

# Public Works Officials Field Questions on 'Deplorable' Roads Across Territory

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Department of Public Works officials appeared before the Committee on Disaster Recovery and Infrastructure Wednesday and were questioned on an issue front of mind for Virgin Islanders: the status of ongoing road projects in the territory. During questioning, senators sought answers on roadwork for their respective districts.

Senator Kurt Vialet asked about the roads in the Christiansted town, calling them “deplorable.” “When are we going to have them paved? And the next question is Frederiksted Main Street, is that a priority,” he said.

Eran Flemming, a civil engineer at the Department of Public Works explained that D.P.W. has been holding off on work in Frederiksted to allow the V.I. Water and Power Authority to install

underground power lines. Relative to Christiansted, Mr. Flemming said D.P.W. was awaiting the Waste Management Authority to perform some work before tackling the town. D.P.W. Commissioner Nominee Derek Gabriel stated, "We have the utility coordination meetings to make sure this is done as expeditiously as possible."

Sen. Violet added, "I'm bringing this up because you can't be in a constant mode of reconstruction and you're not seeing the completion of anything. I mean you go to other areas, they pave roads in a couple of nights and here we dig up the heart of our towns and it stays that way for a long period of time. We're messing with economic development and everything else."

Senator Janelle Sarauw addressed a dangerous stretch between Antilles and Donkey Hill in St. Thomas, where drivers have to avoid multiple potholes and can't see oncoming traffic. She also spoke about a road heading up to Blackpoint Hill that does not have reflectors and is unmarked. The road also has a damaged guardrail, putting motorists in a dangerous situation.

Dennis Brow, assistant D.P.W. commissioner, stated, "We have to elevate our patching capabilities," which he said the department should be able to do because it recently received equipment to do so.

Senator Samuel Carrion queried about the inspection process of patching and inspections. "We identify the areas that need to be addressed, they go out and address the area. The directive is for them to patch every pothole in that location that needs to be addressed," said Mr. Brow, adding that himself and other directors assess areas that are patched on a daily basis. He said patch work is performed daily so long as asphalt is available. Inspections, Mr. Brow added, occur the following day.

According to the assistant commissioner, patch work in the St. Thomas-St. John district is performed by D.P.W. employees, while on St. Croix the job is contracted out.

Elsewhere, when asked what were some immediate actions that can be taken at the department, Mr. Gabriel said filling vacancies and prioritizing projects. The idea is to get projects mobilized with the hope of boosting employee morale at the department, Mr. Gabriel said. "If the public starts seeing projects under construction, I think the patience will start to get a little longer," he said.

Ms. Sarauw asked Mr. Gabriel to add to his list the Frederiksted temporary paving and the areas on St. Thomas where one has the potential to go over a hillside like Blackpoint Hill.