

Richmond Connects Advisory Committee

MEETING SUMMARY

June 6, 2022 | 10:00 am to 3:00 pm | Main Street Station, Richmond, VA

Attendees

Andreas Addison, Richmond City Councilmember

Yesmine Bethea, Path to Equity Ambassador

Missi Boyer, Senior Connections, CAAA

Jackson Carmack, Timmons Group

Monica Fecht, Richmond Public Schools

Tara FitzPatrick, Fit4Kids/RVASRTS

Noah G.

John Hamilton, Richmond Area Bicycling Association

Jakob Helmboldt, City of Richmond, DPW,
Pedestrian and Trails Coordinator

Jada Jolley, Virginia Department of Health

Chet Parsons, Plan RVA (RRPDC)

Yessenia Revilla, City of Richmond, Planning and
Development Review

Patricia Robinson, GRTC

Aquanetta Scott, Path to Equity Ambassador

Sam Sink, GRTC

Barb Smith, Chesterfield County

Michelle Taylor, Richmond Public Schools

Brantley Tyndall, Bike Walk RVA

Faith Walker, RVA Rapid Transit

Ross Ward, Hanover County

Diane Whitfield-Tyree, PRCF

Colleen Wilhelm, Senior Connections, CAAA

Richmond Connects Team

Chenice Brown, OETM

Windy Campbell, On Point Transportation PR

Mike Carosi, On Point Transportation PR

Jessica Dimmick, EPR

Vlad Gavrilovic, EPR

Brandon King, OETM

Brian Kinger, Timmons Group

Josh Mallow, Michael Baker International

Atiba Muse, OETM

Amanda Poncy, EPR

Kelli Rowan, OETM

Thomas Ruff, Timmons Group

Brad Shelton, Michael Baker International

Alan Simpson, EPR

Paul Trapp, Timmons Group

Ebony Walden, Ebony Walden Consulting

MEETING SUMMARY

The first meeting of the Richmond Connects Advisory Committee focused on preparing for the first round of public engagement, which will gather input on what needs to be improved to make transportation in Richmond equitable. The committee previewed a survey to gather input and discussed needs that have been identified in prior surveys. The committee also discussed ways to make this process equitable and inclusive.



The project team, led by Kelli Rowan and Jessica Dimmick, presented an overview of what Richmond Connects is. Then, the committee participated in a series of mapping activities and group discussions. The following sections describe the outcomes and feedback from the committee's discussions and activities.

Mentimeter Responses

To begin the meeting, committee participants were asked to respond to the prompt "If transportation was equitable in Richmond, what would be different?" via Mentimeter. All responses are listed below.

If transportation was equitable in Richmond, what would be different?

- More bus stations in my neighborhood
- Fewer cars
- Better lights at bus stations
- High frequency routes with more sheltered bus stops
- Regional expansion
- People wouldn't be so isolated
- People on southside would have the same access to safe alternative transport options as people on the northside
- Roads designed to give bikes safe use
- More people walking everywhere!
- There would be sidewalks in every neighborhood
- The GRTC Pulse would go to Church Hill instead of Rocketts Landing
- Every neighborhood would have access to well maintained sidewalks. Bus stops would have shelters, not just downtown area. Community members' opinions would actually be taken into consideration
- Sidewalks in my neighborhood
- There would be connectivity between all modes of travel that doesn't discriminate by mode choice
- I-95 and the Downtown Expressway would not have divided neighborhoods
- Streets would be safe for children to walk to school and parks
- We would have more protected bike lanes, not just sharrows or painted lanes
- Less gaps in sidewalk
- Reliable and safe intra-southside connectivity via bus, bike, foot, etc.
- It would not take more than 60 min to get anywhere in the city by transit
- Bus stops, bike racks, and other transit options everywhere
- Light passenger rail as foundation for future economic development
- All communities would have more complete streets, with access to basic amenities like grocery stores
- Safety measures would be in place in all communities
- More door to door assistance. More microtransit options. More on demand. Health would improve. More social connection
- Access to jobs and services will not rely on car ownership

- Non motorized transportation would receive the same consideration as motor vehicle transportation. Bike infrastructure wouldn't suddenly terminate
- No resident or visitor would require a car to reach their job, school, grocery store, or any other daily necessity. People would also feel safe walking and biking across the city, and a reliable public transportation system would be within reach

Richmond's Transportation Needs – Test the Survey

For the first activity, committee participants were split into small groups based on the area of the city they were most familiar with. Next, they were asked to take “Survey #1 – What Needs to be Improved?” (<https://bit.ly/3x5o4XU>). After taking the survey, participants discussed their experience by answering the following questions (paraphrased responses of note are included below each question):

What worked well?

