

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Mapp On Why Liat Halted Flights To The USVI

Travel / **Published On January 26, 2018 11:18 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **January 26, 2018**



ST. CROIX -- Liat, the most prominent yet beleaguered Caribbean airline, made known in February 2017 that [it would no longer have flights to and from the U.S. Virgin Islands](#) beginning March of last year. The news shocked Caribbean diaspora living in the territory, realizing the inconvenience that would be caused by the halt. Suddenly, going to Trinidad and some other Caribbean islands meant taking a connecting flight from the U.S. mainland.

Giving a vague answer to why the decision to suspend operations in the territory was made, Liat said it was “to achieve greater profitability and improve efficiency.” “These moves are intended to help stabilize the airline’s flight schedule and network,” the

company said.

But Governor Kenneth Mapp, in an interview with The Consortium on Thursday, explained what he said really happened, stating that Liat's problem of constantly being behind schedule meant the company had to pay for Transportation Security Administration (T.S.A.) employees, who would have to stay at their jobs later than normal to do the work of checking passengers arriving from foreign countries.

"Liat was on a schedule and it became difficult for them to arrive on time. And our T.S.A. and immigration don't operate but to certain hours. And if you're going to have them operate at those hours, somebody has to pay them, and it can't be the government," the governor told this publication.

Mr. Mapp said Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter met with Liat officials, but the governor did not say how the meeting went. And he said the initiative by the local government that subsidizes airline seats by guaranteeing revenues for the carriers, was not something his administration was willing to do with Liat.

"We've done that a couple of times on the stateside trips, but those flights have done very well, to the point that now we have daily Atlanta to St. Croix flights, [and] we have North Carolina to St. Croix flights," Mr. Mapp said.

He expressed optimism that the market would see growth, hopefully giving more incentive for Liat to resume travel to the territory. And he said Jetblue Airways has been considering being an inter-connecting airline through the Caribbean, using Puerto Rico as a hub. "We have some interest that they should use St. Croix as a hub," Mr. Mapp said of Jetblue's plans. "But we could not go to a foreign company, owned by foreign governments and do contracts."