



FINANCE, BUDGET, AND APPROPRIATIONS TESTIMONY

PRESENTED BY:

RUEBEN JENNINGS – ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

CHERISE PENN – CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS ADMINISTRATOR

KIZMA L. PETERSEN – CHIEF PROCUREMENT OFFICER

Good morning, Chairman Novelle E. Francis, Sr., members of the Committee on Finance, Budget, and Appropriations; other senators and colleagues in attendance, and members of the public in the listening and viewing audience.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide an update on the Department of Public Works' capital program and operational progress. My name is Rueben Jennings, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Public Works. Joining me today are Ms. Kizma L. Petersen, Chief Procurement Officer, and Ms. Cherise Penn, CIP Administrator.

As the Governor noted during the State of the Territory Address, the Department has experienced an extraordinary year of infrastructure delivery across both districts and remains *Anchored in Progress*. That progress was not accidental. It reflects disciplined planning, strong federal coordination, contractor performance, and the sustained commitment of our team.

From reconstructed bridges on St. Croix designed to withstand future flood events, to major roadway improvements in our downtowns and residential corridors, to long-awaited congestion relief projects and marine transportation investments — tangible progress is visible across the Territory.

Infrastructure investment is one of the most significant financial responsibilities entrusted to the Department. Today's testimony will focus on measurable progress. Our purpose is to provide this Committee with a structured update on where key projects stand today — their current phase, expenditures to date, and the sequencing of work ahead. I'll begin with our horizontal portfolio, DPW's "bread and butter."

Horizontal Infrastructure & Major Roadway Investments

The foundation of our capital portfolio remains horizontal infrastructure — roads, bridges, drainage systems, and transportation corridors that connect communities, support commerce, and protect public safety.

Over the past year, multiple bridges on St. Croix were reconstructed under the Federal Highway Administration Emergency Relief Program. These structures were rebuilt — not patched — to modern engineering standards capable of withstanding future heavy rain events. Simultaneously, paving initiatives across Charlotte Amalie, First Avenue, Fort Christian Parking Lot, Estates LaGrange and Peter's Rest, South Shore Road, and Airport Road strengthened economic corridors and residential connectivity.

Ethel McIntosh Memorial Drive (Mahogany Road)



What began as a long-stalled project has transitioned into active construction. The Contractor, Marco St. Croix, is approximately 30% complete. The scope of work includes 5.65 miles of roadway rehabilitation, culvert replacements, retaining wall reconstruction and construction, guardrail replacement, signage improvements, striping and installation of drainage swales. We have expended \$1,720,820.95 to date and anticipate completion in Fall 2026. This represents full corridor transformation — not temporary resurfacing.

Raphune Hill Expansion Project – St. Thomas

Raphune Hill is a critical east-west artery connecting residential, commercial, and tourism zones. All design aspects are complete, positioning the Department to move forward without delay once federal concurrence is achieved. We anticipate solicitation beginning in Fall 2026.

Raphune Hill Phase 1 – Relocation of Mountain Side Lane (Route 381) proposes to relocate the existing intersection at the crest of Raphune Hill to align with the roadway descending from Flag Hill in Al Cohen's. The existing intersection will be eliminated due to current conditions that include dangerous turning movements and an inadequate line of sight. The new intersection will be constructed approximately 500 feet to the east, significantly improving safety and accommodating the future expansion of Raphune Hill under Contract 3.

The scope of work includes the construction and relocation of Mountain Side Lane (VI-381), demolition and obliteration of the existing intersection and roadway, construction of new driveways to maintain access to existing properties, and all associated incidental work including drainage improvements, signage, striping, and maintenance of traffic (MOT). The project remains pending acquisition of the required right-of-way (ROW).

On St. Croix, the **Clifton Hill Connector Project** has significantly streamlined traffic flow on a main artery. Key milestones include the addition of a dedicated turning lane at the Container Port intersection on the Melvin Evans Highway — directly addressing a longstanding congestion point — as well as comprehensive improvements to the Clifton Hill roadway and streetlighting along the highway and adjacent roadways. We have expended \$12,635,785.64 to date. We anticipate this project to close out in May 2026.

