



September 20, 2022 Board/MIC Meeting Breakout Session Notes

Document Purpose:

This document captures the general consensus of the Board/MIC small group breakout sessions that were held as part of the September 20, 2022 Board/MIC meeting.

General Consensus:

- Everyone feels RVA757 Connects is focused on the right priorities. All priorities have been timely for the megaregion.
- Most groups did not offer any suggestions for new, additional priorities to consider for 2023. One group suggested supporting the growth of the pharmaceutical cluster in Petersburg.
- Everyone feels the BoAT trail is an appropriate priority for RVA757 Connects.
- One group feels the Virginia Capital Trail and BoAT trail could distinguish the I-64 Innovation Corridor as a megaregion that values walking, running, and biking connectivity. All groups see the many benefits of the trail.
- Everyone appreciated HRPDC's/HRTPO's leadership in making great progress in advancing the BoAT trail by coordinating efforts with local governments, preparing and submitting grant applications, and addressing alignment, property owner, and right of way issues. One group pointed to the need for a dedicated full-time staff-person for this work.
- All six straw man suggestions for how RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail are supported by the board/MIC. Building awareness, making a compelling case for trail, and asking for funding support were the top three priorities.
- RVA757 Connects should follow the same model used in the I-64 Gap Project. Build awareness with the public and stakeholders, engage state agencies for support, and advocate to the General Assembly for funding.
- Most groups reported that the BoAT trail development would benefit from a stronger data-backed case for support. Intuitively, trail development connects with placemaking, creating a better quality of life, and improving fitness. Making this case with specific data will help build greater support. This includes equity, quality of life, healthy living,

economic impact, mobility, environmental impact / sustainability, access, and workforce. Specific workforce benefits include recruitment, retention, and job creation.

- Building a stronger, unassailable case of support for the trail also includes packaging the community's support for the trail, as evidenced from numerous public meetings, surveys, and outreach efforts. In addition, showing the intentional routing of the BoAT trail through underserved or disadvantaged communities (providing another transportation option) would add to a case for the trail.
- Raising awareness of the trail with promotional materials (one-pager, website, video footage) will educate the public and bring attention to this priority.
- Several groups suggested building awareness through signature events using the Virginia Capital Trail or existing segments of the BoAT trail with a triathlon, marathon, or 10K.
- Everyone feels the naming of the BoAT trail should be revisited.

Report-outs from Each Group

The following sections are the report out notes from each group following the topics raised.

Theodore L. Chandler, Jr and James Spore Group

Overall, what additional input and suggestions do you have for RVA757 Connects? Are we working on the right priorities? Are there any other topics or focus areas we are missing?

- On the topic of other potential priorities, the pharmaceutical cluster in Petersburg should be a 2023 focus.
- Also, for the Global Internet Hub, there needs to be more discovery / disclosure as to economic development opportunities beyond data centers and broadband network support to excite the megaregion. Fintech?



The BoAT trail is one of RVA757 Connects' board-approved priorities (like the I-64 Gap and Global Internet Hub). Now that you know more about the trail, should it remain a priority?

- As for the trail system commitment, all were in for conceptual agreement (but with one participant noting that the \$125 million might be more appropriately invested in workforce training or affordable housing).

What do you think about the list of six possible ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail? Is there something on this list we shouldn't do? Please prioritize these suggestions:

- We should follow our I-64 Gap funding playbook: Op-ed pieces and educating the public; advocate and support VDOT [and other state agencies with a piece of the action] to prioritize the project; advocate to the Governor and his pertinent cabinet secretaries; and pitch to the General Assembly the funding requirements.

Thomas R. Frantz and Wilson Flohr Group

Overall, what additional input and suggestions do you have for RVA757 Connects? Are we working on the right priorities? Are there any other topics or focus areas we are missing?

- We think our areas of focus are right.

The BoAT trail is one of RVA757 Connects' board-approved priorities (like the I-64 Gap and Global Internet Hub). Now that you know more about the trail, should it remain a priority?

- We believe the BoAT is an appropriate priority focus area.
- Placemaking / quality of life / fitness are important factors to attract people, including company CEOs with their companies, citing an example. Bike-walk trails are particularly helpful in attracting younger demographics to the megaregion.



What do you think about the list of six possible ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail? Is there something on this list we shouldn't do? Please prioritize these suggestions:

- Of the six ways to advance the BoAT trail, it was recommended that the focus should be on numbers 2, 3, and 4:
 - We should focus on #2 – raising awareness and benefits of the trail by creating a project website, promoting the project through RVA757 Connects' communications efforts, and generating earned media.
 - We should support #3 – advocating for funding from the new state bike agency to support the “Big Four” trails.
 - We also believe #4 would be helpful – conducting a return-on-investment (ROI) study that makes a powerful economic case for investment in the BoAT.

