

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Liat Set To Return To U.S. Virgin Islands; Press Conference To Be Held On Monday

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Liat, the prominent Caribbean airline [that announced the halting flights to the U.S. Virgin Islands in February 2017](#), will announce its return to the territory during a press conference on Monday, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor has confirmed to The Consortium. An official press invite will be issued to the media on Thursday.

At the press conference, Mr. Potter along with Liat executives, will announce the airline's return, which is expected to be well received by the Caribbean diaspora residing in St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John.

Asked to provide more details, Mr. Potter's office said the lieutenant governor would share all the specifics during the press event, being held at his office in St. Thomas. Mr. Potter's office did, however, drop a snippet of information. "The date of the first flight will not be far from now," said Petra Mathew, special assistant to the lieutenant governor. "Liat executives will also be at the press conference and will issue a formal statement as well."

The Consortium learned of a recent meeting between Mr. Potter and Liat officials, which took place on St. Croix last week. (It was not the first time that the lieutenant governor had met with Liat officials.)

When the airline announced that it would halt flights to the USVI, the explanation given was vague. Liat said the move 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 in January](#), 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 Mr. Potter had met with Liat officials at the time, 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 the Caribbean airline.

"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."