

Connect Transit Board of Trustees
March 28, 2023, 4:30pm
351 Wylie Drive, Normal, IL 61761 – Board Room
Regular Session Minutes – Approved at April 25, 2023 Meeting

Chairman Ryan Whitehouse called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.
Board Clerk, Janice Crago, recorded attendance via roll call.

Trustees Present: Trustee Judy Buchanan
Secretary Tim McCue
Trustee Mandava Rao
Trustee Barbara Singer
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

Trustees Absent: Trustee Linda Foster
Vice Chair Julie Hile

City Managers Present: None

Staff Present: David Braun, General Manager
Aubrey Staton, Marketing Manager
Brady Lange, Procurement Director
Charlie Busse, Maintenance Manager
Jacob Smith, Transportation Planner
Janice Crago, Board Clerk
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director
Shelly Perry, Operations Manager
Stephanie Butler, HR Manager
Steve Stockton, IT Manager

Guest(s) Present: None

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to approve Vice Chair Hile to attend virtually due to reason three – family emergency, as stated in the by-laws.

Trustee Rao motioned; seconded by Trustee Singer.

Discussion:

There was no discussion.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

Motion to approve Vice Chair Hile to attend virtually due to reason three – family emergency, as stated in the by-laws was **approved**.

Chairman Whitehouse led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance and read the Connect Transit Mission Statement.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

CONSENT AGENDA:

- a. Approval of February 22, 2023, Regular Session Minutes
- b. Approval of Financial Information for February 2023
- c. Monthly Statistical Reports for February 2023
- d. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report
- e. Cornerstone – Illinois Weekly Update – noted this report was not received

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Approve the Consent Agenda.

Secretary McCue motioned; seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

Discussion:

David Braun, General Manager, stated that the Houck Transit Advertising expense included wrapping four buses. The four buses included one for Heartland, two for ISU, and one for Miller Park Zoo. Heartland Community College split the cost of the wrap with us, and they have paid their half. The two ISU wraps were part of our contract with ISU, and the Miller Park Zoo wrap was part of our obligation to the City. Mr. Braun pointed out that our statistical report reflects a 19.56% year-to-date increase in Fixed Route ridership over last year, and that we are on par to reach 70% of our pre-COVID ridership this year. The Connect Mobility statistics show that we are almost 40% higher than we were last year, but we that the trend has been flattening over the last few months. Mr. Braun also pointed out that the Operator Pay Hours to Service Hours decreased because we are scheduling the drivers efficiently, keeping those hours that we pay for time as close to the time that they are driving the bus as possible. Mr. Braun encouraged the Trustees to review the Cardinal Infrastructure Federal report and stated that we did not receive a Cornerstone report this month because they are busy tracking all of the bills right now so it was not included in the meeting packet.

Chairman Whitehouse stated it is good to see Connect Mobility growing, as well as Fixed Route.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

Consent Agenda minus the Cornerstone Illinois Weekly Update was **approved**.

NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Authorize the General Manager to sign and enter into a one-year Cash Farm Lease with Mark Thompson beginning on April 1, 2023, and ending on March 31, 2024, on a cash rent basis of \$200.00 per acre, per year, for a total of \$1,000.00 per year.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to sign and enter into a one-year Cash Farm Lease with Mark Thompson beginning on April 1, 2023, and ending on March 31, 2024, on a cash rent basis of \$200.00 per acre, per year, for a total of \$1,000.00 per year.

Trustee Buchanan motioned; seconded by Trustee Singer.

Discussion:

Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director, explained in the past several years Connect Transit has leased the five acres of land to the west of our operations and maintenance facility to Mark Thompson to use as farmland. Under the lease agreement, the property is maintained by the Lessee and provides additional revenue to Connect Transit.

The land produces average to fair yields due to sitting rather low and does not properly drain because of tile damage. Per the Farmland Values and Lease Trends, the typical cash rental rates per acre of land with average to fair productivity ranges from \$125 to \$225. The purpose of the one-year term is to allow flexibility for future development of that property for Connect Transit use.

The revenue received will be directed to the fiscal year 2024 operational revenues.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse
NAY: None

The motion to authorize the General Manager to sign and enter into a one-year Cash Farm Lease with Mark Thompson beginning on April 1, 2023, and ending on March 31, 2024, on a cash rent basis of \$200.00 per acre, per year, for a total of \$1,000.00 per year was **approved**.

- b. Authorize the Staff to allow riders to utilize our service at zero-fare on Tuesday, April 4 (Election Day), Saturday, April 22 (Earth Day), and Sunday, April 30 (Fair Housing Affair).

