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- 0:00:00 some of the different stakeholders in the game are doing. One of the things, I'll be honest with you, C-Trade, what drives C-Trade is data. What the clients, what the constituents are saying, what the tourists are saying about home. Not just taxi drivers. So this is not just, this is in general. They talk about the restaurants, they talk about the service, they talk about the good and bad. So a lot of times, when we, you know, we stay focused on one thing, they cover all aspects of things.
- 0:00:33 And these, you know who does it best? Especially those in the cruise industry. They survey their passengers before they leave. And a lot of you cruise, too. And you give that information. And that's how they improve on their product. So I ask you to come to Sea Trade. this year we were fortunate to have some good long conversations my crucial colleagues were able to have some good conversations with Royal Caribbean about things they could do in St. Croix and they haven't left out St. John you know right now Vipers in negotiation with Royal Caribbean to do some major work in the Crown Bay area in St. Thomas and that partnership is going forward and you know what we're going to need you here too because everybody can sit in Crown Bay so some have to come to Redo you know and another thing at Sea Trade was surprising they didn't just talk about the tourists they talked about how the residents treat each other as well too at Sea Trade in front of the tourists so some of that we're going to be discussing tonight but again I urge you, and I'm going to leave Senator Blyden or Senator Dittance to talk a little more about C-Trade as well.
- 0:02:00 Thank you, Senator Lewis. Again, let me just add to what Senator Lewis spoke to. It's important to note, though, that other island destinations, taxi drivers come to C-Trade, you know. They come, observe, look at what's going on, of soaking everything, go back and rebrand what they're doing based on what they're telling them they want, what they're looking for, what the tourists are saying, because they have inside information that we don't really have enough. See, trade is very important. It's a good place to be, and I think you need to experience that. It's one who see exactly what's going on in the space, because it's very important. They're telling you everything that's come back to them based on the industry, and they're the experts in terms of they're the ones with the ships. They're the one that's coming on the surveys,

et cetera, and they do inside surveys and stuff, so they know what they want, and they are telling you what they are looking for and how to improve your brand. So I just wanted to share that also with you.

0:03:03 So it's not all about individual going to C-Trade, but you guys are on the front line. You're on the ground, so it's important that you be involved and be vested in your business when it comes to SeaTrade and another aspect to have a cheat sheet to know exactly what to do, who, what, when, where, and why. That's important also. Thank you. And I wanted to chime in also because SeaTrade is a global cruise ship conference. And they have industries from the Pacific, the Atlantic, the transatlantic, and, of course, the Caribbean.

0:03:37 And we're all technically competing against each other. And it's relatively important that our representatives from your industry participate because, like was mentioned before by my colleagues, other taxi association representatives from around the Caribbean attend this. And what they do is they network and they're able to share their information, whether it's website, email, phone number, access the communication, because now they have a direct contact to the cruise ship liner. So in some cases when we have like global tours and these operators who may need or want to utilize a taxi driver to provide a service, you're only getting a percentage, correct? So you now, as an association, are able to have a direct link to these cruise ship liners and network, and now you're going to see more activity, more accessibility, more funding for your association and your drivers directly and not have to be the middleman technically. Senator Giddens? Good evening, everyone.

0:04:49 Yeah. So you've been hearing about the Sea Trade Global Cruise Conference. And like I said on St. Quoy, one of my disappointments when I get to Sea Trade is that when it comes to the U.S. Virgin Islands, and let me just stick with the U.S. Virgin Islands, I am always seeing government officials and not people from the industry. Taxi drivers, restaurant owners, people that do the excursions, etc. These are folks who need to be at the table so that they can hear firsthand what's taking place.

0:05:38 So, excuse me, so while we were there, we engaged in good conversation, off-camera conversation. And saying that, Mr. At-Large Senator, you put me on the spot tonight because initially when we started these meetings, we said the initial meeting would be off-cameras. I noticed we have cameras tonight. Someone heard them say on St. Croix, oh, he didn't want us to be hard.

0:06:11 But they're hearing St. John and St. Thomas, but it wasn't designed like that. But I'm kind of happy that we're having it recorded because on St. Croix, some things came out of that meeting that wasn't even in that direction. They said we were pushing right here. But in any case, as we met with the board members and the executive director for Port Authority and the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line, like I said, we had some good off-camera conversations. They told us some of the things that we were actually doing wrong, and, of course, we wanted the feedback from the passengers themselves. I couldn't even imagine what it is exactly that they wanted to see in the town of Frederickstead and St. Croix, because I'm continuously crying out about the conditions of our buildings in the downtown areas. I don't know what it's going to take for us to address that. I think I have a simple fix for that, but that's for another time. In any case, as they told us some of the things that we need to do, we made a commitment.

0:07:33 The Senate president was there, Milton Potter. The finance chair, Senator Francis. The majority leader, Senator Kurt Valle. and the Senate Minority Leader, Senator Duane DeGraff. And just like how Royal Caribbean made a commitment to us, we made a commitment to them for the District of St. Croix that we will turn some of the things around that they brought to our attention. With that, we got our colleagues to all agree that we would put \$5 million towards the revitalization start of a project in the downtown Frederickstead area.

0:08:19 Frederickstead is a unique area. As you pull into this cruise ship dock, this is one destination that once you pull in, on your left, you're flanked with a long row beach, and your right, the same thing, a long row beach. I mean, it's not the best now because of the erosion and whatnot that's taken place over the years, but we have committed to do certain things in those areas. For instance, the walk from the pier itself towards the Fort Frederick Beach. There's a bridge there that passengers could actually walk to the beach. If you go there now, the bridge has been down since the hurricanes.

0:09:05 We want to get all of that repaired so that the passengers who don't catch the taxis can actually walk to the beach in that area. What we'll also like to do is create a task force, St. Croix having one in that district and a task force for the St. Thomas, St. John district. And at times, the task force will come together, but we decided we should separate the task force because St. Thomas St. John is much more organized than St. Croix is. We understand that. So St. Croix may have a lot more work to be done.

0:09:49 But at some given time, we need to have that coordinated effort. And one of the things that we're looking at across the territory is customer service. Customer service, training, our appearance. Your appearance, I mean, I heard my colleagues talk about us being, you guys being ambassadors. The first people that they come in contact with, the last people that they

come in contact with. We want you to leave a lasting impression. So, as we put the task force together, again, we're looking at the customer service, we're looking at enhancing the driver training and certification, the modernization of the entire taxi industry, the resolution of the industry conflicts, and regulating the fares.

0:10:52 Too often, you will get on one taxi, and they charge one price to go to a destination. Somebody has come up, they want to go to the same destination, and there's some ridiculous price. At some point, we have to have a regulation in place. We have to be able to regulate all these fares across the board. So at the appropriate time, hopefully there was a sign-in sheet, or before you leave, there will be a sign-in sheet for you to put your contact name, number, and your email address and let us know if you would be interested in serving on the task force.

0:11:34 Again, the task force will be a St. Thomas-St. John District Task Force and a St. John District Task Force and at times both task force will get together. So I want to just thank the Senator at large for taking the lead here on the Island District of St. Thomas and Senator, I mean, I'm sorry, for taking the lead here on St. John and Senator Lewis for taking the lead on St. Thomas tomorrow evening. And thank you, colleagues, for your interest and being here with us tonight. Thank you all so much.

0:12:08 And looking forward to hearing some of your concerns as well, because we did get a lot of good concerns on St. Croix that we are definitely going to be working on. So we want to hear from you as well. Thank you. Thank you. And before we go to Senator Carla Joseph, I neglected to say congratulations to the new taxi tour operator graduates, Ms. Yvette Stapleton and Mr. Steadman Hart. Congratulations. Oh, one more? Who else? Oh, okay, Dwayne Lawrenson. Okay, congratulations to the new taxi drivers.

0:12:49 Thank you so much, Senator Bocas. I really want to just echo that congratulations. That's been a long time in coming to get taxi drivers, get new operators. So really kudos to you. Kudos also to the interim executive director and the Taxicab Commission Board because that's been a long, long time in coming. I just want to say one key point, and then I'm going to be quiet, and I really am very interested in what you all have to say. You know why we're here this evening? We're here this evening because statistics is showing that the Virgin Islands is one of the number one destinations. The Caribbean as a whole, when we go to Sea Trade, is showing that the Virgin Islands, the Caribbean as a whole, is a number one destination for cruising. And we have it.

0:13:48 We are ahead of most, if not all, of the markets. And we want to keep it that way. And how can we do it? We need you, just like you need us, to be able to stay on top. It's no talk of war here. We're all in it together. okay and so if you are we all are benefiting we all have to make sure we spend the time and be intentional intentional and what we do going forward yes we're gonna have a little push and talk here and there but we want to be able to put our best foot forward to represent the Virgin Islands that's why my colleagues and I are just here tonight and we are pushing and asking you to become part of and participate in the sea trade. There's a food and beverage component. I visited it a number of times when I go to the sea trade. And these are vendors who actually have and they're opening opportunities for them to serve or serve their dishes on the cruise ships. that's another area. Another area that we could venture in, we could cook here. We have really great restaurateurs and chefs here in the Virgin Islands. So that is another opportunity that is there. And we want to be able to have you explore those opportunities by investing. You know, it's a professional development investment for the taxi drivers to definitely invest and come and attend and participate in the C-Trade. And I'm anxious right now to review my notes from 2023 and see what updates we've had. And I'll turn it over to Senator Bolquez.

0:15:50 One of the things I'd like to say, too, before I give it to Senator Bolquez is that I'd like to really say thank you to all the taxi drivers in, especially in the St. Thomas St. John District. And let me tell you why I really want to express this. Last weekend, last weekend, we had the USS Iwo, Iwo Jima? Iwo, Iwo Jima, sorry. Thank you. And the taxi drivers in Crown Bay. And I know some of them made it to St. John. But all of those sailors that I met, talk how good the transportation was. And it was a blessing to them. I'm glad for whoever made that connection, and I'm glad that you guys lived up to your end at the bargain and making them feel comfortable and safe to be in the Virgin Islands. Thank you for doing that every day. Not just for the sailors, but it means for all our residents and passengers alike. Thank you.

0:16:49 Yes, thank you. Thank you. And we sort of coupled in the highlights and the taxi expectations throughout the discussion here with the panel. And I wanted to touch on it one last time before we go over to the Department of Tourism. One of the most important things when we talk about taxi expectations, we understand that you're independent business owners, but there is a call to action in a sense of being able to, especially here for our Virgin Islands, that's important to us is that we want to push our VI history, our culture, our music, our food. And I know that that is a requisite for the new graduates. You all did have to do sort of a VI history course. Correct? Correct. So that is very important because a one-time visitor does not do anything for our economy. It just holds it in a pattern. When you have return visitors, that's when your economy grows. So we want to encourage you to continue to push our culture, push our heritage, our history, our music, our food, make them want to come back. And even if they don't come back, let them refer the Virgin Islands

to somebody else. And that's also potentially growth as well. So we're going to go over to the Department of Tourism.

