



| Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 . so Thank you.

0:01:30 All right. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. so Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let's go.

0:07:00 Thank you. Oh, my God.

0:08:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:11:00 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:13:00 Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back.

0:14:30 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:16:00 Thank you. Thank you. so so so

0:18:30 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:20:00 I'm going to go. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:23:30 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:25:00 All right. Thank you. Oh, my God.

0:26:30 so Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. [3 such phrases repeated 10 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:32:00 Thank you. Thank you. I'll see you next time.

0:33:30 Thank you. so [2 such phrases repeated 9 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:38:30 uh Thank you.

0:39:30 Thank you. Thank you.

0:40:30 ¶¶ Thank you. Thank you.

0:42:00 We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you.

0:43:30 ¶¶¶¶¶¶ Thank you. ¶¶ so so so

0:46:30 so Here we go.

0:47:30 Thank you. Thank you.

0:48:30 Thank you. so Thank you. I don't know. [3 such phrases repeated 11 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:54:30 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. the committee on housing transportation and telecommunications is called to order

0:56:47 good morning colleagues staff testifiers and most importantly good morning to the people of the virgin islands and welcome to the first hearing of the committee on housing transportation and telecommunications in the 36th legislature of the virgin islands i would like to extend a special welcome to our new members and we look forward to your contribution and insight that comes with a fresh perspective the jurisdiction of this committee is a wide one as it extends to not only housing transportation and telecommunications but also to critically important elements of our infrastructure as such the specific departments and agencies that this committee is responsible for overseeing are the virgin islands housing authority the virgin island housing finance authority the department of public works and the vi waste management authority over the next two years we will have the officials of these agencies before us many times to provide updates and to provide expert testimonies on bills before the committee and to discuss critically important issues and projects for which the agencies are responsible for we are in an environment in which the swift and efficient utilization of federal and local resources is of paramount importance therefore the committee will be vigorous in exercising its oversight responsibilities to ensure that the best interests of our people are served. Today, we will be hearing from the Department of Public Works regarding its operations and personnel and the status of road repairs, public ground transportation, and inter-island ferry operations, cemeteries, engineering services, and other areas of the Department's responsibility. We will also be hearing from the Waste Management Authority which would also provide critically important updates regarding our solid waste collection and our wastewater infrastructure. In our next two hearings we will be addressing housing and telecommunication issues. Before we begin today's session I would like to

0:59:08 remind everyone that we are closing out Black History Month and preparing to begin VI History Month. The struggles and the contributions that our ancestors have made are what paved the way for us to be here at this moment. And the work we do today will shape the future for our children tomorrow. And we will stand at the record by which we are judged. So I ask you to join me in a moment of silence as we honor those who have gone before and pledge to redouble our efforts on behalf of our people. So I'm going to take a couple seconds, moment of silence right about now.

1:00:03 Thank you. Before I move forward, I have a delegation in the chambers from the Dominican Republic, San Pedro de Macariz. Mayor, can you please start? And I'm going to introduce them briefly. They are here in the territory doing some training and other initiatives.

1:00:35 Colonel Dr. Altagracia Hernandez, Major Alexandra Navarro-Gill, Major Maria Mabel Navarro-Gill, Lieutenant Colonel Jose Francisco Ortega M, First Lieutenant Jamer Trinidad Conner, First Lieutenant Flavio Guevara, Director of Civil Defense Staline Leher, and Colonel Angel Jiménez, Brigadier Commander. Thank you for visiting us and spending some time here with us. And I hope you enjoy your time here in the territory. And I hope the training goes well. Thank you so much for being here. Appreciate it.

1:01:22 Madam Clerk, can you please read the agenda for the record? And before you begin, I want to acknowledge also Senator Samuel Carrion. Thank you for being here, sir.

1:01:52 Nice to see you. You may proceed, Madam Clerk. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Agenda. Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications. Friday, February 28, 2025. Earl B. Otley Legislative Chambers. St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Call to order. Roll call. Reading of the agenda. Block 1.

1:02:19 Updated. and updated and discussion on key matters related to the operations of the Department of Public Works providing the department's short and long-term goals staffing updates transportation and bus route extensions ferry operations engineering services to the GVI agency and the current state of the territories road bridges and cemeteries as well as challenges the department is facing and their plans to address them to better serve the residents of our territory

invited testifiers Honorable Derek Gabriel Commissioner Department of Public Works lunch block to discussion on the operation of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority as it relates to their plans and priorities for the coming year updated on the status of staffing payroll challenges and vendor payments in addition to the status of tipping fees wastewater treatment plants pump station operations and capacity, landfills within the territory, garbage collection, oil collection, and other challenges the agency is facing along with their plans to overcome them to better serve our community. Invited testifiers, Dara Griffith, Interim Executive Director, Virgin Islands Waste management authority this concludes the reasoning of the agenda thank you madam clerk from the

1:04:12 committee standing recess for 10 minutes All right. Thank you.

1:05:34 Thank you. [1 such phrases repeated 10 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:10:34 Thank you. Thank you.

1:11:34 All right. ? Thank you. [3 such phrases repeated 15 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:13:04 Thank you. Oh, my God. [2 such phrases repeated 16 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:21:04 Thank you. We're back on the record, Madam Clerk, can you please call the roll, roll call.

1:22:01 call Senator Clifford A. Joseph senior Senator Clifford A. Joseph senior Senator joseph senior absent senator duane m de graf senator de graf present senator ray Fonseca. Senator Fonseca, present. Senator Maurice C. James. Senator James, absent. Senator Carla Joseph. Senator Joseph absent. Senator Cook A. Ville. Senator Ville absent. Senator Marvin Blyden. Senator Blyden present. Mr. Chair, there are three present, three absent, four absent, I'm sorry.