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize staff to allow riders to utilize our service at zero-fare on Tuesday, April 4 (Election Day), Saturday, April 22 (Earth Day), and Sunday, April 30 (Fair Housing Affair).

Secretary McCue motioned; seconded by Trustee Rao.

Discussion:

Aubrey Staton, Marketing Manager, explained that April 4 - Historically, Connect Transit has operated fare free on Election Day to increase opportunity for those in our community to express their right to vote. By going zero-fare on our system, we hope to encourage voter turnout by removing one of the biggest challenges of voting – transportation.

April 22 - Each year since 1970, Earth Day has been celebrated on April 22 to bring awareness to growing environmental issues. A single person who uses public transportation instead of a personal vehicle for one day can prevent up to 10 pounds of CO2 emissions. We want to do our best to provide everyone with the chance to contribute to the reduction in CO2 emissions on Earth Day.

April 30 – The Mid-Illinois Realtors Association (MIRA) will be hosting a Fair Housing Affair to educate citizens about their rights and opportunities related to housing. In order to allow for maximum attendance, we would like to offer our support of this event by operating at zero-fare and providing transportation, so everyone has an opportunity to attend this event and receive this information.

We believe that each of these days is worth support from our organization and will contribute to the overall opportunity and enrichment of individuals in our community.

This will result in the loss of one weekday's, one Saturday's and one Sunday's worth of revenue. Sunday is typically our lowest ridership day.

Secretary McCue asked if we know how many people are expected for the Fair Housing Affair? Ms. Staton stated we do not know that number at this time but that the event organizers have a spot on their registration form asking if the attendee needs transportation to help us gather an estimate as the event nears. She plans to use this years' numbers for planning in coming years.

Secretary McCue stated he would be hesitant to go fare-free for the day if the event only impacted a small number of people. Mr. Braun stated that the event organizers asked for the Purple Route to be fare-free, and he suggested the entire system be zero-fare due riders having to pay for transfers to or from the Purple Route because of the accessibility to the lower income communities.

Chairman Whitehouse stated he agreed with Secretary McCue in that he would be hesitant to provide a system wide zero-fare day for a small number of people. Ms. Staton stated she would review the numbers for this years' event and use that to determine how we can participate next year.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

The motion to authorize staff to allow riders to utilize our service at zero-fare on Tuesday, April 4 (Election Day), Saturday, April 22 (Earth Day), and Sunday, April 30 (Fair Housing Affair) was **approved**.

c. Route Efficiency Update – Informational

Mr. Braun stated that every three months we plan to report on the efficiency of our service, month-to-month, and year-to-year. He has asked Jacob Smith, Transportation Planner, to put the report together and present it to the Board.

Mr. Smith stated that as previously discussed, the staff aims to regularly provide a closer look at system performance and trends. For this report, the first eight months of FY23 will be examined: July 2022 through February 2023.

First and foremost, ridership is continuing to trend upward towards our pre-pandemic ridership numbers. On average, Fixed Route ridership has recovered to 82.9% of our pre-pandemic ridership.

Year-over-year, both services have continued to climb. The Fixed Route system has an average monthly ridership of 172,638 in FY23, up 19% from 144,397 per month on average in FY22. Connect Mobility has seen even more of an increase, with an average of 8,115 trips per month so far in FY23, a full 39.88% increase from the 5,847 trips in FY22.

Mr. Smith explained charts provided in the meeting packet document here.

Despite continual ridership growth on Fixed Route, our on-time performance has remained consistent. As a reminder, “On-Time” is a vehicle that does not leave more than five minutes later than scheduled. From July 2022 to February 2023, our lowest Fixed Route on-time performance was at 92% in February, down two percent from the year prior. On average, our on-time performance is down 0.625% in FY23 compared to FY22.

Mr. Smith explained charts provided in the meeting packet.

For the Connect Mobility service, on-time performance in FY23 was even more impressive with the lowest month operating on-time 98% of the time, in line with prior year on-time performance. As a reminder, CM “On-Time” is a vehicle that does not leave more than 15 minutes later than scheduled.

Chairman Whitehouse stated his pleasure that our on-time performance remains stellar for as long as he has been here.

d. Sapphire Route Realignment – Informational

Mr. Braun stated that in October of 2022 we introduced a new route, the Sapphire Route, which serves the west side of Bloomington and Normal, including Rivian. We wanted to give that route time to grow and become as successful as it could become, but six months in we are finding it is an unproductive route and we need to do something about that. It is carrying passengers, but we are putting a lot of resources into carrying those passengers. Mr. Smith did an analysis of the route, and the Operations Team worked with Mr. Smith to come up with a recommendation to modify the route. Today’s presentation is informational, but if the Trustees agree that we should move forward, we will begin public input sessions and bring the recommendation back in April.

