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Port Authority Breaks Ground on Phase 1 of St. Croix Airport Terminal Expansion and Modernization Project

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A render of the HERA Terminal Expansion and Modernization Project. By. V.I. PORT AUTHORITY

ST. CROIX — When speaking of the St. Croix airport, the complaints have been many: it needs to be modernized; it's in desperate need of a jet bridge; and the terminal is simply too small. Dignitaries who gathered at a V.I. Port Authority event on Thursday morning at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, for what will be the first phase of six in a modernization plan for the facility, concurred.

Senator Novelle Francis spoke of a vision he has for the entrance on both ends of the road leading to the airport; Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett reminisced on her youthful days traveling to

and fro and how unique the experience was every time she landed — mostly coming from New York.

And Senator Kurt Vialet reminded the gathering how quickly the rest of the Caribbean was moving, and that if the U.S. Virgin Islands didn't make its own big moves, the territory would be left behind.



Render of the pre-clearance hold room of phase 1 of the HERA Expansion and Modernization Project (Credit: V.I. Port Authority)

Governor Albert Bryan agreed with the speakers who spoke before him and said the experience when leaving a Miami airport, for example, "where the experience is like a mall, and landing in St. Thomas and St. Croix where you come out on a tarmac," was not the best. "That is not the same experience," he said. "That is a bad experience in our visitor centers when you're leaving the island not to be in something that you're used to [or] that's even on par."

The officials lauded V.I.P.A. Executive Director Carlton Dowe, (called "Dowe Now" for his penchant to see [work get done](#)).

The project, which has already started and is scheduled to be completed in 15 months (December 2021 or early 2022) — with contractor J. Benton Construction aiming to finish ahead of schedule

— will make locals and visitors alike feel good while waiting to board, according to James Benton, founder of J. Benton Construction.

The 6-phase plan will cost roughly \$140 million, according to Mr. Dowe. Damian Cartwright, who serves as Port Authority assistant director and director of engineering, is at the helm of the project. He said phase 1 will address much needed capacity and concession deficiencies in the current pre-clearance hold room that serves the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico. Currently there is enough seating to handle a little over two jets simultaneously. "The completion of this project will allow for comfortable accommodations of five to six jets simultaneously, with a host of concessions and amenities to include a bar, restaurant, retail options, various kiosks and multiple charging stations for mobile devices," Mr. Cartwright said. "The overall decor will be inviting and modern."

The first phase of the project was made possible through a \$7 million U.S. Economic Development Authority grant, with the Port Authority providing matching funds of \$1.6 million. Mr. Cartwright said the grant and match were made possible through a collaborative effort that included the legislative and executive branches of government, along with efforts from Delegate Plaskett in Washington.

Mr. Benton said the facility will be 18,000 square feet, and will bring the pre-clearance hold area on par with the best systems anywhere. Work include the departure area, lounge, concession area, ticket counters and public rest rooms, among others. A new 250 ton air-cool chiller will be installed. The facility will also include intelligent LED lighting that will brighten or dim depending on how much sunlight is coming in.

The project will employ 95 tradesmen and women across ten subcontractors and nearly 35 vendors, and J. Benton has achieved a 93 percent local hiring rate, according to Mr. Benton.

For Mr. Dowe, the HERA Terminal Expansion and Modernization is part of a continuation of projects under his tenure that came through because of teamwork (the executive director has consistently praised his team at V.I.P.A.), all of which are part of his unyielding determination to see things get done.