0:18:03 You're recognized. Good evening again. Elizabeth Hanson-Watley here. First, I want to just congratulate you for making the effort to be here. Ms. Watley, would you like to come up here? It'll be better that way. Yes. Good evening again. I was just congratulating you on coming out.

0:18:41 I know that you guys work very hard, and this is an extra ask of you to come out, but you felt it important enough to show up, and so I congratulate you for already stepping out on the right foot. At the Department of Tourism, you know we work hand-in-hand. Also, being a part of the Taxi Cab Commission Board, I have a more intricate role. I have another board member here.

0:19:08 You may be familiar with Ms. George. And also the acting executive director, I have to shout them out because I know one of the things you may be familiar with is that we don't have a big staff at the Taxicab Commission. So they really have a yeoman's job to do. And I want to just tell you guys thank you for being able to give us some grace while we work out the kinks at the Taxicab Commission. One of the things from the Department of Tourism that we want to share with you is that we want to commit to being more connected to the community, hearing from you as the drivers, being able to respond and address whatever concerns that you have because this isn't just about the tourists. this is about we know the importance of what you do for the territory it's not just tourists you know um and you are a representation of us right so we always want to make sure that you do the best uh one of the things that we're mandated with at the taxi cab commission is making sure that we evolve the industry to make sure that it's vibrant it's competitive and we maintain the industry in the territory you have to remember we are in the eastern well i can't say eastern we're in the caribbean and so our neighbors although we love them very much and we have great friendships and relationships we are competing with our neighbors and so we have to keep that in mind we always have to have our best foot forward and so one of the things that we're doing now is instead of just talking to you and mandating things to you we want to hear from you about because you're the experts you're the subject experts and we want to hear from you about what we can improve from the governmental side so tourism the legislature you know taxicab commission we're not just about regulation but also improving the industry and so i think that

0:21:13 um i'm happy about what we're doing now where we can have all the players in the room we could get all the hard questions out of the way and find out what the solutions suggestions are and like I said you're the subject expert so we expect to hear how you think we can improve what we do for you right um I'm here to answer any questions I'm not one of those people if I don't know I ain't gonna lie and say no I gonna say I'll find out you know but um I'm here I cut that small plane and that boat to come over from st croix because i want you to know me i don't want you to just hear my name and and hear about us as board members we're trying to change the dynamics of the board where you know who represent you you know who to put our feet to the fire if we ain't doing the right thing but at least you know who we are and and we're virgin islanders like everybody else no matter where we may have come from when we hear we are virgin islanders and so we have to work as a collective to make sure we do great all right so we're here uh we're here for you so i look forward to a very good conversation and um then we'll be able to go back and do what we have to do as a team to improve for you okay thank you so much we have our acting executive director of taxicab commission thank you so much ms watley from the department of tourism please give her a hand and taxicab commission dual roles thank you chair lady thank you for those great words and it's indeed a pleasure it's indeed a pleasure to be here this evening to meet with the taxi operators i'm familiar with quite a number of you i've met with you i've seen you graduate through the classes and we really are here to serve and on my level improve the operations of

0:23:13 the taxicab commissions i'm going to add that we too are looking forward to making the virgin islands a number one tourism destination and i know that we are headed in that direction um between the board and the commission itself we initiated and we actually produced 84 new taxi operators for the territories i have and we are proud of them and speaking with the association leadership they are looking forward to working with these new operators training them and having them ready to be the front liners for the tourism industry and we recognize that that is critical in addition to that we are hiring staff to support our new operators as well as the onboarding of new taxi enforcement officers and we have actually advertised those positions so we are proud to say that we are supporting our feeder to the ground and we are moving forward so thank you for the vision we support the vision on the operational level we are producing outcomes so thank you and we look forward to your questions okay thank you so much uh executive director smith please give her a hand okay so now we move forward to our next agenda item which is a discussion and preparation for the upcoming tourism season um what i wanted to do is um we're going to couple most of these together um that way we touch on all on everything there is information that was available before before i continue uh did did you want to say anything on behalf of the port authority no okay very well uh so we we want to touch on Oh, I apologize.

- 0:25:23 You always have something to say. We love you. We love you. Okay, so I wanted to touch on a few key takeaways, right? And these key takeaways derive from information from Sea Trade and information from the Port Authority's most recent report. um cruise ship arrivals and passenger growth for 2026 is going to be exponential um they are moving into accommodating what is considered to be icon class vessels or any of you familiar with icon class vessels those are those big super big crew colossal large city like cities on water So, you know, there is going to be some dredging that's going to be taking place, but the Virgin Islands is moving in to accommodating these Icon-class vessels, and that means, obviously, more passengers as well. There's a 286 combined cruise ship call scheduled for Crown Bay, of which a portion of that is also scheduled for St. John, because they're going to come over here and want to do our tour and experience St. John as well. And St. John's cruise ship passenger arrivals increased from 5,514 in 2023, and as of July 2025, it was, because I'm assuming it's higher now, 8,450, which is a 53% rise in the last two years. So that shows that growth is happening. It shows that we need to be ready for this next season. And of course, the accommodation at some given point of these ICON class vessels will likely bring that number up again. The Port Authority, as mentioned earlier, has gone into agreements with Royal Caribbean
- 0:27:24 and are implementing customer service and safety trainings for taxi drivers and tour operators in St. Croix, as mentioned by Vice President Gittins, but I believe this model can be expanded territory-wide, meaning that the potential for training should be available to all the islands, which I believe it will be, to include St. John as well. I see tourism wanting to give some input. May I have the media? If there's the floor mic to give to Chairwoman Watley.
- 0:27:58 Yes, just wanted to mention quickly that The Department of Tourism is going to be implementing some additional trainings. It is one of the investments, as you know, or you may not know. We also, we collaborate to deal with the classes with UVI cell and lend some support in that area. So in addition to the classes that some of you may have taken if you're new, We also want to extend training across the community and specify to taxi as part of that plan to roll out because we are aware that many of you have already gone through the process of taking a class and we still want to offer that support in whatever area that we can with the customer service. And even, you know, as we talk about different sources of payment and so forth, maybe that's an area we could help you guys in as well. And so that is one of the things that is going to be rolling out of the Department of Tourism, additional training outside of the regular classes. and just to add to what Ms. Watley just said, the chairwoman of the taxi commission just said even some of the feedback we've gotten from some of the industry players and to include you know include people who complain to the taxi commission as well, we have I am not saying it happened at St. John it might not happen at St. Thomas where taxi drivers have picked up people and, you know, really don't know the history of the place and so forth and carry them all over the place to the wrong location and all kind of thing. And these are people who are embarrassing us, for lack of a better word. You know, we have people who have people in their van,
- 0:29:50 in their car and talking about, hey, if you really want to see a beautiful place, try Dominica, try this place, try that place. You know, and we, you know, the people of them are saying, why here on your land? Why not promote your land? So, I mean, we, you know, some of the people have asked when we were in St. Croix, they said they welcome even a refresher history course because some of the information we're spewing out there and some of the things that they're saying to the customers is inaccurate, for lack of a better word.
- 0:30:21 And I know it ain't happening to none of you because I know you're a star, but I'm just saying for those who may have forgotten or who never had the course, they're opening it up the department so we could get on the right track you know it's not fair for us to have our passengers here you know we're the premier destination and you you you advertising for someone else I am sorry but Ghana those days we have to promote the Virgin Islands St. Thomas St. John St. Croix Water Island we have to promote our place so that's some of the things then we why we urge partner with tourism as well to make sure that these type of things don't continue happening here in the Virgin Island. And I'm so glad that now, thanks to the officer, lieutenant governor, they're getting the GIS system in place.
- 0:31:08 So even the tourists would tell the taxi man, no, no, no, according to Mitraka, you're wrong. You came in the wrong place. You know. And it's true. It does happen. We could laugh, but it does happen, and we really need to stop it. And like I said, I know some of the problems in St. Croix is not the same in St. John or in St. Thomas, but we really have to put an end to it. And one of the things I despise is when we have people that come in and give the industry a bad name. You don't treat the customers right, because when the people go out and say, they don't say the gypsy taxi or whatever they say, the taxi driver, the taxi man, the taxi woman.
- 0:31:45 So all of us get stained. I would just add that the curriculum that we did present for this course here did include just as you mentioned the destinations and educating the taxi drivers on the different form of payment so they are prepared and they're well aware of the territory and they have been educated on those areas and we have a map for gypsy and we're working on that as we speak we do have that okay thank you so much for your input and i i'm just to clarify because that

sounded weird well what we mean is we have done this case study to investigate the most prominent areas that we have illegal activity and gypsy in so that we can target those areas especially during high frequency of travelers so it would help you guys to have more enforcement in place so that's one of the things we've been coordinating with VIPD to make sure that we know the high traffic areas for gypsy in thank you for the input and i just want to reiterate um a one-time visitor does not grow our economy we have to encourage them to come back um and even if even if they may not want to come back to one specific island it's three of us out there you should go st croix st croix has some a lot of you know cultural and culture and history they have a lot of different food events and so forth, and then vice versa. Go to St. John. St. John is beautiful.

0:33:31 It's the most beautiful island. And I'm going to say that in front of the St. Croix senator so he can know. Okay, so... St. John is the most beautiful island. So, moving forward, I wanted to also mention that in the port authorities' report, there is a projection. Okay? It's just a projection. However, in that projection, it's projected to rise to 770 361 cruise ship calls in 2026. That's a lot of more cruise ship calls, and we have to be ready for that. Passenger traffic is up on all three islands. The report has, since 2023, we had 1.7 million people from cruise ship calls, and it's projected to jump up upwards of 1.8 million this year, 2025, okay? What that means for us here on St. John is that we have visitor growth. That means more business for you, more higher ferry transfers from St. Thomas. We need to be ready for that rise in demand because of the larger ships that will be coming to St. Thomas. We also want to encourage you to get into technology. I know that that's something that has been sort of a double-edged sword in some cases. But, you know, we want to encourage you to perhaps look at different forms of payment.

