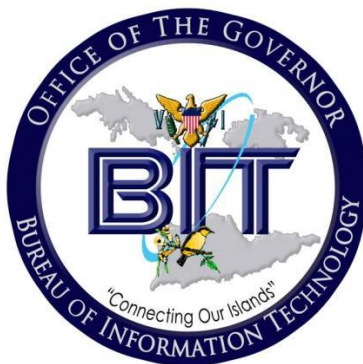


The 36th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands
Committee on Housing, Transportation &
Telecommunications
Bureau of Information Technology
State of G.V.I. Telecommunications



Presented by:

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Director/Chief Information Officer

Bureau of Information Technology

Office of the Governor

1 INTRODUCTION

2 Greetings Chairman Marvin A. Blyden, Vice Chair, and honorable members of the
3 Committee on Housing, Transportation & Telecommunications. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to appear before you today and to participate in this important discussion on the
5 state of telecommunications in the Virgin Islands. I am Rupert Ross, Director and Chief
6 Information Officer of the Bureau of Information Technology. I appreciate the Committee's
7 continued focus on telecommunications issues that directly affect government operations,
8 emergency response, and public safety throughout the Territory.

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10 The Bureau of Information Technology serves as the central technology organization for the
11 executive branch of the Government of the Virgin Islands. While BIT is not a retail
12 telecommunications provider, our responsibilities place us at the center of government
13 communications infrastructure. We oversee and support the networks and systems that
14 agencies rely on daily to deliver services, coordinate operations, and respond to
15 emergencies. As a result, the reliability, resilience, and security of telecommunications
16 infrastructure are foundational to our mission.

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18 Telecommunications resilience is especially critical in the Virgin Islands due to our
19 geographic realities and exposure to natural hazards. Hurricanes and other disruptive events
20 have repeatedly demonstrated how quickly communications failures can cascade into
21 broader public safety and government continuity challenges. BIT's work therefore
22 emphasizes ensuring that essential government communications remain available before,
23 during, and after emergencies, through redundancy planning, coordination with providers
24 and utilities, and continuity of operations support across agencies.

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26 From a public safety perspective, dependable communications are not optional. Law
27 enforcement, emergency medical services, fire services, health agencies, and emergency
28 management all depend on stable and secure connectivity to perform their duties
29 effectively. BIT supports these functions by maintaining government networks that enable
30 interagency coordination and information sharing, particularly during emergencies. Our role
31 includes ensuring that these systems are designed with resilience in mind and that
32 cybersecurity considerations are integrated into telecommunications planning, recognizing
33 that disruptions can result from both physical damage and cyber incidents.

34
35 A significant portion of this work is carried out in close coordination with the Critical
36 Infrastructure Working Group, VITEMA, and the FirstNet Authority. These partnerships are
37 focused on strengthening public safety communications and ensuring that
38 telecommunications investments align with real operational needs during emergencies. BIT
39 serves as a technical and coordinating bridge between public safety stakeholders, federal
40 partners, and telecommunications providers to help advance resilient and interoperable
41 communications capabilities.

42 Through our engagement with the FirstNet Authority and AT&T, BIT has been actively involved
43 in monitoring and supporting progress on FirstNet deployment commitments in the Virgin
44 Islands. Based on the most recent State Commitments update provided to BIT, several
45 permanent FirstNet sites on St. Croix, including West End, Green Cay, Sally's Fancy, and Sion
46 Farm, are now on air and providing service. An interim solution at the Clairmont site is also
47 on air, while permanent construction activities continue. On St. John, construction has
48 begun at the Coral Bay site, with foundation work underway and equipment mobilization in
49 progress.

50

51 At the same time, BIT has remained engaged in addressing challenges that affect the pace
52 and completion of FirstNet deployment. On St. Croix's East End, progress on the proposed
53 communications site continues to be affected by the Coastal Zone Management review
54 process. During its March 2026 meeting, the St. Croix CZM Committee elected to table a
55 decision on the proposed tower and requested additional information and consideration of
56 alternative solutions before moving forward. This action followed continued public
57 discussion and reflects the Committee's effort to balance environmental, community, and
58 infrastructure considerations. BIT remains engaged with our partners to support a resolution
59 that advances public safety communications while respecting the regulatory process.

60

61 On St. Thomas, the originally proposed Tango site did not move forward due to unsuccessful
62 lease negotiations. While there was no formal permitting denial associated with that site,
63 telecommunications siting in the broader West End and Fortuna area has
64 historically required heightened sensitivity due to community concerns and competing land
65 use priorities. Consistent with that context, BIT has been working with AT&T and the FirstNet
66 Authority to evaluate alternative approaches, including enhancing Band 14 coverage at
67 existing sites such as Fortuna, to ensure public safety communications objectives are met.

68

69 In addition to broadband based public safety communications, BIT is advancing a major
70 upgrade to the Territory's mission critical radio infrastructure through the planned
71 deployment of a Project 25, or P25, advanced digital land mobile radio network. BIT
72 has initiated the procurement process to design, build, and optimize a modern,
73 interoperable P25 radio system that will support police, fire, emergency medical services,
74 public works, utilities, and emergency management across the Virgin Islands. This initiative
75 is intended to replace legacy government radio systems and address longstanding
76 interoperability challenges that can emerge during largescale incidents, disasters, or
77 periods of commercial network congestion. BIT is already coordinating engineering analysis,
78 site assessments, procurement planning, and grant compliance activities with partner
79 agencies to move this effort forward in a deliberate and structured manner.

80

81 In parallel with these site specific and system level efforts, BIT's coordination with VITEMA
82 and the Critical Infrastructure Working Group ensures that telecommunications planning is
83 integrated into broader emergency management and critical infrastructure resilience
84 efforts. This coordination helps ensure that communications investments support

85 continuity of operations, disaster response, and interagency coordination, particularly
86 during hurricanes and other high impact events.

87

88 Despite ongoing progress, challenges remain. Aging infrastructure, funding constraints, and
89 complex permitting and coordination processes can slow the pace of modernization.
90 Addressing these challenges requires sustained collaboration among the Legislature,
91 executive agencies, regulators, and private sector partners. BIT believes that continued
92 engagement is essential to aligning policy, investment, and operational priorities in support
93 of resilient telecommunications infrastructure.

94

95 In closing, I want to thank Chairman Blyden and the members of this Committee for the
96 opportunity to present today. The Bureau of Information Technology remains committed to
97 working collaboratively to strengthen the reliability, resilience, and interoperability of
98 telecommunications infrastructure that supports government operations and public safety
99 in the Virgin Islands. I look forward to your questions and continued dialogue on
100 these important issues.