

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Letter To The Editor: The Stressful Nature Of Air Travel To And From The Virgin Islands

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Dear Editor,

Air travel is a process that can become incredibly stressful.

In one instance a traveler while arriving at his destination was confronted by a team of federal agents accompanied by detection dogs. The traveler was not notified as to why he and everyone else on his flight were being detained, nor was it ascertained whether he or anyone else were afraid of dogs. This story is one of many examples that residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands face when traveling to and from the territory.

Another scenario involve passengers who are so excited to reach our islands only to discover that it is raining and have to leave the aircraft exposed to the elements by a flight of wet stairs. This has been and continues to be a major challenge especially for individuals who have a mobility impairment or families accompanied by small children.

Here is another story, a St. Thomian man who uses a wheelchair was returning home after being away for several days on business. When he arrived at the Cyril E. King airport he was told that the aircraft lift that would allow him to leave the plane was not working. He had to wait 45 minutes, and a caterer truck with a lift was able to help him get off the plane. The caterer lift could not reach the tarmac. He then had to be transported from the caterer lift to a delivery truck with a power tailgate. It took 90 minutes for him to finally arrive on the airport tarmac.

These are just a few of many stories that this passenger and others have experienced traveling to and from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

As a service for all passengers we propose the introduction and routine use of jet bridges for the territories' airports. While it won't remedy the issue of detection dogs, jet bridges would improve the experience of travel to and from home.

We can state with certainty that a proposal for the construction of jet bridges was under consideration by the V.I. Port Authority just a few years ago.

In the wake of hurricanes Irma and Maria, this is an opportune time to make the jet bridge project a priority so that all passengers can have the facility, comfort, and safety of air travel-with a lot less stress.

Submitted by: *Amelia Headley LaMont, Esq., executive director of Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands, and Julien Henley, an advocate.*