0:35:04 I mean, because you lose out. We've heard stories, well, we don't, we're speaking to the choir now, but I have heard stories where, and I'm not saying any of you in this room did it, but stories whereas someone would say they don't have cash, meaning a tourist to a taxi driver. and is a family of four, and potentially he or she, the taxi driver, could have made over \$80-something to transfer them somewhere, and because they did not take a debit card or an ACH or a credit card as a form of payment, that means that taxi driver just lost \$80 that could have paid bills or fed his family. So that is something that we have to look at because there are other forms of transportation that are becoming very prominent.

0:35:56 And as many of you already know about ride share, ride share obviously is trying to get into the Virgin Islands. and either we are going to empower our first ride share taxi industry to be able to empower itself and be able to accept different forms of payment. But that is a discussion that will likely come down the pipeline. That isn't for this evening, but I need you to think about it and be open-minded about it because accepting different forms of payments means more money for you and your families.

0:36:35 Let me add to that because that's critical in my opinion. Every time I travel, I don't work with cash. People don't work with cash anymore, so you don't have a choice of the business you're running. So you must accept more than one type of payment. That's the bottom line. When you do that, it makes us look like we are totally a country and we are not. You know, we are a leader in this industry, so we must show who we are and be ready, willing and able to work with individuals when they come in because these people, these, they don't deal with cash. The phone, everything from the phone, the bank account on the phone, the transfer. So I mean, that's just the way it is. Times are changing and we must change with the times in terms of business opportunities and growth in your investment, which is your business, which is your taxi.

0:37:25 Okay, do you want to add that? Thank you. And one last thing before we continue. I utilize social media for a number of things, and from time to time when I go through my social media feed and so forth, I follow a lot of travel enthusiasts. Sometimes they call themselves travel junkies or whatever. And what they do, they're influencers, and the people who follow them follow what they do, right? And these people travel.

0:38:00 I don't know where they're getting the money from, but they travel to all of these destinations. And I've seen about a dozen videos that are related to the Virgin Islands. And I will tell you, 100% of them complained about the fact that they could not pay a taxi with a card or Apple Pay or some sort of electronic form of payment or a credit card or a debit card.

0:38:29 And they also, in some cases, said it was very expensive in comparison to like Rideshare and stuff like that because Rideshare, I suppose, you could have four people flat rate in the same car. You don't have to pay for bags or nothing like that. But this is the system that we have. They're just going to have to deal with that. But the thing is, the complaint derives from the fact that there is no optional form of payment. So I really want you all to open your minds as associations and discuss it with one another and decide if, in fact, it is time for you all to create another opportunity for these passengers to be able to pay for your services outside of cash. I think it's something that will be beneficial in the long run. Ms. Watley?

- 0:39:17 I hate having to have my back to you guys. I just wanted to double down on what the senator said. One of the things we mandated with at Taxi Cab Commission is evolving the industry. And truth be told, you're going to lose out if you don't start to accept another form of payment. It's because everybody else is doing it. Every other destination is doing it already. And I think you're well aware now that we have rights for hire that are being operated in the territory. I know you guys are aware of it. And whether we like it or we don't like it, the thing that's going on is that the senator is right.
- 0:40:03 Most people, when they travel, because of safety concerns and convenience, they don't travel with cash. And so we're finding where people may opt to take a ride share because they take cards, right? And while we have to work out the logistics of that and the legitimacy of it, it's happening. So we could either act like it's not going on and lose the business, or we could figure out a way to organize, even if it is that you don't have the skills or the knowledge of it, because it's new to us we as a government will have to support you in figuring a path out but you're going to lose out and i don't want it to be a situation where um we just age out of a system because we're not willing to to conform and i'm not saying everybody thinks that way because i've met many taxi drivers who are willing to take a second um you know payment option it's just about figuring out how to do it right so we have to meet in the middle we have to figure that part out but it's definitely something that would make us more competitive our neighbors are already doing it and so I've heard a lot of discussion you weren't there in St. Croix but there was an individual who happens to be operating something like a ride share business from what he explained and he did express to us that the reason he even started it was because he couldn't get around the island, right? Because many times, and I know when you work in ship and stuff, you ain't gonna pull out for one person.
- 0:41:41 It just don't make sense, right? So what he decided to do was come up with a business to fill the gap. One or two people want to go someplace. That's how he explained it to us. I'm just sharing the knowledge with you. But what he said is he wants to pay his fair share. He needs to figure out how to do that. That's why he wasn't hiding. he came to the public and he said um that basically he had the technology to share and he wanted to share it with the taxi drivers that's what he said so that's what hit home for me that he was willing to pay out of out of his pocket and share it with a taxi driver so that might be something and share the data with the government that's true so um so here it is i'm thinking because we we have to pick sense out of nonsense if we have access to something that could benefit the taxi drivers it makes sense for us to bring it to the table you could turn it down but i'm just saying it's a good idea to have a discussion find out how we could um possibly work it even mention and other people in the room also mentioned putting apps together to help taxi drivers so that you wouldn't actually have to do the legwork yourself but somebody could actually assist you with that So I just wanted to share the information since it was shared with us at the town hall in St. Croix.
- 0:43:02 Thank you so much. And I think it's important for you all to acknowledge that we are here today, meaning that we're here to discuss with you, to share with you what we have learned, and also to hear what your concerns may be. because, you know, we want to make sure that if, in fact, something does change, especially in this industry, which is an instrumental industry in our tourism, you are the first and you are the last. You are the representatives that that individual sees from the beginning to the end of their trip, and it's an instrumental responsibility that you have representing the Virgin Islands. So we want to make sure that when we have the opportunity to come to you, to speak to you, to share with you what's happening in our space that we also can hear from you to learn what challenges you're experiencing and what we can do to try to either fix it or meet you halfway when it comes to that because all problems are not necessarily 100% fixable. Sometimes there has to be deliberation and we have to meet halfway.
- 0:44:08 And I'm glad I went to this part in the agenda because like I said earlier, yes i know we're here to have this open discussion but we as a government and i take the blame to i shelter the blame shoulder the blame that we have to put some skin in the game too and make things better for you guys out there too we keep asking you to police yourself sometime yes i'm glad to hear the director talked about we bring trying to bring on more enforcement officers because it's needed because at times you you know you have your your disputes you have these disagreements and, you know, we really need the enforcement out there to settle these disputes with you and a tourist or something because when they go back, they never say the fair share, the right of the story. They always say their side, which is always the right side for them, but they give us a bad name.
- 0:45:00 Now, at times, you know, they get in your cab, they don't want to pay. For many different reasons, we get in these confrontations. So we have to make sure that we have our enforcement arms out there. VIP, they try their best. I know in St. Thomas I have to give Officer Mary Louby kudos, that lady worked hard but I'm giving all the other officers their kudos, their credits as well but I know Mary worked very hard another thing that I know that we have to work on is the roads I know I'm happy to see you guys so we have to fix the roads save your front ends and everything so we have to put some skin in the game and own some of the responsibilities I understand but again we ask you guys because you know they talked about like I said in St. Croix the problems is unique over there versus to ours you know I like to see our men

in here we do dress up and things at times some days we have a half day understandable but the tourists sometimes just don't know who's a taxi operator and that's just one of the things in certain areas I'm not saying in St. John because you're already located but like in St. Thomas in downtown they ask for like a dispatching center if you know the tourists could go to one place and a taxi would be dispatched all of this I think could be assisted through technology as well but this is where we have any discussion because I, one senator don't have all the answers so it has to be a collaborative effort and that's why I lean on you guys tonight this evening but I just had to put that out there that the tourist season is coming up and I think among the association we need to get together plan to go to C-Trade but see how you could improve the product that you have the chairwoman is correct

0:46:47 we're going to sit down here just like how Blackbuster watch Netflix come in and lose out everything we have to keep on top of our game and I don't want that taxi drivers is one of the last local business you and the fishermen then and I want you to be up to par I really look for the best of that Thank you. I want to, I don't want us to leave tonight without one goal that we were able to achieve. The Taxi Cab Commission Board need taxi cab operators as members of the board. They need to have your voice at the table. So that's a process, and I really think that especially the leadership of the various taxi associations, you need to make a cognizant effort, make an intentional effort to give one of us your information. the Assistant Commissioner of Tourism is here, the Chairwoman. Also, we are here, but you really need to have additional members and taxi operators, especially, there to represent you and your issues on the Taxi Cab Commission Board.

0:48:14 Because you, again, are vital to this industry. and it takes a mixture of inclusion to be able to understand the very essence and the diversity and all the work that goes into this this major industry and and so I want to encourage you those of you who are in leadership position those are who are taxi operators veteran taxi operators to take that leap and become a member of the Taxicab Commission Board because they really need some people who are committed. Right, Senator Carmen Wesselhoff? Right? Yes. You need some people who are committed, who understand the industry, who have a vested interest, and who can speak to the tax for and behalf of the taxicab men and women on that board. you have to be in the mix and that's one of the things i really want to urge to come out from this meeting tonight that you get some representation from the taxicab operators and the taxicab commission board yeah um i do agree right now the majority of the members on the board our taxi operators i just didn't i just wanted to clarify that but um you are correct you have to be vested um and this is why i'm so happy about this event this evening because i i find historically we have been talking at taxi drivers and not including you all in the conversation so you might see a legislation come down something and then that's the first time you're hearing about it. So we're taking a different angle. It doesn't make sense to tell a subject experts how to do your own job. What we do is we want to support you in being good at what you do because you're good at what you do. Nobody can tell a taxi driver. You know, I've never been a taxi operator. So I always welcome the conversation because it's important to know from the ground level what's going on and and what we could do to improve we know that we have

0:50:42 a lot of issues that we need to address gypsyism is a very big one and that's why while you're here you could ask the legislature to give us a little more funding so we could get some more officers this is a collaborative effort yeah we need some more funding however we we don't work with what we have that's what we've been doing. And so VIPD lending us some assistance, DLCA, it's a collaborative effort all around to make sure that we make this thing work. But one of the things I wanted to mention since Senator Bulke spoke about influencers is that we actually have an influencer right now in the territory that has over a million followers. And he has been vlogging throughout his his stay talking very highly of the territory and so I just want you to be aware that this isn't a one-off thing these people come all the time and one bad experience could change the whole dynamic of our territory like I said we're competing and so it's not just about being a tourist destination but we always have to be on our a-game because you never know who's in a room you don't know this man has so much followers I thought I follow him and I didn't even know and what I mean by followers is that he puts content out on social media on the internet and he has over a million people check in what he does every day so that could drastically impact us so and this is a regular thing and in addition to that we also in the Department of Tourism we bring in influencers to experience our territory and go back and spread the good news. So we always have to be conscious of who we are dealing with in the territory.

