Route 29–Rio Road Intersection Naming Qualitative Study

Draft #1: July 16, 2015

Southeastern Institute of Research, Inc.
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Objectives and Methodology
Research Objectives

1. Understand **how much stakeholders appreciate and support the official naming of the Route 29–Rio Road intersection and immediate area** to help build a greater sense of place for the area.

2. **Identify leading name or names** for the Route 29–Rio Road intersection and immediate area.

3. Identify **a naming architecture for the four geographic “parts”** that make up the Route 29–Rio Road intersection.

*This research effort is not about specific plans related to the Route 29 Solutions construction efforts.*
Research Methodology

• SIR developed a discussion guide to direct a series of 75-minute discussion groups. This guide was approved by VDOT with input from members of the Route 29 PDAP.

• Discussion group participants were recruited from a list provided by the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce. Participants had to work or live in the general Route 29–Rio Road intersection area.

• SIR conducted nine separate groups for a total of 40 participants.

• The groups were held at Fashion Square Mall and at the new public library.

• All participants were given a $50 gift card as a thank you gift for their time and input.
Overview of Participants
Participants’ Location
Key Findings and Implications
Study participants agree that some geographic areas become known as one-of-a-kind “places”—having a name and a unique identity, and delivering a unique set of experiences. Charlottesville has a handful of these unique places. Study participants see the value in having a place-oriented identity.
What Makes a Place?

Research participants were asked to brainstorm what attributes make up a geographic area or location that has its own personality or branded name.

Study participants came up with the following attributes that make a “place.”

- Variety of things to do
- Types of people going there
- Memorable
- Recognizable
- Is a true destination
- Self-sustaining
- Growing
- Has a critical population mass
- Is a destination
- Has a recognizable landmark or two
**Major “Places” in the Charlottesville Region**

*Participants were asked to brainstorm which “places” in the Charlottesville region already have a known personality and name.*

- **The Corner***
- **Stonefield Mall***
- **Downtown Mall***
- **Pantops***
- Barracks Road
- Belmont
- Hydraulic Road
- Forest Lakes
- Crozet
- Hollymead
- Fashion Square
- Greenbrier
- Rio Road
- 29 Bypass
- 5th Street
- 250 Bypass “Chicken Alley”
- Rio Hill Shopping Center
- Trader Joe’s
- UVA
- Fry Springs
- Albemarle Place
- Monticello

*Most mentioned*
Perceived Benefits of a Defined Place-Oriented Identity

Study participants were asked to identify any perceived benefits for areas that have a defined sense of place. The participants identified several benefits.

- Helps make a place easier to appreciate—*what it’s all about*.
- Helps attract more attention, support, and growth.
- Positions the place as more of a destination.
- Makes it easier for businesses to market their service—*“We’re located at ____.”*
- Helps tourists find the location, since locals know where to send them.
“Naming creates that sense of place and really defines it.”

– Focus group participant
Study participants easily came up with criteria needed for place naming: relation to the area, local equity, simple and memorable, timeless, and marketable.
Criteria for Naming an Area

Participants were asked to brainstorm a possible list of criteria that could help guide the creation of a name for a region or geographic area that might not have a set or established name today. Their answers fell into five broad areas of consideration.

1. Based on something related to the area:
   - Includes something that is visually unique to the area—a major landmark.
   - Meaningful and significant to local area; for example, Pantops Mountain.

2. Leverage local historic equity:
   - Ties into any significant historical event(s) in the region or broader market; for example, the Civil War battle fought at Rio Hill.
Criteria for Naming an Area

Continued

3. Simple and memorable:
   - Easy to remember.
   - Easy to read or text.
   - Short.
   - Positive, upbeat.
   - Catchy.
   - Unique.

4. Timeless
   - A name that is not tied to a retailer or some other asset that may not be there in twenty years.

5. Marketable
   - Has the potential for mass appeal.
   - Something that conjures the idea of a geographic location.
   - A word that’s trustworthy, that is, not controversial.

Participants’ naming criteria (continued from previous page).

Note: This list was used by participants later in the discussion to “assess” the potential names they came up with for the Route 29–Rio Road intersection and area.
“Thinking 15 to 20 years from now, you want to name it something that will last, and many of the businesses located in this area may not be here.”