1:23:39 Very well, Madam Clerk. Are there any correspondence that seems to be read into the record? Yes, Mr. Chair. Please proceed. Letter dated. Letter dated February 26, 2025, from the Honorable Carla J. Joseph, Senator, 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, to the Honorable Marvin A. Blyden, Chairman, Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunication, 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Capitol Building P.O. Box 1690 St. Thomas VI 00804 regarding late arrival to Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications meeting.

1:24:47 Dear Senator Blyden, please accept this letter as a formal notice that I will be arriving late to friday february 28 2025 committee on housing transportation and telecommunications meeting scheduled to begin at 9 a.m in the earl b ottley legislative hall on saint thomas thank you for your consideration on this matter sincerely khala j joseph senator 36 legislature of the virgin islands please mark senator joseph excuse until she arrives and proceed letter dated february 28 2025 from honorable maurice c james esquire senator to honorable Marvin A. Blyden, Chairman, Committee of Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunication, 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands Capitol Building, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00802. Dear Senator Blyden, as a member of the Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunication, I have been invited to participate in the CSG East Housing Summit, taking place today this summit will focus on exploring solutions to the ongoing housing shortage and affordability crisis we gotta be this commitment prevents me from being present at today's committee on housing transportation and telecommunications hearing on Friday February 28 2025 I

1:26:37 I sincerely apologize for any inconvenience, my absence, my cause, and appreciate your understanding. I wish to commit a productive and insightful hearing. Sincerely, Maurice C. James Esquire, Senator, 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Please mark Senator Maurice C. James as excused. Letter dated February 28, 2025 from the Honorable Clifford A. Joseph Sr. to Honorable Marvin Blyden, Chair Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications, 36th Legislature of virgin islands capital building saint thomas vi 00801 their chairman blighting please accept this correspondence as a formal notice and apologies for my absence from today's committee on housing transportation and telecommunications meeting scheduled to begin at 10 a.m in the earl b Atlee Legislative Chambers on the island of St. Amos. As you are aware, as Vice Chair of the Committee of Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications, I am attending the CSG East Housing Summit in Boston to discuss solutions to the housing shortage and affordability crisis.

1:28:14 Please mark me as excused and forward any documents relative to this meeting to my office for my attention i apologize for any inconvenience this may cause i appreciate your consideration and the opportunity to represent this committee at the summit lastly i will take this opportunity to wish you a successful meeting today sincerely honorable clifford joseph vice chair committee on housing transportation and telecommunications thank you madam clerk um what the new count there are three members present one absent three excused thank you so much um we are going to proceed let me just state for the record also that senator kurt a vla is on his way in transit on another airline. He was supposed to be here early, but

Seaflight, Seabourn Airline has issues, so they cancel all of their flights.

- 1:29:17 But he was on teams, and he is, he will be marked as soon as he gets here. Let me speak to the CSG that's referred in a correspondent from Senator Mike Koche, Senator Clifford Joseph, and Senator Maurice James. they did go to a conference with the council of state government and they deal a lot of our pending matters in terms of housing issues and um that's a very good conference I would have been there but I have a hearing but none of us is important that they attend as the coach here and former coach here and see exactly what new in the industry and what assistant they can bring back home in respect to housing issues in the territory so I wish them the best success on their trip and a safe return back to the Virgin Islands again good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands we did have a late start because as I said Seabourn had some issues and at the same time we had our own challenges but nonetheless we're gonna begin good morning Commissioner Gabrielle let's do a mic check please state your name and text it for the record along with your colleagues and then we're gonna proceed with the testimonies good morning my name is Derek Gabriel. I am the Commissioner of the Department of Public Works. Good morning. Good morning. Carol Overson McGregor, Deputy Commissioner of Transportation, Department of Public Works. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Jomo McLean, Highway Program Manager, Department of Public Works. Good morning. And no one on the team is correct? No, just the three of us. Okay, you may proceed with your testimony. Thank you. Thank you. Good morning, Senator Marvin Blyden, Chairman of the Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications, Committee members, all other Senators in attendance today, all those seated in the Senate Chambers, and those in the listening and viewing audience. I am Derek Gabriel, the Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works.
- 1:31:18 With me today are Deputy Commissioner of Transportation, Carol Olveson McGregor, and Federal Highway Program Manager, Jomo McLean. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the department of public works ongoing efforts to improve and enhance infrastructure commissioner i'm sorry i'm sorry since you haven't gone that far as yet i neglected to recognize my colleagues on a big island of st croix because senator francis has been here for some time good morning senator francis and i think i just saw senator franklin johnson um enter so thank good morning colleagues and i appreciate um you being here they're non-committee members but uh they are here so thank you so much sir you may um proceed i'm sorry i'll just start from the top of the second paragraph okay please thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the department of public works ongoing efforts to improve and enhance infrastructure the status of transportation programs and cemeteries across the u.s virgin islands we are making significant strides in road rehabilitation drainage improvements bridge construction and public transportation programs we are pleased to highlight key achievements and ongoing projects demonstrating our unwavering commitment to building a more resilient and sustainable transportation network for our for our residents and visitors while my team and i testified before the committee on budget appropriations and finance on february 18th 2025 today will allow us to have a deeper discussion focused on this department. First, let me congratulate our 2025 Employees of the Year. On St. Croix, we have Mr. Brian Hendrickson from the Division of Operations, and on St. Thomas, we have Mr. Kelvin Pickering from the Division of Transportation, Vitran. These employees were nominated by their managers and peers for their commitment to professionalism,
- 1:33:11 customer service, teamwork, innovation, and leadership. We thank them for being shining stars in the department over the past year the department of public works has continued our substantial progress in maintaining and rehabilitating our transportation infrastructure throughout the territory the permanent bridge on east airport road officially opened on officially opened to traffic on february 3rd 2025 and the temporary route 669 bridge adjacent to the Agricultural Fairgrounds reopened on February 14th, 2025, just in time for AgriFest 2025.
- 1:33:47 These bridges now join the list of reopened bridges along with the Altona Lagoon and the Queen Mary Highway bridges. Work on the remaining bridge continues. It is anticipated that construction will be complete by September 2025. The bridge projects are managed by Eastern Federal Lands, a Federal Highway Administration division within the U.S. Department of Transportation. DPW is a liaison between the Federal Highway Administration, local contractors, and the community. The notice at the McIntosh Drive. The notice to proceed was issued to Marco St. Croix on January 27, 2025, and a pre-construction meeting was held on February 3, 2025. The contractor has already started grubbing and clearing certain areas in anticipation of significant scope items beginning in March 2025.
- 1:34:37 The project scope includes pavement rehabilitation for the entire Ethel Mackintosh Memorial Drive, drainage improvements, retaining wall reconstruction, guardrail replacement, signage, and striping, with an estimated completion date of September 2026. the clifton hill connector project this project is in its final phase with dedicated turning lanes on melvin evans highway and paving and paving schedule for completion by april of 2025 most utility relocation has been complete the street light repairs are approximately 80 completed with approximately 100 poles remaining to be installed once delivered the contractor expects to receive the new poles and complete installation within the next three months by