0:52:40 So thank you for that input, Assistant Commissioner. You know, as I sit here, I was just taking some notes because this is a big, big topic. And one of the things that we haven't discussed is transportation for even our local people in the territory. It's not just the tourists who come in here. So individuals also depend on your services. But I wrote down a couple of things, and I hope I could understand what I wrote down quickly.

0:53:19 Because as we prepare for the upcoming tourist season, as the senator at large spoke about these megaships that's being built and the increased number of cruise passengers, one of the things that we need to look at is the visitor volume and scheduling. And with that, we need to look at the peak traffic days and coordinating with the Virgin Islands Port

Authority. We need to look at some staggered pick-up and drop-off times to ease congestion, especially in the St. Thomas, St. John district.

0:54:02 Also, we'll need to coordinate with the Virgin Islands Police Department when it comes to traffic management and routing. We need to look at alternative routes to avoid the bottlenecks that we see. And based on that briefing that we got the other day, once this partnership really comes into play, especially here in the St. Thomas St. John District, it's going to really be booming. It is something that we really have to plan for.

0:54:41 We also need to look at our customer service standards with regards to refresher training and professionalism and hospitality. We had some concerns about that as well when we met with the cruise line executives. We need to have clear communication practices with regards to greetings, pricing, and directions. Also, safety compliance, again, coming back to public safety, and also getting the taxicab commission officers back up to its number. We need to look at vehicle safety checks and inspections. We need to have proper signage in the downtown areas, establishing zones, et cetera, public health protocols and emergency procedures and contact information sharing for these passengers.

0:55:40 Also, we need to look at the pricing transparency that we spoke about, enforcement of published taxi rates, and reestablishing a clear rate chart that's supposed to be within your vehicles. Also, you heard about the technology integration. Technology seemed to be running a lot of us. I could remember, bless my mom's soul, But I can remember just before she retired from the Department of Health, when she came home one day frustrated and saying, my son, these people with this computer, computer thing pushing on me, I ain't into that.

0:56:21 At my age, it's time for me to go home. And she talked about being able to, in a heartbeat, just go and change a ribbon in the typewriter and being able to type a GTR. She ain't got no time to wait with this technology. But I say that to say that today, technology is what it is. So we need to get on board. We need to get on board, otherwise we're going to get left behind. As you heard from Senator Joseph earlier, the Virgin Islands, there's something about us. They're looking at us. The Virgin Islands is where passengers are saying that they want to come. Believe it or not, and this is feedback from the crew's passengers. So, again, in the technology integration, we need to encourage the digital payment options, the use of dispatch apps or ride coordination platforms, and address our infrastructure needs.

0:57:29 I think the Senate Secretary, Senator Lewis, spoke to that about our roads and whatnot. We even spoke about that. We've already carved out in the budget where they'll be addressing certain areas that's really bad with our roads. We need to establish taxi stands. We need to improve signage. We need to have restrooms, not only for passengers, but even the taxi drivers. You know how it look to see a taxi driver pull on the side of the road to do the business?

0:58:05 I mean that we have seen. I saw it just the other day so I mean when you say one you say two maybe you really had to go so we need to as a government we need to look at this and have these areas and lastly I'm also looking at the environment and cultural awareness with regards to anti-litter campaigns and educating visitors on island customs, etiquette, and local highlights. We also need to work with the Department of Education and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. We have two forts that's under our local government control.

0:58:54 The one in Christian City is under federal control. So you have the one in Frederick City, you have the one here in St. Thomas, Fort Christian. Why we don't have reenactment going on within the forts? We could utilize our students to do these reenactments. This is a revenue-generating measure and something for our students to be involved in constructively. So hopefully these set-of-town hall meetings will start the ball rolling and we'll have a snowball where we just create that big ball that we need to have so that we could be ready for when this boom comes to the territory. Thank you all again. And I'm looking forward to hearing from you all too because I'm hearing a lot from us, but I really want to take some notes and hear from some of the taxi drivers that's in here. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Vice President Gittins. And we have went through plans in your agendas.

1:00:07 We went through the plans for sufficient transportation. We've touched on upgrades to current operations. We've touched on preparations for increased visitor volume and payment options for passengers. And we also saw Senator Giddens went through some of the customer service enhancement details that he spoke of as well. But I wanted to touch on one more item in the area of customer service enhancement before we proceed to the last agenda item before closing remarks. And I wanted to touch on a number of things in that area before opening the floor for open discussion. Okay, I apologize. So we are here because tourism is a large part of our GDP, our gross domestic profit.

1:01:00 Tourism is what keeps our Virgin Islands going. There's other things that help, but obviously predominantly tourism is how we keep things going here in the Virgin Islands. So you are the stakeholders, you are the leaders of tourism, you have your role and responsibility to play. And we want to make sure that when we talk about customer service enhancement, we are simply expressing to you respectfully to continue to do what you do to the best of your ability. promote the Virgin Islands, support our culture, push our music, our entertainment, our food, all of those things. And I

wanted to touch on something.

- 1:01:44 I'm not going to call any names. Not Souths. But there was a video that I saw recently. Do not call any names, but it seemed as if a tourist may have called a taxi driver, the N-word. Do you all know what I'm talking about? Okay. I saw that video. I didn't like it.
- 1:02:14 I can understand the reaction because it's a very derogatory, disrespectful term. You know? But I want to encourage you. I know that sometimes in life, things like that may come knocking at your door. And sometimes we got to be the bigger person. And I'm not blaming that individual. I'm not. Okay? I do not blame him. But I'm just saying that came out and is out there.
- 1:02:47 Right? So all of our actions have a reaction. Right? So now, some people may have not understood what happened by looking at that video. I looked at it from the other side. Right? And it just may look like, why is this taxi driver going on like this with this gentleman? You know, they may look at it or may not have heard or, you know, so I encourage you to, you know, be the bigger person. There were different ways to handle that, but I understand what happened. I understand how impactful a term like that can be when somebody says it. It's happened to me when I used to live in Georgia.
- 1:03:30 So I've been on the auto-receiving end of that. But these things happen, and a lot of people do not know what taxi drivers have to go through every day. You have to deal with passengers. You've got to take care of them. They're like your children. You want to make sure they're safe. No, don't go on that side of the road. We're on the left. Go on that side. So you're taking care of them, you are the caretaker of this individual when you have them in your possession so we understand that you know but for those who may want to say negative things um let's be the bigger person you know um so i wanted to at least just say that and bring that out um one thing that was mentioned in the saint croix taxi town hall that i am very proud to report is that um we we spoke about having structure you know and i i was able to at that point in time talk about the numbering system that exists here on the island of saint john um there was a gentleman from a taxi association that in st croix um but he seemed he was an elder and um he was talking about back in the days how they used to do it but it's different now it's a lottery system they used to call it but I was able to express how we do things here on St. John and they all agreed that the numbering system is something that they believe would be a good structure because it's, I don't want to say free for all I think everybody is sort of independently just going and picking up and it sort of gets confusing at times and it could be a bit problematic but I believe as we continue to have these discussions we'll be able to encourage them to adapt similar lottery systems or numbering systems such as we have here on St. John's. So I thank the chairman for letting me have that input at the time when we were having that meeting.
- 1:05:25 So the last thing was that for this section, and now we're going to move into the open discussions, hearing from you. What we would like to do is media can just provide the microphone in a stationary section where the individual could just get up and stand up with a sergeant of arms if they want to come over here in this section or do you prefer to sit whatever works for you but if you prefer to come up and speak that's fine we can bring the mic to you or if you prefer to come up and speak whatever is easiest okay so if there if there isn't any questions right now if there's any additional information from the department of tourism or taxicab commission ok we do have a question all the moat eye that be talking in this sing-chan, get up here and speak the chief has spoken please state your name and if you're with our organization please state that as well, thank you Good evening, everyone. My name is Patrick A. Hendrickson, Sr. I'm a taxi driver for 20 plus years. I'm with the St. John Taxi Service. I'm listening to the young lady here in the black for, basically, you say you have 286 ships coming to St. John. I remember back in my days when I used to taxi, every Wednesday we had a Norway. come right out of the harbor on this side,
- 1:07:24 and we'll bring the people in. They'll go on tours, independent, prepaid. When they finish, they have a ferry from TS or Balak. We take them back to St. Thomas, and they know we'll go down to St. Thomas. To ease some of that traffic going on with all these ships, why don't you send one of those ships over in the same area and send a can anchor over here because National Park. When they send to the same area, have them come into, you know, by boat come into the National Park area, you know, going towards the B Strip, whatever. That would ease some of the traffic over there. And we and Xinjiang will also get a fair chance of some of those big mega-ships are attacking above. Let Xinjiang make some money, too.
- 1:08:08 Mr. Patrick, just one thing I wanted to add, right? When they said the 286 ship, that was to Krong Bay. And then we have 362 to Waipo. So... it's a total over 500 and change and 113 will be called on saint croix St. John 80 80 80 or 81 or something 80 Port Authority has 8-0 for 2026 to St. John 80 So where would these ships be unloading these passengers?
- 1:08:56 Well, the ships cannot come up to the dock, so they would have to have a vessel that would transport. But Port Authority is here. We can have them respond. Good evening, Alam. Starting October 27th, you'll have your first ship call for cruise fishing in January. And of course, you know, they come into the creek. Okay, that sounds good. That's what I'm talking

about. Most ships come from 8 till 6 p.m. Most of the cars will be from 8 p.m. to 6 p.m.