– Focus group participant
Study participants see the need for and many advantages (and few disadvantages) to having one name for the Route 29–Rio Road intersection and immediate surrounding area.
The Majority of Participants See Issues Related to the Lack of a Common Name

“There is an issue giving directions to people who visit from out of town. There is a lack of a compass here on the road.”

“Name of the road [Rio] and shopping center [Rio Shopping Center] cause confusion.”

“Some of the parts of the intersection are already named for the major retailer, and this can be confusing for people without a name for the overall intersection.”
The Majority of Participants Feel the Route 29–Rio Road Intersection and Immediate Area Needs a Shared Common Name

“This is necessary for this place; creates status and a draw.”

“Having an idea of the area you are going to is extremely significant and helpful.”

“We need something to keep small businesses in this area.”

“This would be great for marketing purposes.”
Study Participants See Few Disadvantages to a Shared Common Name for the Route 29–Rio Road Intersection and Immediate Area

Participants were pressed to come up with negative aspects of naming the intersection and immediate area.

“This area may be too broad of an area to be defined with one name.”

“One name—if something negative happens, like crime—could associate the whole area with that image.”
The Route 29–Rio Road intersection has many defining features, as well as several (but not one dominant) place-oriented names. However, “Rio” comes up as part of many names that people can recall for the general area.
Defining Features and Visual Iconography in the Route 29–Rio Road Area

Participants were asked to brainstorm a list of the defining features and iconography in Route 29–Rio Road area. The complete list of answers is presented here.

- Fashion Square Mall
- Rio Road itself
- Albemarle Square
- Reservoir
- Rio Hill Shopping Center
- Barracks Shopping Center
- General shopping area and retail
- Greenbrier
- Toys ‘R’ Us
- Library
- SunTrust (clock)
- The Mall
- Stonefield Shoppes
- UVA shopping center
- Hollymead Town Center
- Colonial Auto
- Hardee’s
- Wood Grill
- Albemarle High School
- Fresh Market
- Lowe’s
- Daily Progress
- Putt-Putt Golf
- ACAC
The Complete List of Names That Study Participants Have Used or Heard Being Used for the Route 29–Rio Road Area Included:

- Rio
- Main Highway
- 29
- Rio 29
- Fashion Square Mall
- Albemarle Square
- Uptown
- Midtown
- 29 North
- Rio Road Intersection
- Rio Road Mall
- 29 Rio
- Rio Strip Mall

Note the number of mentions that included “Rio”
**Unaided** Names for the Rio Road Intersection

This slide is from the Route 29 Solutions Telephone Survey
“I am partial to ‘Rio’ because I have lived here for a long time—‘Rio’ has some heritage to it ... the name ‘Rio’ is authentic.”

– Focus group participant
“People looking for directions specify ‘Rio’ because 29 is so long. ... If they say ‘Rio,’ you know where on 29.”

– Focus group participant
“This area is Rio. It’s big. You would think the whole area would be Rio with its own zip code.”

– Focus group participant
There is remarkable consensus on the leading potential names for the Route 29–Rio Road intersection and immediate area: Rio Crossing(s), Rio Crossroad(s) and Rio Square. All three hold promise.
## Possible Route 29–Rio Road Intersection/Immediate Area Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Name</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rio Crossing(s)*</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Square*</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Crossroad(s)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Place (Rio 29 Place)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Square*</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midtown or Midtown Charlottesville</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rio</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Corridor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Name</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rio City</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rio Corners</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio 29*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Grid*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Intersection</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio District (&amp; Bus.) District</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northpoint</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Without the aid of a list, most of the groups came up with these names.*
## Route 29–Rio Road Intersection Possible Names

**Additional Names That Came Up When Brainstorming Potential Name Possibilities – But Received Two Or Less Votes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Name</th>
<th>Possible Name</th>
<th>Possible Name</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rio ridge</td>
<td>Mall Place</td>
<td>Rio 29 District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Retail</td>
<td>The Lasso</td>
<td>Albemarle Midtown</td>
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<td>29 Rio Bypass</td>
<td>North Crossing/Uptown Crossing</td>
<td>Rio Interchange</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rio Interchange* (Rio 29)</td>
<td>The Spot</td>
<td>Riverside</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Rio Circle</td>
<td>Four Square</td>
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<td>Rio Road Area</td>
<td>The Corridor</td>
<td>Rivanna Place</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rio Exchange</td>
<td>Civil War square</td>
<td>Four Corners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Square</td>
<td>Rio North</td>
<td>Rio Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southriver</td>
<td>29 Corridor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albemarle Hub</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pros and Cons of Preferred Names

