

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Vialet Expresses Frustration With Slow Pace Of Road Repairs On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Kurt Vialet expressed frustration on Thursday relative to the slow pace in which road repairs have been occurring on St. Croix, stating that the Senate two years ago approved over \$100 million in funds specifically for road projects. "The Legislature has approved over \$100 million for road repair that remains in the coffers of the PFA [Public Finance Authority] unspent," said the senator in a release issued this afternoon.

Governor Kenneth Mapp [in an interview](#) with The Consortium during the festival season on St. Croix, acknowledged the unacceptable state of the territory's roads, made worse by Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

"The biggest issue that I know is on everybody's minds is roads," he said. "We have problems with asphalt plants. All of the government roads that are not federally designated, FEMA [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] will support fixing them and we're going to do that by the D.O.T. [Department of Transportation] standards. So we're going to be doing that and we're working with the Congress to lift the caps. The roads are really bad, we're really going to have to put some time into it."

When exactly the buildup in road construction would begin, Mr. Mapp did not say. Mr. Violet said the Department of Public Works should be held accountable by the executive branch for assuring that the repaving and repairing of roads not only be given first priority, but be expedited, with measures being taken to ascertain that everything that needs to be in place is.

Giving some examples, the senator said asphalt plants with no power because of storm damage should be energized immediately; all equipment owned by the Dept. of Public works should be repaired; monies pursuant to legislation that was set aside to purchase road repair equipment should be utilized; D.P.W. should begin patching roads frequented used; and the funding set aside for paving should be expended.

The condition of the territory's roads has been a sticking point for many a Virgin Islander, whose vehicles have suffered damage because of potholes that are sometimes unavoidable. In [December of 2015](#), the PFA closed its Series 2015 Federal Highway Grant Anticipation Bond financing, commonly referred to as GARVEE Bonds, with \$91 million of proceeds for critical highway infrastructure projects, including \$40 million allocated to Veterans Drive Highway on St. Thomas and \$51 million directed to fund key initiatives on St. Croix, one of which is the Melvin Evans Highway.

The funds were made possible through legislation sponsored by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly and supported by members of the 31st Legislature.

"With the offering of the Series 2015 Bonds, this signifies the beginning, and continuation, of major road construction projects in both districts that would provide jobs to our residents, deliver an economic boon to the territory, but more importantly, will enhance our transportation safety and relieve traffic congestion on some of the territory's most essential roadways," said Mr. Mapp, who also serves as chairman of the PFA, back in December 2015. Since then, however, the funds have been unspent.

In August 2016, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly [assailed the Mapp administration](#) for its crawling pace relative to the 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.

"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.

