

## The Embargo of Vieques is Committed to Writing

The residents of Vieques have been fighting for decades to gain sufficient ferry service to allow us necessary access to medical services, government services, and commerce. While both HMS (winner of contract) and PRFF (2<sup>nd</sup> place) are capable of providing excellent service; capacity, schedules, and fares are still under the control of the ATM, who has historically and systematically withheld these services to the islands.

The newest and best boats (Isla Bonita and Cayo Largo) have been rotting and rusting tied to the docks in Ceiba for over a year instead of being utilized or sent to USCG required maintenance in the States - as the ATM fallaciously stated months ago they had done. They have continued choking the economy of Vieques through the constrained capacity of cargo service and caused a much higher mortality rate among our population for medical outcomes due to the lack of reliable transportation. It is criminal.

The new contract dated 27 Oct 20 (<https://aafaf.pr.gov/p3/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/OM-Agreement-Execution-Version-Nov-5.pdf>) defines the obligations of the P3 operator and the responsibilities of the ATM. The minimum requirements for service (page B-2 of contract) are:

Phase 1 (first 3 years):

- 4 trips of a large combination cargo/passenger boat per day – 28 trips/week
- 1 trip of a small combination automobile/passenger boat per weekday – 5 trips/week

Phase 2 (after the first 3 years):

- 2 trips of a large combination cargo/passenger boat per day – 14 trips/week
- 1 trip of a small combination automobile/passenger boat per weekday – 5 trips/week

Historically Scheduled:

- 2000's - 2010: 15 Cargo and 14 - 21 passenger trips per week
- 2011 – 2013: 43 ATM cargo/passenger trips/week;  
15 small combo automobile/passenger trips/week

So now, the minimum service is actually being cut back (to below the levels of the early 2000's) rather than expanded under the terms of the contract. Furthermore, despite the fact that Vieques has 5 times the population of Culebra, Vieques will receive only 1.5 times the cargo service of Culebra. It is criminal. It is forcing many to leave the island.

I am totally in favor of the partial privatization of the ferry system, but the P3 program is being used to the sole benefit of the government to do whatever they want. The original Desirability & Convenience Study was a fraudulent travesty. The refusal to make the RFP public is a contrivance of Omar Marrero, as was the denial to stakeholders of the ability to be part of the process through public hearings or other methods or activities. Even the boats are all different and do not serve their purpose well. We fear the new boats expected to come online in phase 2 will be specified as incompetently by the ATM as previous vessels. With this contract we are locked in for 23 years under terms that are not consistent with our desperate needs.

The embargo of Vieques continues.