- The survey is short and input is easy
- The survey is easy to navigate on your phone, but even easier on a PC due to the size of the map
- The ability to add points outside the city limits was useful
- Drop-down menus are user-friendly
- GIS maps make it easy to gather and sort data

What didn't work well?

- “View survey response” screen does not load consistently
- The number of dots on the map is overwhelming
- Comments on existing pins don't display on phones
- Zooming in is difficult on a phone
- Some phones autofilled optional questions for the second “dot”
- The call to action is unclear
- QR code scanning is not ideal for some people

What should we change to make it better?

- Users' email addresses are publicly visible on comments – remove this
- Add a combined option for “Bike + Pedestrian” improvements
- The default pin color should be different from any of the colors used for barrier or future connection options
- Add an option to agree with or “upvote” an existing point
- Users should be able to select more than one checkbox in the “racial identity” section
- Dropping a pin should be optional
- Writing a comment should be optional
- Change the district names and designations to match City Council districts or neighborhoods – the current names are unfamiliar to many Richmonders
- A supplemental paper survey should be implemented for people who aren't comfortable using smart phones or PCs
- An option to upload photos to identify issues should be implemented
- There should be a short how-to video for users who don't find the survey intuitive
- Need explanation that points are there to shape the plan

- There should be more encouragement/recognition after submitting comment
- There should be an option to leave comments on examples of good/successful projects in the city that should be replicated

Richmond's Transportation Needs – Explore the Map of Prior Responses

For the second activity, participants in small groups viewed the map of survey responses (<https://arcg.is/0mLG0y>) and explored the barriers and future connections identified in their respective areas. After exploring the map, participants answered the following questions (paraphrased responses of note are included below each question):

1) Where did you add a new dot? Why? 2) What barriers and future connections did other people identify nearby? 3) What comments on the map resonate with you the most? 4) What other barriers or future connections should be added?

- **Citywide group:**
 - Pin #46: crossing over I-95/64 is not pedestrian friendly and serves as a barrier to active transportation that divides Gilpin & Downtown. There is a need for additional crossings.
 - Pin #45: bike lanes end south of Manchester bridge
- **Huguenot & Midlothian group:**
 - Chippenham Parkway interchanges need better pedestrian connections
 - Fatality @ Jahnke Rd. & German School Rd. – this should be a priority safety improvement, need speed cameras/speed bumps here
 - Midlothian Turnpike needs pedestrian facilities
 - Need signs where fatalities have happened “Drive like a life depended on it”
 - Old Bon Air Rd. – need bike/ped facilities
- **Near West group:**
 - Thompson near Monument sidewalks missing, on ramps
 - Elmsmere & Ashe Boulevard area – nearby hotel is being used for unhoused people. Lots of traffic & pedestrians with no safe crossings – need rapid flashing beacons and traffic calming features
 - Bellevue – older adults aging in these areas need services to come to them
 - Byrd Park street closures limit access to the park
 - Roundabouts are generally not great and take up space for sidewalks, parking, beautification
- **North & East group:**
 - There is a lack of sidewalks in the North End
 - Sidewalks in Meadowbridge are not ADA compliant
 - On Mosby between Little Page, it is dangerous - stop signs have been knocked down, no safe place for children to cross the street to get to the middle school. Need a crossing guard there.
 - No sidewalks around Southside Plaza. A lot of underserved communities use this area. It's a main connection point, and wheelchairs can't get there.
 - Floyd @ Arthur Ashe – the diverter was not built
- **Old South & Broad Rock Group**

- All bridges need multi-modal access (Potterfield Bridge is not enough). Bridges are too wide for amount of traffic & high speed. There needs to be more separation (bollards/planters).
- Buschall School needs sidewalks & Safe Routes to School (connect schools, parks, commercial areas w/ a route)
- Southside Plaza: Belt & Hull needs attention
- Focus on nodes for multimodal improvements from Richmond Connects
- Opportunity to use abandoned rail bed near Forest Hills Park (from previous plan)

How can we make this process equitable and inclusive?

