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Port Authority Expected to Break Ground on Airport Modernization Project in 2024

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The Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas, USVI By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

The V.I. Port Authority is making arrangements to enter into a public-private partnership, called P3, that will allow it [to modernize](#) the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix and the Cyril E. King on St Thomas.

Both airports have maxed out their capacity to facilitate visitors as the territory's tourism product becomes more attractive to travelers.

“As we speak today, we are seeing upwards of 800,000 people go through the same footprint that was designed to accommodate 300,000 people,” said Carlton Dowe, VIPA's executive director.

After almost three decades, both airports are scheduled to receive well-needed upgrades that is expected to rival similar facilities on the United States mainland. In the P3, the private sector partner will fund the modernization of the airports and manage the facility with the aim of providing first-rate services while retrieving its investment along with profits over a 30-year period. VIPA will also receive a share of the profits.

“Our economy is based on tourism. The experience from arrival to departure is critical. That determines whether folks come back or don’t come back, or don’t tell their family and friends to come back. Doing nothing is not an option for the Port Authority,” Mr. Dowe stressed.

“We’ve got to get this done... our airports are going to look like those in the United States and better than everyone in the Caribbean,” Governor Albert Bryan Jr. remarked further.

Willard John, chair of VIPA's Board of Governors praised effort, saying, "Our ports is the first point of entry for anyone coming to the Virgin Islands, and it is important that we make it up-to-date for everyone," he said.

The V.I. Dept. of Tourism was also present for Wednesday's announcement, with Alani Henneman-Todman, assistant commissioner of marketing at the department, expressing D.O.T.'s full support for the endeavor.

Timeline

After meeting with several stakeholders including unions, the Transportation Security Administration, employees and senators, the Port Authority will begin to identify companies that are qualified to do the work.

The authority will then send out a Request for Qualification (RFQ) to determine who will modernize the airports in St. Thomas and St Croix.

That will be followed by Request for Proposal (RFP) which will be disseminated territory-wide as well as regionally and internationally to developers who are qualified to construct the facilities. That request will close on January 12, 2023.

People interested in the project will be invited to visit the territory on February 1 on St. Thomas and February 2, 2023 on St Croix.

The last day for bidders to submit questions is on February 23, 2023 and on March 7, 2023 VIPA will respond to bidders' questions.

No more than four bidders will be shortlisted during the week of April 3, 2023. In the week of May 8, the RFP will be issued and all other requirements will follow.

Larry Belinsky, consultant and managing director at Frasca & Associates, LLC said the procurement effort is for both airports which are expected to be developed within the same timeline.

“We are looking to select a preferred proposer that will be for both airports, one entity over both airports and as we go through the negotiating process with the shortlisted entities and ultimately the preferred proposer, there will be investment levels and timelines for redevelopment,” he explained.

The ground breaking is anticipated to happen in the 4th quarter of 2024 or in early 2025. A portion of the new terminal will open at the end of 2025 or in early 2026, followed by completion sometime after.

The actual cost of the project will be determined after the RFPs are submitted. However, preliminary calculations are that the St. Thomas airport expansion will cost between two to three hundred million dollars and between \$100 to \$150 million on St. Croix.

Mr. Dowe stressed that the public-private partnership is not driven by a need to cut employees. "This is not an employee-driven issue. No, the Port Authority have no intentions of letting go any employees," he said.

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