



## Highlights from the RVA757 Connects board meeting: Governor Youngkin addresses board

The board of RVA757 Connects and the Megaregion Institutional Council met to discuss key initiatives and to receive updates on the organization's effort to drive the future of the Richmond and Hampton Roads regions.

The updates included the progress being made on the Global Internet Hub initiative and the Interstate 64 Gap Project.

Theodore L. Chandler Jr., the co-chair of RVA757 Connects, said movement is taking place on those two initiatives, noting both are at key mileposts.

Also during the March 29 meeting, the board and council members heard from Governor Glenn Youngkin, who applauded RVA757 Connects for its efforts to push to increase connections and collaboration in the two regions. He spoke to and answered questions from the board for about 40 minutes.

"It is all about your foundational principles of increasing collaboration ... and making sure that we're innovating," Youngkin told board members.

"RVA757 Connects' foundational principles literally overlap with our ambitions for Virginia in such extraordinary ways. That's why I'm excited to be with this group," he said during the virtual meeting.

"Thank you for the work that this group does," he said. "Thank you for committing yourselves to thinking about the future and bringing leaders from industry, education, and the world of development together to strategically plan and set out a real vision about where we can go as opposed to just letting things happen."

The governor said he looks forward to continuing to partner with RVA757 Connects to foster growth.

"At the end of the day, this is about growing. And Virginia has not had the kind of growth that we need. This is a great opportunity for us to just fundamentally accelerate the growth in Virginia's future and bring forward all the things we know that will make Virginia the best place to live, work, and raise a family."

The governor also discussed other key business and economic development issues including to:

- **Support the need in the upcoming state budget to fund the 29-mile stretch of Interstate 64 between Richmond and Williamsburg that is still two lanes and widen those lanes to three in each direction.**



The Virginia Senate’s budget proposal calls for \$190 million in funding toward the project. The House’s plan calls for \$50 million. The General Assembly is slated to return on April 4 to start hammering out budget details.

“We’ve still got work to do on 64,” the governor said. “There’s money in the budget – in the House and the Senate versions – that will end up being money there. It’s not enough. We’ve got to go find more funds in order to make sure that we get I-64 finished all the way to Richmond.”

Virginia, he said, needs to take full advantage of funds available through the federal government’s bipartisan infrastructure bill that was approved last year.

“Infrastructure improvements like those on I-64 are important,” Youngkin said.

“I grew up in Hampton Roads and sat on many a bridge and many a tunnel for a lot of my life,” he said.

Youngkin urged board members and others to call their representatives in the General Assembly to encourage them to fund adding a third lane on the 29 miles of I-64.

- **Push forward on creating a strategic plan to make the I-64 Innovation Corridor the next Global Internet Hub.**

“It is a great, great topic and one that we need to race towards,” the governor said.

Youngkin said a “cohesive plan is something that we should get folks focused on. It exists in elements; we should pull it all together in one place.”

The governor said he would seek to designate someone in his administration to help RVA757 Connects push forward to make the Richmond-Hampton Roads megaregion a Global Internet Hub.

The I-64 Innovation Corridor has many of the digital infrastructure assets needed to become the next Global Internet Hub, including the fastest deep-sea cables in the world that come ashore in Virginia Beach and the fourth largest internet data integration facility in the world located in Henrico County.

Creating a Global Internet Hub is a top priority for RVA757 Connects. The organization is in the process of creating a strategic plan to make the I-64 Innovation Corridor the next hub.

“Having the megaregion as a Global Internet Hub also would attract data centers to Virginia,” the governor said.

“Virginia has been the leader when it comes to data center build out and data center build out ends up being foundational to being an internet hub,” Youngkin said.



“We've got to continue to compete. We've got to recognize that Maryland and North Carolina particularly are starting to figure out that data centers are important,” he said.

“It's not singularly about data center business. It is about all the things that come with it,” Youngkin said, noting it could be anything from software development to application infrastructure.

Tom Frantz, RVA757 Connects' co-chair, ended the meeting with an impassioned reminder that “this organization makes things happen by convening, connecting, and collaborating to drive economic growth and improve the quality of life for the Richmond and Hampton Roads regions.”