

First-Hand Look

The new administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has now had a first-hand look at the St. Thomas airport situation, and we trust this will help him in appreciating the seriousness of the problem here, and the need for a speedy solution.

It is always difficult to step into a new post and be immediately confronted with a wide host of critical decisions, and we are sure this is particularly true at the FAA. The increasing importance of air travel, the rapid changes in aircraft types plus the constraints on federal spending have all combined to put pressure on the FAA's recommendations concerning federal aid for airport development.

Fortunately, there has been substantial study over the years of the St. Thomas airport situation and the various proposed remedies, and we were heartened to hear that the new administrator will be reviewing these studies. It seems here that the quantity of studies and number of public hearings on the subject will be of genuine assistance to him, in assessing the situation and coming to a decision on the upgrading of Harry S Truman Airport.

After many years of discussion, the Governor, Legislature and majority of the community are now behind one plan for

improving safety conditions at Truman and enabling larger jets to make direct flights from the mainland to St. Thomas. The recent FAA environmental impact study demonstrates the need and benefits from this plan, and it in particular should provide valuable help to that agency's new chief.

While the majority of people understand the need for upgrading the St. Thomas airport, there are still a few who maintain that all the islands can successfully be served by St. Croix's Alexander Hamilton Airport, with direct flights from the mainland landing there and small planes providing shuttle services to St. Thomas. On paper, this idea has some plausibility, the only trouble is that the airlines have stated they will not go along with it. They know that more than twice as many passengers have St. Thomas as their destination than St. Croix, and they have frequently pointed out that if they were to stop coming into the Virgin Islands then San Juan would be the logical base for any shuttle operation. Such a development could only hurt all three Virgin Islands.

We trust that the FAA administrator's first-hand inspection and review of the well-documented case for needed improvements at Truman will lead to progress in this area in the near future.