What's not on this list? Please suggest other ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail.

- Building awareness through a thoughtful targeted marketing campaign could pay dividends in the future. It was suggested to study two or three successful megaregions to get some ideas of how they built their awareness and image. It may be that no megaregion has pushed walking, running, and biking connectivity, in which case it would help to differentiate us.
- The Virginia Capital Trail Foundation staff has the capabilities to create an event for the BoAT trail to build awareness for its development. Perhaps they could work with a similar group in the 757 region to put together a triathlon, marathon, 10K, or similar event or events, and could help provide the necessary funding for an event.
- Sports tourism sells – for instance, the Boston or NY marathons. Ryan Conrad, who just left J&A Racing in Hampton Roads to join Worldwide Marathons as an executive in charge of sponsorships may be of help. Worldwide Marathons is an international company that owns the rights to the Boston, LA, Paris, London, and NY Marathons, among others. Ryan said the two regions working together should be able to attract a couple of signature events using the trails and he would be happy to pitch in. He lives in Hampton Roads.

Bob Holsworth and Sarah Jane Kirkland Group

Overall, what additional input and suggestions do you have for RVA757 Connects? Are we working on the right priorities? Are there any other topics or focus areas we are missing?

- Kasia Grzelkowski: Impressed with the type of projects that are being engaged – has real substance and timely needs.
- Brian Davis: All of the projects have value.

The BoAT trail is one of RVA757 Connects' board-approved priorities (like the I-64 Gap and Global Internet Hub). Now that you know more about the trail, should it remain a priority?

- All agreed that this should remain as a priority focus for RVA757 Connects.
- The bike trail is harder from a workforce development standpoint but goes to the quality-of-life aspect. Also, may provide opportunities for workforce in construction / tourism / ancillary needs for those using the trail.
- Bob Crum: The trail address some of the diversity challenges / opportunities in our region. The routing of the trail will provide disadvantaged communities the ability to utilize the trail as a transportation option. Many of the community groups we have engaged with have stressed the immense need for choice regarding transportation. The trails can offer an alternative safe option for workforce. Also, it can address the challenges with food deserts and healthy community goals by providing an active transportation choice for our residents.
- Kasia Grzelkowski: Trails can help with placemaking efforts. Trails can also help attract and retain workforce (quality of life) especially younger talent.

Is there any missing information on the BoAT trail topic – things you would like to know that were not covered today or are not in the PowerPoint or Executive Summary?

- Can the slide deck be circulated?
- What feedback has been received from the communities that this will impact?
- Is there a list of organizations that are engaged and helping to inform citizens about the importance of this project?
- Bob Crum noted that there have been numerous public meetings, surveys, and outreach efforts to provide residents the chance to share input. He has been impressed with the support for this trail. Most residents would like to see it move forward more quickly.
- Bob Crum noted that the HRPDC is advancing the BoAT trail as time allows by coordinating efforts with local governments, preparing and submitting grant applications, and addressing alignment, property owner, and right of way issues.
- Kasia Grzelkowski noted that a paid and dedicated staff person will be critical to get things moving.
- The group asked Bob Crum when the project might be finished. Mr. Crum shared that having available bandwidth to oversee this effort has been challenging. He noted other important regional priorities that the HRPDC / HRTPO is leading / coordinating including the following:
 - Coordinating a regional response among the region's mayors on crime and violence.
 - Coordinating the regional fiber initiative.
 - Finalizing the funding for the I-64 Gap.
 - Coordinating efforts on the region's funding of regional transportation projects (over \$5.3 billion in transportation investment).
 - Preparing the Regional Legislative Agenda.
 - Jefferson Lab.
 - Regional economic development site preparation.
 - Submission of federal grant for fiber network extension to the Peninsula.



What do you think about the list of six possible ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail? Is there something on this list we shouldn't do? Please prioritize these suggestions:

- The group all noted that the six suggestions were all valuable with the key priority on focusing specifically on funding (so, No. 5 and No. 4).
- In addition to No. 1 (Engaging trail champions), we need to include a more diverse subset of people – Young professional groups, student groups, etc., to help build momentum.
- It was noted that with so many competing priorities for funding, other groups should be identified who are working on similar initiatives to help align and promote collectively.
- No. 2 – Raising awareness – Include social media, video, and a one-pager that can be shared with RVA757 Connects' board members who can then use them to help promote this effort. The one-pager should include bullet points that help make sure that everyone is communicating the same – one voice.
- It was noted that the name might need to be revisited for the trail.
 - BoAT might imply that the trail implies water (boat).
 - Birthplace of America Trail – Not everyone views the historical events in the same way and the name might not be sensitive to other perspectives and experiences.