May of 2025. We anticipate full completion of all scope items by July 2025. Airport Road. Work on Airport Road began on December 9, 2024 and is approximately 70% complete.

- 1:35:40 The project includes milling, paving, and striping of the three-mile-long roadway. West Airport Road has been milled and paved while sections of East Airport Road remain. We anticipate that this project will be closed out in March of 2025. This project was awarded to Marco St. Croix. Christianstead Roads. In Christianstead, DPW Contractor VI Paving, Inc. has completed all Phase 2 roads except for King Cross Street. The roadways included in Phase 2 of this project were Queen Cross, King, Strand, Queen, New, West, and Smith Streets. This project included milling, minor drainage improvements, resurfacing, and striping.
- 1:36:20 Frederickstead Roads. We have recently initiated the solicitation process for the Garvey-Frederickstead Roads project. This project includes minor drainage improvements, pavement milling, resurfacing and striping of Queen, King and Strand Streets in Frederickstead. The St. Croix Vitran Maintenance Building Phase 2. The original contract for this project was terminated on October 28, 2004. The project is now out for re-solicitation. A pre-bid meeting and mandatory site visit occurred on January 31st and the solicitation will close on February 28th 2025 we expect construction to resume in August of 2025. Welcome to Saint Corey sign and landscaping project the department recently solicited a project to design, install and maintain a welcome sign and decorative landscape at the East Airport Road intersection on St. Croix. The solicitation closed on February 14th and a contractor will be selected next. This project aims to enhance the area's aesthetic appeal and provide directional information. Veterans Drive Improvements Phase 2A. This project proposes to widen and revitalize Veterans Drive to provide a tree-lined four-lane divided roadway with a waterfront pedestrian promenade that simultaneously addresses Charlotte Mali's congestion and failing infrastructure problems while creating a signature pedestrian-friendly environment. The proposed work will cover an area from the west of Tolbud Gata near Vendors Plaza to Hospital Gata near Fort Christian parking lot. This project will be managed by the Eastern Federal Lands Division, a Federal Highway Administration Division within the U.S. Department of Transportation. The bid documents have been reviewed and are now complete.
- 1:38:10 Eastern Federal Lands has submitted the acquisition plan for certification and approval to the federal lands headquarters. Once approval is obtained, they will begin the solicitation process. The Veterans Drive resurfacing of certain segments. This project includes patching, milling, paving, and striping to include crosswalks on segments of Veterans Drive from Emile Griffith Park eastward to the bus stop at the southwestern end of the fourth Christian parking lot. About 50% of the work is completed. DBW anticipates having this maintenance project complete in March of 2025. The first avenue roadway and drainage improvements work continues on this project by the contractor. Island Roads. This past month, the contractor installed 213 linear feet of curb and gutter, two drop inlet catch basins, and two 12-inch diameter drainage pipe laterals on the north side of the road in work zone number nine. The contractor completed the placement of asphalt in work zones number seven and eight, which extends between second and fourth street. Traffic has been diverted between first and second streets, and the road is currently open to vehicular traffic from second to 10th street. The contractor is currently working in work zone nine, which extends between first and second streets. This project is approximately 59% complete. However, due to challenges with the failing waste management infrastructure in the area, we anticipate extending the project to fall of 2025 via a change order. Charlotte O'Malley Town Drainage Improvements. Work continues on this project by the contractor, Island Roads.
- 1:39:52 This past month, the contractor replaced the damaged box culvert at the intersection of Raditzgada and Wimelskafsgada on Back Street. Crystal and Raditzgada were paved, and Island Roads continues to clear and clean the swales and v-gutters on Raditz and Crystal Gada. Island Roads repointed and repaired 46 square yards of blue-bit stone v-gutter swales on Crystal and Raditzgada along with some segments of Wimo Skaff's Gada. This project is approximately 55% complete. Again, due to challenges with the failing waste management infrastructure throughout the downtown of Charlotte and Mali, we are negotiating a change order with the contractor to extend the project through fall of 2025. Additional road maintenance on St. Thomas. During the first and second quarters of 2025, the department will undertake minor drainage improvements, pavement milling, resurfacing, and striping several segments of roadways on St. Thomas. These areas include segments in Scott Free, Cookie Point, Contant, and Carrot Bay, just to name a few. Unfortunately, we are not prepared to share start or end dates for these areas today, but we will publicly share a comprehensive schedule of upcoming road maintenance projects in the coming weeks. Fort Christian Parking Lot Renovations. The Fort Christian Parking Lot Renovations involves trenching, installing water lines and valve boxes in the southern area of the lot, milling, paving, and striping.
- 1:41:21 This project is scheduled to be completed in early April of 2025, ensuring the parking lot is ready for use before the 2025 Carnival festivities. DPW contractor Grace Civil LLC has substantially completed trenching and installation of new water lines for the Carnival Boots. They are now installing valve boxes and will move on to milling and paving next.

