Mental Mapping in the Richmond Region: 
The Use of the Physical Environment in Building Regional Cooperation

URSP 691: Urban Planning and Design Research Class: Mental Mapping, Spring 2010

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the planners from all nine of the Region’s jurisdictions, as well as those from the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission, who participated in the mental mapping exercises. Our research project would not have succeeded without their help. Collectively, this example of jurisdictional cooperation demonstrates forward steps towards a new pattern of regional planning for the Richmond Region.
**Introduction**

Every day around the world, people use clues in the physical environment to help them understand where they are and figure out how to get where they need to go. Within the same city, a tourist may rely completely on maps and street signs to get around, while daily commuters make use of landmarks, well-known paths, or even subtler clues like familiar smells. The process of developing a mental image of a place, known as *mental mapping*, serves to develop the ability to gain a spatial understanding of the environment and develop a sense of orientation or understanding of where one travels. Mental maps also help to inform spatial decision-making in new places and solve spatial problems in new environments. The mental image of a place varies from person to person and is shaped heavily by past experience and personal perceptions. Different individuals may rely on some of the same features in forming their mental maps; reinforcing the importance of these features in the physical environment.

The study of mental maps can help us understand what perceptions people have about the physical environment as well as provide notable insight into issues or problems that can complicate or confuse these perceptions. The imageability of an area, basically the ability of an object or place to be remembered in a mental map, is influenced by those qualities that provide a high probability of being remembered by an observer, within a particular neighborhood, corridor, city, or region. Imageability is influenced by such factors as the activities done within a space, or the physical features in the space, such as its architecture, building patterns, or level of density. Through an analysis of mental maps, the most significant features of an environment may be identified. By analyzing a collection of personal hand-drawn maps, one may uncover those features which come together to form a collective mental image of a particular area.

Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City*, printed in 1960, is a major work in the field that brought widespread attention to the study of mental mapping. Lynch’s focus is the collective image. He conducts extensive field research and concludes that the main objects we use to “read” the city fall into a few categories: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. The illustration below shows a simplified example of how features from these categories are
found in an urban environment. Paths are “the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves,” (Lynch, 47). These can be roads, sidewalks, alleys, or other linear features. Edges are also linear, but are boundaries and serve to limit movement, as do walls, property boundaries, or even a highway, if one is on foot. Districts are areas that have some sort of identifying character, and are identifiable from the inside, like neighborhoods or business centers. Nodes are point references of condensed character, like bustling public squares or hangout spot. Landmarks are also point references, but cannot be entered; they are viewed externally, like statues, trees, or signs. Lynch notes that paths seem to be the predominant city elements used in mental maps, and that major access lines become key image features.

Figure 1: Elements common to Mental Maps

Source: Kevin Lynch, The Image of the City

Lynch’s research methods have become somewhat the standard in the field, and are the basis for those within this research project. This method is comprised of asking people at random to take about ten minutes to hand-draw a sketch map of the city or research area. He makes sure to keep any explanation of the research study to a minimum, allowing participants decide on their own what features to place on their maps. The main goals of this method are to develop a new approach discovering important features in an area, in order to solve urban design dilemmas and improve quality of life for residents and visitors. (Sources)
Roger Downs and David Stea did further work in the field during the 1970’s. *Maps in Minds (1977)* delves into the psychology of mental mapping, and describes concepts such as environmental learning, pattern perception, and the nature of mental maps as personal, subjective, and selective tools. They describe how uniqueness of features is important because it allows individuals to choose between two separate objects and understand that they are different from each other (and thus use them to as navigation tools). They conclude that features become imageable due to a memorable activity, architecture, or cultural significance that occurs there, or a combination thereof. A private home with unique architecture may become a local landmark, for example, or a plain building that is the site of a unique activity, like the manufacture of a local export, may become a symbol of the area’s identity. This work has been important in understanding how people form mental maps and why they choose to remember the features they do. (Sources)

J. Lewis Robinson’s exercise on mental mapping with Canadian geography students has been beneficial to this project as well. The study area for that project, which is the entire country of Canada, is of a much larger-scale than most previous mental mapping exercises, and the study includes participants from across the country. Robinson, as a teacher, uses the maps to gain an understanding of what students knew about the nation in order to focus his lectures on what they don’t yet know. It thus provides a good example of the practical uses of mental mapping.