- 1:09:28 It all depends on the size of the ship. Some of them is under 100, some over 100. That's for the boutique ships. And then, like you stated, those going to Waiko and Crown Bay also have the day excursions that come into the same creek also. Okay, but back in the days, we had a Norway coming on the side. They have about 2,500 passengers. they tender them in and why can't we get some of the mega ship back all day and then have them tender in and then go to St. Thomas? Well my brother the Senate does talk about going to Sea Trade and you guys stepping up and offering something that make the ships want to come to St. John because the ships will request you know right now we have a big demand a big request right now we're doing some more bathymetrics for the waterways between here and St. John that maybe some might ask, but you gotta offer them something to come for. So the reason why I'm saying this is because most of the time the passengers come off from St. Thomas and said, the taxi driver in St. Thomas said that ain't nothing to do on St. John. We got the number one beach here, Tronk Bay. You know, we got Maho Bay and we also got Honeymoon Beach. These are popular beaches out there right now. So you can tell the people that they have nothing on St. John to do. It's beautiful in St. John. What did you say there?
- 1:10:46 You know, Mr. Patrick, that's what I talk about, what us are talking about, talking down our country. Now, we're talking down one island to the other island, and we have to pick up our products, you know. No taxi driver, no place should be talking about none of the islands. I mean, a negative, like, we need to promote. So if they don't want to stay in St. Thomas, fair. But you could go to St. John, go to Trong Bay, go to what I want the government to want. Oppenheimer, whatever the case may be. Promote St. John.
- 1:11:17 Promote the cuisine. You know? And I wanted to also touch one more time on the importance, and I believe my colleagues and I, we've been trying to echo that sentiment over and over. C-Trade Global Conference, I apologize, is an opportunity for the heads of your associations to go up there and network and be able to get direct bookings for your associations. Not waiting until Global Tours or one of these other companies calls up the association to say we have 100 people coming over on this date.
- 1:12:03 I believe that you can empower yourselves to be able to access that market, but you have to invest in yourselves as well. It's a business venture. And when you're able to go to these conferences, and we keep saying SeaTrade because it's the largest one in the world, and it covers the Atlantic, the Pacific, transatlantic, Caribbean, the whole entire world. And if we're able to get you to come up there, you'll be able to come with your packages, meet the heads of different divisions of these cruise ship liner companies, and provide a package to them, speak to them, have meetings. This is what happens when the Commissioner of Tourism and their teams go up there. They market the Virgin Islands to these cruise ship entities. And of course, as mentioned prior, there are individuals from taxi associations across the Caribbean that attend this conference, except unfortunately for us. So we're here trying to encourage you now to be able to be a part of this discussion and in addition to what Sandra Bulquist says they're going to take it more seriously that's very important also also the one destination that went skyrocketing ahead of St. Thomas was St. Martin and you know who is well represented at Sea Trade Global And those taxi drivers from St. Martin, the same taxi drivers were ringing our ears, meeting with us, saying, listen, let me show you all this. This is how we're moving passengers around now with the same technology that Assistant Commissioner Hansen was talking about.
- 1:14:02 This is why we say you got to get on board. And when they started to show us some of the technology that they're using and saying, listen, we don't want to take anything from your island. We wouldn't even mind coming to the Virgin Islands to show and teach your taxi drivers how far this could take the industry. Not even knowing that the same gentleman that she spoke about on St. Croix, when he started to say what he was doing, I sat there and I was like, wow, this is just about the same thing that these guys from St. Martin were talking about. So we don't even have to go anyplace else for anybody to teach us this.
- 1:14:49 What I really liked what he was saying was when he was talking about all the data that he was actually putting together, and the assistant commissioner was right. He actually said, listen, I want to pay my fair share. Whatever you want to charge me, you charge me, because I could see that this is a lucrative business, and it is something that's needed. And he asked a question. He said, you know what? When it comes to people being discharged from the hospital at 2, 3 o'clock in the morning, who coming to pick them up? It's me that calling. When people want to move in a group from the hotel to a restaurant, they just last minute decide that they want to go. Who are they going to call? I mean, as I said then, I thought about it. Even when I came off the seaplane the other day from St. Thomas, St. Croix, there was absolutely no taxi drivers there. I personally had to take two couples to the airport to get a rental car. Now I was going right to my office in Christensen, but I took them down to get it because nobody could have even tell you a contact number. And the first thing I did was I drove downtown to see if I could see a taxi driver.

- 1:16:08 So I say that to say that we got to get on board with this. So I'm telling you, C-Trade Global, when they're saying that we're just going, we're just going, I'm telling you, I know my colleagues and I, when we go, we have meeting after meeting after meeting. And to the gentleman in the back, we're telling you, unless you're there to be able to show them that you have the product that they're looking for, because what they look at is the passenger feedback, and their complaints are grung transportation and the lack of excursion.
- 1:16:49 So we have to, if we want to stay competitive in the market, we need to pull up our socks in those two categories. I want you to, we've been talking about promoting you and working with you and partnering with you to attend C-Trade Global. the dates. Note the dates for 2026. That's a critical item that we need to make sure you're aware of. The dates are April 13th through the 16th, 2026 and it's going to be held in the Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami Beach. You can put it up on Google and you see it's there and that's a critical component. I know So, former Senator Carmen Wesselhoff, you wanted to have some comments, make a comment. Kindly proceed.
- 1:17:49 I have a lot of questions. Good evening. Thank you. Carmen Wesselhoff-Hedrington. Before I talk on the taxi matter tonight, I must put on the record that last week, Monday, October 6th, there was a very important meeting held in this chamber with the Virgin Islands Port Authority to discuss fee increases for St. John, especially for St. John, and not one of you senators came. And that meeting was very important. So I just wanted to put on the record, I'm very disappointed that none of you all, not one of the 15 senators attended. I must put that on the record. I will clarify because I was online for the entire meeting.
- 1:18:32 We wanted you here in person, but at least you're online. Thank you. To get started, you started out speaking about the National Park. Here we are again. You said we are exempted until 2026. Exempted from what, the 3%? No. I was able to work with my office and I. We had several meetings with the National Park Service with Penelope Del Bene, who is the superintendent, and her team. and we were able to secure the current exemption up until December 31st, 2025. On September 29th, my office and I met with her, and we discussed the very same CUA, which is the commercial authorization. so we talked about the expiration which is upcoming at that time it's almost 90 days it's going to be coming up again this is going to be a burden for the drivers the taxi drivers of St. John are in a very unique position in comparison to other national park districts which we have a medallion system these taxi drivers whoever they are that work within other parks throughout the nation do not have a unique system like we do. We have all of these different fees that are associated with becoming a driver. We have a very vigorous process.
- 1:20:06 We are required to learn Virgin Islands history to be a taxi driver here. These are not requisites, but I'm trying to explain. These are not requisites that other taxi drivers across the nation have to adhere to. So we spoke with her during that meeting and she verbally agreed to apply for the extension of the exemption for 2026. Again, that's a verbal agreement, but we will continue to have discussions with her and her office to be able to try to extend that moving forward. But that is something that is applied across the United States of America, and they have tried to implement it here. Thankfully, we have the exemption, but I want to try to continue to extend it. That is not something I, as a local Virgin Islands senator, can change.
- 1:20:56 That is something that has to be changed on a national level. So I am not the representative who deals with those matters, but my office has reached out to their office in reference to that issue, and we'll continue to try to fight that effort. I'm hearing you, but I'm still last. Exemption from what? because we paid the \$350 already. We already paid the \$350. We couldn't operate unless we paid that \$350 even though it was what, six months left in the year? We still had to pay that \$350. The only thing that they delayed was the 3%. When you met with them originally, they said they would delay that until 2026. That's the only thing that was delayed, but the members still had to pay that \$350 so there wasn't any exemption. The 3% is what needs to be spoken about because we still want to know what gives the National Park the right to charge us 3%. That's a tax. We already pay income tax. We already pay taxes. So that's the only thing that needs to be discussed. We already paid. We went from \$75 to \$350.
- 1:22:07 We already paid that. So there is no exemption. So the commercial utility. That's the CUA, the 350. The 350 is a requirement. The tax is exempted, to be clear. The 3% that we receive that exemption for is something that you don't have to pay right now. We want to extend that. That is the most problematic part of that whole situation because before, I believe you all only paid \$75, then it went up to \$350. Is that correct? Correct. Okay. So we were not able to change that recourse in a sense of trying to get it back to \$75 or maybe \$100 or \$200. they were very, they stood strong on that. They wanted to make sure or assure that it was \$350. What we did, what we were able to do is get that exemption from the 3%. So, and we want to continue to have that exemption extended into 2026. We want it to continue forever. We should not be paying 3%. It's a tax. Bottom line. I'm not finished. And if I may really quickly before you ask your question, drivers in St. Croix or St. Thomas are not don't have to adhere to that it's only St. John taxi drivers correct and St. John is a very unique place where the local government own the rights the roads that we are riding on and we are taking business to the

park without us basically there is no park we are the ones that's bringing the business to the park we are riding on the government roads through the park roads that the national park is supposed to maintain and they're not even doing a very good job of that. Drive it right now for yourself. We have to complain in order to even get them to clear the roads. There's heavy overgrowth on the roads right now. And unless we have to call sometime and tell them our passengers getting hit in their face with the branches, that's when they go out and cut the bush. So that's what's going on. Take a ride for yourself right now, you'll see it. So we need to be totally exempted from that 3%. That's an illegal charge.

- 1:24:10 That's how we feel. We'll continue the effort. to try to extend that in 2026 again we had a verbal commitment from the superintendent that she will formally apply to the Department of Interior to request an additional extension of the continuation thereof into 2026. The National Park plays a lot of games first they say they can't and then they said they were the ones that made the decision sometimes they make it seem like it comes from Washington, but a lot of us feel that the Friends of the Park is a big influence over the Virgin Islands National Park that makes the decisions for us. They could make some of those decisions right here in St. John. It's not Washington. It's the park. I don't want to put the...
- 1:24:57 You just said it's an illegal... We feel it's illegal. But if it's illegal, then you know the wrong thing to say is something is illegal, right? Yes. Okay. Yes. But if we're going to say it's illegal, then we need to do what we have to do. Well, we want the senator's support on it. Moving right along. Sorry. Are you finished, senator? Yeah.
- 1:25:26 Secondly, I'd like to speak about the Taxicab Commission. I think it's high time. We all know that the Taxicab Commission have been struggling over the years. We have been knocking down, beating down. Seems to me like we were trying to do away with the Taxicab Commission. I think it's time that the senators find a way to continue to help supporting, giving them the financial where it all so that they could get the proper staffing and upgrade their systems and bring the Taxicab Commission into the 2026th century, into this century. Years ago, we could go up to the battery and obtain our taxi license. Now we have to go down all the way to sub-base every time we need to get documents. I think it's time that it be brought up to date where they can come to St. John, jump on the computer, find my files, and do what they need to do for us right here on the island of St. John. Please give them the necessary funding so that they could upgrade.
- 1:26:26 thank you senator Wesselhoff for your comment we definitely share the same sentiments at the taxicab Commission even with our small staff we have looked at unique ways of trying to accommodate in particular the st. John community we've discussed the uploading of files sharing communications that way through emails I briefly discussed with the administrator the idea of now coming back to St. John and offering those hands-on services but we do need the funding it's funding that drives travel it's funding that drives upgrades so we really do need this the support of the senators we asked for funding with ideas and plans in mind we studied these ideas we look forward to implementing them and we know that we can do it and we look forward to improving the services we even we have been in brief discussions with BIT we've tossed the idea around of different operating tools and we really look forward to improving the taxicab commission and we can do it one example is my staff we're looking forward to training we're doing some computer training and like I said we're in-house we're utilizing and we started with St. Croix as an example we're moving from hand receipts tonight electronic receipts we need our computers to be upgraded to support it oh sorry I have a bad I better relax in my wrist so in St. Croix we've actually started utilizing electronic payments and gradually moving our staff from the paper system so we started that in St. Croix to expand that now to communicate with BMV real-time we need to upgrade our computers and it's something that we look at as simple a simple fix because we are the new generation. We have a mixed generation at TaxiCab. We have our millennials. We have us who want to move forward with the times and be trendy as well. We really need the funding.
- 1:29:10 We're not going to keep you much longer. I know you have more to say. Let's have a couple more points. I know you have more to say. Long story short, I think that everybody knows we need the funding. We have three staff members at the taxicab territorially. So, again, we're just asking the legislature to support us in that way. We know that we have to evolve. The budget is the same budget. The budget didn't change. We ain't beaten down the legislature. What we're saying is collectively, we need the support. And I think everybody in the room understands that. We need more staffing so that we could offer more services. We're just being real about it. But thank you so much for acknowledging the hard work, giving the needed support. We appreciate that. To Senator Joseph, I just wanna let you know, it's ironic that you mentioned the board. From 2022, I spoke with the governor and asked that I be a member on the Taxi Commission Board from 2022. I'm still waiting. I spoke with Toya, Toya Malone.
- 1:30:27 I spoke with Colette Monroe. I spoke with everyone, but still haven't gotten any answers. So I just wanted to let you know it's ironic you looked at me, but I did request to be on that board because I do have a vested interest. Yeah, divine intervention. Also the payment plan option. It's very difficult in Xinjiang. After you leave Cruz Bay, you have no service. A lot of the drivers, they have Venmo, they have Zelle. Some have already gotten credit card machines, but it's very hard after you leave Cruz Bay. You cannot get any signal. Sometimes you can't even make a phone call in the case of an

