



COMMITTEE ON

HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

SEPTEMBER 30, 2026



RUEBEN JENNINGS
ACTING COMMISSIONER
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

Good day, Senator Marvin Blyden, Chairman of the Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications; committee members; all other senators in attendance today; all those seated in the Senate chambers; and those in the listening and viewing audience.

I am Rueben Jennings, Acting Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works (DPW). With me today are Deputy Commissioner of Transportation Karole Ovesen-McGregor and Federal Highway Program Manager Jomo McClean.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the passing of one of our current DPW family members, Mr. Wilbur Joseph, who served the Department as a General Maintenance Worker for more than six years. Mr. Joseph's passing is a tremendous loss to our Department, and on behalf of the entire DPW family, I extend our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues. I would also like to acknowledge the passing of a former member of the DPW family, Mr. Frederick Mohammed, Jr., who served as the Materials Manager in the Office of Highway Engineering for more than nine years. We are grateful for their years of service to the Department and to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Department's operations and the work underway to improve the Territory's transportation infrastructure and public transportation systems.

Since our previous appearances before this body, the Department has continued to advance a significant portfolio of projects across the territory. Some projects have reached completion, and others have moved into construction or procurement.

This afternoon, I will provide an update on our roadway and drainage projects, federal highway and GARVEE initiatives, public transportation and ferry programs, capital projects, and other operational priorities. I will also address several of the challenges affecting project delivery and transportation services, including staffing, fleet availability, maintenance demands, and other resource constraints.

PROJECT UPDATES — ST. CROIX DISTRICT

Over the past year, the Department has continued to make significant progress in advancing critical roadway rehabilitation and infrastructure improvements throughout the St. Croix District. These efforts encompass a broad range of projects, from the comprehensive reconstruction of major transportation corridors to targeted roadway resurfacing, drainage improvements, bridge rehabilitation, and neighborhood road repairs. Together, these investments are improving roadway conditions, enhancing safety and mobility, strengthening the Territory's transportation infrastructure, and addressing long-standing needs within our communities. Some of the major projects currently underway or advancing include:

Ethel McIntosh Memorial Drive

Work continues on the comprehensive rehabilitation of Ethel McIntosh Memorial Drive, commonly known as Mahogany Road. This \$18.86 million project extends from Hams Bluff Road to Carambola Road and includes roadway reconstruction, full-depth reclamation, milling and repaving, major drainage improvements, retaining walls, guardrail replacement, signage, and pavement markings.

Since our previous update, the contractor has completed the installation of culvert pipes of various sizes, as well as a new double box culvert. Paving and striping of the temporary detour routes have also been completed. The contractor is presently milling the roadway in the vicinity of the Domino Club in preparation for paving scheduled to begin in early October.

This project represents much more than resurfacing an existing roadway. The drainage, structural, and safety improvements being incorporated into the corridor are intended to address longstanding infrastructure deficiencies while providing a more durable roadway for the residents and motorists who depend on this route.

Frederiksted Roads

The Department is also advancing the Frederiksted Road Repairs Project. The project includes pavement milling and asphalt overlay, partial-depth pavement repairs, drainage improvements, rehabilitation of paved waterways, utility adjustments,

roadway striping, regulatory signage, and replacement of the temporary bridge on Route 7025 with a new two-lane temporary bridge that includes an eight-foot sidewalk.

During July and August, the contractor completed water-valve and manhole adjustments and resurfaced Queen Street, Fisher Street, and King Street. Work on Strand Street encountered an additional challenge when underground drains were found to be clogged with significant amounts of trash and debris. To properly address the condition before resurfacing the roadway, portions of the concrete drain tops were removed and the drainage system was cleared at seven locations. Resurfacing of Strand Street is anticipated in early October.

Spring Gut Road — Phase I

The Department is also moving forward with Phase I of the Spring Gut Road project. The project includes pavement milling and asphalt overlay, roadway reclamation, and replacement of the existing bridge.

The project is currently being procured, with the solicitation scheduled to close on October 7, 2026. Following the close of the solicitation, the Department will proceed through evaluation and award toward construction.