Mr. Smith explained with the introduction of Rivian as a major employer in the area, Connect Transit recognized an opportunity to provide additional service to the west side of Bloomington and Normal. The Sapphire Route was developed to meet the needs of Rivian, as well as expand opportunities to travel to other west Bloomington and west Normal businesses that were not being served. The route was designed to provide maximum direct service from Downtown Bloomington and Uptown Normal to minimize the need for multiple transfers.

With time to observe the route, it is apparent that service to west Bloomington-Normal is beneficial and has ridership that boards and deboards at Rivian, as well as Walmart and some other stops along the route. For the observed period, the Sapphire Route saw an initial increase in ridership. While our goal is to provide excellent service to our community, we need to do so efficiently to remain financially sustainable. The Sapphire Route is the least efficient of our routes.

Mr. Smith referred to a chart included in the meeting packet.

There are two methods to increase passenger per hour productivity. The first is to encourage ridership. Over the past six months, we have worked with Rivian to promote the service to their

employees and advertised the route in the media. After an initial growth period, the ridership growth rate flattened.

Another method to increase passenger per hour productivity is to reduce hours. As shown in the map below, the Sapphire Route covers much of the same area as the Lime Route, due to the limited roads that can be used to access employers on the west side of the City and Town. The Lime Route is one of our more productive routes and we did not want to impact that service by adding more miles and hours to it.

Presently, the Sapphire Route is making use of four vehicles, operating for 41 hours and traveling 438 miles daily while showing an average of 56 boardings and deboardings at Rivian and a few other stops along portions of the route that are not served by other routes.

Staff believes the best method to increase productivity on the Sapphire Route is to reduce the hours and miles.

Mr. Smith referred to maps included in the meeting packet.

The benefit of this alignment is that it connects to the Silver, Lime, and Brown Routes at Walmart, offering greater access to other parts of the City and Town. It also allows for the same 30-minute service but increases it to all day while significantly reducing hours, miles, and bus requirements. The change in the customer experience is less direct service, while also being required to transfer at the Bloomington Walmart location.

By realigning the Sapphire Route, the new Sapphire Express service will operate 17 hours over 191 miles per day using only one bus. To ensure that those traveling from Uptown or Downtown via current Sapphire pathing are not left without an option for transit, staff believes it is best to add time to the Lime route in the morning to provide that service.

In summary, next steps will include publicly exploring the proposed adjustment to the Sapphire routing. This will include five public engagement sessions and a means for online feedback related to the change. Staff will present a formal proposal and request for authorization to modify the route to the Board after it accounts for all comments received during public engagement sessions. If approved, the service modification will begin as early as May 14, 2023.

This proposal is a service reduction. The financial impact will be determined with the final recommendation.

Chairman Whitehouse asked how this will impact the current ridership numbers? Mr. Smith stated we do not know that at this time, but we hope to learn that through engagement sessions. He hopes through those engagement sessions and marketing campaigns we can make sure the new route information is distributed to the riders who need it so there is minimal negative impact since we are not cutting stops.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there will be a stop at the OSF Prompt Care? Shelly Perry, Operations Manager, explained there had been a request for an ADA stop at that location and when we did a preliminary look at that location we discovered we cannot put an ADA stop along that stretch.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if this would free up any buses or drivers? Ms. Perry explained this route is currently split up between eight drivers, with the new proposed route we could probably split it up between two drivers. Mr. Braun stated this would also take the route from four buses per day down to one bus per day.

Mr. Braun stated this isn't a recommendation, just a request for authorization to pursue the route modification.

Trustees agreed to pursue the modification.

Trustee Rao asked if we could operate the route during the Rivian shift change. Mr. Braun stated the new route captures the 6:00 a.m. shift change.

e. FY24 Earmark Requests – Informational

Mr. Braun reminded the Board that at our last meeting he mentioned some of the items we were requesting as part of our FY24 earmark requests and Brady Lange, Procurement Director, has put together a presentation on those items.

Mr. Lange referred to a presentation on screen, also included in the meeting packet.

