

RIC Rail Connector Initiative

Intro packet for a phased public/private airport mobility corridor

Williamsburg / Newport News / New Kent-Lanexa / Richmond International Airport

Concept: use a shuttle pilot to prove demand, then study a future rail-adjacent airport connector, station, or transfer hub.

DISCOVERY

SHUTTLE PILOT

FEASIBILITY

PPP FUNDING

Executive summary

A broad, practical starting point for a public/private corridor conversation.

The idea

Create a phased airport mobility corridor linking Williamsburg, Newport News, New Kent/Lanexa, and RIC. Start with a reservation-based shuttle pilot and use the data to test whether a future rail-adjacent airport connector deserves formal study.

The public value

Better airport access, less I-64 pressure on peak travel days, improved visitor mobility, student and workforce transportation, stronger tourism connection, and a long-term rail/transit planning option.

The ask

Convene a 90-day discovery sprint: validate demand, identify constraints, define agency roles, and scope a feasibility study for a future RIC rail connector / multimodal airport access point.

Why now: the demand signal is getting stronger

Airport growth, existing transit gaps, and Virginia rail investment create a timely opening.

4.9M+

passengers moved through RIC in 2025, a new annual record.

223M lbs

cargo handled by RIC in 2025, also a record.

15 min

GRTC airport bus frequency to downtown transfer station.

#25

RIC plan item: "Regional Rail Connection."

The gap

RIC has local bus access to downtown Richmond, but there is no direct passenger rail station at the airport and no dedicated Williamsburg/New Kent/Newport News airport rail connector today.

The opening

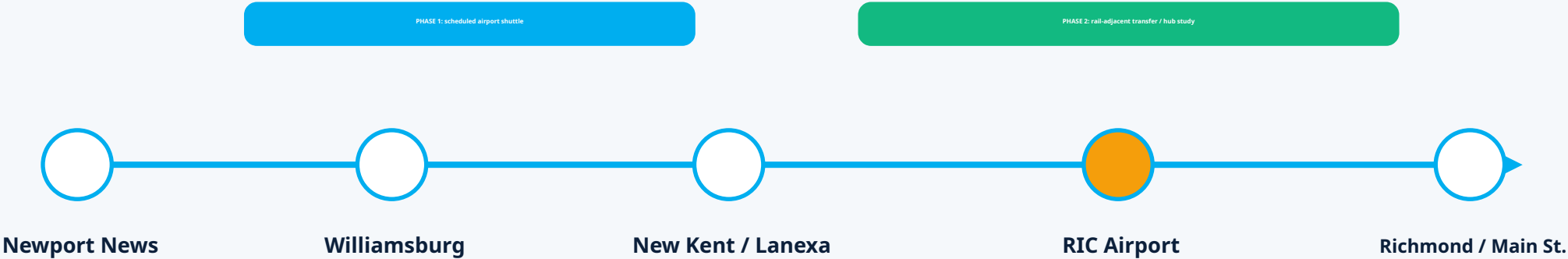
The airport master planning materials preserve/recognize a regional rail connection concept, while the CSX Newport News line is identified along the southern airport boundary.

The path

Use a shuttle-first model to produce real ridership and trip-purpose data before asking public partners to study rail infrastructure.

Corridor concept: shuttle-first, rail-ready

The first product is mobility. The long-term option is rail integration.



Near-term operating idea

Reserved-seat shuttles timed to flight banks, with stops at Williamsburg, New Kent/Lanexa, and selected Newport News runs.

Mid-term planning idea

Screen a RIC-adjacent multimodal transfer point near existing rail, paired with frequent shuttle/people-mover access to the terminal.

Long-term idea

If demand and engineering support it: rail connector, station, spur, or dedicated transit link.

Who benefits

The corridor is broader than airport passengers. It is a regional access and economic-development tool.

Airport passengers

Reserved transportation to RIC without parking, I-64 driving, or fragmented transfers.

Students and families

William & Mary and other student travel periods create concentrated, repeatable airport demand.

Tourism and hotels

Visitors flying into RIC need clean connections to Williamsburg, Colonial Williamsburg, resorts, events, and conferences.