emergency. So that's, you know, we're looking into it as an option, but it's very hard. So just wanted to put that on the record. And lastly, last thing before I sit down, this right share. Y'all talking about it because it's a good thing. It's something that y'all say need to happen or it's filling a gap.

- 1:31:28 But what's troubling to me is why is it so easy for them to be out there operating and there is no penalties or how are they able to operate? I remember having a conversation with Horace Graham and licensing. And the only way they could be able to operate is because of the type of license they obtained through licensing. And I requested that they remove that license so that they cannot obtain that license for a time sorting until we could get some kind of handle or control and all these illegal drivers that we have driving. We have these jeeps, and I've sent pictures to certain people where you have these, what do you call them? Jeep tours. Jeep tours. You're talking about our attire.
- 1:32:19 I took some pictures where the guys jump out, bare feet, short pants, and they come dressed anyhow. They charge \$350 for a tour. Our tour is \$35. No regulation. Who is regulating them? what requirements do they have to have to be able to be out there even providing this service so we're talking about it these are the things we need to hear you're talking about it but they need to be shut down as long as you know it exists somehow you have to find a way to shut them down the taxi drivers have invested too much in taxi medallions we have to do costs, we have to pay a business license we have to pay for everything they pay twenty dollars maybe a hundred dollars for a license and they are they charging higher fees than us and getting away with it somewhere somehow like between licensing the taxi commission the legislature the police department whoever somebody needs to start shutting down these business because if you don't start now it's only going to get worse thank you yeah just wanted to get back to the right here so in our law already there's something called oh god no we're gonna slip me at this time and I've seen it all night vehicle for hire that already exists in our law. The thing is, I agree with you, the distinction needs to be had because we don't have to reinvent the wheel. This is going on all over the world. The thing is, in the Virgin Islands, we have not clearly defined everybody's rule. In my research, ride shares are vehicles for hire. However, there's been a, you
- 1:34:16 know we've been pushing it to the legislature dlca taxi commission and we need to just clarify what it is and then we could regulate because there needs to be regulation and this is why i mentioned it because if we know that something is actively taking place and there are loopholes let's just be clear about it you just said they have a license to dlca so it's not that they're really operate in an illegal business. That's one.
- 1:34:44 Secondly, what we need to do is clarify so that we know how to regulate. Because I agree there's some people operating under tour license that are doing other things, that taxiing. There are people operating with limousine licenses that are taxiing. So while we're in this space, we have to be aware of everything that's taking place. And that's why we want to come to Taxi Drivers because we know you'll see it before we see it. But one of the things that we're lacking and we need to do is enforcement. That's number one. But we also need a clear identifier so that it's not a vague thing.
- 1:35:23 In other districts, things like Uber, which is what we call ride share, exists right in Puerto Rico and everywhere else. Even in the Caribbean, it just aren't different names. But you can't regulate something that we don't clearly define. And that's where we as a government, and the government agencies need to step up and put in the guidelines. For instance, an example would be if a ride share takes four people, right? They pick up four people. Then what you could do, if we have it in mind that they might use a SUV or a car for four people, that they're restricted to just four people. They can't take any more than four or two or whatever the number is as an example. So what I am saying is that while it's there in the law as vehicles for hire, we, if we wanna regulate something, we have to stipulate what it is.
- 1:36:16 Because there are people using loopholes to run all these outside businesses and we are seeing it, but it's hard to regulate it when we don't have anything in writing to say, this is what you're doing wrong. And just for more information, the guy in St. Croix, He told us that he pays fines to the LCA. So they've been collecting money from him in, yeah, he gets charged regularly, and he's not the only one, there's another company as well.
- 1:36:46 So they're paying fines, but again, we need clarity so that everybody understands the distinction of what type of transportation it is. Yeah, go ahead. I'm just standing up, sucking his stomach. That's a little joke. Good evening, everybody. Okay, so there are a number of good points we've made here tonight.
- 1:37:15 Taxi drivers are... Huh? Oh, Stedman Harts Jr. Thank you. Yeah. So we are the ambassadors, and I'm really happy to have just recently came to the taxi and to operate a class as well. But being in the class really discovered a number of different things and a lot of the disconnects. Okay? So I reached out to Ms. Smith in reference to where I actually created that textbook. I was in a class and there was no textbook. So eventually we're going to connect and see what the textbook looks like, including Chapter 1. That would also eventually include the VI history and everything else. But when we talk about training, Port Authority and Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines is going to be providing training for taxi drivers as relates to safety, et cetera. But here we have the Taxi Commission.

- 1:37:59 Okay, so when we talk about monetizing an agency so they can generate revenues through surcharges and other different fees that will cover operational, their operation, and also benefits the government for the general fund. Okay, they can be driving that narrative with a partnership with the police department. Ain't nobody else who are better trainers when it comes to driver safety. Okay? Me as a soldier in National Guard, I'm a detective in the military, military police investigator. Okay? So when we do our local training and driver trainings, guess who we work with closely and trains us?
- 1:38:36 The VIPD. Okay? We can monetize them. So when we talk about also going into the ride share, why call it ride share, Uber, all of them, the taxi commission. Okay? They're the ones who are going to create the policies along with the board. Okay? Guess what? Surcharges, fees, operations again, and guess what? The government benefits with, of course, funding going into their general fund. So, yeah. But, yeah.
- 1:39:13 So, I'm really sharing that to see. So, now I truly have a vested interest. and I really understand the dynamic and just being in the class, and the class was a great class, where we learn everything from driver safety, customer service, the same disconnects, and everything as I was discussing here this evening, it's imperative that we have the right things in place to make it happen. I ain't going to talk no more, but... Excellent, former Senator, and with your input as well, we'll invite you to be a part of the task force as well so be sure to contact my office so that we can get with you. Alright. Any other taxi drivers before we wrap it up?
- 1:40:01 Good night. Good night everyone. Morbid Smith Eastern Taxi. I mean I know I'm going to be down in St. Thomas tomorrow so I'm going to share a lot more of white ears I have to say but I was just listening to the assistant commissioner and the chairperson of the board of the taxi board and he was talking in reference to the share ride. According to what I understand this is supposed to be the lads and the books and for what he just said with them having getting them license on the DLCA and they could come in according to what they said after October 30th, 1978 no person, company, corporation or partnership may register the automobile for hire or purchase license plates therefore or own the automobile for hire enterprise within the Virgin Islands who has not first obtained an automobile for hire medallion for purpose by this description. And it also goes on to tell you what an automobile for hire is. So the laws are there. The laws are clear. There is no way other than these laws being changed, anybody could come and operate a vehicle for hire unless they obtain a medallion and a license through the taxicab commission now what I feel you all should be doing is siding with the taxi industry with the taxi drivers themselves to try to bring revenues to your to your car force to obtain all because every vehicle for hire is supposed to be under your preview to
- 1:42:04 To include taxi, I mean, to include limousines that was pulled out from there. One second. So I just said that to let you know, Mr. Smith, that we definitely are looking into that. And we've already identified the problem. And the problem where we're falling short is enforcement. And we will be working with the Taxicab Commission to see how we could assist them outside of the budget that we just passed to make sure that they're able to hire the individuals that they need. thank you for that but the taxi the taxicab commission is bleeding because of this act that was sneaked in when they was given out in 2012 when they was giving out franchise agreement to the different taxi organization this was sneaking it was never lit um we never did had any kind of session on it with it took out limousine from under the taxicab commission and made them there is no place in the i have googled it all over there is no place in the united states that says a limousine is not a vehicle for hire only in this u.s virgin islands and these man are running shuttle service back and forth up and down and taxi and nothing and is taking away revenues from the taxicab commission because guess what they are putting down their taxi medallions and they are registering as a limousine and they're doing the same work
- 1:43:52 you all have your smartphone go on it now look at red car look at red car usvi look at it right now look it up tell me if that's a limousine service tell me if that's a limousine look at it Look, these, and as far as collecting different types of payment, I can only speak for my organization, we do collect credit cards.
- 1:44:31 I, as the president of the organization, what we did, we tell all the drivers to try and obtain some kind of form of payment. Me, myself, I do Zelle, I do Venmo. But what we did as an organization, anybody come and have a stand that needs to pay by credit card, we have a credit card machine in the office. So, if a driver cannot collect credit card, his thing is to talk to that passenger, take them in the office, do the charge, we will pay them after. So, there is no, and any driver that comes, any passenger that comes there and tells me that my driver said that they can't collect credit card, he got to deal with me. So, that is our thing. in and as far as your rideshare app i just pay attention and i just try to upgrade and keep our organization up to date that person who i mean whatever other company coming trying to come in under the class of rideshare we don't need them we have already started our digital app and we this is going to be tailored to taxi not and it's going to be tailored to the tariff so whenever we will be there to take over wherever whenever it's filling it's just about finish within the next week it will be done and mr smith this is exactly what we want to hear from you so i listen i am proud to hear that tonight because we don't want to take anything away this