Upcoming Road Repairs

Recognizing the need for repairs along these two important roadways, the Department is planning roadway improvements in Estate Barren Spot, at the entrance to Lagoon Beach and in the vicinity of the Pearl B. Larsen School. These improvements are intended to address existing roadway conditions and provide safer, more reliable access for residents, motorists, and the school community.

Operations and Maintenance

In addition to our major construction projects, our St. Croix Operations team continues to address drainage, roadway maintenance, vegetation management, and other community needs throughout the district.

Recent work includes the completion of gut-clearing activities at Mount Pleasant, Rainbow Beach, East Street and Watergut Shanty, as well as roadway patching on Rest

Road. Current activities include tire collection and removal throughout the island, sidewalk construction near the morgue, clearing of the cemetery, vegetation clearing near the new Arthur Richards School, and patching along Golden Rock Road leading to Harbor View.

The Department is also moving forward with additional clearing and brushing around the perimeter of Grove School and roadway patching along Rattan Road.

Strand Street Public Parking Lot

I am also pleased to share that beginning October 1, the Department will resume normal paid operations at the Christiansted public parking lot.

Parking fees were previously suspended while repairs were underway within the facility and while ongoing construction activity in Christiansted reduced the availability of on-street parking. During that period, DPW maintained free public access to the lot to help accommodate residents, businesses, and visitors to the town.

As we transition back to normal operations, we look forward to continuing to provide convenient public parking in Christiansted while also restoring an important source of revenue that supports the Department's parking operations.

Welcome to St. Croix Signage & Territorial Wayfinding

The Department is also proud of the progress made on the Welcome to St. Croix Sign and landscaping project at the East Airport Road intersection. Completed by Island Designs Landscape & Storm Water Solutions, LLC, the project included a primary gateway sign, two complementary signs, and decorative landscaping designed to enhance one of the island's most heavily traveled gateways and create a more welcoming arrival experience for residents and visitors traveling to and from the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport.

Building on the success of this project, the Department is now working to expand the initiative through additional Welcome and directional signage at strategic locations on St. Croix and St. Thomas. The proposed expansion is intended to improve wayfinding

while creating a more consistent and attractive identity along key transportation corridors throughout the Territory.

PROJECT UPDATES — ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN DISTRICT

The Department has similarly continued an aggressive program of roadway rehabilitation, reconstruction, drainage improvements, and emergency infrastructure repairs throughout the St. Thomas/St. John District.

District Roadway Improvements

Through approximately \$5.5 million in comprehensive roadway task-order packages, the Department has completed targeted pavement improvements throughout St. Thomas and St. John. The work included a combination of direct asphalt overlays, pavement milling, pavement restoration, and thermoplastic safety striping.

On St. Thomas, roadway improvements have been completed in areas including Mafolie, Nicholas Friday Drive, Bakkerø, Skyline Road, Bovoni, Hospital Ground, Coki Point, Sibilly Circle, General Gade, Vester Gade and Silke Gade, Nordisevei Gade—commonly known as Fireburn Hill—and Bluebeard's.

On St. John, improvements have included Enighed Pond Road, Wharf Bypass Road, Vester Gade and Hill Street in Cruz Bay, as well as portions of Centerline Road and Kendall George Drive in Coral Bay.

These task-order packages allow the Department to address multiple priority roadways under a coordinated program rather than treating each roadway as an isolated project.

Meadar Place — Bordeaux Road

The Meadar Place roadway repair project in Bordeaux was initiated following the failure of an existing reinforced concrete wall, which compromised the structural integrity of the roadway and ultimately made the road impassable.

Following the emergency closure, the Department developed an in-house design that allowed the work to proceed through a task order issued to Rumina Construction. The

completed project included construction of a reinforced concrete retaining wall and gabion basket system to stabilize the roadway shoulder, reinforced concrete pavement, repair of a sewer manhole cover, and installation of a guardrail system.