Participants were asked to discuss the pros and cons of the highest-rated potential names. Their points are listed on the next page.
Rio Crossroad(s)

Pros

• Signifies a precise spot on the map—the intersection is a crossroads.
• Naming convention is being used successfully (Zion Crossroads).
• Works very well for the interchange name.
Rio Crossroad(s)

Cons

• Not overly suggestive of a larger area.
• Not suggestive as an “active place”—doesn’t reinforce that there is a lot going on there.
• It would take work to build awareness of a new name. Using “crossroads” may need a clear descriptor tagline:

Rio Crossroad

Route 29–Rio Road
Rio Crossing(s)

Pros

• Signifies a precise spot on the map—the intersection is a crossing of roads.
• Appealing; sounds like an “active” place. Suggests that more is happening there—not just “a road crossing a road.”
• Works well as an intersection name and name for a larger area.
Rio Crossing(s)

Cons

• It would take work to build awareness of a new name. Using “crossing(s)” may need a clear descriptor tagline:

Rio Crossing

Route 29–Rio Road
Rio Square or The Square

**Pros**

- Simple (easy to text, say and recall)
- Upbeat.
- Ties into area—specifically, the major shopping malls (Fashion Square Mall and Albemarle Square Shopping Center).
- “The Square” invokes an image.
- Works with other Charlottesville “place names”—Pantops, the Corner.
- It’s a location, but also destination.
- Good name for the immediate area.
- Works well for naming the parts of the intersection “corners” of the Square.
Rio Square & The Square

Cons

• Not as good of a name for the intersection as it is for the immediate area.
• Could sound like another mall.
• It would take work to build awareness of a new name for any brand. Using “square” may need a clear descriptor tagline:

Rio Square
Route 29–Rio Road
The most appealing identifier name for the four parts of the Route 29–Rio Road intersection is “corner.” There is a challenge, however, in finding unique corner-related names for two of the four corners. Most study participants feel the most practical solution is to also use a traditional geographic orientation (NE, NW, SE, SW) for each corner.
Based on an Aided List, “Corner” Was the Top Name for the Parts of the Route 29–Rio Road Intersection

Study participants were then given a list of terms that could be used in naming each part of the intersection.

The most appealing name was “corner,” followed by “quadrant” (or quad) and “square.”

Two participants felt that the “corner” name brings up Tysons Corner.

- **Corner**
- Quadrant (Quad)
- Square
- District
- Area
- Box
- Quarter
Most Survey Respondents who Are Familiar with the Rio Road–Route 29 Intersection Identify the Four Quadrants as “Corners”

- Corners: 53%
- Centers: 8%
- Squares: 7%
- Districts: 2%
- Something else: 16%
- Don't know/not sure: 14%

This question was asked among respondents familiar with Rio Road intersection.

This slide is from the Route 29 Solutions Telephone Survey.

Q15. Now, think of the four immediate geographic corners that make up the Route 29 and Rio road intersection: northwest, southwest, northeast, and southeast. Do you think of these four locations as:

n = 379

Aided …
Defining Features and Visual Iconography in Each Corner of the Route 29–Rio Road Intersection

Participants were asked to brainstorm a list of the defining features and iconography in each corner of the Route 29–Rio Road intersection. The complete list of answers is presented here.

**Major Unaided Identifiable Features:**

- Northeast corner: Albemarle Square
- Southeast corner: Fashion Square
- Northwest corner: ?
- Southwest corner: ?

**When Pushed on Possible NW and SW Identifier, Places Mentioned:**

- Northwest corner: Rio Hill
- Southwest corner:
  - Stonefield
  - Northrop Grumman

*Note: Study participants did not feel that the new library was recognizable enough to be considered an identifier for the southwest corner.*
Consideration in Naming the Corners

Observations and considerations offered by participants

• One challenge with naming anything after an existing business is that the business might not be here in 20 to 30 years.