- 1:46:24 ride share thing all of a sudden got out of hand with the conversation but we want to hear from you guys we want to be able to support the taxi industry that's why we have in these town hall meetings so that we could see how to better assist you guys who are organized and those who we need to get even more organized or as organized as your organization so hats after your organization now with showing us that you're on the road with that app we're ready to operate and hopefully the other associations across the territory will be able to get up on board we don't We don't even need other organization, even if they don't want to.
- 1:47:09 How this app is designed, any licensed taxi operator will be able to incorporate in it. So if I want to put all of VI, all of Bess, all of St. Thomas Taxi, even St. John Taxi Service, even St. Croix Taxi, a touch of the button, my app could take you to St. Croix and we could cover the whole project in Ireland. Excellent. Excellent. Thank you. so another individual that we want to be a part of the task force as well but let me let's hear from the taxi drivers because we want to wrap this up so that because some people are trying to catch the eight o'clock boat so I don't is it sorry Yvette Stapleton new taxi driver but the meeting on the arm and the scheduler went out it said 530 to 830 the the other classes that are being offered to enhance the older taxi drivers are they going to be mandatory at this point we're still working through it it's not mandatory at this time however we'll have to work with the taxicab Commission but we do want to implement something think that would elevate the standard and maintain it also why okay so for my class we weren't able to get the regulation section because of an audio problem so that's I was asking if it would be mandatory because we took the class. And when I asked for it to be offered at another time, we still haven't gotten any word on that because there were a lot of questions coming from that class.
- 1:49:26 I'm just going to clarify that I'm aware of the audio issues that occurred particularly for the St. John District. Another time was offered, but it was not conducive. So the regulations portion was actually recorded. However, we did discuss with the instructor that moving forward, that portion of the class would be done in person because the audio, that glitch was an unexpected glitch. So we are working on correcting that, and we are going to support. We did offer the audio version.
- 1:50:07 I'm not sure if all of the students received it, because it was worked through UVI cell. But we would work with you to provide additional information to you. You're welcome. I needed that class. Senator Gettings, I don't know if one of you could answer it. But the 3% that he was speaking about, well, actually, he was speaking about the rates and offering the correct rates for the taxi drivers, offering different rates. But with the digital, I know it was before the Senate, that 3% that different businesses were offering and someone was trying to get it. Is it something that can be offered on the taxi driver's side? Thank you for that.
- 1:51:03 I think what you're talking about when you need to pay with a credit card. So we worked it out with licensing. If you're paying with your debit card, that's coming from your bank. So that should not be charged with 3%. What the individuals are charging you, the 3% is a transaction. fee they're saying claim it when you use your credit card not your debit card so that's that's standard so and what happened is like a lot with the machines and not so much from the banks like banco popular and oriental and first bank but those who have those outside um what the thing name locks but what the the machine salty locks and those other entities they are they charge you that at three percent but licensing is aware of it and they're saying to you if you're overcharged that three percent paying with your debit card you could come back to them and they'll make sure that you get back your your money as well but to set if it goes to the taxi and the taxi side or or not, that's something I'd have to ask for the commissioner or even the deputy. I don't know if she could answer that one tonight.
- 1:52:16 But the commissioner will definitely be in St. Thomas tomorrow and I'd definitely have an answer. And they said it would be televised as well too. OK. One other thing. In 2022, I paid for the taxi class \$500. In 2022, for the 2022 class, there wasn't there well my friend and I we paid there was no class offered until 2025 in St. John and I have we have sent in emails as to how we're going to get refunded so are we going to get refunded who should we be speaking to UVI the Taxi Commission I mean we paid the fee to the Taxi Commission and since this year I in taking the class I have had to pay other fees so why is it the fees wasn't taken from that exactly yeah so like my \$500 is still there I just have a question to that, do you have the receipt? I don't. Okay, we'll forward it to the tax commission. Okay, so of course I inherited a lot of, I have inherited a lot of history, some administrative challenges to include what she does mention a cost that was paid several years ago I would have to research the details and revisit the purpose in of the of the payment the purpose of the payment but in addition to that there is a cost for the badges that's that's not a fee that's waived so certain costs are going to stand, but I don't know how many years ago that was. Yeah, that's a long time ago. So, I would have to research that and address it with her. Yeah. So, we considered that as a board when, you got to remember, there's some new people in Plano. So, what we had decided to do
- 1:55:04 was, if you had your receipt, you bring it into the office, you're saying you didn't get a class, so in your case, what we would do is we'd take your receipt and whatever wasn't covered, I mean, whatever was utilized, we'd credit you back. So

that's something we could discuss with the executive director. Okay. So I'm hearing about it for the first time, so I'm going to have a discussion and we'll figure that part out. But for anyone who paid for the class and did not get the class was able to produce their receipt, you come into the office, produce the receipt to us, and then we'll take it from there. Because if you've already paid, we definitely wouldn't charge you again for it. Yeah, well, I don't want to discuss her personal business in front of the world, but yeah, but we don't know. we don't have a file so what I would do is I would ask you to reach out to the executive director let's set up a meeting you bring in your supporting documents and we'll work it out okay what one one more thing the class the classes that we did this year were completed the end of August they told us to pick up the certificate we got an email pick up your certificates the end of September but we have people have been going back every week and still to the taxi commission you don't have the certificate but then to get the letter I I went this afternoon.

1:56:49 So these sound like operations. So let's clarify. Let's clarify. Okay. Let the director respond. Okay. That sounds like a very unique situation because, number one, all of the certificates were received through UVI cell. And that was for transparency and fairness to all of the students. All of the certificates were to be picked up at UVI Cell through the administrative. I apologize for interjecting.

1:57:32 So to clarify, the Taxi Commission does not generate or issue the certificate. It's UVI Cell. Correct. Okay. Now, we are made aware of the grades. We are made aware of the success rate of the students, so we have that for documentation purposes in order to now issue a badge. Now, the badges can be picked up at the Taxicab Commission, and the badges, the issuance of the badge is \$100 by policy. and that is the letter that she may be referring to but that didn't have a deadline you can come and pick that up at the taxicab Commission so okay so just for clarity when the documentation that comes out of you taking a class you get that through uvi cell and i think that's what we needed to clarify the badges itself will come from the office of taxicab commission and um we should be a it's ready and available to be picked up so you went today so we'll find out what took place today we'll find out what took place i'm just being transparent i was i don't work in the office i could only try to find out the information But they are supposed to be readily available.

1:59:09 We're going to find out why they weren't accessible today. Because that shouldn't be the case. So what we'll do here is, even one moment, director. What we'll do here is if there is any specific grievances, right, we'll make sure that we provide the director with a name, contact phone, email address, so that she can get a ledger going of whatever issues or grievances exist. and then she would be able to respond to each of you at the appropriate time. But please respond, Director.

1:59:44 Okay. I do know that 85% of the badges were picked up both in St. Croix and St. Thomas. Some of them were picked up from St. John. Now, we do recommend that in certain cases, St. John calls ahead for certain items that they're going to pick up, retrieve, because we may have a technical glitch. I do know that the ladies mentioned that they had an issue with the badge machine, which was brought to my attention.

2:00:19 All of the letters for the potential operators were pre-populated and signed because those were approved. But I think that we did have a glitch that was brought to my attention just this morning with the actual badge machine. So we do apologize for that. That's just a conversation, and we're working on having that fixed. It was a technical matter. Pardon?

2:00:48 I'm not sure what happened last week. So what we probably should implement, just speaking real time here, is that anybody coming over, because you know it's a task to get over to the employee. So let her finish and then we can... The executive director said that she has to, or she would suggest that we can't have fire too. So she could pull the files instead of wasting your time what I'm suggesting and we'll have a conversation afterwards because I'm now being made aware of this that when anyone is coming especially from St. John that we're able to have a notice before so we could pull your information and you don't have to play, you know, hit and miss and it would be prepared for you and then you could just acquire it. So, I'm hearing of this now. I didn't know about it before. So, I'm going to have a conversation with the executive director so we could better address your needs.

2:01:48 And I think, proceed. Being that, I don't know if she would mind. Miss Mona George is on the board. If she would be able to pick up the information for us. Because coming from St. John, to go down there, to be told you have to come back, it's a, it doesn't, come on. Let me chime in here, too, because one of the things that the Taxicab Commission has been lacking is the technology.

2:02:29 The technology, the technology, the technology. and we as the legislature we need to make sure that they upgrade their technology to be able to provide information to you in real time this thing about paper based because right now they have an antiquated system and I'm preaching to the choir if I'm wrong they'll correct me they have an antiquated system, it's all paper based that means that you have to open up the draft file search down somebody name if it misspelled we gotta go double check we gotta do this that and the other and that is not conducive for this day and age and we really need to make

sure that they have all the technological upgrades and enhancements so that you meaning or any other taxi driver are not inconvenienced with wait times like this you you the more time you waste going back and forth the less business you're going to get so you know please chime in director or chairwoman yeah i absolutely agree and this is what we're talking about getting that financial support to upgrade our systems but in addition to that we we try to address this matter in a different way as uh we spoke with dlca about trying to make a portion of this electronic for instance when you get your business license you get an electronic copy and then if you want a hard copy you have a fee to pay. That is one of the things that we considered because we know that it takes away from your business to have to come into an office. And at this time and age, we shouldn't even have to do that. You should be able to access your stuff online. And if you want a hard copy, we get it to you. But again, this is some of the trials that we have because we really don't have the staffing and the support to be able to hire the amount of staffing we need. As far as having someone bring it over to St. John it would have to be out from the office itself because we have certain ways that we secure documents we can't just

2:04:32 willy-nilly give it to anybody and board members we try our best although we're we're more hands-on as board members these days because we we are trying to lend extra support to the office as they don't have much staff we're also not to be so intricately involved in the day-to-day operations and so it's really up to the the executive director and her staff however we know that we know this situation is going on we can't have a conversation about maybe even scheduling once a week or twice a week that we have somebody come over but again everything costs money right so we we have to we have to figure it out but Thank you for bringing it to our attention.

2:05:19 The best thing I could say is that we'll have the discussion about possibly setting aside a schedule where we could have somebody possibly come over, and then everyone would know whatever date it is to come to get their stuff. I believe Mr. Calwood wanted to make a statement. Yes, good evening. My name is Derek Calwood. I'm a taxi endorser for the past 20 years. I've been an employee of the Taxicab Commission. Ms. Elizabeth Hansen-Watley, Ms. Smith, and Ms. George. Good night to the present board members. My question is, C-Trade, because I take a lot of notes, I wait for my turn. C-Trade. I hear the senators talk about C-Trade and the exposures and stuff.