In this research project the class was interested in determining what a collective mental map of the Richmond Region would look like. The Region is defined as the jurisdictions that fall within the borders of the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission. It is thought that variations in regional perceptions between jurisdictions may contribute to a lack of regional understanding and cooperation. By implementing policies that would improve regional imageability and provide a more consistent mental map of the region, jurisdictions may consider their neighbors to be closer than they thought, and realize that regional commonalities outweigh differences. This could help foster more frequent collaboration on a regional scale to help achieve common goals. We chose urban planners for this study because they were thought to have a strong image of the region, due to the
nature of their work. By finding gaps in familiarity or imageability in planners, it is hoped that problems with the physical nature of the region can be discovered, and improved upon.

**Methodology**

Urban Planners from around the region, including the City of Richmond, Henrico County, Hanover County, Goochland County, James City County, New Kent County, Chesterfield County, Powhatan County, and the Town of Ashland, were asked to draw a map of the Richmond Region. In addition, planners from the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC) were asked to participate. These jurisdictions are all the members of the RRPDC. Urban planners and planning departments were selected as participants due to the extensive spatial knowledge of the region they were assumed to possess and to have an even distribution of results from around the entire region. Each planning department was willing to participate throughout the study; however, the sample size for each jurisdiction was not consistent due to certain jurisdictions having more hired planning staff than others.

The class was divided into two-person groups for the purpose of contacting jurisdictions, meeting with the planners, and facilitating the mental mapping exercises. Planning Directors were contacted for permission to have their staff hand-draw regional mental maps for the study. Initially, each department was asked to provide six to eight planners to participate in the data collection process. A total of fifty-five maps were produced by county planning staff including eleven planners from the RRPDC. The Town of Ashland only had two hired planning staff members and each provided a mental map. New Kent County, Charles City County, and Powhatan County each had three participants from their jurisdictions. Both Chesterfield County and the City of Richmond completed eight mental maps. Hanover County provided ten maps while Henrico County provided four. Each planning director, as well as the staff members, was informed about our goal of attempting to gain an understanding of how urban planners perceive the spatial and physical elements of the Richmond Regional Planning District, as well as the goal of identifying a regional image and determining commonalities and differences between perceptions across the region.
After explaining a general background on mental mapping, participants were all asked the following directions:

“Please take about 10 minutes to draw a quick sketch of the Richmond Region Planning District, including features which are distinctive to you. Please do not write your name on the paper. We do not expect an accurate drawing; rather we expect just a rough sketch. Feel free to add labels or make notes on the paper. Please fill in only your jurisdiction, home zip code, and years of residence in the region in the top left corner of the paper. After drawing your map, please flip over your paper and write or list what you think characterizes the Richmond Region.”

Participants were provided a blank 11” x 17” sheet of paper to construct their mental maps. A table on the left hand side of the page included rows to write down participants’ jurisdictions, home zip codes, the number of years they’ve lived in the region, as well as the same directions written above. Participants were told to take about 10 minutes to complete their maps.

A count of the elements drawn on the maps by the planners from all nine jurisdictions, and the RRPDC, was entered into a spreadsheet. The results were categorized into how often an element was noted on the map. These categories were 1) political jurisdictions (both within and outside the Region), 2) roadways, and 3) individual features, such as buildings, neighborhoods, and activity uses. Only the elements that were labeled in writing were tallied. Pictures that were drawn – for example a farm silo drawn in the rural area around Goochland County – were not tallied into this count. These however, were referenced to in the Notes section of the spreadsheet. The percentage of maps with each jurisdiction, roadway, or feature noted was calculated as well.