For this activity, participants were split into new, randomized small groups. A brief presentation on the demographics of survey respondents, including age, gender, race, household information, employment, and transportation methods, was shown to the committee. Following the presentation, participants discussed the following questions first in small groups, then as a larger group:

Whose input are we missing?

- People with physical disabilities and visual impairments
- Older people
- Unhoused people
- People with immigration status – look to U.S. Census Bureau for best practices
- Low-income neighborhoods on the fringe
- Children – we need to engage them directly. Consider the city as a “campus” – they should be able to get where they need to go easily
- Parents of school-age children
- Busy people dealing with life
- Need more Black/Hispanic voices

How might we get their input?

- We need to go to events that are already occurring to meet people where they are – not just recreational events, but to social services, bus stops, other places people have to go
- We should plant people in the community to get direct feedback, but we need to be intentional about who we put there (similar race, engaging, talkative, welcoming, etc.)
- Seek opportunities for regional collaboration – we’re seeing a lot of dots outside of Richmond
- Make a shorter version of the survey, especially for people who ride the bus who only have 15 minutes
- Partner with fraternities & sororities
- Work with employers, chamber(s) of commerce
- Door-to-door canvassing
- Partner with Unlocking Richmond
- Surveys on the bus or at bus stops
- Go to PTA meetings/pre-school/back-to-school events
- Partner with Venture Richmond
- Seek out community champions
- Partner with Richmond Night Market

- Find senior communications/connections experts
- Partner with summer camp providers
- Find high-traffic pedestrian locations
- Seek out pastors and other church officials
- Social media, PSA, radio ads
- Partner with schools over summer for free lunches
- Work with VCU Health Hub, VCU planning students
- Create 30-second video – music, visuals, hands-on
- Inspire people to participate
- Need a paper version of the survey to engage with seniors
- Go to senior places & events (Friendship Café, Active Aging Week)

What are the biggest challenges we will face?

- Trust – we need to build it to yield results
- Apathy – concern that people don't buy in or have participated before & haven't seen improvement
- Prioritization – need to identify which needs are truly most important
- “Analysis paralysis”
- Wording & messaging
- Staff capacity and \$\$\$ for engagement
- Language barriers
- Technology - many people who use public transportation work in service industry, may not have a laptop
- People need to be in the community – surveys not enough

How can we overcome them?

- To counter apathy, get short-term projects done, clear projects in the pipeline to get people invested.
- Use jargon-free language. Example: “What changes are needed to help you get around?”
- Tailor messaging to specific audiences
- Translators to engage with immigrant communities
- Need to pay people and engage them innovatively – there should be some incentive to participate
- Hire community ambassadors to bring information & surveys into the community. Pay them well.
- Some comments relate to crime safety, not transportation safety – may need to forward some comments to other departments
- Directly engage with city council members about needs in their districts
- Ambassadors have gotten powerful input, but need deeper engagement – need continuity of ambassadors throughout the project
- Manage expectations and communicate clearly. Time-phase projects. Go after “low-hanging fruit”
- Engage with Latinx churches in southside (Sacred Heart, etc.) – Back to School events are huge
- To overcome staff capacity issues, work with community partners to focus on specific areas/geographic categories
- Can't solve it all. Pick priorities that give opportunities. Focus on right things – most impactful
- Engage with other city departments & community partners – cohost events, put pamphlets & posters in city departments and libraries

- Have people identify short-term actions in the survey

Why does Richmond Connects matter?

- Gives the public a voice - especially the everyday person who may not have a voice
- Richmond Connects can coordinate equitable transportation with affordable housing, high density, and economic development
- Richmond Connects is an access plan - a plan to get you to jobs, services, amenities
- Transportation investments can improve health. We must consider holistic transportation network -must build bike/ped infrastructure, must make better choices
- It supports safe infrastructure for school kids to walk to school
- The more walkable/bikeable a city is, the more healthy they age
- It develops foundation for long-term planning that can be applied to near-term solutions
- It prioritizes people over vehicles
- It's a transportation plan that works for all

How can we craft the message to resonate with Richmonders?

