a stone has been moved," Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly said at the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall, speaking directly to Nellon Bowry, director of Management and Budget, in August 2016.

"Not a bulldozer has been placed on the ground. Not a job has been created. So I submit to you that the government is just as responsible for the stagnation that we're seeing. Because if you can't roll out those capital improvement projects that will generate jobs, then there will be no consumer spending. And if there's no consumer spending then there's no corporate taxes, or gross receipt taxes. You have a problem; Houston, you have a problem," Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly continued, as she blasted the administration for the slow pace in which it has moved.

The administration has since commenced some of the projects, including the Paul E. Joseph stadium and small road jobs. But the bulk of the funds are still sitting at the PFA, waiting to be used.

"Now that most of the debris has been cleaned up, residents of the VI deserve better roads for quite some time now," Mr. Violet wrote. "We need to energize the asphalt plants and start repairs immediately. The ball is in the executive branch's court, time to get it rolling, it has been long enough."

