

Dear Sr. Maldonado,

As the people of Vieques and Culebra suffer through the pains of transition, the residents are furious with the conditions, and the ATM seems helpless to speed the process. The public is kept in the dark, accustomed to dealing with a self-serving organization, and is interacting with the ATM accordingly. We need to change....

PARTNERS IN FERRY SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

For decades the ATM and the island communities of Vieques and Culebra have been at odds over the quality and quantity of the government ferry service. Basically, the ATM has created a transportation company pretty much as it unilaterally saw fit. The communities have been in a constant state of frustration and anger due to the lack of meaningful input afforded them in both the design and operation of the service. This has led to an antagonistic adversarial relationship that has accomplished next to nothing positive for either entity. We need to change our attitudes, orientations, and manners of dealing with one another. We need to become partners.

As you mentioned in our community meeting, we need better and regular communication. Trust in ATM management by the residents is nonexistent because of the historical performance of previous leaders who:

- Promised changes and failed to deliver them;
- Refused to implement a reliable method of real time information dissemination regarding operational aspects effecting customers;
- Lied about existing conditions and planned improvements; and
- Placed politics and employee conveniences above customer needs.

Unfortunately for our part, Vieques has never spoken with one voice, and that has led to confusion, contradiction, disrespect, and anger driven demands, which has caused authorities to disregard citizen input. ATM management simply implements their plans, and the communities then react. This generates a cycle of lose-lose rather than a win-win solutions.

HOW TO BECOME PARTNERS

As stated, the root of the problem is that the public is not included in the formative stages of the creation of the transportation solution, and the result is an operation that responds to the ATM goals but not the customers'. **We all need to work together to make the ferry service the best that it can be**, and in order to accomplish that, we must:

1. Establish regular and reliable communications;
2. Understand the needs, constraints, and desires of one another; and
3. Develop ground rules and methods of working together.

You unquestionably represent the ATM, but who represents Vieques interests and positions? The initial answer is the mayor; however, historically, it has not always worked out that way. Legally, things go through the mayor and the Municipal Legislature, but this is only required for official approvals. Often local officials don't participate in meetings with Central Government entities, and even when they do, they don't necessarily communicate with their constituents. While this isn't the way it should be, it is what it is. Similarly unproductive are the lengthy,

redundant town meetings that turn into bitch sessions and verbal assaults. Given this reality, I would propose the following arrangement to enable solutions that will reduce the politics and serve the needs of the ATM, island communities, tourists, and the Governor.

First, informal working committees, charged with becoming the liaisons between their respective communities and you, should be formed in Vieques and Culebra. The members would have no authority to act on the behalf of any entity in a legal or official sense but would be conduits for the organized exchange of information and ideas that come from both the communities and the ATM. A couple of members of each island would meet regularly with you to discuss plans, problems, and solutions. The committees would communicate extensively within their own communities to educate, inform, and collect and consolidate opinions, complaints, and suggestions.

Second, to help clarify the needs of each community and the ATM, each entity should present its goals, constraints, and limitations. These are **not intended as negotiations or demands** in any way, but rather a means to help define the whole problem that is required to be solved. The relative importance and/or priority of each point should be assigned as well. Once identified and thoroughly defined, the group (collectively and individually) can move to offer solutions for mutual consideration.

Third, regular means of communication among the participants need to be formalized. The working relationship with you must be defined so that communications will flow quickly through your preferred channel, and that limits of confidentiality, sensitivity, and timing are prescribed and observed.

The following list includes some of the primary goals of each entity with the understanding that Ceiba has permanently replaced Fajardo and that Mosquito Pier has replaced Isabelle Segunda for cargo (and is intended to replace it for passengers as well soon):

VIEQUES GOALS

This list includes the concerns of different groups which have conflicting desired outcomes. Clearly compromises must be made, but an accurate picture requires this more complete list.

1. Adequate capacity is provided for both cargo and passengers.
2. The schedule of trips provides sufficient space available for passage and convenience to all users including residents, businesses (both from Isla Grande and Vieques), and visitors going both directions.
3. Quick and efficient transition is established from arrival and embarkation through disembarkation and departure from the ports.
4. Nearby, economical, secure parking at all ports is available.
5. Clean, weather protected, and easy to use facilities for all functions at the ports - from parking, to sidewalks, to rest rooms – are constructed.
6. Quick, respectful, and convenient ticket purchasing online and in person is the norm.
7. Information transfer: customers are kept notified of any and all changes to the schedules.
8. Customer assistance procedures are integrated into all areas from giving directions to helping loading, etc.

9. Adequate, convenient, and economical transportation options procedures are implemented at all ports.

Other Stakeholders (who may be the same as many of the customers...) are pleading to:

10. Minimize the secure area to allow traditional users of Mosquito Pier to continue their activities.
11. Eliminate proposed use of the passenger pier to allow continued SCUBA and snorkeling in the surrounding waters and to protect the valuable sea life that will be endangered with the operation of the ferry.
12. Keep the passenger ferry operating out of Isabell II permanently.

CULEBRA GOALS

My guess is that they are generically the same as Vieques.

ATM GOALS

From the recent RFQ one can deduce some of the ATM goals and limitations:

1. Reduce the subsidies required to operate the service.
2. Reduce the flak and constant annoyance to the Governor of the never-ending distractions from Vieques and Culebra regarding the inadequate and incompetent ferry operation.
3. Establish a PPP to operate the ferry.
4. Operate all combination cargo and passenger boats to Vieques to reduce crew, fuel, and other related costs.

ACTION

I can put together a small cadre of English and Spanish speaking residents that represent community interests in Vieques, and I can recruit the same on Culebra. Is this of any interest to you? If so, what are your thoughts?

We've got to change the cycle of mutual abuse and make lemonade out of the lemons. Time is of the essence as the crowd gets restless. Thank you very much for your consideration.