Once complete, this project will also include EV charging pedestals and new automated pavement boots, bringing the parking lot into compliance with ADA standards. The Leonardo Trotman Drive. The design for this project is finalized. We revised the bid package to reflect the project's current budget, and now the revisions will connect the new roadway from the Weymouth-Rimer Highway to the rear of the Tutu Park Mall and Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library. Fish Fry Drive. The department was awarded a FEMA hazard mitigation grant to effectuate improvements along this area of Cruise Bay. The department has contracted a design consultant who is currently designing the proposed solutions to alleviate flooding along this roadway, including nature-based solutions where applicable. Once the proposed design concept has been completed, it will be submitted to FEMA for review and approval of construction funds for this project. In the interim, the department will perform maintenance resurfacing in the coming months. Centerline Road.

1:42:49 Before the end of May, the Department will begin minor drainage improvements, pavement milling, resurfacing, and striping of several segments of roadways along Centerline Road and East End Road on St. John. These dates are subject to the contractor's availability to mobilize to St. John, pending completion of other projects on St. Thomas. The Johnny Horn Trail. DPW's engineering division is developing a scope of services and project manual for a design build solicitation for the roadways, road, and drainage design. DPW understands the importance of this project and has made it a priority among the department's other transportation projects. the cruise bay restrooms the design build solicitation began on July 12th and a pre-bid July 12th of 2024 and a pre-bid meeting and site visit were scheduled for January 22nd 2024 bids were submitted by February 29 2024 and the evaluation process occurred on March 8th 2024 the evaluation committee discussed the lack of competition only receiving one proposal and the respondents lack of relevant experience in construction and the overall cost being over the agency's budget the committee agreed that dpw would revise the scope and solicit the project again to obtain more competition and comprehensive proposals we anticipate the project being re-solicited in march of 2025 transportation initiatives the department is soliciting a qualified firm to deliver a detailed comprehensive planning transit study or comprehensive transit operational plan analysis that evaluates, improves and expands DPW's public transportation system within the Virgin Islands. This study will help the department to align with modern transportation needs, ensuring operational

1:44:42 efficiency and enhancing accessibility and safety. This project will also include a feasibility study for our transit, transfer station and micro transit service. The study will provide a strategic framework to enhance ADA transit services, variable transportation, public bus services and coordination with traffic light control systems. It also complies with the Federal Transit Administration's procurement regulations and includes strategies to maximize the effectiveness of our federal funding. transportation master plan update under this task order our consultant WSP will undertake the agreed scope to develop the 2050 comprehensive transportation master plan they will collect recent data evaluate projects completed from previous efforts prioritize projects and update the recommendations presented in the 2040 comprehensive transportation master plan DPW staff will aid in identifying potential sources of relevant information including the primary including the primary public and private agencies and contacts within the even individual agencies WSP will use the existing conditions data to project future conditions which will forecast the 2050 transportation demands and then use the demand forecast to identify the necessary transportation infrastructure improvements that will address the projected future transportation impacts. In 2021, the USVI passed Bill No. 34-0087, also known as the USVI Complete Streets Act of 2022, providing for a complete streets policy and creating a complete street task force within DPW to aid in the development and implementation of strategies to increase the use of complete street models. In line with this legislation

1:46:34 And as an initial step towards achieving the mandate of this bill, WSP will assist DPW in developing a Complete Streets policy and a pipeline of Complete Streets projects based on the analysis performed as a part of the Transportation Master Plan. WSP will be on island next week to have our project kickoff. The Spirit of 1733. 3. Investment in public transportation continues to be a central focus for the Department. The 300-passenger ADA-compliant Spirit of 1733 will be delivered next month, marking a significant milestone in our commitment to inter-island transportation. This ferry, the third of the Department's fleet, will service Route 32M between Cruise Bay, St. John, and Red Hook, St. Thomas. Designed specifically for the unique maritime conditions of the Virgin Islands, this vessel represents a significant step forward in improving commuter accessibility between the islands.

1:47:36 The ferry, designed and fabricated by Gulf Craft LLC in Franklin, Louisiana, is completed and will begin the required dock and sea trials and the U.S. Coast Guard inspections next week. Earlier this week, Jomo and I visited the shipyard to conduct one of the final owner's inspections before completion. The ferry is scheduled to begin dock-and-see trials next week, and barring any setbacks, will be in the territory and in service by June of 2025. As we are still in the procurement phase, I cannot disclose the ferry's operator. I want to recognize and thank Assistant Commissioner Ruben Jennings, Deputy Commissioner Carol Olvison McGregor, Chief Procurement Officer Kisma Peterson, and Mr. Jumel McLean, and their respective divisions for their hard work on this project. It took a lot of coordination and effort to bring this to fruition and words cannot adequately express my sincere appreciation and gratitude. The St. Thomas St. Croix Ferry In

keeping with the Department's mission of transforming connectivity, the Department will use Garvey bonds as the financial tool to fund the fabrication of a St. Croix St. Thomas Ferry.