The project has been completed at a final construction cost of approximately \$476,180. The completed improvements restored access to the roadway while providing the structural stabilization necessary to protect the surrounding roadway infrastructure.

FHWA Emergency Repairs Projects - TS Ernesto

After the passage of Tropical Storm Ernesto, along several federal aid routes, a number of sites were identified and submitted to FHWA as damage locations. This month, the Department received FHWA approval of the bid packages for the first two sites, one location for a box culvert replacement in Estate Bonne Resolution on Route 333 and the other location for a retaining wall in Estate Mandahl along Route 42. These two locations will begin the solicitation process during October. We are continuing to work with the FHWA for approval of the design and construction packages for the remaining sites damaged by Tropical Storm Ernesto.

St. Thomas Airport Intersection and Julian Jackson Drive:

The Department continues to advance paving improvements at the St. Thomas Airport intersection and along Julian Jackson Drive, with the current phase of paving expected to be completed this week. However, additional funding will be required to complete the remaining sections of Julian Jackson Drive and bring the roadway improvements to full completion.

Dorothy "Dotsy" Drive – Raphune Hill

Additionally, the Department is preparing to undertake much-needed roadway repairs along Dorothy "Dotsy" Drive, commonly known as Raphune Hill in October. This heavily traveled corridor serves as a critical connection for residents, businesses, and the motoring public on St. Thomas, and addressing its roadway conditions remains a priority for the Department. The planned repairs will focus on improving the condition, safety, and overall reliability of the roadway. As these improvements move forward, the Department will coordinate the work to minimize disruptions to the traveling public while ensuring that the necessary repairs are completed efficiently. We recognize the concerns

expressed by the community regarding the condition of Raphune Hill, and we remain committed to delivering meaningful improvements that provide a safer and more dependable roadway for all who travel this corridor.

Post Office Square Beautification

The Department is also nearing completion of the Post Office Square and Historic Parks Revitalization Project on St. Thomas. A majority of the work has been completed, with the remaining activities now moving toward final completion. The project includes improvements to Post Office Square, Educators Park, and Emancipation Garden, including ADA-compliant pathways, restoration and sealing of historic brick walkways, landscaping improvements, and structural repairs to the Emancipation Garden bandstand.

The current contract with Island Designs Landscape & Storm Water Solutions, LLC is scheduled for completion on December 7, 2026. This project represents an important investment in the preservation and improvement of some of Charlotte Amalie's most visible and historically significant public spaces.

TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN AND FEDERAL HIGHWAY INITIATIVES

While construction continues throughout the Territory, the Department is also planning for the longer-term transportation needs of the Virgin Islands.

2025 GARVEE Roadway Projects

The Department is also advancing the next group of roadway projects to be funded through Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle, or GARVEE, financing.

The proposed St. Croix projects include Sidney Lee Road, also known as North Shore Road or Route 80; Praxedes Nieves Ridge Road, also known as East Scenic Road or Route 78; and South Side Road, Route 62.

Design-build Requests for Proposals have been drafted for these projects. The Department anticipates submitting the packages to the Federal Highway Administration for approval to advertise by November 2026.

These projects represent the next phase of our use of federal highway resources and GARVEE financing to accelerate major roadway improvements that would otherwise be difficult to undertake within the constraints of annual local appropriations.

2050 Transportation Master Plan

The Department's 2050 Transportation Master Plan is intended to provide a comprehensive roadmap for how residents, visitors, and goods move throughout the Territory over the next 25 years.

The planning process began in March 2025 and has included public meetings held in May 2025 and February 2026. The study evaluates anticipated population changes, economic activity, future traffic conditions, transportation alternatives, and emerging clean-energy transportation technologies.

Following review and approval by the project's Executive Committee, the consultant will produce the final recommended 2050 Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan. The Department anticipates making the plan available to the public before the end of the year.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES

Our responsibility for transportation extends beyond roads and bridges. The Department continues to work toward a public transportation system that better connects our communities and responds to the mobility needs of residents throughout the Territory.

USVI Transit Connect

The Division of Transportation has initiated USVI Transit Connect, a comprehensive transit planning study funded through a grant from the Federal Transit Administration.