The data compiled into the spreadsheet was divided into four Tiers based on the number of times each was listed on the hand-drawn maps. Tier One consisted of jurisdictions, roads, and features that were identified by at least 70 percent of the participants. Tier Two included features identified 69-50 percent of the time and Tier Three features were identified
49-30 percent of the time. The bottom Tier, Tier Four, included features that were identified 29-10 percent of the time. Anything listed less than 10 percent of the maps was not recorded in the analysis.

In addition to an analysis of the mental maps drawn by the fifty-five planners, written comments about the major characteristics of the Richmond Region were analyzed and divided into four categories. The four categories most noted included comments related to history, the suburbs, jurisdictional cooperation, and land use or geographical character of the region. The summary charts regarding the written comments depict how many times each category was mentioned and whether the comment was positive, negative, or neutral in nature.

**Data Analysis**

The tables below depict the frequency in which particular jurisdictions, roads, and features were noted as being part of the Richmond Regional Planning District. As noted above, a tier system was created to group data with similar percentages. Within each tier, individual items recognized include percentages and the number of participants shown in parentheses.

**Jurisdictions Noted On the Maps**

Three jurisdictions were mentioned by at least 70 percent of those participating in the project: Hanover, Henrico and Chesterfield. The City of Richmond is only noted by 69 percent of all participants despite its geographical location at the center of the Richmond Region. Hanover is mentioned most frequently. This may be a result of fact that this jurisdiction fielded the highest number of participants (10) from any one jurisdiction. Goochland is noted as frequently as the City of Richmond (and comprise Tier Two), while Powhatan, New Kent and Charles City are mentioned significantly less often. Goochland’s high imageability compared to other rural counties may be attributed to its location adjacent to Henrico County and the Short Pump shopping center. The Town of Ashland is recognized least often at 44 percent. (See Table 1 and Map 1)
### Table 1: Jurisdictions Noted On the Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tier 1 (≥ 70%)</th>
<th>Tier 2 (69%-50%)</th>
<th>Tier 3 (49%-30%)</th>
<th>Tier 4 (29%-10%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>75% (41)</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>Charles City</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henrico</td>
<td>73% (40)</td>
<td>Goochland</td>
<td>Ashland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesterfield</td>
<td>73% (40)</td>
<td>Powhatan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(53%) (29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Map 1: Jurisdictions

*Legend*
- Tier 1
- Tier 2
- Tier 3
- Tier 4
Other jurisdictions that are located outside the RRPDC region included:

- Petersburg (15%)(8)
- Amelia (13%)(7)
- Hopewell (9%)(5)
- Prince George (7%)(4)

The City of Petersburg is noted by the largest percentage of participants, followed by Amelia County. The occurrence of these jurisdictions on multiple maps may be attributed to their location south of the Richmond Region along the Chesterfield border, or could be the result of the large number of participants from Chesterfield County. The appearance of jurisdictions outside of the Richmond Regional Planning District indicates that the regional boundaries may be somewhat unclear. (See Map 1)

**Roads Noted On the Maps**

Major highways were discovered to be highly imageable characteristics in the Richmond Region. In particular, Interstates I-95 and I-64 were noted by over 65 percent of participants. These routes are major thoroughfares through the region, and together, they touch seven of the nine jurisdictions. I-95, the only Tier One road, was noted the most and I-64 second, in Tier Two. (See Table 2: Roads Noted On the Maps)

Tier Three roads, including I-295 and Route 288, all circumnavigate the urbanized center of the Richmond Region and provide uncongested access across jurisdictional boundaries. These roads form a rough boundary between the urbanized and rural areas within the Richmond Region.