Mr. Lange stated as part of our FY24 Congressional Directed Spending or Community Project Funding, also known as an Earmark Request, we would be requesting the following items:

1. Mobileye Shield+ Collision Avoidance Systems and Advance Pedestrian Alert Systems
 - a. The Mobileye Shield+ system is an active collision avoidance system (retrofit 26 buses)
 - b. Headway monitoring system – warns operators if they are following too closely
 - c. Pedestrian, cyclist, and other mobility device users collision avoidance
 - i. Warns Bus Operators that a pedestrian is getting close to the bus during a turn
 - ii. If a collision with a pedestrian is eminent, the system will notify the pedestrian
2. Radio System Replacement
 - a. Radio systems provide the vital communication Bus Operators require to keep themselves and passengers safe
 - b. Current systems are outdated and frequently experience outages and maintenance problems
 - c. Upgraded system utilizing the Starcom21 statewide public safety system will improve communication with local agencies needed for emergency response scenarios
3. Facility safety and security improvements
 - a. Upgrades to electronic door locking systems
 - i. Ability to securely limit access to all areas of our facility and external doors
 - ii. Allows for single management interface for current and future facilities
 - b. Potential for some additional camera upgrades
 - i. Also managed in a single interface

Chairman Whitehouse asked if Starcom21 is what the county uses? Mr. Lange confirmed it is the same system.

Chairman Whitehouse stated the county is going to bid for a new system and asked if we could go in with them? Mr. Lange stated he would look into it.

f. Draft FY24 Budget – Informational

Mr. Braun referred to a presentation on screen, also included in the meeting packet.

Mr. Braun stated he focused on the services we are providing and developed the budget around them. He explained in this budget we have not modified any of the Fixed Routes, except for the Sapphire, as we proposed earlier in the meeting. We did plan for the expansion of Connect Mobility at a rate of 12.5%, similar to what we are seeing in the flattening of the curve now and similar to 2019 number. The FY24 budget also includes Microtransit and continued vanpool service.

Mr. Braun stated the proposed FY24 budget includes four new positions: one Paratransit Operations Manager, one Customer Service Representative, one IT Specialist, and one Marketing Assistant.

Mr. Braun explained the proposed budget takes into consideration training for both staff and Trustees, numerous programs and projects for FY24, anticipated cost increases, detailed IT and utility expenses, and challenges facing the agency in the upcoming year.

Mr. Braun stated our FY24 proposed budget is \$19,067,384, a 7% increase over our FY23 \$17,763,098 budget.

Ms. Staton shared our marketing plan for the year will focus on impact the impact we are having on our riders, employees, and the community over focusing on the blanket number of media impressions that we are receiving.

Ms. Staton stated we have previously leveraged media with traditional newspaper ads, radio ads, digital banner ads, and TV commercials, which we may still continue to use those with job fair/employment advertising, service change and zero-fare day announcements. However, she hopes to expand with new ways to leverage media, including native content – instead of paying for content - being the content, interviews and podcasts, pre-roll video and geofencing, and paid interviews and stories. By utilizing these new media sources, she hopes to educate the community, establish a personal connection, and give Connect Transit a face.

Mr. Braun shared a 2021 Peer Agency comparison, stating we are highest in Passengers Per Hour in Productivity, we carry more passengers per hour than our peer agencies. We are the same as Champaign-Urbana for Passengers Per Mile, meaning the number of people who board on a per mile basis is the same as Champaign, which is a much larger system serving many more students. We are among the lowest on a Cost Per Hour basis, second to Decatur, which is a contracted city system.

Mr. Braun shared our revenue will come through various sources, such as Illinois Downstate Operating Program, FTA Operating, Bloomington and Normal, contracts fares, passenger fares, and advertising/misc.

Mr. Braun stated several planned Capital projects are mostly covered by Federal and State funds, with close to \$1m coming out of local funds.

Mr. Braun shared the FY24 budget priorities for each department.

- Operations & Safety
 - Microtransit Implementation
 - Reorganization
 - CM and Microtransit Management
 - Training & Development
 - Planning Study Results Review and Implementation
- Maintenance
 - Electric Vehicle Training and Expansion
 - Facility Improvements
- Finance
 - Budget Management and Review
 - Fiscal Compliance
- Procurement
 - Transit Center
 - Facility Update
 - Vehicle Replacements and Asset Planning
- IT
 - Systems updates
 - Radio System Replacement
 - Uptown Passenger Information Displays
 - On-going Operations Software and HRIS Implementation
 - Potential Mobile-eye
 - Data analysis review and efficiency improvements
 - Existing Systems
 - New EV Systems
 - New Technologies
- HR
 - Full employment
 - Wellness Program
 - Employee Handbook Update
- Marketing
 - Microtransit Implementation
 - Communications Plan Roll-out
 - Planning Study Results Communications

Mr. Braun shared the final actions for the FY24 budget are to finalize healthcare and liability costs, present to City and Town Councils, fine-tune and finalize the budget, present to the Budget Committee, outline changes for the Board, present to the Board at the April meeting, and submit to State of Illinois.

