

Transportation/Infrastructure Chair: Safe and reliable transportation is a must

Date : April 23, 2019

ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – On Monday, April 15, the Committee on Housing, Transportation, Infrastructure and Telecommunications met to hear testimony from the Department of Public Works on the status of infrastructure and public transportation services in the territory.

Committee Chair, Senator Marvin A. Blyden, stressed the role the roads and public transportation system plays in our lives in order to highlight the importance of keeping them maintained.

"The study of human civilization shows us that roads are the physical links that bind communities together. From everyday transportation, to commerce, to healthcare and other emergency services, the functioning of a modern society depends on a solid road system and a solid public transportation system"

In his testimony, Commissioner Nominee Nelson Petty Jr. detailed multiple active infrastructure projects totaling \$176 million. These projects include the Veteran's Drive project, the Melvin D. Evans Highway project, Carlton Road repavement and drainage, rehabilitation of Sion Valley Hill, paving of Moravian Highway, replacement of Scott Free Bridge, emergency repairs of Fish Bay Road in St. John, the Mainstreet Enhancement Project, and more. Overall, the Department of Public Works expects to receive approximately \$460 million in funding through a combination of local non-disaster funding and federal funding from FEMA, the Department of Interior, GARVEE bonds, the Federal Highway Administration and HUD CDBG-DR grants.

To increase the presence and reliability of the VITRAN bus system, the Commissioner Nominee and Transportation Planner Dennis Chance explained how 10 medium buses had been ordered and that there were plans to hire more drivers.

Noting the considerable interest in the topic, Commissioner Nominee Petty explained his opinion on the way the GVI accepts private roads in order to repair them. He noted there are provisions that allow the Government to make repairs without having them deeded, but the larger issue was a matter of funding. Unless funding sources are identified, he recommends against accepting private roads. Should a source be found, the Department of Public Works can evaluate the request appropriately.

Senators in attendance also pressed for a resolution of the traffic light issue on St. Thomas and learned that the delay is the result of supply issues with the manufacturers. All necessary materials are expected to arrive in May.

Senators Marvin A. Blyden, Novelle E. Francis, Kenneth L. Gittens, Alicia V. Barnes, Janelle K. Sarauw, and Javan E. James were present at Monday's hearing. Non-committee members Donna Frett-Gregory and Oakland Benta were also in attendance.