Tier Four roads include Route 360 and Route 150. Since these roads serve as links from the inner city to the surrounding transitional, inner suburbs, they are imageable by a notable portion of the participants. Interestingly, all four of the jurisdictions mentioned that are outside of the region (Petersburg, Amelia County, Hopewell, and Prince George County) are also located along I-95, I-295, and Route 360.
Table 2: Roads Noted On the Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
<th>Tier 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(≥ 70%)</td>
<td>(69%-50%)</td>
<td>(49%-30%)</td>
<td>(29%-10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-95 (73%)(40)</td>
<td>I-64 (69%)(38)</td>
<td>I-295 (47%)(26)</td>
<td>Rt. 360 (Hull St) (16%)(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rt. 288 (36%)(20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rt. 150 (Chippenham Pkwy) (11%)(6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VCU Mental Mapping Class

Map 2: Roads
Features Noted On the Maps

Recognizable features in the Richmond Region were generally far less imageable to participants than roads or jurisdictions. As depicted in the table and map below, major features of the Region were seldom noted on the maps as significant. The James River is by far the most imageable feature (71%). This may be attributed to the fact that the James River bisects the Region and touches six of the nine jurisdictions. Short Pump is the second most recognized feature in the region with 30 percent of the participants, acknowledging its imageability as a regional shopping destination and its large cluster of buildings.

Tier Four contain the highest number of recognized features; however, these were noted by less than 30 percent of all participants. Regional activity-based destinations such as the Richmond Airport (27%), Downtown (15%) and Kings Dominion (13%) were mentioned in this category. Other activity based features noted by participants were Innsbrook (15%), VCU (15%) and the Appomattox River (11%) most likely due to their popular commercial, educational and recreational uses. Significant buildings or neighborhoods such as the State Capital (24%) or The Fan (15%) were also mentioned in Tier Four. Of the ten features, eight are located within the City of Richmond or Henrico County, also among the most-noted jurisdictions. (See photos of major features of the Region)
### Table 3: Features Noted On the Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
<th>Tier 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(≥ 70%)</td>
<td>(69%-50%)</td>
<td>(49%-30%)</td>
<td>(29%-10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James River (71%)(39)</td>
<td>Short Pump (31%)(17)</td>
<td>Richmond Airport (27%)(15)</td>
<td>The State Capital (24%)(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Downtown (15%)(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Fan (15%)(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Innsbrook (15%)(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VCU (15%)(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kings Dominion (13%)(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appomattox River (11%)(6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: VCU Mental Mapping Class*
Map 3: Features
Other features were noted on the maps, but not in enough times to qualify them as significant. This signifies a lack of strongly imageable features in the Region overall. Features listed by at least four participants are shown below.

- Bon Air (9%)(5 participants)
- Varina (9%)(5)
- Richmond Raceway (9%)(5)
- West End (9%)(5)
- Manchester (9%)(5)
- Railroads (7%)(4)
- University of Richmond (7%)(4)
- Pocahontas State Park (7%)(4)
- Colonial Downs (7%)(4)
- Downtown Business District (7%)(4)
- PDC (7%)(4)
- Midlothian (7%)(4)
- Mechanicsville (7%)(4)

Characteristics of the Richmond Region Written On the Maps

In addition to an analysis of the mental maps drawn by the 55 participants, written comments from participants about the major characteristics of the region were also analyzed. These comments revolved around four categories, including those related to history, the suburbs, jurisdictional cooperation, and land use or geographical character. Table 4 shows how many times each category was mentioned and whether the comment was positive, negative, or neutral in nature.