• Related to being “timeless,” several participants suggested naming each part of the intersection using historical references.

• Another concern identified is the limitation that one particular business-oriented association would place on the size of area being defined.
Geographic Orientation as Part of the Corner-Related Name

• Geographic reference points in the naming of parts of the intersection had appeal. Participants started to make sense of this naming structure by using examples of the overall names previously discussed for the Route 29–Rio Road intersection and immediate area:
  – **Rio Square**: naming the corners based on the geographic points of the “square”—NW Rio Square, SW Rio Square, NE Rio Square, etc.
  – **Rio Quad**: naming the corners based on the geographic points of the “quad”—NE Rio Quad, SW Rio Quad, SW Rio Quad, etc.

• Most participants said this geographic orientation (NE, SE, etc.) as a naming convention already existed for the area (i.e., Barracks East, Barracks West) and should be utilized for the Route 29–Rio Road intersection, too.
“If you don’t know where you are going, naming the parts by geographical area is better description-wise.”

– Focus group participant
Geographic Orientation as Part of the Corner-Related Name

• Many participants also believe the geographic naming convention helps people who are new to the area or are just visiting the area.

• While the majority prefer the geographic orientation (NE, NW, SE, SW), an insight came from some people who said they understand this idea, but just don’t appreciate “a compass, geographic orientation” in their own head; they can’t intuitively think or point to each direction, even when driving on Route 29. They simply need more information to know what’s ahead, such as what businesses and attractions are located in each geographic part.

• For the most part, participants felt that naming the specific sections of the Route 29–Rio Road intersection would be a challenging task.
After participating in the focus group experience, all of the study participants believed this overall naming and placemaking initiative was important to pursue.
“This initiative is a good idea to bring our community together.”

– Focus group participant
SIR’s Five Primary Naming Recommendations
Keep the Route 29–Rio Road naming and placemaking momentum going. People feel this work is important and appreciate VDOT’s efforts here.
Include the name “Rio” in any final naming consideration. No question, Rio has some brand name equity.
Related Considerations

• “Rio” as a naming convention for the intersection and immediate area is almost part of the region’s vernacular when describing the Route 29–Rio Road area.

• It’s possible a longer name (Rio Crossings, Rio Crossroads) will eventually default to just one word, “Rio,” like with Pantops and the Corner. Consumers drive this evolution. This happened to Federal Express (now FedEx), Kentucky Fried Chicken (now KFC), and International House of Pancakes (now IHOP).

• If Rio or some derivative of Rio (e.g., Rio Crossroads) becomes the name, consideration should be given to using the mispronunciation of Rio Road as the basis for an outreach effort: “It’s Ry-oh, not Ree-oh.”
Focus future Route 29–Rio Road naming conversations on Rio Crossings, Rio Crossroads, and Rio Square.
Explore naming the “parts” of the intersection corners and using both geographic (NE, SE, SW, and NW) and locational references.
Sample Signage on Route 29 North for Motorists Headed Toward the Route 29–Rio Road Intersection.

Rio Crossings
Southeast Corner
To Rio Road East and Downtown Charlottesville

Rio Square
Southeast Corner
To Rio Road East and Downtown Charlottesville
Involve more local businesses and residents in the naming process. Participants in this study believe the intersection and immediate area would benefit from having a name. They appreciated VDOT’s work in this area.
Related Considerations

• Build on the popularity of this naming initiative.
  • Option A: Go back out to the list of all people invited to attend the sessions, including the participants. Thank them and ask for a final vote using a short 2-3 minute online minute survey. (Estimated list: 100+ people).
  • Option B: Use a crowdsourcing approach to inexpensively involve hundreds of residents and businesses in naming the intersection, corners, and immediate area.
• Use the results of this study, as well as the recent Route 29 Solutions survey, to offer up a small set of potential naming options. The research to date provides the rationale for using a very tight list of naming options:
  • *Rio Crossing* . . . *Rio Crossings*
  • *Rio Crossroad* . . *Rio Crossroads*
  • *Rio Square* . . . *The Square*
  • *Plus corner-related naming alternatives*

• Additional involvement will wrap up before the end of August with a follow-up to PDAP on Sep 3.
Thank You