Chairman Whitehouse stated the Budget Committee is Vice Chair Hile and Trustee Singer. Mr. Braun confirmed Chairman Whitehouse was correct.

Secretary McCue stated he would like a job description for the Marketing Assistant and explained it is because we previously pulled this position and we now have Dovetail assisting, he would like to know what this position will be doing. He cautioned Mr. Braun not to get into the healthcare business when recertifying for the Connect Mobility rider applications, and to take a second look at some of the technology expenses that are increasing heavily because a 300% increase is worth a second look.

Chairman Whitehouse expressed his concern with the Remix expense doubling in cost and would encourage staff to negotiate hard for a better cost because we have been using them for years, and since we did just sign a contract with them for another very expensive service last month.

Chairman Whitehouse would like a justification and timeline for the staffing increases, especially the IT Specialist, perhaps consider holding off on hiring that person until we see if the software bought last month takes some of the burden off as hoped for.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if quarterly bus wraps are needed at our cost of \$25,000.00, maybe there are other ideas for this and to consider other options.

Trustee Buchanan stated the four new positions would be an investment and she would like to know what kind of data they would produce and how we would use it that data.

Secretary McCue would like the professional development to include the attendees bringing the information back and sharing it with staff or peers.

Chairman Whitehouse encouraged Trustees to attend the City and Town budget presentations.

Trustee Buchanan also encouraged the City and Town budget presentations.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

None.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT:

Mr. Braun shared his monthly General Manager report.

Community:

Outreach

- Life Multiplied Podcast
- Content Days with Miller Park Zoo, ISU, HCC
- ISU EDI Employer Expo
- Best Buddies Lunch Party for Friendship Walk
- BACC Mock Interviews
- Hosted U of I Senior Planning Students
- Trucking & Transportation Fair at HCC
- The Chicago Transit Authority and Pace Suburban Bus visited Connect to view our charging infrastructure.

Employee Welfare Events

- Transit Employee Appreciation Week
- Employee Fun Lunch
- HR Manager Farewell Lunch

Employee Development:

- Operations Supervisors - Jared Simons, Brandon Miles, Jeff Mancil, Carrie Bailey, Dora Kohtz, and Chris Fuller
 - How to Give Feedback to Poor Performing or Difficult People
 - Active Listening: You Can Be A Great Listener
 - Difficult Conversations: The Complete Guide
- Maintenance Foreman – Chris Sharkey, and Mechanics – Brett Kinsley, Zeke Marquez, John Crago, Billy Basham, Ulysseus Compton, Joe Eich, Aric Tackett, and Dustin Nalley completed 32 hours of Proterra Maintenance Training.
 - This training included lockout-tagout, basic high voltage principles, familiarization with electrical schematics, multiplexing diagnostics, component locations, etc.
- Dave White, Safety and Training Director
 - Transit Rail Incident Investigation; Virtual Training, U.S. Department of Transportation, Transportation Safety Institute
 - The course provides participants with the knowledge and skills to successfully investigate various types of transit incidents. Dave has previously completed Fundamentals of Bus Collision Investigation and Advanced Problems in Bus Collision Investigation. The additional class counts towards a Public Transportation Safety Certification Training Program (PTSCTP) certification from the U.S. Department of Transportation.
- Justin Allen, Safety and Training Coordinator
 - Tabletop Exercise for Emergency Evacuation; Heartland Community College
 - This training exercise hosted by Heartland Community College allowed participants to see firsthand how the simulation cell of a disaster exercise functions. Justin learned how to write injects for an exercise, and he was able to be a resource for exercise participants who had questions regarding Connect Transit's role in responding to local disasters.

Recruiting:

Promotions:

- Stephanie Butler – HR Manager
- Aric Tackett – Mechanic

Positions Filled:

- Bus Operator (4)
- Custodian (1)
- Mechanic (2)
- Service Technician (2)

Positions Open:

- Bus Operator (10)
- Purchasing Agent (1)

- Service Technician (1)

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

No Executive Session was held.

TRUSTEE COMMENTS:

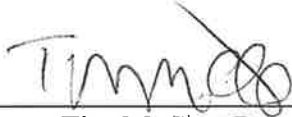
No Trustee comments.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Adjourn.


Trustee Singer motioned; seconded by Secretary McCue.

Meeting adjourned by consensus at 5:56p.m.



Trustee Tim McCue, Board Secretary

[SEAL]



Janice Crago, Board Clerk