Comments relating to history within the Region are mentioned most frequently (by over 40 percent of participants). Examples include “History/Culture back to 1607,” “History/Historic Sites,” and “cradle of America”. Of the twenty-four comments, all but one is positive, solidly establishing history as an important element of the region’s imageability. Suburbs or issues relating to suburban sprawl were mentioned by nearly one third of participants, with the vast majority of the responses being negative in nature. Some
examples are “Soulless suburbs” and “sprawl, low-density region, lots of roads and cars.” The suburban nature of the Richmond Region, which many viewed as negative, may be a result of the highly imageable road network, as people are able to easily and quickly travel around the region. Land Use and Geographical Character was mentioned thirteen times, meaning that twenty-four percent of participants identify significant areas of the region by land use such as “residential,” “commercial,” or “suburban” or “urban.” These characteristics are mainly noted in the rural counties, near large subdivisions, or near large tracks of undeveloped, agricultural land. Examples of these are “Hanover, Fluvana, Goochland, Louisa, New Kent, Charles City = rolling farmland” and “Swampy.” Jurisdictional cooperation across the Region also received negative feedback from participants with all nine comments shedding a negative light regarding current relationships between neighboring cities and counties. Comments listed included “competitiveness between jurisdictions” and neither business, political or civic leaders view the region in a unified way”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Times Mentioned</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Use/Geographical Character</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurisdictional Cooperation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VCU Mental Mapping Class

**Discussion**

Based on the maps and comments from participants, the Richmond Regional Planning District is not imageable. While major roads are recognizable, people are generally unaware which jurisdictions comprise the region, and collectively recognize very few features. Although the participants were practicing planners within the region, many of the jurisdictions were not included or labeled on individual maps. The boundaries were unclear
and many of the drawn maps included jurisdictions outside of the Richmond Regional Planning District. Examples include Petersburg, Amelia County, the City of Hopewell, and Prince George County. In addition, participants were unaware of the jurisdictional boundaries and locations of specific localities in relation to one another. For example, Charles City and James City were confused with one another as well as Goochland and Powhatan Counties. The data also suggests that areas within the region are less recognizable the further the distance they are located from the City of Richmond. Jurisdictions which are either located adjacent to Richmond City, or contain denser populations, were more legible within the region.

Roadways play an important role in the region’s imageability. As the drawn maps indicate, peoples’ cognitive understanding of the region is very dependent upon popular roadways. People become more familiar with a particular region or jurisdiction if they have to travel through it to reach a particular destination. This was evidenced by the lack of recognition of jurisdictions such as Charles City and Powhatan Counties that do not contain major roadways.

Depicted below are Tier One and Tier Two Maps that combine the most noted imageable elements of the Region. These include first, the Tier One elements: jurisdictions, roads, and features that were noted at least 70 percent of the time. The second map includes the Tier Two elements. Characteristics represented by less than 50 percent are not imageable within the region therefore left off of the composite map.
Map 4: Tier One Composite
The results of written comments show that the Richmond Region is associated mainly with its historical past. Comments included historical architecture, the region’s Civil War past, and historical transportation along the James River. This suggests that people associate the region more with history than geographical features or land uses. Another popular response included descriptions and characterizations of suburbs around the region. The majority of comments regarding the suburbs received a negative connotation; such as a practice that promotes unsustainable practices and the conversion of farmland into residential subdivisions. Interestingly, many of the subjects also recognized the lack of regional cooperation between the regional jurisdictions. Some commented on how regional cooperation has improved within the region over the years, but still has an upward hill to climb.
Issues with Data Collection

The mental mapping class identified different issues throughout the research project that could have affected the results of the data collection. Due to the class division into separate groups, there may have been some differences in each group’s methods, such as background discussion with each set of planners in addition to the initial discussion pertaining to the purpose of the project. There was a variation in the number of planners surveyed in each jurisdiction, ranging from two to eleven planners. Therefore, results may have been weighted more heavily for jurisdictions that had high numbers of participants, such as Hanover County, the City of Richmond, and planners from the RRPDC. The region’s size itself may have also been a constraint. Since the region is so large, it may have been difficult for participants to visualize the entire region and to decide which significant features were important enough to locate and label on their mental maps. In addition, since each map was hand-drawn, it required some interpretation to understand what each participant wanted to communicate. It could be possible that some features were misidentified or not counted at all if they were not recognized by the researchers, despite efforts to be as thorough as possible (for example a line drawn on a map may be seen as an unidentified road or county border).