What's not on this list? Please suggest other ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail.

- We did not receive any other comments other than the need for resources and Ms. Grzelkowski again reiterated the need for dedicated staffing, otherwise the project might not be able to advance in a timely manner. Robby Demeria noted that the case for support must show a unified front to gain momentum for funding.

Mitch Haddon and John Reinhart Group

What additional input and suggestions do you have for RVA757 Connects? Are we working on the right priorities? Are there any other topics or focus areas we are missing?

- There is a general feeling of comfort with the priorities but strong emphasis on remaining vigilant, staying the current course, and demonstrating success.

Now that you know more about the trail, should it remain a priority of RVA757 Connects?

- Yes, jump while the iron is hot. And it is an example of staying focused on regional opportunities / topics / issues.

Is there any missing information on the BoAT trail – things you would like to know that were not covered today or are not in the PowerPoint or Executive Summary?

- There is an incomplete understanding of why the trail is important. The rationale has many “swim lanes” and we need to do a great job of identifying them (Equity, Quality of Life, Healthy Living, Economic Engine, Workforce/Recruitment, Retention, Job Creation, Connecting People, Environment, Sustainability, Reducing Dependency on Public Transportation, Access) How can we tie into the coming celebrations? Need to create a sense of urgency.
- We need success stories and testimonials of other trails. Example would be Greenville, Milwaukee, and Atlanta. Marketing should be at the macro level (state and region) and micro (local and grassroots). Need more media attention – traditional and social. Could we better tell the story via use of video and drones? Define the ROI and from the perspective of each “swim lane”.

What do you think about the list of six possible ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail? Is there something on this list we should not do? Please prioritize these suggestions.

- Nothing to add to list not covered above.

Please suggest other ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail.

- We ran out of time to really explore the BoAT naming. Limited commentary suggests that it should be explored more. The true name of “Birthplace of America Trail” will get lost if not very careful in brand management.

John W. Martin and Moses Foster Group

What additional input and suggestions do you have for RVA757 Connects? Are we working on the right priorities? Are there any other topics or focus areas we are missing?

- Everyone in the breakout session group feels RVA757 Connects is working on the right priorities.
- “Nothing. Our employees ride on I-64. We needed to close the gap. They ride on bikes in and near their neighborhoods. The bike trail makes sense.... we are impressed with RVA757 Connects’ focus and impact.”

Now that you know more about the trail, should it remain a priority of RVA757 Connects?

- Everyone in the breakout room agrees that the BoAT trail should remain a priority of RVA757 Connects.
- “My son lives in Denver. He is seconds to recreational activities. The BoAT trail is about retaining our talent.”
- “The BoAT trail will be a big draw. It enhances accessibility. It will serve all. And I don’t want my daughter riding her bike on the street.”
- “A similar investment was made in Atlanta. Property values increased around that trail that loops the city.”
- “This entire effort needs to be repositioned from ‘a nice to have’ extra community feature to ‘a must have’ community utility.”

Is there any missing information on the BoAT trail – things you would like to know that were not covered today or are not in the PowerPoint or Executive Summary?

- More details on how the ferry will work would be nice.
- How to connect waterway issues on the Southern route.
- How to make more connections to business and industry.

What do you think about the list of six possible ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail? Is there something on this list we not should do? Please prioritize these suggestions.

- This breakout session group said yes to all straw man areas.
- Help identify and engage trail champions. This includes elected local, state, and federal officials, community leaders, and business leaders.
- Help raise awareness and benefits of the trail by creating a project website, promoting the project through RVA757 Connects' communications efforts, and generating earned media.
- Advocate for funding from the new state bike agency to support the "Big Four" trails.
- Conduct a return-on-investment (ROI) study that makes a powerful economic case for investment in the BoAT.
- Provide organizing support to make the case for financial support of the BoAT.
- To the extent possible, help facilitate BoAT stakeholder discussion on the best name for the new trail.

What's not on this list? Please suggest other ways RVA757 Connects could help advance the BoAT trail.

- Support trail advocates in applying for grants or creating a cool race on the open segments of the BoAT trail.
- Tie into Virginia Capital Trail by throwing events on that segment to support the BoAT trail segment.