

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gov't House Says 'Major' Roadwork Set To Begin On St. Croix, But Fails To Say When

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ST. CROIX -- In a release issued on Monday, Government House said Governor Kenneth Mapp has approved contracts for four more road projects on St. Croix that are expected to "vastly improve road conditions on the big island."

But at a time when motorists have been incessantly complaining about the poor condition of the territory's roads and the damage done to their vehicles by potholes, the release failed to give a timeline as to when the projects would start, far less be completed.

Calls placed to Government House press secretary Sandra Goomansingh seeking a timeline were not returned at time of writing.

According to the release, the plans for Melvin Evans Highway include pavement rehabilitation and safety improvements from East Airport Road to the Estate Profit intersection. The project includes construction, surveying and staking, soil erosion control, removal of guard rails and concrete paving. The jobs will be performed by VI Paving and VIAPCO, according to Government House.

Two roads in Frederiksted are slated for improvements as well -- the street adjacent to the Walter I.M. Hodge Housing Community and Queen Mary Highway (Route 70) in the vicinity of Armstrong Ice Cream, according to Government House. And extensive repairs will also be made in the Estate La Grande Princess neighborhood in Christiansted, the release added.

Mr. Mapp said rehabilitating and rebuilding the territory's roads remain a high priority of his administration. "I urge the public to proceed with caution while work is being performed in these areas," he said.

During a [December hurricane recovery press briefing](#), Mr. Mapp said the already horrendous condition of many of the territory's roads would get worse before getting better.

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

He said about \$16 million would have been made available to patch the roads, however his goal was to see permanent construction. "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 in December.

The newly announced work appears to be part of the [GARVEE bond funds](#) sitting in the treasury for multiple years waiting to be spent. The funds, secured through legislation authored by Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, [guaranteed the availability of roughly \\$100 million](#) for road construction territory-wide. Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly on multiple occasions has criticized the Mapp administration for its slow pace in utilizing the funds.

"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, then-director of Management and Budget. The funds were [secured in December 2015](#).

"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.