2:06:12 Now, I would be under the belief that Ms. Hanson-Watley have experienced C-Trade, but have the other members of the board have an opportunity to experience C-Trade. That's a question to the board members. We were hoping to go, but financially the board could not send us. So not saying that that's not on our radar to do because we do believe that we need to go and experience it and also whenever we can get our additional funding I think another good idea would be to ask of the legislature's support in getting some of the taxi drivers to go just to get it's not a cheap venture the cost of tax the tickets and the rooms and all of that and so it'd be a consortive effort but it's definitely something I think that the taxi drivers need to experience even if you guys collectively come together and have a delegation go on your behalf It is something that I would very much encourage because it really opens up your perspective to what other destinations are doing all in one conference. And they do a projection of five years out.

2:07:44 So you would know what's coming five years ahead. You'd know what ships and all of that stuff ahead of time. The reason why I ask is because, I mean, this setting right here is kind of being redundant. And it's a good effort that our community leaders is taking a forefront and trying to bring it, whereas it could have a decent operational structure. structure but um within the uh the laws under title 20 chapter 37 um it would be based upon the responsibility of the board members to get with the taxi community in holding tongue hall meetings these different things to bring about changes implement changes advise the legislature advise the governor which part we could implement these changes to make a better and improve industry for the transportation service right so when i hear senator getting stuck about task force we really don't need a task force we just need to support our board members on top of the taxicab commission to help it possible where they could hold more community meetings and be more in interactive with the taxi members because we have members that have optional payment we have members new innovative members we have a young lady right here she's in her 20s early 30s these are new innovative drivers that don't want to leave that dollar go or don't want to have to put the the patron at an inconvenience to take them to a bank or take them to some other monetary transaction industry to get pay, right?

2:09:37 So we have these things already established. But then let me ask you a next question. What is, and this is pertaining to you, Ms. Hansen-Watley, what is the lowest capacity of your cruise ship that calls in our territory? well it depends on what we're talking about if it's boutique ships it could be 100 200 people and then we could go as far as about 3 000 okay and mega ships so there's a variety so and the reason why i asked you that question is because we're talking about numbers statistics these things the lowest capacity of cruise ship cars here in the territory is at minimum 1500 passengers and whether it's passengers and crew because those numbers are separated at least to accommodate 1,500 passengers at a capacity of 25 passengers per taxi you're going to need 60 taxis okay you're going to need 60 taxis to accommodate 1,500 passengers for one ship our territory called over 345 ships per year according to your commissioner testimony before the

legislature okay so if we if we call over 345 ships at minimum at 1500 maximum at eight or nine thousand passengers we need to increase our capacity we have to increase our capacity when it comes to the taxi industry we can't cut them at 25 or 27 we have to find more innovative ways to increase their capacity and an innovative way to increase the capacity in a road worthy and safety environment which body could trans traverse these passengers along our highways and streets right um however that would be based upon the taxicab commission board to look into

2:11:43 establishing a new capacity for our taxi men and ladies we talk about share ride right now the taxi industries is already doing share ride whether mr kenneth have 25 whether this young lady have 14 everybody that that goes into that taxi are not going to the same location that's a share ride It's a share ride. It's already in existence. They're done doing share ride. We have to be able to secure our laws, protect our taxi industries and protect the drivers to make sure they could accommodate our constituents, our visitors, everybody in our territory. So when it comes to share ride I would advise our leaders we don't look into undermining the law that protects our medallion franchise. Because of our medallion franchise, we actually have six medallion per territory. Two St. John, two St. Croix, two St. Thomas. And if we undermine that we are going to undermine the value in a medallion one and then we're going to undermine the interest that the sales of those medallions goes over to the veterans affair to help our veterans that's two so we're going to undermine our whole structure i do believe what you guys should be looking into is separating department of transportation out of public works and renaming our transportation industry whereas our local department of transportation can govern

2:13:38 land air or sea whether it's limo whether it's a tour company or a taxi industry we have to think more we have to be more open-minded okay we won't be here and we're Go ahead, Mr. Bokoz. I'm going to rebuttal. Thank you. So, I appreciate your input and comments. Most definitely, you're well-versed in the area. But one thing I wanted to bring to your attention, if you had not known, the revised Organic Act prohibits us from creating any additional departments currently. So, we, unfortunately, cannot create a separate department for the government of the Virgin Islands. at this time. We're now in the middle of our sixth constitutional convention. Hopefully that is something that they are discussing based on the writing of the 1954 Revised Organic Act. But that is a good idea. I mean, having a Department of Transportation definitely would be something beneficial that you would be able to, you know, regulate public and private. I don't know if that would be part of how the Taxi Commission, I don't know where you would exist in that network or in that vicinity, but it's something that could be thought about. But at this time, we cannot do it, unfortunately. My quick comment is I do see where the public transportation services and the services that the taxicab commission, they do overlap to some degree in certain areas. It is a policy issue, so I can't delve into policy matters. So, for instance, with the 2050 transportation plan, we see where there are certain regulatory matters specifically to safaris and the BITRAN public transportation system. And I think that somehow between the umbrella of the association and the VITRAN

2:15:52 public service, the public transportation system, we should be able to leverage and tap into some of those resources to support the uniqueness of the Territory's transportation system, which actually does include safaris. We have to include that. I just remember the uh well the the guy left now but i went thoroughly through that law and there are different distinctions of vehicles for hire automobile for hire so i didn't want the assumption to be made that he was correct in that what he said because the law if you read through the entire title then it tells you the different distinctions taxi um vehicle for hire automobile for hire and I know the terms sound similar but there's definitions in the title and I don't want anybody to think I'm an advocate I I don't have no right to your business what I'm doing is I'm being fully transparent about the information shared because I think that one of the things that has been going on for a long time is people are speaking in their own corners and nobody's actually coming in the room and sharing the information which could benefit taxi Because if I am charged with, as a board member, making sure that we don't only exist but we thrive and we stay competitive, I have to be honest when I hear information and share it with you all and say this is what's happening, we see it, I know taxi drivers have seen it because you're the ones on the front lines. I get some complaints and I've seen some things, but I have to, and the Taxi Commission itself, has to heavily rely on taxi drivers to tell us when you see something going on. Especially given that we don't have the amount of enforcement

2:17:51 that we would like, although we are working on that. So it is definitely a collaborative effort, and that's what I'm saying, it's very important that we stay connected with you all, because you're our eyes and ears out there on the road. Okay. Well, Mr. Callot, one thing I want to clarify with you. Your ideas, you know, I heard my colleague's position, but I'm not certain, but your idea about the transportation department, because I know this current governor had one time, I was thinking of putting taxi cab on the public works with the whole transportation, yes, whole transportation stuff.

2:18:33 So we're going to look into it, because you brought some relevance there. So I know you need some more research on it, but great idea. So I just wanted to put that on the table, that like it's not scratch off the table there's something that definitely would look into but thank you for your for your idea well i can pass as much ideas and solutions for you guys to come together collectively improve the industry conversation because that's why running for office next year in 2026

to try to improve the operation of the government and help our people in this community however 84 new drivers how was the drivers them how did they attended class via zoom in person okay did we had classes throughout the cove um adventure uh that we had classes via zoom and i do believe i can support her because i thought it over zoom yes we did so we have a more larger platform over zoom so i think um our board need to get back to the drawing boards and make it available whereas because if you open a taxi commission the taxi drivers list the testing application of process you open that st thomas you're gonna have damn near 500 people not as much as st janice st croix because the the the demand is more on st thomas but then when you have that demand because right now you remember every taxi plate that you see on the road operating reflects a medallion so we only have only 1200 medallions here in the territory of saint thomas 1200 and change okay and if it takes if it takes 60 at 1500 passengers we are under staff when it comes to the industry promoting taxi operators and getting more medallions

2:20:46 out there so i don't mean to cut you off but we do have a hard stop at 8 30. because media cuts cutting off at 8 30. i know i took the mic at the last 5 30 to 8 30. so i i do appreciate you we're gonna be on st almost tomorrow and i thank you 8 27 and i really thank you so if you have to get in one quick question mr louis i have a lot tonight really i really understand you but i see your back they play bachelor all night to you they want to speak up so i mean i really you know but thank you i really appreciate it let's go mr louis quick question to miss smith director yes kenneth louis in the past when a taxi driver violated that case was being brought to the director and the director herself or his self was here in that case is that still going to continue do you have plans of changing that so so let me ask what what are the backgrounds that director have in law enforcement or being a lawyer to hear the case because for my feeling what i'm looking at if you're if your officer and Carl would kind of test to that if your officer give me a ticket are you going to go against your officer i think that's where we have like the courts to address it or even the ag office but i mean it's something that we let you respond because the reason why i'm asking that senator quickly yes i i don't i do not know if ms smith going to implement that but in the past they were not giving you that taxi driver any right yes to appeal to somebody to a court of law

2:22:44 which is wrong because i really don't like open-ended questions like this so yeah let me just address that fast um the answer is that we as a board also we have subcommittees and we have board members assigned that deal with with complaints so what would happen is that when it's turned in and and remember we're changing how things operate we would be involved with our executive director and of course we would allow her to do her investigation but in addition to that we are certain information is brought to the board for our review so it's not something that we want to ignore and I know in the past things have happened differently but we are we're changing the direction to make sure that we could respond to complaints but the point of contact would be the executive director yes I understand I understand but colleagues and I'd like to I really have to close because I can't continue doing stuff like this. I want to thank everyone for coming out tonight, especially the St. John community, the taxi community. You've been awesome. You've been great.

2:24:02 We gleaned a lot of information. We do have homework to do. We do have a lot of homework to do, and we put a lot of ask and demand on you, and I really appreciate it. Again, on behalf of all the members of the 36th Legislature, I really do appreciate you. Thank you. God bless, and everybody get home safely. Have a great night. You

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.

- 5x **Senator Avery Lewis**
heard in this transcript as: Lewis
- 4x **Senator Carla Joseph**
the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph
heard in this transcript as: Joseph
- 3x **Senator Angel L. Bolques, Jr.**
heard in this transcript as: Angel L. Bolques Jr., Bolquez
- 3x **Senator Kenneth L. Gittens**
heard in this transcript as: Giddens
- 2x **Senator Angel L. Bocas Jr**
heard in this transcript as: Bocas

- 2x **Senator Angel L. Bulkes Jr**
heard in this transcript as: Bulke
- 2x **Senator Dwayne DeGraff**
heard in this transcript as: Duane DeGraff
- 2x **Senator Marvin Blyden**
heard in this transcript as: Blyden
- 2x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis