



Board and MIC Member Input on RVA757 Connects' Strategic Direction

RVA757 Connects is off to a great start in 2021. As a working collaborative, we value the input and guidance provided by our Board of Trustees and the Megaregion Institutional Council (MIC) in setting our organization's strategic direction and annual scope of work.

To that end, this document presents the strategic input generated from the RVA757 Connects Board and MIC meeting held on January 27, 2021, as well as feedback from the meeting's follow-up survey.

The Board/MIC meeting was attended by 47 participants: 34 trustees, 10 MIC members, and three invited guests. Nine breakout sessions were held and moderated by Executive Committee members, who reported highlights of the discussion.

The Board/MIC Meeting follow-up survey was distributed to all 47 meeting attendees. Twenty-five (25) people participated in the survey (a 53% response rate) — six MIC members, 18 trustees, and one person who serves in both capacities.

The first two pages of this document capture the overall strategic input for 2021 and the eight main insights that are now informing our work. The supporting data is inventoried in the Appendix of this document, beginning on page three.

Insights Informing Our Work:

- **January 27 Meeting Satisfaction:** Overall, 8 in 10 attendees were satisfied with the January 27 meeting — an 81% satisfaction rate. The breakout sessions were particularly well-liked, and attendees provided several suggestions to improve the design and timing of our next meetings.
- **Organizational Structure:** Everyone supports RVA757 Connects' organizational structure of having a Board of Trustees and a separate Megaregion Institutional Council (MIC).
- **Board and MIC Recruitment:** There is strong support for the Board's recruitment strategy to fill the remaining board seats with diverse trustees who will represent a new generation of leaders. The survey participants provided a list of 27 additional organizations to consider for the MIC and 37 prospective Board members to consider. (Thank you!) Several suggestions related to Board and MIC Recruitment were offered, including:
 - Use the Board's diversity and mentorship of the next generation as a way to define us and our megaregion.
 - Consider adding "naysayers."

- **Positioning:** The proposed “I-64 Innovation Corridor” positioning for our megaregion received unanimous support, marking great enthusiasm for this direction.
- **Priority Focus Areas:** RVA757 Connects’ focus area priorities are supported by both the Board and MIC members:
 - a. Short-term
 - Run our 501(c)3.
 - Advance the “Innovation Corridor” positioning.
 - Implement the GO Virginia Talent Pipeline Study.
 - Showcase and support our members’ initiatives — offshore wind.
 - Accelerate the understanding of digital connections.
 - Increase R&D collaboration.
 - Create a legislative agenda and build relationships with the RVA757 joint caucus.
 - b. Long-term
 - Support the completion of the Virginia Capital Trail.
 - Remove barriers to increase passenger rail service.
 - Advocate for I-64 widening (29-mile gap from RIC to Williamsburg).
- **Additional Considerations Related to Priority Focus Areas:**
 - Lean into diversity and inclusion as a differentiator for our organization and cause.
 - Advance all focus area priorities with an equitable and inclusive lens.
 - Get ready for new Administration’s capital projects.
 - Include energy supply/water/natural gas to our priority areas.
 - Monitor and share the impact of COVID on future talent and business development.
- **Key Concerns Based on the January 27 Breakout Sessions:**
 - Financial sustainability and attaining ongoing funding from multiple sources
 - Demonstrating practical results when focused on big infrastructure projects
 - Being clear about what can and cannot happen
 - Addressing inevitable tensions between what may be locally advantageous versus regionally beneficial
 - Doubts regarding whether RVA is fully invested in the megaregion concept
 - Confusion around the mission, with some calling for increased marketing to tell the story of our megaregion nationally (this is not our mission, nor do we have the funds to do so)
 - Large size of the Board and MIC potentially limiting agility, complicating communication, and watering down ideas, making them mundane and middle-of-the-road
 - Lack of in-person gatherings due to COVID potentially hindering buy-in and team building
 - More thought potentially needed regarding how fast we expand the I-64 corridor to avoid becoming too unwieldy and ineffective
- **Member and MIC Engagement:** Board and MIC member engagement is high. All post-event survey participants, both Board and MIC members, indicated their personal interest in supporting directly at least one of RVA757 Connects’ priority areas. In addition, some participants offered personal testimonials on the promise of RVA757 Connects.

APPENDIX

The Appendix contains comments from the January 27 breakout sessions and highlights from the January 27, 2021 post-meeting survey.

January 27 Breakout Session Input:

The January 27 Board/MIC meeting was attended by 47 participants: 34 trustees, 10 MIC members, and three invited guests. Nine Breakout Sessions were held and moderated by Executive Committee members, who reported highlights of the discussion. Key highlights include:

Strengths (Internal):

- Robust group of leaders – leadership has had the vision and organization to bring together all these leaders, with room for expansion
- Truly forward-thinking
- Innovative structure – especially partnerships with third-party groups who have deep experience in the community
- Large size of the Board/MIC allows for greater depth of reach
- Board/MIC blending brings together key megaregion governmental and philanthropic institutions, including some of the top “movers and shakers”
- Enthusiasm of the Board
- The fact that institutions of higher education are willing to work together
- Willingness to recruit and engage younger generations
- Inclusive mix of people (MIC/Board), diverse, and rounded out to nurture the leaders of tomorrow
- The priorities and structure of the organization support the success of others without threat
- The organization augments the work of others rather than usurps them
- Regional commitment
- Assets/products
- Infrastructure (roads, water/port, rail, transportation, digital/tech, airport)
- Government (local EDOs are funded better than other states)
- Regional EC efforts supported
- Agreement around investment, research, and innovation
- Transformative ongoing and emerging projects to advance (offshore wind, Jefferson Labs, pharmaceutical engineering cluster)

Weaknesses (Internal):

- Financial sustainability – attaining ongoing funding from multiple sources
- Our priorities will take time to accomplish – demonstrating near-term successes will be hard
- Being clear about what cannot happen
- Addressing inevitable tensions between what may be locally advantageous versus regionally beneficial
- Doubts whether RVA is fully invested in the megaregion concept
- The task at hand, as coordination and collaboration are always difficult
- Recruiting for diversity and next generation leaders is challenging

- Commitment may be unequal region to region, and the overall commitment to regional collaboration is at question
- Not all regions are represented equally (Williamsburg/Peninsula), though the desire to be represented is present
- Governments could work together more effectively
- Resources are inadequate to tell the story, and brand definition is unclear
- We need greater buy-in from internal stakeholders
- Large size of Board/MIC may limit agility, complicate communication, and water-down ideas, making them mundane and middle-of-the-road
- COVID makes in-person gatherings impossible, making buy-in and team building difficult
- Our work seems very top-down and elitist – need to popularize our initiatives
- Leadership transition
- Financial and leadership sustainability needs to be established
- MIC needs to identify and mentor its successors to pass on organizational knowledge
- Concerns of RVA looking north to I-95 Innovation Corridor
- Need to expand with intention – avoid I-64 expansion growing too fast and become unwieldy

Opportunities (External):

- Combining our workforces – 1.5 million individuals – which has the potential to increase in size with upskilling and post-COVID unemployment declining
- Redesigning communities to become more equitable
- Leveraging Williamsburg’s location as a potential unifier
- Marketing the region’s quality of life
- Celebrating our great universities
- Growing from COVID – the pandemic has brought us together to reimagine a different place
- Advancing land use – with post-COVID living/working priorities shifting and much developable acreage between our urban centers, there is great opportunity to focus on mega sites as well as smaller sites
- Appreciating that New Kent development would spur I-64 widening of the 29-mile gap
 - There are 195 potential mega sites east of I-95 available to transform our region
- Obtaining Biden Administration funding – this may become available for clean energy opportunities
 - New funding could support offshore wind, I-64 widening, and Rail EIS
- Capturing our share of positive rail changes that are coming – need for Tier 2 study
- Better integrating our megaregion’s airport system
- Advancing our advantages in lower cost of living, taxes, and affordability of real estate
- Including Wallops Island as part of our megaregion
- Seizing manufacturing opportunities
- Creating statewide awareness of RVA757 that can unlock value and accelerate growth
- Aligning universities and community colleges around future workforce development needs
- Using I-64 as a way to unify the area rather than creating division and competition
- Realizing the potential of the “Great Migration” out of large cities thanks to COVID and the promise of remote work
- Realizing the full promise of ultra-high speed and capacity cables landing at VA Beach
- Establishing a committee that can work with legislators

- Supporting the maritime industry in expanding talent pathways and job growth, especially with offshore wind coming
- Leveraging RVA's pharmaceutical and biotech growth opportunities
- Showcasing the megaregion's diversity – a variety of assets, natural resources, urban/rural areas, and educational systems
- Expanding technological developments, data cables, high-speed data capacity, offshore wind, Port of Virginia, and Jefferson Labs
- Building awareness of RVA757 so everyone can associate where and who we are: "I-64 Innovation Corridor – The Capital to the Coast"

Threats (External):

- Identifying early win-wins
- Developing a framework for involving governmental and political stakeholders, as well as gaining support for cross-region mission
- Identifying issues where there can be both state and federal support
- Maintaining interregional cooperation
- Building relationships – jurisdictions aren't familiar enough with one another to identify and communicate with their regional counterparts
- Building bridges: colleges and universities are still siloed and very resistant to change – silos need to be broken down and addressed to create collaboration and culture
- Addressing work force development – there's no standardized method to address career and technical education
- Advancing public health school across the megaregion
- Driving culture – the mindset of business culture in Hampton Roads needs to be shifted to a place where employees can live and raise a family (Nashville is a prime example of an area that showcases its kinship and pride)
- Building awareness and pride in our megaregion
- Funding for startups to attract entrepreneurial talent
- Addressing attrition – Virginia Beach in particular doesn't have a dynamic job market, so half of college graduates leave the state
- Realizing and addressing the lack of R&D and research
- Addressing things like arenas – we need "public furniture" to draw professional sports teams and develop regional pride
- Addressing water supply – consider this as a future priority, as it enables development and growth, and we don't have as much well-placed fresh water as most would assume
- Addressing the lack of energy supply/natural gas that can threaten regional growth
- Monitoring and responding to political risks:
 - Right-to-Work actions by General Assembly may erode Virginia's #1 business-friendly status
 - Our initiatives are vulnerable to Federal spending changes and the potential impact of an unanticipated macroeconomic shock/financial crisis
- Understanding the competition from other megaregions like the GWP and Research Triangle, who have a head start on us
 - The relevance of megaregions in a post-COVID world
- Understanding how COVID will impact working and location selection
- Understanding climate change and sea level rise
- Realizing multimodal transportation constraints

Comments on the List of Priorities Provided:

- Broadband: Our fiber superhighway under I-64 is the infrastructure of innovation, which is a huge branding opportunity – we literally own the most robust East Coast "Digital Highway."
- Passenger Rail: More passenger rail is attractive, but this seems a longer-term priority than autonomous vehicular policy on I-64.
- Virginia Capital Trail: This is important and consistent with our region's brand of participatory sport (contrasted with spectator sport) and quality of life.
 - Lessons from the Atlanta Beltline model?
- R&D Collaboration: Find where it is happening and applaud it; find where it is not happening, but should be, and inspire it.
- Talent Pipeline: This is critically important, as all economic development turns on talent.
- Offshore Wind: This is a huge investment.
 - Large components (turbines and blades) need to be made in waterside facilities and shipped to installation by barge (over water) rather than rail/road, which is a great opportunity for VA waterway locales.
- Legislative Agenda: Make this a priority. Get two legislative groups together and brought up to speed.
- Innovation and Technology: Focus on Maritime Industry, Wind Energy (757), and Subsea Cables/data analytics (RVA).
- I-64 Gap: Consider evacuation/emergency management issues to help increase possibility of I-64 widening.

Comments on What's Missing from Our Priority List:

- Add diversity and inclusion as an initiative or priority that should be added and supported to distinguish us from other corridors.
 - Demonstrate how RVA757 Connects built a coalition of diverse people from all backgrounds and walks of life to create a megaregion for all people to feel welcome.
 - Embrace a focused approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion that sets our megaregion as a national example of how to create an inclusive community for all.
 - Bring together young diverse leadership early on to mentor the next generation of leadership so they may continue the work and advance the mission.
- Spend time on culture within the corridor to attract and retain business and improve quality of life and education.
- Consider high performance computing that can tie together Jefferson Labs, undersea cables, Henrico data centers, higher education, etc.
- Focus on all clean energy options, not just gas and wind.
- Market our story with the "why" and publicly advertising our vision, collaboration, and desire to get on the map.
- Make sure a talent/workforce development-related priority comes out of the GO Virginia Talent Pipeline Study.
 - Advance the digital workforce and develop innovative credentialing programs.
 - Develop a K-12 public/private organization that can support innovative teaching and programs.

January 27 Follow-up Survey - Key Findings:

The Board/MIC Meeting follow-up survey was sent to all 47 meeting attendees. Twenty-five (25) people participated in the survey (53% response rate) — six MIC members, 18 trustees, and one person who serves in both capacities.

Most questions were asked on a 5-point scale with anchor statements for the “1” rating (lowest) and “5” rating (highest). The findings are reported on a “top two box rating,” combining the “4”s and “5”s.

The survey highlights include:

Meeting Satisfaction: Overall, 8 in 10 attendees are satisfied with the January 27 meeting – an 81% satisfaction rate. Satisfaction with different aspects of the meeting are as follows:

- Time of meeting: 96% satisfaction
- Length of meeting: 88% satisfaction
- Meeting content: 83% satisfaction
- Meeting with Board and Megaregion Institutional Council together: 88% satisfaction
- Breakout sessions: 100% satisfaction rate

Suggestions for Future Meetings: There were several suggestions for improvements for future meetings:

- Devote more time for breakout sessions.
- Share the importance of the breakout sessions prior to the meeting.
- Decrease background information in presentation to avoid repetitiveness.
- Keep meetings tight and transitions strong.
- Summarize input from sessions to form a focus for near-term and short-term goals.
- Involve others and provide active engagement to unify the group.
- Meet in person.
- Optimal future meeting times are 12 to 2 pm (60%) and 10 am to 12 pm (44%).

I-64 Innovation Corridor Positioning: The proposed “I-64 Innovation Corridor” positioning for our megaregion received unanimous support – 100%.

A few examples of innovation that we can promote as proof that this positioning is relevant and believable were suggested:

- Jefferson Lab and Tech Center
- NASA
- Diversity of region and next gen leadership (paradigm changes – collaboration between mainstream and minority owned organizations)
- Wind energy (Turbines)
- Virginia Arts Festival
- Patient Care and Health Science Innovations (ivWatch)
- Higher education/research institutions

Short- and Long-term Priority Focus Areas: All of RVA757 Connects’ straw man priority focus areas as presented were affirmed by this survey, both by the Board of Trustees and MIC members. The numbers in the two tables below reflect top 2 box scores.

Short-term Priorities	Total (n=24*) Satisfaction Rating	Board (n=17) Satisfaction Rating	MIC (n=7) Satisfaction Rating
Run our 501(c)3	79% 19/24	82% 14/17	71% 5/7
Advance the “Innovation Corridor” positioning	100% 24/24	100% 17/17	100% 7/7
Implement the GO Virginia Talent Pipeline Study	92% 22/24	94% 16/17	86% 6/7
Showcase and support our members’ initiatives - offshore wind	92% 22/24	88% 15/17	100% 7/7
Accelerate the understanding of digital connections	79% 19/24	82% 14/17	71% 5/7
Increase R&D collaboration	88% 21/24	100% 17/17	57% 4/7
Create a legislative agenda and build relationships with the RVA-757 joint caucus	83% 20/24	94% 16/17	57% 4/7

* Sample number does not add to the total number of respondents, as one survey participant did not rate the short-term priorities list.

Long-term Priorities	Total (n=25) Satisfaction Rating	Board (n=18) Satisfaction Rating	MIC (n=7) Satisfaction Rating
Support the completion of the Virginia Capital Trail	80% 20/25	89% 16/18	57% 4/7
Remove barriers to increase passenger rail service	84% 21/25	89% 16/18	71% 5/7
Advocate for I-64 widening (29-mile gap from RIC to Williamsburg)	92% 23/25	94% 17/18	86% 6/7

Member and MIC Engagement: All participants indicated their personal interest in directly supporting at least one of RVA757 Connects’ priority areas. The top areas of interest include:

- 1) Advance the “Innovation Corridor” positioning – 17 people would like to help here.
- 2) Advocate for I-64 widening – 13 people would like to help here.
- 3) Remove barriers to increase passenger rail service – 9 people would like to help here.

Prospective Board and MIC Members: Survey participants recommended 27 new organizations to consider adding to the Megaregion Institutional Council, including: 757Thrive, Central Business District Association, Greater Peninsula Now, GRTA, Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance, Hampton Roads Transportation, HBCUs in the region, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, HRT, HRTAC, Lead Virginia, ODU Strome College of Business, Peninsula Community Foundation, RVA LMR, Urban Land Institute, Virginia Bio, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation, Virginia Catalyst, Virginia Data Center Coalition, Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Volunteer Hampton Roads.

In addition, participants recommended 37 potential candidates for the Board of Trustees.

Testimonial Quotes: 10 out of 25 participants offered a quote our organization can use in advancing our megaregion. Below are four examples:

“RVA757 Connects brings two great regions together to capture and promote all we have to offer. With our talented workforce, institutions of technical and higher learning and research facilities, coupled with a great place to live, we are developing the next great innovation corridor.”

– Robert Duvall, President, Virginia Natural Gas

“Collaboration is key to winning in the marketplace and in attracting economic development to our region. Connecting the attributes that makes RVA757 a great place to work and play is how we can win in the market and accelerate our region’s growth.”

– Brian Rountree, Senior Vice President & Market Manager, Bank of America

“If we succeed, and no reason to think that we won’t, this will catapult Virginia into a powerhouse destination for businesses and professionals.”

– Rony Thomas, President/CEO, LifeNet Health

“Megaregions are rapidly becoming the economic powerhouses in the nation. We can ill-afford not to leverage the vast assets we mutually enjoy for the greater good of all. RVA757 Connects is the perfect organization to lead us to accomplish this.”

– Bryan K. Stephens, President/CEO, Chamber Hampton Roads