The study evaluates VITRAN's fixed-route bus system, paratransit services, ferry operations, transit facilities, and supporting infrastructure. Its purpose is to identify opportunities to better align services with passenger needs, improve mobility, and

increase access to employment, essential services, and other key destinations throughout St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John.

Public engagement is an important part of this process. The USVI Transit Connect rider survey remains open through September 30, and feedback received from residents and transit users will help identify service needs and inform the recommendations developed through the study.

The study will also evaluate potential traffic-signal improvements on St. Croix and St. Thomas, including opportunities for improved signal coordination and other transportation-system improvements that can support traffic flow and transit operations.

VITRAN Fleet

The Department continues to make progress in modernizing the VITRAN fleet. Of the 28 medium-duty and paratransit vehicles ordered, 21 have been received and placed into service throughout the Territory. The remaining seven vehicles are expected in late 2027.

While the addition of these vehicles has strengthened the fleet, availability and reliability remain operational challenges. VITRAN continues to manage older buses that remain in service, ongoing maintenance requirements, parts availability, and procurement timelines while working to maintain dependable service for the traveling public.

Saturday Fixed-Route Service

The Department has developed plans to implement Saturday fixed-route bus service throughout the Territory.

The initial service model proposes operations from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. Final route schedules and service levels must account for ridership demand, destinations, available fleet, operator staffing, overtime and other operating costs.

Our goal is not simply to add another day of service on paper. Saturday service must be reliable and sustainable once implemented. The Department is therefore evaluating

the resources necessary to expand service while managing staffing requirements and employee fatigue.

St. Croix–St. Thomas Ferry

The procurement and development of the St. Thomas–St. Croix ferry vessel continues to advance through the detailed design and engineering phase.

Incat Crowther is developing the vessel's plans and technical specifications. Work underway includes the vessel's initial general arrangement, watertight integrity and tank capacity plans, cargo securing arrangements, electrical systems, fire main, wastewater and potable-water systems, fuel system, stern-ramp arrangements, and other critical engineering components. Completion of this work will allow the project to advance toward the subsequent procurement, construction, and delivery phases.

The St. Thomas–St. Croix ferry remains an important component of the Department's broader effort to improve inter-island and inter-district connectivity and expand transportation options for Virgin Islands residents.

Water Island Ferry

The Department was also awarded \$2.5 million through the Federal Transit Administration's Passenger Ferry Grant Program to support acquisition of a new passenger ferry vessel serving Water Island.

This investment will support our continued efforts to improve the reliability and availability of marine transportation for Water Island residents and visitors.

St. Croix VITRAN Operations Facility

On St. Croix, work also continues on the VITRAN Operations Facility, a \$10.24 million investment in a modern maintenance and fleet-operations complex. Phase I is substantially complete, with Phase II advancing to complete the facility.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

Although transportation infrastructure represents a significant portion of the Department's work, DPW also continues to manage capital projects that support other essential government services and public facilities.

Head Start Facilities

Construction of four Head Start facilities has been successfully completed: the Anna's Hope and Concordia Head Start facilities on St. Croix and the Lindbergh Bay and Dilsa Capdeville Head Start facilities on St. Thomas.

The projects included new classrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, support areas, and dedicated playground spaces. Major construction activities are complete, and the facilities are ready to support the daily operations of the Head Start program.

Enid Baa Public Library

Renovations at the Enid Baa Public Library on St. Thomas are approaching substantial completion.

The elevator installation has been completed, along with brick pavers along the walkways, cabinetry, and bathroom stalls. The project has entered its final phase, with punch-list and remaining finishing work underway. Completion is currently scheduled for November 2026.

Sion Farm Mansion

Repair and restoration work also continues at the historic Sion Farm Mansion on St. Croix.

The entrance retaining wall has been reconstructed, and roof repair and restoration work has been completed. Current activities are focused on interior and exterior finishing work, including painting, floor restoration, and fabrication and installation of hurricane shutters.

The project remains active and is advancing toward completion in November 2026.

