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New Carrier to Provide Flights Between St. Croix and St. Thomas Within 60 Days, VIPA Executive Director Says

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

The availability of air service between St. Thomas and St. Croix is expected to improve within the next two months, according to Carlton Dowe, executive director of the V.I. Port Authority.

"Up to today the governor and I were in discussions with a new carrier that we believe will be able to get into this territory, doing an inter-island route within the next 60 days," Mr. Dowe told senators on the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture Wednesday evening.

While he stopped short of naming the carrier, the VIPA executive appeared confident of a deal being struck with the Port Authority soon. He simply told legislators that he is “meeting with someone in the industry who has expressed an interest in providing air service connecting St. Croix to St. Thomas.”

In August 2022, the territory began to experience severe flight shortages between the islands because of a lack of pilots, among other issues. Mr. Dowe told lawmakers that the Covid-19 pandemic is to blame for the changes as well as demand by travelers to use “certain routes.”

"We certainly feel the impact here in the U.S. Virgin Islands as we notice a lack of flights between St. Thomas and St. Croix due to retiring pilots or pilots who leave the territory to work for larger airlines," he shared.

Incidentally, Senator Marise James said she was unable to attend a meeting regarding expansion efforts for two new airport development projects because there was no flight available.

VIPA does business with Seaborne Airlines but the carrier no longer operates from the airport, and instead offers seaplane service downtown to downtown between St. Croix and St Thomas. Mr. Dowe said the airport operation was being conducted by Silver Airways, [which purchased Seaborne Airlines in 2018](#). Silver now provides service between San Juan and St. Croix.

In the meantime, a lease agreement valid until the year 2028 prevents other carriers from accessing the seaplane ramp at the Edward W. Blyden UV Marine Terminal in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, and the Svend Aage Ovesen Seaplane Facility in Christiansted, St. Croix.

"We have approached representatives of the airline to discuss the removal of the clause from the existing agreement. They have responded to let us know that they are considering the removal of the clause but to date no final decision has been made," Mr. Dowe said.

He also shared that VIPA is actively trying to get locals interested in the aviation industry in an effort to beef up the availability of qualified pilots. According to Mr. Dowe, the authority recently hosted a reception with Adrian Tutein and Adrian Martin, two native Virgin Islanders who fly with major airlines. He said the reception was publicized internationally and “garnered [great interest in the aviation industry](#).”

VIPA, he said, has been in discussion with the VI Department of Education in hopes of introducing aviation as part of the school curriculum. “In addition, the VIPA aircraft rescue firefighters on St. Croix and St. Thomas have resumed tours of the port authority’s airport fire station much to the delight of the youngsters of our communities,” he added. Mr. Dowe said VIPA not only hopes to inspire an interest in airport firefighting but in other aviation-related fields.