Recommendations

The data identified a lack of imageability of the Richmond Region. Using the analysis, some recommendations have been proposed to increase imageability over the breadth of the region and guide efforts to increase regional cooperation as part of this process. There has been significant recent effort within the region to raise awareness of the importance of regional cooperation. Increasing imageability can help with that. There are three main foci of recommendations: 1) strengthening the imageability of already-established features, 2) regional-level information projects to build awareness of less imageable features, and 3) developing leadership to guide future imageability programs. Various stakeholders will need to be involved in order to implement these recommendations ranging from interested individuals, to county governments, non-profit groups, and the Richmond Regional Planning
District Commission. The following recommendations will help establish a comprehensive
effort to increase collaboration, build a network of understanding, and potentially increase
regional collaboration in the Richmond Region.

1. **Promote increased awareness, access, conservation, and regional importance of the James River**

The James River was by far the most noted feature of the region (not including roads and
jurisdictions). This is probably due to a number of reasons: it bisects the region, touching a
majority of the jurisdictions; has served in the past as a transportation system for people and
goods; and currently provides drinking water for thousands of people; provides
opportunities for recreation; and as a major geographical feature many people see it or cross it regularly. In Lynch’s terms it is an edge that serves as a boundary between districts and counties. By safeguarding the resources the James offers, the region can maintain a major
commonality and source of regional pride.

Promoting awareness through school trips, regional rafting, tubing, or hiking trips, or other
activities should be a top priority at the regional level. Information and awareness-building
brochures or displays emphasizing the regional connections afforded by the James River may also build awareness that conservation must be coordinated at the regional level.

2. **Place regional gateway signage along roadways that enter/exit the region**

Developing regional gateway signage on the outside boundaries of the region will help
motorists identify clear boundaries of the Richmond Region and help promote a sense of
place for the entire region. Our analysis determined that there is confusion about which
jurisdictions were actually part of the Richmond Region and these signs would further clarify the regional boundaries and help increase the idea of regionalism.

Major gateways to consider placing signage:

- Interstate 95
• Interstate 64
• US Route 360 (Hull St)
• US Route 1
• US Route 60 (Midlothian Tpke)
• Route 250 (Broad St Road)
• Route 301
• Route 33
• Route 522

Map 6: Gateways

Gateway Location Map

3. Create art and/or sculptures in each locality showcasing jurisdictional identity

Another way to bring attention to the unique features of the region through design is to add art or sculptures representing specific qualities or products unique to that particular locality.
An example would be a billboard in a soybean field along a road in New Kent County that described the crop to passersby, or creating sculptures of tomatoes along I-95 in Hanover County, to reinforce an aspect of their identity that is known throughout the region (and happened to be noted in more vague terms in illustrations drawn on the maps). Counties can consult local citizens, artists, and recommendations found in their comprehensive plans, for optimum themes and placements to consider. There is a potential for these installations to become memorable local landmarks in rural areas and reinforce an identity in locations where there may be little visible activity. Another recommendation would be to place these art pieces along major roadways since they are very imageable features. Funding such projects could be obtained through federal grants for regional planning or through National Endowments for the Arts.

4. Create regional destination places along major roadways throughout regional localities

Creating regional destination points in each jurisdiction will help bring people into an area that otherwise would be unfamiliar with. For example, the Colonial Downs racetrack in New Kent County was highly imageable, even though it is outside the main population center of the region. Visiting this destination may be the only reason many people in the region make a stop in the county. Through our research, we have discovered that people are generally more familiar with areas that are right near the major roadways in the region and since major roadways are a primary way for people to experience unfamiliar areas, placing regional attractions or destinations along these roadways will help increase their visibility and increase the likelihood of people to use them. Passersby will also be more likely to be able to remember how to connect their neighborhood to such a location. Other suggestions could be to develop areas of high density, such as a major shopping center or a distinctive dense neighborhood like the Fan in Richmond. We recommend that jurisdictions with lower recognition rates, such as Charles City and Powhatan, create these regional destination places.