New Kent / Lanexa residents

A park-and-ride mobility hub could offer airport access without a full drive to Richmond.

Workforce access

Improved access to airport jobs, hospitality, universities, healthcare, and regional employers.

Military and families

Newport News, Hampton, Yorktown, and Fort Eustis-area travelers add recurring demand.

PPP framing: multiple beneficiaries mean multiple possible funding partners, not one agency carrying the full concept alone.

Existing planning foundation

The concept is not new - the next step is a modern, scoped version.

RIC planning material

The airport Recommended Development Plan identifies a future project labeled "Regional Rail Connection" and includes both existing and future rail-line symbols. This is not a funded project, but it is important planning evidence.

Rail corridor reality

RIC master planning text recognizes the CSX rail line along the southern airport boundary. The 2003 rail feasibility study described the CSX Newport News line as passing about one mile south of the terminal.

The implication

There is enough basis to ask: could a future rail-adjacent station, transfer point, shuttle bridge, or rail spur be feasible, fundable, and useful?

Key caveat: recognition in a plan is not the same as approval, funding, environmental clearance, or railroad agreement.

Historic study snapshot: RIC airport light rail

The 2003 study helps justify a new study, not a direct construction decision.

6.4-7.2

miles in the airport light rail concept.

\$374-\$420M

capital cost estimate in 2003 dollars.

19,100

estimated weekday boardings.

\$7.0M

estimated annual O&M cost.

\$3.77M

annual subsidy estimate.

What it said about the south rail corridor

The CSX Newport News line was described as active for passenger and freight service and passing about one mile south of the airport terminal. Light rail could not operate on existing track; separate infrastructure and coordination would be required.

What it said about airport access

Airport terminal access would require coordinated planning and design with the airport commission. Potential southern access could follow Airport Drive South or Lewis Road, or use a new alignment.

Why it matters: the old study showed strong enough promise to keep the airport connector idea alive, but it is now more than two decades old and must be re-scoped around current RIC growth, VPRA rail investments, CSX operations, and modern funding programs.

Public/private partnership model

The private role is to prove demand and organize the customer experience. The public role is to enable infrastructure.

Public sector

- Agency alignment
- Planning authority
- Grant eligibility
- Right-of-way coordination
- Road/curb/stop approvals
- Public benefit case
- Local match options

Private partner

- Shuttle pilot
- Booking platform
- Demand data
- Hotel/university contracts
- Customer service
- Operating innovation
- Private capital where useful

Airport / railroad

- Airport land-use interface
- Terminal access
- Curb management
- Railroad capacity review
- Safety and operating agreements
- Freight/passenger separation

