



## Light rail system studied

Peninsula routes being discussed

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Light rail on the Peninsula. Would people ride it? How much would it cost to build? How would it affect the environment, homes and businesses. Those are some of the questions that Hampton Roads Transit, the regional bus service, is trying to answer. The service is in the middle of a \$7.2 million study, paid for by the federal and state governments.

Now comes the decision about which routes should be considered.

Hampton Roads Transit and Parsons Transportation Group, the company doing the study, have cut in half a list of 10 possible light-rail routes on the Peninsula using potential ridership as a guide.

Now they're asking for the public to weigh in on cutting that back even more to determine the two or three potential routes that will get a serious look. "We are very serious about designing a system in a way the public wants it," said Michael Townes, executive director of Hampton Roads Transit.

There's one route that will definitely get in-depth study, Townes said. This route envisioned as the main light-rail line on the Peninsula would use the right of way for the CSX rail system from downtown Newport News to Williamsburg. It would follow a similar route to Interstate 64 and Route 143 in most places.

But there are four other routes being considered for in-depth treatment, Townes said. HRT will pick two or three of these to study:

**Airport/Oyster Point Line:** It would leave the CSX main line at Denbigh Boulevard and follow Denbigh east to Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport. It would cross through the airport, with stops at Patrick Henry Mall and Oyster Point shopping areas.

**Hampton Roads Center Parkway Line:** Would leave the CSX main line at Harpersville Road and lead to Armistead Avenue and the Coliseum Mall area.

**Mercury Boulevard Line:** Would leave the CSX main line at Mercury Boulevard and travel along Mercury to Armistead Avenue and the Coliseum Mall area.

**Victoria Boulevard Line:** Would leave the CSX main line at Pembroke Avenue and turn quickly south to Victoria Boulevard, ending up in downtown Hampton, and from there to the Coliseum area.

Once HRT determines which routes should be studied, the Parsons Group will look into the environmental effect; effects on air quality and noise; and the displacement of businesses, homes, schools, churches and parklands.

Only after that study is done, later this fall, will Hampton Roads Transit go to the step of getting federal approval, designing a project and determining a cost. Townes said the cost of actually building a light-rail system would be well into the hundreds of millions of dollars.