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Territory Now Included in Federal Marine Highway System Following National Project Designation Awarded to Port Authority

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St. Thomas waterfront By. VIATOR

The Virgin Islands Port Authority announced this week that it has been awarded the National Project Designation by the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD). "With this designation, the U.S. Virgin Islands is now included in the United States' federal marine highway system. The USVI has been designated as M-V1, M-95, and M-2," VIPA said.

VIPA said it applied for the designation to allow the territory to qualify for additional grants from the U.S. Department of Transportation and MARAD that are only available for ports under this classification.

Other benefits of this designation include:

- The creation and sustainability of employment opportunities in the USVI's ports and shipyards and the vessels that visit and operate in the territory.
- Relieved landside congestion
- Reduced maintenance costs and improvement of the U.S. transportation system's wear and tear on roads and bridges
- Improves economic competitiveness by adding new, cost-effective freight and passenger transportation capacities and mandates the use of modern engine technologies.
- Improves environmental sustainability of the U.S. transportation system using less energy and reduced air emissions (such as greenhouse gases) per passenger or ton-mile of freight moved.
- Improves public safety and security by providing alternatives for the movement of hazardous materials outside heavily populated areas.
- Improves transportation system resiliency and redundancy by providing transportation alternatives during times of disaster or national emergency.
- Improves national security by adding to the nation's strategic sealift resources.

VIPA said the marine highway system currently includes 25 "Marine Highway routes" that serve as extensions of the surface transportation system. Each all-water route is designated by the Transportation secretary and offers relief to landside corridors suffering from traffic congestion, excessive air emissions, or other environmental challenges. Other U.S. territories awarded this designation include Puerto Rico and American Samoa.