- Ask people what their barriers are and then ask them to elaborate
- Consider the barriers of the aging who want to age in place
- Use messaging that tells participants what's in it for them
- Give a voice to the voiceless
- Incentives to get participants involved – anonymous participation, events with people there to assist, etc.
- Schools can partner in sending out survey to parents
- Work for all: parents, older people
- Short 30 sec – 1 minute inspiring video – why do I need to take the survey?
- # hashtags to share experiences and inspire others
- Make people feel like rockstars for completing the survey – acknowledge how important this is
- Prioritize on initiatives that will be noticed – highlight these
- Focus on injustices and offer solutions
- Tailor messaging to audience – know your audience
- Link to environmental issues, climate change – especially important to younger people
- Let people know this will help them get anywhere faster/safer/easier with several modes

How can you help?

For the final activity, committee members were asked to take a few minutes to write their responses to the following questions on a sticky note.

What I can do to advance this process

- I offer to help Chenice engage community outreach efforts. (Atiba Muse)
- I offer to speak to RTO members to see what they think is the best solution for communities (Aquanetta Scott)
- Offer: continue to advocate for a change in how we prioritize bike + pedestrian access, mobility, and safety (Jakob Helmboldt)
- Offer – take message into schools, retirement homes, community meetings

- I offer micro-transit planning expertise. Also connection to large Black churches. (Brandon King)
- Ask: that the community is flourishing from additional transit opportunities, and that transportation is utilized to help families flourish (Chenice Brown)
- I can help advance this process by promoting the vision and importance of it to others.
- I offer to help spread the word! Share the survey information w/ personal & professional community (Tara FitzPatrick)
- I offer to speak with people on my block & get their input & to continue coming to committee meetings. (Jada Jolley)
- I offer to help engage the Latino community (Yessenia Revilla)
- I offer:
 - Promote survey during my outreach with community
 - Practical engagement with underrepresented communities
 - Increased budgets for outreach \$\$\$ (Faith Walker)
- I offer to support this work by helping to connect you to older adult persons with disabilities and ensure not using ageist language (Colleen Wilhelm)
- I offer to stay involved with the Richmond Connects process and look for future engagement opportunities (Noah G)
- I offer to assist w/ promoting survey/outreach efforts via county media
- I can help get input from older adults (Missi Boyer)
- Offer: spread the word to friends and family to participate in the survey (Alan Simpson)
- Distribute survey at rec centers
- Safe routes to schools. Establish some walk zones for schools that don't have one (Michelle Taylor)
- Offer: take information to my organization – “spread the word” (Monica Fecht)

What I hope to see from this process

- I hope to better understand and appreciate her style and approach as Richmond Connects moves forward. (Atiba Muse)
- I hope to see better input of job opportunities and helping them to pursue a better way of living (Aquanetta Scott)
- Ask: an outcome that is actionable, measurable, & which wisely allocates limited resources (Jakob Helmboldt)
- Take – better understanding of how to improve city & better at representing progress being made
- I ask that the data collecting process is equitable (Brandon King)
- Ask: that the community is flourishing from additional transit opportunities, and that transportation is utilized to help families flourish (Chenice Brown)
- I hope to see a stronger more connected and livable community for all residents of Richmond
- I hope to see a safer, more balanced, less auto-centric approach to our city's transportation system (Tara FitzPatrick)
- I hope to see a plan place that will also aim to minimize displacement or gentrification after the ideas in the plan are achieved (Jada Jolley)
- I ask you work hard to include individuals who are functionally home-bound to share their needs. Older adults, new moms, persons with disabilities (Colleen Wilhelm)
- I ask for a meaningful change from the 2013 product (Noah G)

- I hope you will share responses from Chesterfield residents and/or visitors
- I hope for improved transportation options for all individuals (Missi Boyer)
- Ask: meaningful change that reduces car dependency in Richmond (Alan Simpson)
- Ask: I hope to see short term actions implementation items during the 2-years process
- Example: pick up the worst block in Downtown & apply tactical urbanism to improve it & transform it from “worst to first” (Yessenia Revilla)
- Ask: to see change that I actually contributed to! (Monica Fecht)

Next Steps

A kickoff webinar and Facebook Live event will be held on Tuesday, June 21st.

Committee members were encouraged to share the webinar, website, and survey with their colleagues, constituents, friends, and families.

NEXT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Anticipated for October 2022.