1:48:43 This addition will provide a crucial link between the districts while addressing inter-island connectivity. The ferry will allow passengers to travel with their vehicles, which adds an additional convenience. The final design and cost estimates are expected to be completed within 30 days. I want to thank the 35th Legislature for approving this landmark legislation, paving the way for the Territory's second Garvey issuance later this year. The Department has a procurement contract with Model 1 Commercial Vehicles, Inc. for nine medium-duty buses for both districts, scheduled to begin manufacturing this month. The buses are expected to be delivered within the next 18 months and will have 28 passenger seats and two designated wheelchair locations and will meet ADA requirements for public transit.

1:49:32 The Department has plans to procure additional fixed rail buses to replace its aging fleet. Paratransit buses are also scheduled for procurement this fiscal year. It is important to highlight that this contract was the department's first utilizing a state cooperative purchasing contract, a procurement method that allows eligible entities to use available funds to purchase from pre-approved industry partners across jurisdictions. Challenges. Heavy rainfall throughout 2024 has significantly impacted road and drainage systems throughout the territory. The territory typically receives 20 to 40 inches of rain annually, but the amount was much higher last year. It is estimated that we receive 20 inches above the annual average, amounting to about 40 to 60 inches of rain depending on the island and localized area. The Department has begun actively responding to these challenges by clearing down trees, debris from guts, landslides and mudslides, and addressing damage to critical roadways, including Centerline Road on St. John, Bolongo Road and Nick Friday Drive, Fortuna and Solberg on St. Thomas, just to name a few. However, that is not enough. With no federal dollars currently designated, we will need the help of this body to fund repairs to other areas.

1:50:55 We acknowledge the ongoing need for vegetation control along roadways. While we have made some progress over the past few months, we have plenty more work to do in this area. Later this year, the Department anticipates acquiring its own sidearm cutter to help with vegetation management in St. Croix. We have also been actively discussing leveraging our combined resources to tackle this challenge with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority. In the next 30 days, the Department will publish our roadside contractor schedule for greater public visibility and awareness of the program. We also encourage the public to continue to use the department's website, dpw.vi.gov, to report areas of concern. Staffing update. Like much of the government, the department faces the challenge of staff attrition due to retirement, relocation, or other job opportunities. The problem has manifested in the transportation, operation, and engineering divisions.

1:51:56 Over the past 12 months, DPW has lost 30 employees in these areas alone. Critical positions like mass transit operators, general maintenance workers, mechanics, engineers and project managers remain unfilled, which poses problems in keeping our roadways actively maintained, buses on the road and projects managed. DPW has been brainstorming ways to fill these positions in conjunction with the Division of personnel, the Office of the Governor, and other partners. Still, we recognize the challenges that specific job requirements and lower salaries pose.

1:52:34 Even considering these challenges, I want to thank all our staff, particularly in these key areas, for all they do daily to keep the Department's mission and mandates moving forward. In January of 2025, I appointed a new CIP Administrator, Ms. Cherise Penn, to lead our team of engineers working on capital improvement projects throughout the territory. We continue to serve our GVI partners with their requests for engineering services and have procured several task orders for engineering services to address our current engineering shortfall. As always, I want to close by first thanking the men and women who serve in the Department of Public Works. cannot thank you enough for your commitment to serving our community I recognize our job is often thankless but I salute you for your work every day to the public thank you for your patience trust and understanding dealing with closed roads bridges detours and change traffic patterns is frustrating this frustration and pain represent progress progress that will lead to generations of growth the Department of Public Works remains dedicated to enhancing our residents and our visitors quality of life by improving roads bridges drainage systems and public transportation we recognize that challenge that challenges remain but we will continue to make meaningful progress through collaboration with stakeholders and steadfast commitment to our mission despite the challenges mentioned above it is vital to recognize the progress that made territory-wide residents are seeing recovery dollars manifested in new neighborhood roads temporary and permanent bridges, rehabilitated parks and facilities, improved cemeteries, and enhanced beautification. Federal collaboration is

1:54:20 delivering growth in our ferry program in ways we could have never imagined possible and will lead to improved and affordable inter-island and inter district travel. The foundational pieces of the department's multimodal transportation plan and the comprehensive transportation plan are finally taking shape thank you for your time and support my team and I will remain and are happy to answer any questions you may have thank you so much Commissioner Gabriel for your testimony but before I begin how I said Gabriel Gabriel Gabriel I apologize for butchering your name um before I begin

though or let me again recognize my two colleagues that were here for me very early center on your Boquez and Senator A.V. Lewis. Thank you so much, non-committee members, for being here first and on time. Thank you so much. But before I go to the line of questioning, let me give the line-up, and then I'm going to ask a couple questions to you, Commissioner. The line-up will be Senator Boquez, then Senator A.V. Lewis, then Senator Kurt Viely, Senator Novel Francis, Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Dwayne the Graff, and then Senator Franklin Johnson, the other lineup for now. Commissioner, in respect to your testimony, I note that you did not mention anything about the cemeteries, especially the one that's being worked on right now in St. Thomas.