OPERATIONAL AND TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES

The progress I have outlined today does not mean that the Department is without challenges. Our responsibility is not only to identify those challenges, but to make the operational decisions necessary to address them while continuing to provide services to the public.

Within VITRAN, staffing and fleet availability remain two of our most significant constraints. Shortages among bus operators and maintenance personnel have affected our ability to expand routes and services. At the same time, the Department must maintain an adequate number of fixed-route and paratransit vehicles while managing older buses, maintenance requirements, parts availability, and procurement timelines.

Demand for VITRAN Plus paratransit service has also increased. That growth places additional mileage on vehicles and creates additional demands on operators, dispatchers, scheduling personnel, and overtime resources.

These challenges are particularly relevant as we consider service expansion. Adding Saturday service, for example, requires more than having buses available. It requires sufficient operators, supervisors, maintenance personnel, and operating resources to provide dependable service without compromising employee safety or creating unsustainable fatigue.

The Department will continue to balance the public's need for expanded transportation options with the personnel, fleet, and financial resources necessary to provide those services safely and reliably.

WORKFORCE

Staffing remains a broader challenge throughout the Department. DPW continues to experience vacancies in critical operational and technical positions, including transit personnel, mechanics, equipment operators, engineers, project managers, and general maintenance personnel.

These vacancies have a direct effect on service delivery. They affect how quickly equipment can be repaired, how many buses can be placed into service, how frequently road and drainage maintenance can be performed, and the number of active construction projects that can be effectively managed at one time.

Recruitment and retention therefore remain operational priorities for the Department. As our capital program grows and transportation services expand, our ability to recruit, develop, and retain qualified personnel must grow with them.

The Department remains committed to strengthening its workforce while making the best possible use of the personnel and resources currently available.

TRAFFIC SAFETY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND PUBLIC RIGHTS-OF-WAY

Traffic safety and accessibility remain integral components of the Department's transportation program. Our roadway projects incorporate improvements such as pavement markings, signage, guardrails, drainage, sidewalks, and other safety features as appropriate to the individual corridor and project scope.

The USVI Transit Connect study will also evaluate potential traffic-signal improvements on St. Croix and St. Thomas, including opportunities to improve traffic flow and transit operations through enhanced signal coordination.

Addelita Cancryn Pedestrian Crossing

In August, the Department successfully completed the removal of the pedestrian bridge at the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School. The operation required careful planning and coordination to safely remove the structure while minimizing impacts to the surrounding roadway and community.

I want to thank the DPW team, our contractors, law enforcement, our government partners, and everyone who assisted with the planning, traffic control, public notification, and execution of the removal. The success of that operation was the result of a coordinated effort by everyone involved.

With the bridge now removed, the Department's focus has shifted to establishing a safe and accessible permanent pedestrian crossing at this location. The Department recognizes the importance of establishing a safe and accessible pedestrian crossing at the former pedestrian bridge location and will continue to coordinate the necessary planning, design, and implementation activities.

ROADWAY MAINTENANCE, EXCAVATION PERMITS, AND ROADSIDE CONDITIONS

In addition to major construction projects, the Department's Operations teams remain responsible for the day-to-day work necessary to maintain the Territory's roadway network. This includes pothole repairs, drainage cleaning, vegetation management, debris removal, and response to emergency roadway hazards.

Coordination of roadway excavation is particularly important as the Department continues to invest in resurfacing and reconstruction. Our objective is to reduce unnecessary disturbance of newly improved roadways and ensure that permitted utility work is properly restored.

GASVAERKS GADE

The Department completed the reconstruction of a segment of Gasvaerks Gade during the last two weeks of August. The work included the installation of a trench drain, culvert pipe and resurfacing of the asphalt roadway. This roadway work became necessary due to a neighboring property owner's discharge of water onto the public roadway for the past seven months.

PROCUREMENT, CONTRACT MANAGEMENT, AND FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Effective project delivery also depends on sound contract administration and timely financial management. As the Department's construction portfolio continues to grow, DPW must ensure that project expenditures, contractor performance, change orders, payments, and available federal and local funding are actively monitored.