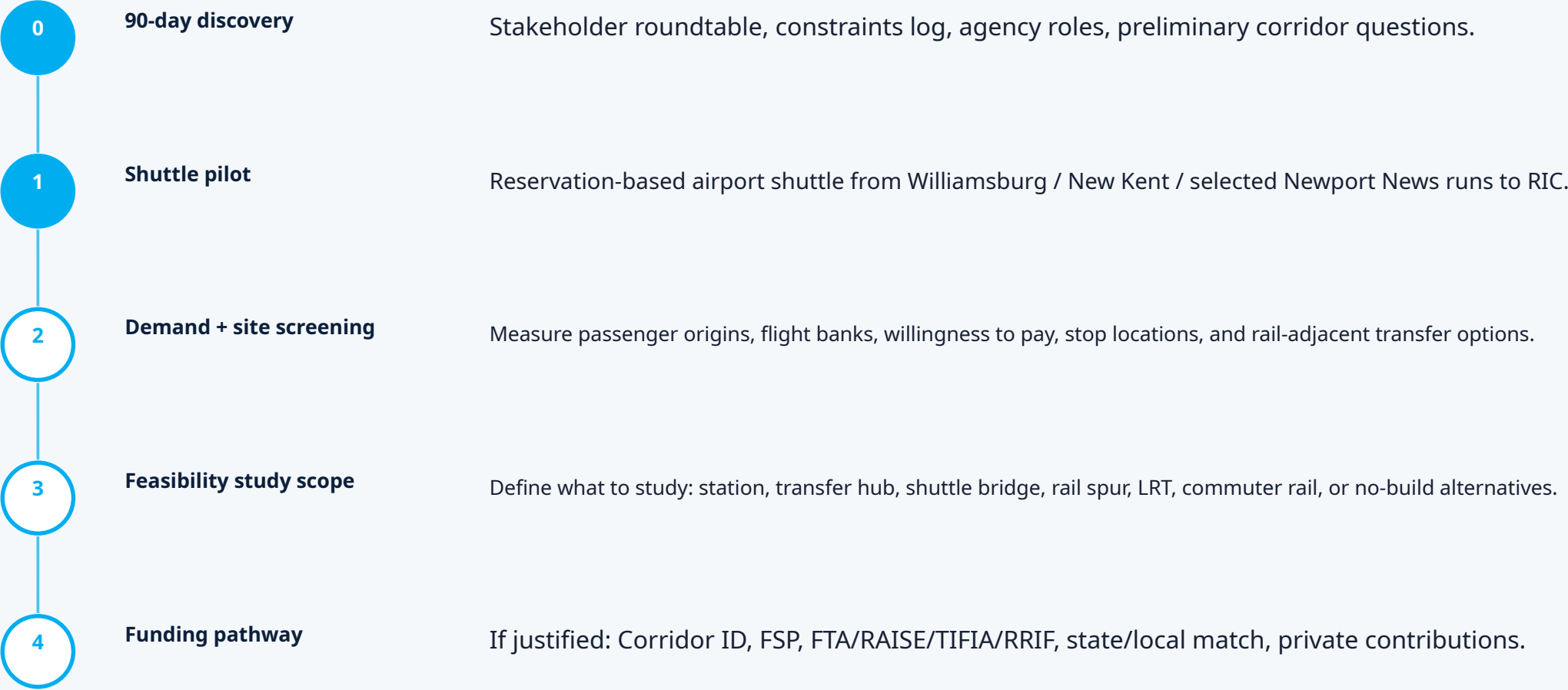
Community partners

- Tourism
- Higher education
- Employers
- Military travel
- Senior communities
- Chambers
- Local governments

PPP principle: avoid asking public agencies to bet on theory. Use a low-risk operating pilot to generate the facts needed for the next planning decision.

Phased roadmap

A staged path keeps the idea broad but actionable.



Pilot data strategy: make the rail question evidence-based

The private pilot should collect the information agencies need to decide whether a formal study is worth funding.

Demand data

- Passengers by origin
- Passengers by flight bank
- Booking lead time
- Cancellation/no-show rates
- Round-trip capture
- Willingness to pay
- Seasonality

Operational data

- Trip time reliability
- Pickup dwell times
- Luggage load
- Traffic delay
- Driver hours
- Vehicle utilization
- Missed connection risk

Partner data

- Hotel contracts
- Student travel blocks
- Employer interest
- Tourism packages
- Senior communities
- Public event demand

Planning data

- Stops
- Sites
- Park-and-ride
- Rail proximity
- ADA needs
- Curb access

Output: a demand and constraints memo that agencies can use to decide whether to sponsor a formal RIC Rail Connector feasibility study.

Potential funding and financing pathways

The goal of the intro packet is to identify the right first funding lane, not pick the final capital stack.

FRA Corridor ID

Comprehensive intercity passenger rail planning pathway; selected corridors initially receive \$500,000 for early development activities.

Federal-State Partnership

Capital program that can fund projects improving performance or expanding/establishing intercity passenger rail service when eligible applicants are involved.

FTA / CIG / BRT / transit

Potential lane if the project becomes a fixed-guideway, light rail, commuter rail, or transit-access project rather than intercity rail.

State/local transportation funds

DRPT, VPRA, CVTA, MPO/TPO, VDOT, local governments, and airport partners may help with planning match or enabling infrastructure.

Private contributions

Operating pilot, booking technology, demand aggregation, hotel/university contracts, sponsorship, and station-area economic-development participation.

Credit / P3 tools

Later-stage financing could include TIFIA/RRIF, private activity bonds, local value capture, parking, concessions, or station-area development.

Near-term best fit: a public agency sponsors a small discovery/feasibility path while the private partner runs a shuttle pilot and provides demand data.

Stakeholder universe

Too many early conversations is better than missing a party that controls a constraint.

Airport / rail

RIC / Capital Region Airport Commission
VPRA
CSX
Amtrak Virginia coordination

State / federal

DRPT
FRA
FTA Region 3
VDOT
Commonwealth Transportation Board

Localities

Henrico
New Kent / Lanexa
Williamsburg / James City County
Newport News
Richmond

Transit / planning

GRTC
WATA
HRT / HRTPO
CVTA / PlanRVA
RideFinders

Demand partners

William & Mary
Hotels and resorts
Tourism groups
Employers
Military travel
Senior communities

Private partners

Shuttle operators
Planning/engineering firms
Station-area developers
Technology / booking platform
Concession or sponsorship partners

First roundtable target: airport + Henrico + New Kent + VPRA/DRPT + CSX + GRTC/WATA + tourism/university demand partners.

Key questions for the first roundtable

The first meeting should narrow the problem, not solve the entire project.

Planning status

What does RIC's "Regional Rail Connection" planning item mean today? Is it still active, conceptual, reserved, or superseded?

Right-of-way

What are the real CSX, roadway, airport property, utility, and safety constraints south of the terminal?

Mode choice

Should the next study compare shuttle-only, rail-adjacent transfer, people mover, BRT, LRT, commuter rail, or intercity rail options?

Data threshold

What pilot ridership, origin-destination, and partner commitments would justify a formal feasibility study?

Funding sponsor

Which public entity could sponsor a planning grant or study if the concept is worth advancing?

Quick win

Can New Kent/Lanexa or Williamsburg become a near-term park-and-ride / airport shuttle node?

Recommended next step: 90-day discovery sprint

A narrow, useful step that keeps the idea moving without overcommitting anyone.

1. Convene

Hold a 90-minute stakeholder roundtable with RIC, VPRA, DRPT, CSX, Henrico, New Kent, Williamsburg/Newport News representatives, GRTC/WATA, and demand partners.

2. Define

Create a one-page problem statement, corridor map, constraints list, stakeholder matrix, and study-scope outline. Confirm what “success” would look like for the shuttle pilot.

3. Decide

At the end of 90 days, decide whether to: continue shuttle-only, pursue a formal feasibility study, apply for planning funding, or pause the rail component.

Proposed ask: permission to coordinate introductions, gather agency feedback, and return with a concise feasibility-scope memo.

Sources and caveats

Selected public sources used for this intro packet.

[1] Richmond International Airport, "RIC Sets Passenger and Cargo Records in 2025" - 4.9M+ passengers and 223M pounds cargo in 2025.
<https://flyrichmond.com/ric-sets-passenger-and-cargo-records-in-2025/>

[2] RIC Recommended Development Plan / ALP map - future project #25 "Regional Rail Connection."
https://flyrichmond.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ric_alpmap.pdf

[3] RIC Master Plan 2022 - identifies CSX rail/right-of-way along the southern airport boundary.
<https://flyrichmond.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RIC-Master-Plan-2022.pdf>

[4] PlanRVA, Richmond Rail Transit Feasibility Study, June 2003 - RIC LRT concept and estimates.
<https://planrva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Richmond-Rail-Transit-Study-Feasibility-06232003.pdf>

[5] GRTC Airport Connection - Routes 7A/7B provide high-frequency bus service from RIC to the Downtown Transfer Station every 15 minutes.
<https://www.ridegrtc.com/grtc-services/airport-connection/>

[6] FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program - selected corridors initially receive \$500,000 for early development activities.
<https://railroads.dot.gov/corridor-ID-program>

[7] FRA Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail - funds projects that improve, expand, or establish intercity passenger rail service.
<https://railroads.dot.gov/partnership-program>

[8] VPRA Transforming Rail in Virginia - acquiring right-of-way, increasing capacity, and improving passenger/freight operations.
<https://vapassengerrailauthority.org/transformingrail/>

Important caveat

This packet is an introductory concept document. It is not engineering, environmental clearance, railroad approval, airport approval, a ridership forecast, or a capital-cost estimate.