5. Create connections between the disparate historic features of the region
Participants in our study reported an importance of historic features to the region's identity. However, many did not list specific examples. Adding a sense of culture and history to the region as a whole can be accomplished by establishing a “living history” museum or Interactive History Park that would show how the various parts of the region developed. These Living History museums would be staffed with full time employees who dress, act, and live the part of a person from these historical times; showcasing the skills needed to live during this historical time period. For example, a model Goochland, or a view of life around the port area of the James near Richmond, and relationships between these seemingly disparate areas could be shown. Partnerships with local universities such as Virginia Commonwealth University or the University of Virginia could help market and develop these programs. Counties could also seek help from the Association for Living History, Farm, and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM) or from living history museums in other parts of the state, including Jamestown, Colonial Williamsburg, and the Citie of Henricus.

Creating regional maps for distribution that present the historic assets of the region by category (such as "historic battlefields" or district "historic homes in the Fan") can also clarify the extent or location of the most important regional historic features. This way people may be better able to group features and understand them in historical context.

6. Increase regional park assets throughout rural and less populated counties

State parks serve as great regional destinations. Within the area, there are several parks, like Pocahontas, James Rover Parks, and Dorey Park, that were labeled by participants. Powhatan County, for example, currently has lower imageability than other counties according to our study, has set aside land for a public park. The completion of this park could draw visitors and help increase its imageability.

7. Create a website for distributing information about the region

A new regional website with details about attractions, governments, regionally-important issues, or other relevant matter, will become a popular resource for those looking to learn something new about the region, both for residents and those wishing to visit the area.
Interactive features could help the regional leadership solicit feedback from users about the most sought after activities or uses or most important regional issues.

8. **Encourage regional jurisdictions to host annual activities, picnics, festivals, etc.**

Each year, there should be some sort of activity among all jurisdictional governmental offices throughout the region. Possibilities include rafting trips, picnics, golf outings, or historic tours of particular localities. Each year maybe hosted by a different locality within the Richmond Region with activities or outings that harnesses the qualities and personality of that particular jurisdiction. These activities can increase regional cooperation between jurisdictions by allowing governmental employees from across the region to interact with each other, and above all else, have some fun with colleagues and their families. This could easily be a tradition established throughout the Richmond Region between all of the jurisdictions. An activity consisting of a friendly competition between jurisdictions would be fun, but more importantly, these activities should be aimed at getting people acquainted with other members of each jurisdiction.

9. **Develop a regional imageability committee within the RRPDC to help implement the above recommendations**

In order to know what features and resources are regionally important, a Regional Imageability Committee should be created and housed at the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission. It could help jurisdictions make the most of their assets; develop a unique identity within the region and an overall identity of the entire Region. The committee could also come up with new ways to help increase imageability and forge partnerships across the region. Other strategies can be implemented by this group as they see fit to help disburse information about the region. The newly-formed Capitol Region Collaborative Group, a partnership between the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce and the RRPDC, and made up of local leaders from throughout the region, could be a great starting point for this group.

Duties and activities of the Regional Imageability Committee should include: facilitating a training course on understanding imageability, getting people from across the region who are
interested in specific regional issues together in one meeting, determine new courses of
action to heighten regional imageability, or other projects as the group sees fit.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this study, the data has demonstrated that the Richmond Region is not
imageable; there is not a very clear mental picture of the region. Understanding the physical
environment of the region will help people come to know the region as a collective whole,
and therefore increase the potential for cooperation. A more imageable Richmond Region
can serve as the foundation for a better understanding of the jurisdictions and members of
the region; familiarity with regional borders, specific land use patterns, popular destinations,
and other important landmarks within the region can promote support for a regional culture
and economy. It may also help various jurisdictions see where certain partnerships may be
mutually beneficial, such as for infrastructure or economic development projects. In time,
greater familiarity with physical features can improve regional cooperation.

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