1:55:54 I see most of the wall is up. Can you speak to that, please? Yeah, thank you for that, Senator Blyden. So our cemeteries have definitely been a focus of the department, at least since 2021. As you noted right now, we have the cemetery wall project that is ongoing. I would say it's about 40% complete at this point. And the scope of that project is to erect a wall around Western Cemetery No. 3. we will also have signage and we will also include minor repairs to other areas of Western cemeteries number one and two that's a really important project for us particularly I refer to the project sponsor as a lieutenant governor Tregenza Roach because it is something that he has been championing for quite some time we have made significant strides also with erecting crips and columbariums throughout the district as I'm sorry throughout all the both districts St. Croix and St. Thomas it is something that we're focused on you know I and you mentioned it earlier in your opening we have to really pay homage and respect properly to our ancestors and that starts with how we respect those that are in our cemeteries. Challenges do remain I know we've spoken your several of your colleagues and I have also spoken about the need to acquire land and on all three islands so it is also a focus of ours that we're working on and why we are there what you said we have 40% completed what the time frame what the timeline what's the expected end date so we are pushing for substantial completion of the wall segment by the end of April and then the final project should be done by the end of summer very well and also in respect to the cemetery does of course I just stated we have been speaking to that I know for some time I spoke to the cemetery in Smith Bay and the landowner that's abut to the cemetery and wanted to actually work with you guys in terms of giving the land for burial space in the St. Thomas district

1:58:00 because as you know there is no land in this district. What's the progress with that individual? So we have been, we started with direct negotiations But as you know, Senator, we have to include the Department of Property and Procurement, and there is a very specific process. So we have initiated that process, it is taking quite a while, but we are trying to find ways to expedite it. But I think also, even as we look for land, we also have to find more efficient ways to manage our cemeteries, because as we talked about, as you mentioned, it's finite land. So we really need to be better with our cemetery management, which is why we're looking at Crips and Columbariums we're having we have seen more recently a lot of our residents are looking at cremation which does allow for you know more efficient again burials so we are also we've been speaking with DPNR and they've been exploring more sea burials as well so it's something we're looking at all avenues you know it is something that we're really pushing on and even with But we're trying to do GIS mapping and put that on our website.

1:59:07 So the cemeteries are definitely your focus. Thank you for that. We have two points of information. I'm going to start with Senator Lewis because he had his point first and then Senator Johnson. Senator Lewis, you are going to ask me a point on information. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, testifiers. Good morning, Virgin Islands. Mr. Gabriel, while you are in the line of talking about your cemeteries, could you just expound a little bit for me on your East Cemetery, the facility out there? A couple of people have inquired already and wants to know when it will be open, you know. The chapel?

1:59:40 The chapel. I guess, you know, that could be another revenue generator. I don't know how you look at it. Yes. But could you just expound on it a little bit, please? Sure. Thank you for the question. So it is something that we've been making repairs to. We've actually gotten the cistern online and functioning. Water collection is ongoing. So we actually hosted a funeral in the chapel, I think, for the first time last year. It is something that's available. We are trying to spruce it up, as you mentioned, but it is a facility that's available for the public's use. And just on that same line, we are hoping that this year we're going to be able to put back out the repairs for the chapel in St. Croix. That was a FEMA project that we had to cancel due to some procurement challenges, I think, in 2023. So we're hoping to be able to reissue that this year, and we are making repairs to the Cyril E. King mausoleum on St. Croix. Yeah, I just hope that when you get it up and running, please, you know, let us hear no, and as well as the public, I would imagine it would come with a cost as well.

2:00:41 So let's get all of that ironed out and worked out the kinks. Thank you very much for your response. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Lewis. Before I go to Senator Johnson, you said that the chapel is available. How are you advertising and letting people know that they're available? How are you doing that? we haven't and i think that's a that's a problem that we haven't really advertised it um so we are going to be doing that this year you know this is the first time in a while in the department where we actually have like staff in that division under operations that that that are working specifically in

the cemeteries um so yeah we will be doing some advertising on that very well thank you senator johnson you recognize for your point of information thank you very much good morning to the testifiers good morning to my colleagues good morning to the viewing and listening audience once we're on the subject with our cemeteries i noticed we had an extension of the kings hill cemetery but the road is not paved and i've been in there for two services that your car actually does slide all over the place and i think when we're doing this expansion we definitely to make sure that we have the funding to put a paved road but that and that's going back to the i think is a veteran section in that new section that you really can't even get to that grave site when it's raining in that area and the second information i wanted to speak about was frederick said wall the wall and frederick said cemetery to the southwestern wall that wall has collapsed for some good years and i haven't seen no progress or nothing on that so if you could fill me in on those two i'll really appreciate that thank you very much mr chair thank you senator johnson senator bulquist let me answer his question um so i i i do recognize um the problem with the lack of a roadway system particularly in the kingsdale cemetery um to your

2:02:41 point it is something that was included originally when we were doing the expansion because of cost prohibitions we weren't able to complete that it is something that is still on the books and we do hope to put that out to bid this year actually so we are that is something that's actively on our radar but I do appreciate you bringing it back up on this on the veteran side I have recently spoken to director Patrick Farrell about doing some joint operations on possibly working with the National Guard, actually, to see if we could do some temporary fixes for some roadway networks in that area. So hopefully more to come on that in the next 30 days. And then you mentioned the walls, the walls in the Frederiksted Cemetery. So our next phase, if you will, of our cemetery rehabilitation is to address the walls in St. Croix, particularly, like you mentioned, Senator Johnson in Frederiksted and the portions in Christiansted. So while I don't have a timeline on that, our goal is to put that out a bid this fiscal year. Do you have the funding to do the wall in St. Croix because that's important?

2:03:43 Let me get back to you on that. I need to check, but let me get back to you on that. I think so, but let me get back to you. Okay, very well. Senator Bulquest, you recognize for your six minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Mr. Chair. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning to the listening and viewing audience, and good morning to our testifying panel from the Department of Public Works. Good morning. Commissioner, you mentioned several times in your testimony that several projects have been delayed due to contractor issues. And I'm curious to know what penalties or contractual clauses are in place to hold those contractors accountable for these missed deadlines. Yeah, thank you for the question. So, of course, all GVI construction contracts have liquidated damages.