Leonardo Trotman Drive – Phase 2

The **Leonardo Trotman Drive Phase-2 Road Construction Project** is expected to begin construction within the next 45 days and is currently in the pre-construction phase. A pre-construction meeting was held on Friday, February 13, 2026, during which Grade-All Heavy Equipment Inc. was awarded the contract and issued the Notice to Proceed. Phase 2 will continue from where Phase 1 ended, which currently ties into the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library and the Tutu Park Pathway and extends a few feet behind K-Mart. This phase will begin at the Weymouth Rhymer Highway and connect to the end of Phase 1 at the junction of the Tutu Mall Pathway. The scope of work includes the construction of new pavement, drainage improvements including culverts and a detention pond, installation of sanitary manholes, as well as signage and striping. Mobilization is anticipated within 30 days, and the project is expected to be completed by March 2027. The total contract amount for the project is \$4,345,834.90, with an anticipated duration of approximately 12 months.

Downtown Charlotte Amalie Drainage



The Downtown Charlotte Amalie Drainage and Road Rehabilitation Project is a model for how we now build. Rather than simply resurfacing roads, the contractor, Island Roads, replaced underground drainage infrastructure, upgraded stormwater conveyance systems, addressed some elements of utility improvements, stabilized the roadway base, and completed full pavement restoration. Currently, the project is in its final stages of paving and striping with project closeout anticipated in May 2026. To date, approximately \$5,777,079.87 has been expended. This project ultimately represents a shift in philosophy: build for durability, not short-term repair.

Residential Community Roadway Improvements

While these projects to improve key thoroughfares continue, we remain equally committed to improving residential neighborhoods where daily life unfolds. In both districts, we are advancing community-scale roadway projects that directly impact residents' quality of life.

Diamond Ruby – St. Croix

VI Paving has mobilized and began roadway improvements, including surface drainage elements and pavement restoration. VI Paving Inc. was awarded the Contract in the amount of \$1,189,918.70. One hundred thousand dollars has been expended to date for mobilization, and we expect completion within 45 days.