The Department continues to strengthen its procurement and contract-management controls to promote accountability, transparency, and fair competition.

In September, I issued a Department-wide policy memorandum reinforcing DPW's procurement and compliance requirements. Through the Office of Procurement, Contract Management and Reporting (OPCMR), we are strengthening procurement planning and oversight and reinforcing the use of GVIBUY and competitive procurement processes to ensure that procurement actions are properly authorized, documented, and provide qualified vendors a fair opportunity to compete.

We are also placing greater emphasis on contract management after award. Work beyond the approved scope or value of a contract must receive the appropriate authorization before proceeding, and I have specifically advised our project teams that requests for additional contract time will not be approved simply because additional time is requested. Time extensions must be supported by sufficient justification explaining the cause of the delay, the additional time required, and the basis for that request.

The objective is greater accountability throughout the life of the contract—from procurement and award through project delivery and closeout—and better management of the public resources entrusted to the Department.

With respect to vendor participation, DPW remains committed to providing qualified local, small, and disadvantaged businesses a fair opportunity to compete for Department work while continuing to identify and address barriers that may unnecessarily limit participation.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SECTION 9 OF ACT NO. 9100

The Department is actively working to incorporate the requirements of Section 9 of Act No. 9100 into a broader update of DPW's advertising policies and procedures.

This effort is intended to modernize the Department's existing advertising framework and establish clearer procedures governing commercial and non-commercial advertising within areas under DPW's jurisdiction. The revised framework is being developed to

address application and approval procedures, applicable fees, placement requirements, roadway and public-safety considerations, removal requirements, enforcement, and the responsibilities of persons or organizations placing advertising devices.

Although the comprehensive policy update has not yet been finalized, the Department continues to administer and enforce advertising requirements under its existing authority while the revised framework is completed. This includes addressing temporary signage placed within public rights-of-way and requiring timely removal of signs when the authorized purpose or display period has ended.

The Department recognizes that implementation must be accompanied by clear public guidance. Accordingly, completion of the revised policy will also include updated procedures and public-facing information so that residents, businesses, organizations, and other applicants understand where advertising may be placed, what approvals are required, applicable fees, removal requirements, and the consequences of noncompliance.

Our objective is to establish a program that is clear, consistently administered, and responsive to the requirements of Act No. 9100 while protecting roadway safety and the public right-of-way.

CONCLUSION

The projects and initiatives discussed today reflect both the breadth of the Department's responsibilities and the amount of work occurring across our Territory.

As always, I want to close by first thanking the men and women who serve in the Department of Public Works. I cannot thank you enough for your commitment to serving our community. I recognize that our work is often difficult and sometimes thankless, but your efforts are visible in every road repaired, every drainage system cleared, every bus placed into service, and every project moved forward.

To the public, thank you for your patience, trust, and understanding. We recognize that closed roads, detours, construction activity, changing traffic patterns, and interruptions

to normal routines can be frustrating. However, these temporary inconveniences are often necessary to achieve lasting improvements to our infrastructure. I also want to thank the contractors and vendors who work alongside the Department to deliver these projects and services. We appreciate your continued partnership, including your responsiveness to last-minute needs and your patience when payments have not moved as quickly as any of us would like.

The Department of Public Works remains committed to improving the quality of life for residents and visitors through safer roads, stronger infrastructure, more reliable public transportation, and improved connectivity throughout the Virgin Islands.

Challenges remain. Staffing limitations, aging equipment, aging public infrastructure, maintenance demands, procurement timelines, and the complexity of delivering federally funded infrastructure projects will continue to require our attention. But those challenges do not diminish the progress occurring throughout the Territory, nor do they lessen our responsibility to continue that progress.

We will continue working with this Legislature, our federal partners, sister agencies, contractors, and the community to move projects forward, strengthen our transportation system, and make responsible use of the resources entrusted to the Department.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My team and I remain available and are prepared to answer any questions the Committee may have.

DPW

DPW on the Move!