2:04:28 and that is the way that you know we hold contractors accountable when it is their responsibility very well so let's let's talk about one of the biggest contracts or the longest likely that you've had to deal with I mean I think you inherited it let's talk about liquidated damages for Polly Joseph yeah so I appreciate the question I don't as a commissioner of the department I want to one of the things that we do is we really have to vet when you implement something like liquidated damages because there's a lot of proof of burden that needs to go into that and in this project especially when it comes to Polly Joseph we've been negotiating a number of change orders since I've been here including the conditional letter letter of map review the CLOMAR which was a FEMA requirement then there was the a la carte menu that we did which we actually came before this body to discuss. And now you have this recent delay claim that we've talked about the last time I was at the Senate as well. When you combine those with other factors, we as a government team, the GVI team, didn't feel like we were in a position to implement liquidated damages, especially when the conversation was ongoing with the contractor.

2:05:45 And that's why I take it very seriously. Anytime you take any actions against a contractor, whether it's invoking liquidated damages, canceling a contract, even exercising change orders. We do take it at the department very seriously. It's been a long time, Commissioner, as you know. And you are the commissioner, and I am the senator. But my suggestion, Commissioner, not that I understand your job the way that you do, and I respect you and your position, but in my opinion, I feel that the Department of Public works, or the government, the GVI, should look into terminating the contract and using the banding company, the banding that they have, to continue to work with the subcontractors, put it out for rebid, and find another contractor to finish the job. It has become, in my opinion, a money pit for the government of the Virgin Islands. But that's just my opinion. If I may ask, Commissioner, could you provide a copy of the executed contract along with any change orders? Is that something that we can get from you? So, of course, it's part of the public record. What I would recommend, though, is asking the Department of Property and Procurement for it, as they are the custodian of all government contracts.

2:07:05 Okay, very well. I'll do that. So let's move on. In your testimony, you also mentioned that 30 employees in key divisions over the past year, including the mass transit operations and engineers, have sort of left the department. How many of these vacancies remain unfilled at this given point in time? I need to get back to you with that number. Yeah, I need to

get back to you with that number, but I'll get it for you. Let's shift over to St. John, Fish Fry Drive. You've heard me call you about this many, many times. I know that you're waiting for the pending FEMA approval.

2:07:41 How have you moved since the last time we discussed this? Yeah, the design on the project is really moving well. We've been having conversations with, ongoing conversations with FEMA about it. The next step, as I mentioned in our testimony, is to do some temporary repairs. So those are coming. We will be, you know, because it is a hazard mitigation project, it's a little bit different. But we will be pursuing temporary repairs here, I would say, within the next 30 to 60 days. I understand that recently a private citizen actually made some minor repairs but we need to do proper repairs in that area yeah it's a it's a situation that that really impedes traffic once yeah heavy water comes from the skies yes we agree um the 2050 comprehensive transportation master plan you said that that's being developed to forecast transportation demands in the in the territory how much federal funding has been secured for this initiative I'll ask Mr. Jomo McLean to respond jomo mclean highway program manager senator um we our task order with WSP is is is approximately just over seven hundred thousand dollars is there any um percentage or match by the local government that's required no it's a hundred percent okay very good very good um commissioner we are here to help you and um one of the critical areas that I believe has always come up especially during political uh cycles is the status of our roads it's something that continues to um you know constituents call about from every given point in time and let's talk about road excavation you know as it stands right now you know given given all of these road projects that you have the position of the department is Mr. Chaipame in your opinion do you have enough regulatory

2:09:41 powers to deal with road excavation issues because based on what I've seen in code it seems very vague what are some of the issues or concerns that you have with how road excavation is conducted in the Virgin Islands and how can you regulate it how are you currently regulating it or how would you like to regulate it moving forward yeah that's that's a really good question a very loaded question so I love me to respond right um I think starting with the Virgin Islands code I really think it's time that we look at revising that area when it comes excavation permits because right now even the the fees don't allow for us to properly hire staff to be able to manage those excavation projects and check on them regularly right now I think everybody in this chambers and those listening knows the challenges that we face with Liberty with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority with WAPA and any other utility that's that's yeah waste management or anybody else that's working on their utilities and the roadways so I think I think now especially as we are looking at all of the undergrounding projects that are to come now would be a good time to look at revising those portions even maybe upping the fees oh when there is WAPA again you see you have to cut you still mention them okay hold on okay continue so um I um I think so just going back to the conversation I think now is the time that we comprehensively look at the excavation program. You talked about regulations or my regulatory power. I think we need to look at it from a different perspective, which is enforcement. And it's something that's never been addressed with the department when our anti-litter and beautification officers went with Waste Management Authority. So now we have no enforcement arm. So it really is an after-the-fact

2:11:43 matter or the most power that we have is to withhold future permits. And even to that it becomes difficult with when it comes to like the government utilities we're not going to stop WAPA from fixing a water main at further cost we're not going to stop the Waste Management Authority from fixing a waste water main at further cost so I think now is a time to have a more comprehensive conversation I do think and I am I think I'm on record as saying I do think that we need to look at possibly reinstituting an enforcement arm in the Department of Public Works several of my I would say almost all of my transportation colleagues across the nation have that piece in their arsenal when you look at our partners in Putter in in Puerto Rico in DTOP they have a whole enforcement officer including meter maids you know parking people that issue parking tickets that people of course they regulate pipelines over there so they have a more extensive regulatory entity but I think it's time that we look at just revising or revamping the Department of Public public works to meet the current challenges that we have okay thank you so much for your response and suggestions as well and remember never mention anything negative about WAPA because they're going to turn out the power thank you for the time Mr. Jay thank you thank you so much Senator Borker for your line of questioning and uh before I go to Senator Lewis let me ask you commissioner Gabriel, in respect to the 30 employees that you have lost, what's the employee morale at this time and how is it affecting your population, if anything? Speak to that, please. So if I had to gauge it on a scale from 1 to 10, honestly, I would probably say we're at about a 6, maybe a 7 right now.

2:13:35 I think a lot of it is just the relentless pace of the work that we do every single day. I think a lot of it, and we speak about it offline a lot of times, when you take an entity like, let's say Vitran, what Vitran suffers from a lot is, we don't have the resources and we don't have, we have an older, we have an aging fleet of buses and that's a major challenge especially when you have drivers and mechanics that are consistently dealing with downed buses, the attrition of certain employees, especially as they retire, it really begins to take a toll. When you look at operations, you know, the job is very intense. It's really, really, really intense. We are doing things, I think, we have a really creative management team that is always

doing things to try to improve employee morale, not just during DPW week, but I think throughout the year. We're always talking to employees. I know my chief of staff, Ms. Canila Callender, is always trying to meet with different divisions and find ways to boost morale, especially given the fiscal challenges.

2:14:43 Because I think, while I think everybody deserves higher salaries, I'm not a firm believer that morale improves just with a raise. It's the work that we do. It's improving the buildings. It's improving the facilities. It's making sure that our bus drivers have a modern fleet. It's making sure that we do things like continue to improve our fleet and continue to do things like add ferries, continue to have activities where employees can express themselves. I think one of the biggest things that impacts employee morale also is employees just not being aware of the emotional challenges that they face on a daily basis.

2:15:24 You know, it's hard when we talk about WAPA, but I mean, these jobs are hard when every time your job is mentioned, it's in a negative light. So that's why it, just being honest, I would say it's about a six or a seven, but we are meeting consistently and trying to improve morale. But what's the plan, though, in respect to the shortage? And how are you, what are you doing to onboard other individuals to join a team? What's being done? What's the plan? Our HR team, I feel like, is conducting interviews just about every day. A lot of the problem, just speaking frankly, when it comes to our mass transit operators, there is a drug and alcohol requirement. And if you can't pass that, then you can't be a mass transit operator.

2:16:08 Similarly, as we are applying for more federal funds, we are implementing, we are going back to implementing a department-wide drug and alcohol policy. And so, I mean, there are challenges there if we just speak plainly. But again, we are having a conversation with the employees. Every time I have a meeting with the different divisions, I try to encourage them to utilize the tools and the resources that are available to them through the government's insurance plan and the insurance program so that they can, you know, become or get the help that they need when they do need it. Very well. Thank you for that. Senator Lewis, you're recognized for your six minutes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning again to the testifiers. Good morning, Virgin Islands. Good morning, colleagues.

2:16:56 Real quick, Commissioner Gabriel, do you have any updates as it pertains to the Can Crying Bridge or that bridge? Yeah, so we are making assessments and trying to see if it makes sense that whether it's repair or to remove it completely. That's really what we're doing. You know, of course, we kind of mentioned it earlier with the Comprehensive Transportation Plan. Things are moving, and with CanCry not being there, it may not make sense for a pedestrian bridge, but we need to do the traffic studies to be able to make an informed decision with the future of the bridge.

2:17:33 Okay, and I take into consideration, I still see in afternoon times or even early morning times, I still see one or two students utilize it. So let's take that into consideration. And thank you on the team for enclosing it, for people utilizing it. Thank you very much. Commissioner, on page five or your test page? five of your testimony you talked about uh the leonardo tratman drive i think that's an excellent project that's about to come online could you give an estimated time when you plan to see actually shovel in the ground so we're hoping just based on a timeline it's all for solicitation it's at pmp for solicitation right now i'm hoping by about end of summer maybe like september because it is going to take some time to negotiate to choose a contractor and um execute a contract so we're hoping by you know end of summer early September we should be able to see some movement there okay miss McGregor correct mr. McGregor thus quickly I was in St.

2:18:32 John yesterday and some seniors met me senior citizens met me and they talked about bus timing could elaborate on that let me just give you a scenario they said that when they go to a particular center I don't remember the name of the center where they do activities and so forth either they're they're rich on time but there's not enough time to even um complete the activities or what's not there could you expound on that a little bit it appears that the seniors are talking about our paratransit service which is the ada accessible service for seniors and persons with disabilities what they are required to do is select the time that they would like to go and the time that they would like to be picked up. So they need to let the St. John office know what time they would like to pick up.

2:19:21 Okay, cool. That's a paid service? It is a paid service.

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

7x	Senator Marvin Blyden heard in this transcript as: Blyden
5x	Senator Avery Lewis heard in this transcript as: Lewis
5x	Senator Franklin D. Johnson heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnson, Johnson
5x	Senator Marise C. James the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr heard in this transcript as: James, Maurice C. James, Maurice James
4x	Senator Clifford Joseph heard in this transcript as: Clifford A. Joseph
3x	Senator Carla Joseph the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph heard in this transcript as: Joseph
3x	Commissioner Derrick Gabriel heard in this transcript as: Gabriel
3x	Senator Kurt A. the surname alone also matches: Dwayne M. heard in this transcript as: A.
3x	Senator Ray Fonseca heard in this transcript as: Fonseca
2x	Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr. heard in this transcript as: Angel L. Bolques Jr., Boquez
2x	Senator Kurt Violet heard in this transcript as: Ville
2x	Senator Novelle Francis heard in this transcript as: Novel Francis
2x	Senator Samuel Carrion
2x	Commissioner Virgin Islands Department heard in this transcript as: Department
1x	Senator Angel L. Bullquist Jr

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 34-0087