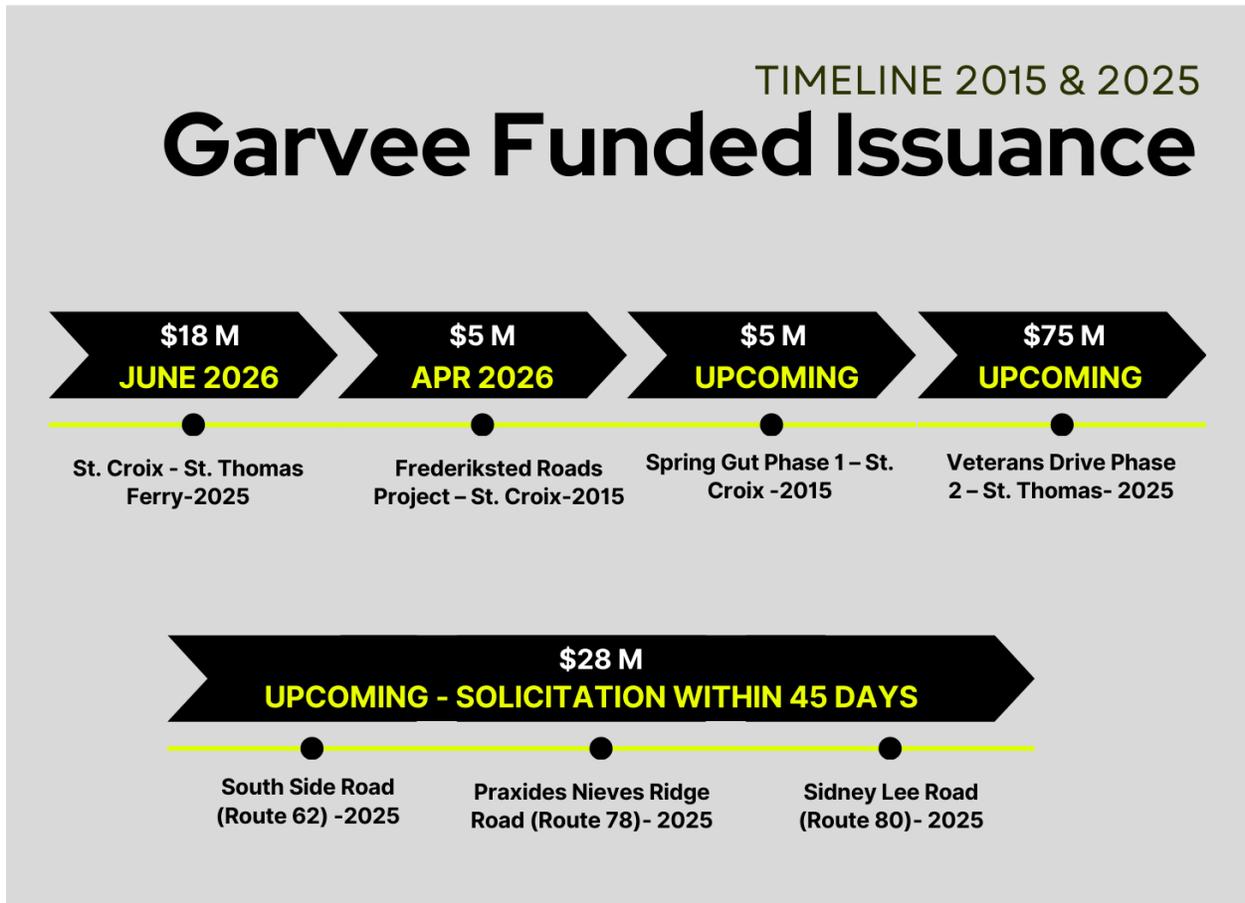
Williams Delight – St. Croix

FEMA has completed environmental reviews. Designs — including extensive drainage improvements — are complete. Solicitation is anticipated within 30 days, with construction beginning late summer.

St. Thomas Residential Community Paving

Using the department's task order contracts, paving will continue in Contant, Estate Thomas, Hospital Ground, Caret Bay and Bovoni before the end of April. These projects involve milling and resurfacing — targeted quality-of-life improvements for established communities.

GARVEE-Funded Projects



Floating GARVEE Bonds remains a strategic financing tool that accelerates transportation investments while leveraging federal reimbursements. Our portfolio is divided into the 2015 and 2025 issuances — completion and acceleration.

Frederiksted Roads Project – St. Croix

The Frederiksted Roads Project, funded through the 2015 GARVEE Issuance, includes King, Queen, Strand, Prince, portions of Fisher Street and the bridge leading to Rainbow Beach. The scope of work includes comprehensive roadway rehabilitation, utility adjustments,

upgraded signage, pavement striping, and reconstruction of existing drainage swales to improve overall functionality and safety. The project is currently in the final stages of the procurement phase, with construction anticipated to commence in April 2026.

Spring Gut Phase 1 – St. Croix

The Spring Gut Bridge Project involves replacing the existing deteriorated bridge (circa 1904) located approximately 1,500 feet south of the East End Road and Spring Gut Road intersection, near Canegata Ball Park, SDA School, and Estate Mount Welcome on St. Croix. The new structure will accommodate two travel lanes, a pedestrian sidewalk, and a shoulder for cyclists to enhance safety and accessibility.

The project includes underground utility upgrades for electric and fiber, installation of new water and sewer lines, minor milling and paving of asphalt approaches, and grading of the unimproved dirt section from Southside Road to the bridge. Construction will occur in sections to minimize traffic disruption, with the bridge expected to remain open for most of the project. The total estimated construction cost is approximately \$5 million.

Veterans Drive Phase 2A – St. Thomas

The Phase 2A Veterans Drive Mitigation Improvements Project will fortify the waterfront area, safeguarding the island’s most critical roadway from flooding and erosion; reduce congestion for vehicular travelers, enhancing access to community lifelines and evacuation routes and decreasing travel times for first responders; and create multimodal transportation alternatives that will enhance walkability, safety, and community mobility after storm events. It builds off and extends the mitigation improvements from Phase I of the project, which was completed in 2021. This project is currently advancing through solicitation via the Eastern Federal Lands Division.

South Side Road (Route 62), Praxides Nieves Ridge Road (Route 78), and Sidney Lee Road (Route 80)

On St. Croix, we have elected to use the progressive design-build procurement model for these three major corridors to allow for expedient delivery and rapid construction. This approach allows for collaborative design refinement and early contractor involvement - improving cost certainty, and schedule efficiency.

A total of \$28 million has been allocated from the 2025 GARVEE issuance to address these three roadways. We anticipate solicitation within the next 45 days, pending final FHWA review and concurrence. This procurement strategy reflects an evolution in how we deliver complex roadway projects — prioritizing speed, coordination, and risk mitigation.

