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## Port Authority to Receive \$7 Million in Third Round of Funding to Airports as Travel Recovers

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**Three American Airline jets at the Cyril E. King Airport on Feb. 2, 2021. The USVI has seen strong travel demand during the pandemic, say tourism officials. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM**

The V.I. Port Authority will receive roughly \$7 million from the Federal Aviation Administration — part of \$8 billion being provided to airports across the U.S. — to help ease the financial burden as travel recovers. The latest provision is the third round of funding for VIPA, with the first batch being over \$30 million, followed by \$3 million, and now \$7 million.

The FAA made the announcement Tuesday. The funding is part of the \$1.9 trillion stimulus package signed into law by President Joe Biden in March.

The funds can be used to pay debt service, meet operating costs, and for new expenses related to mitigating the spread of Covid-19. According to the Wall Street Journal, funding to airports is based largely on the airports' 2019 traffic. Additionally, airports must commit to keeping 90 percent of their workforce as a condition to accepting the funds.

V.I. Port Authority Director Carlton Dowe told the Consortium Tuesday that the funds would provide additional support for VIPA's airport operations and can also be used in the next fiscal year, which eases pressure to spend the money immediately. However, he stressed that the funding cannot be used for VIPA's marine operations. "None of the funding can be used to subsidize or do anything on our Marine operations," the executive director stated.

Mr. Dowe has said and reiterated to the Consortium Tuesday that airport activity had largely recovered and was nearing pre-pandemic levels. The territory has been seeing on average twenty-nine new arrivals of the major airlines daily, with the split overwhelmingly favoring St. Thomas 24-5. That's on average 2,500 people into the territory daily, most of them tourists as Americans have been traveling in large numbers as restrictions ease.

According to data provided to the Consortium by the V.I. Port Authority, St. Thomas sees twenty-four major airline flights daily, while St. Croix is averaging five. The breakdown is as follows:

St. Thomas:

- Delta : 7
- Spirit 3
- American 8
- United 2
- Jetblue 3
- Frontier 1

St. Croix:

- American 3
- Spirit 1
- Delta 1

According to Port Authority officials, jets at the Cyril E. King Airport are waiting in line to take off similarly to the extremely busy airports on the mainland. Sometimes the jets wait twenty minutes on the tarmac before a gate can be cleared because of the high traffic. The increased demand is creating problems for V.I.P.A., but Mr. Dowe described the strain as a "good problem" that V.I.P.A. has been managing.