St. Croix – St. Thomas Ferry (STX-STT Ferry)

The final project under the 2025 GARVEE issuance is the development and delivery of a new inter-island ferry. The selected designer, Incat Crowther, was in the Territory during the week of February 9 for detailed design meetings and site visits. These sessions ensure that the vessel design aligns with upland terminal facilities and operational requirements. It is important to mention that Incat Crowther was chosen for the design as they have been involved in designing the first three VITRAN ferries, including the recently commissioned *Spirit of 1733*.

We anticipate the solicitation package for ferry fabrication and delivery to be issued in the coming months. At present, the Department is finalizing necessary contract riders and clauses with FHWA to ensure full compliance with federal guidelines and reimbursement requirements. This project represents a transformative step in strengthening inter-island connectivity and long-term transportation capacity. GARVEE strengthens our horizontal network. But infrastructure investment extends beyond highways and ferries.

Capital Improvement Projects

The Division of Engineering, including our Capital Improvement Program, provides architectural, engineering, design and inspection services for the Department of Public Works and other government agencies. These services include planning, designing, cost-estimating, and constructing a variety of capital and public infrastructures throughout the territory. The division is responsible for project management, which includes:

- Requests for Proposals development
- Design Review
- Project Inspections
- Contract Administration
- Approval of Contractor Requests for Payment

The division also reviews plans and specifications prepared by independent firms for government projects and manages all hazard mitigation, flood control, and stormwater conveyance projects. The projects included in today's testimony highlight some of the priority projects currently being managed by the division.

Department of Human Services Head Starts

- **Bolongo Head Start:** The remaining scope of work includes completing the priming of all prepared building surfaces to ensure they are ready for final finishes. Tile installation is ongoing in designated areas, following approved layouts and specifications. Drywall installation and finishing are in progress, including taping, mudding, sanding, and preparation for painting. Acoustic ceiling systems are being installed in accordance with the reflected ceiling plans. Window installation is currently underway to properly enclose the building envelope. Additionally, drainage systems and the parking area are being addressed, with erosion control measures actively implemented to maintain site stability. This project, contracted to Custom Builders, is approximately 70% complete with an estimated completion date of June 2026.

- **Lindberg Bay Head Start:** The remaining scope of work includes completion of building priming to ensure all surfaces are properly sealed and prepared for final finishes. Installation of kitchen equipment is scheduled, including placement, anchoring, and connection of all specified appliances and fixtures in accordance with manufacturer requirements and project plans. Work in the mechanical room is ongoing, including the installation and coordination of mechanical systems, equipment setting, and final connections. In addition, construction and completion of the water catchment housing area will proceed to properly enclose and protect

the system components, ensuring functionality and compliance with project specifications. This project, also contracted to Custom Builders, is approximately 80% complete with an estimated completion date of June 2026.

- **Minetta Mitchell Head Start Storage Facility:** The remaining scope of work includes finalizing the air conditioning system, which involves final system connections, testing, balancing, and commissioning to ensure proper operation and performance. Installation of the fire protection monitoring equipment is to be completed, including final device placement, system integration, testing, and coordination with the monitoring service to confirm full functionality and compliance with applicable codes. Additionally, flooring finishes will be installed in designated areas, including surface preparation, placement of specified materials, and final detailing to achieve a complete and finished appearance. This project, contracted to Custom Builders, is approximately 90% complete with an estimated completion date of June 2026.



CONCORDIA HEAD START

- **Concordia Head Start:** The remaining scope of work includes installation of the playground equipment in accordance with approved layouts and safety requirements, ensuring proper anchoring and compliance with applicable standards. Furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FF&E) will be delivered, assembled, and installed in designated areas as specified in the project documents. Final paint touch-ups will be completed to address any blemishes or deficiencies and provide a consistent finished appearance throughout the facility. Additionally, final electrical equipment will be installed, including devices, fixtures, and cover plates, followed by testing to confirm proper operation and system functionality. This project, contracted to Custom Builders, is over 90% complete and anticipated to be turned over in May 2026.

- **Anna's Hope Head Start:** The remaining scope of work includes the installation of acoustical ceiling tiles within the completed ceiling grid system, ensuring proper alignment and a uniform finished appearance. Final paint touch-ups will be performed to correct any minor imperfections and provide a consistent finish throughout the space. In addition, electrical equipment will be installed and finalized, including devices, fixtures, and associated components, followed by testing to verify proper operation and system performance. This project, also contracted to Custom Builders, is over 90% complete and is anticipated to be turned over in May 2026.

Department of Planning and Natural Resources – Division of Libraries and Archives

The **Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library Repair Project** is substantially complete and is anticipated to be turned over in April 2026. The scope of work for this project included mold remediation, sheet-rock installation, floor-tiling, acoustic ceiling tile system replacement, caulking and sealing of windows, cleaning of A/C registers, painting and major roof upgrades. The total cost of the project was \$3,466,004.49. Construction was successfully completed by Four Star Construction.



- The **Enid M. Baa Library**, awarded to Custom Builders, is making continued progress. Work in the courtyard is ongoing and includes completion of landscaping and the placement of brick pavers for the designated walkways to ensure proper grading, alignment, and overall site aesthetics. Interior drywall work continues in select areas, including installation, finishing, and preparation for final finishes where required. Additionally, roof repairs are progressing, with remaining components being installed and finalized to achieve full weather tightness and compliance with project specifications. The project is currently 80% complete with anticipated completion in June 2026.

- The **Athalie Petersen Library** was awarded to Heights Construction. The remaining scope of work includes the full replacement of the existing copper piping to ensure reliable system performance and compliance with current standards. In addition, a ductless mini-split system will be installed, including mounting of indoor and outdoor units, refrigerant line connections, electrical tie-ins, and system testing to confirm proper operation and efficiency. This project is approximately 75% complete and is expected to be turned over in April 2026.

Department of Public Works Facilities

- The **Fort Christian Parking Lot Renovation Project** is substantially complete and currently in use. The scope of work entailed milling the existing asphalt pavement and installing 2" to 3" of asphalt, striping, signage, electrical conduit, water valves and waterlines upgrades, new EV charging stations, an ADA accessible ramp, and upgrading the ticket collection equipment. The total contract cost, including pavement and conduit installation, is \$2,222,647.91. The project was awarded to Grace Civil, LLC.
- The **Western Cemetery Perimeter Wall Project** is a locally funded project and is steadily moving towards completion. The scope of work entails construction of a reinforced concrete perimeter wall around Western Cemetery No. 3. The wall will be adorned with natural stonework, bronze lettering, and will be accessible via new

metal gates, which allow for vehicular and pedestrian access. A monument sign is near completion at the western side of the property. Construction is approximately 95% complete with a full completion anticipated in May 2026. The cost of the project is \$961,918.80. This project was awarded to Rumina Construction.

- The **99 Steps Restoration Project** is 98% complete and is currently in the closeout phase with only punch list items remaining including commemorative plaque installation. This project entailed repair and installation of new brick steps, iron handrails, new lamp posts, landscaping, a leaning wall and sewer line upgrades. The project has a final construction cost of \$719,558.00. This project was funded by the PFA and awarded to Custom Builders.

- The **DPW Operations and Maintenance Facility Project** on St. John is a federally funded project by FEMA. The bid package is completed and ready for solicitation. The scope of work entails reconstruction of the damage maintenance structure to include four garage bays, an office, break room, restrooms and showers. Site features include concrete parking with gate, drainage, and generator building. This project will be solicited with the VITRAN Facility project on St. John since it shares the same site.

- The **VITRAN Operations and Maintenance Facility Project** on St. John is a federally funded by the Federal Transit Administration. The design and bid package are 100% completed and currently under review by the FTA. Upon completion of the review, bid solicitation will begin. The project scope entails installation of a new acoustic ceiling tile grid system in the main office, enclosure of the kitchen area with stud walls, and enclosing and expansion of the garage building. A new 14,000-gallon reinforced concrete cistern will also be constructed, along with a concrete driveway, parking, fencing and electronic gate.

Chairman Francis and members of the Committee, the projects outlined today reflect a capital program that is active, structured, and moving forward across design, procurement, and construction phases. While not every project will conclude within this fiscal year, each is advancing deliberately and responsibly.

Infrastructure delivery requires sequencing, coordination, and sustained oversight. We remain committed to managing these investments with discipline and transparency. Before closing, I would also like to recognize the men and women of the Department of Public Works. Their dedication, technical expertise, and commitment to the process are what make this progress possible. I also want to recognize the contractors executing these projects and

thank them for their continued partnership. These projects are being delivered by Virgin Islanders, for Virgin Islanders.

Thank you for your continued partnership and oversight. My team and I are happy to answer any questions.