

Connect Transit Board of Trustees
April 25, 2023, 4:30pm
351 Wylie Drive, Normal, IL 61761 – Board Room
Regular Session Minutes – Approved at the 5/23/23 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
Trustee Linda Foster
Vice Chair Julie Hile
Secretary Tim McCue
Trustee Mandava Rao
Trustee Barbara Singer (virtual)
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

Trustees Absent: None

City Managers Present: Deputy City Manager Billy Tyus

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

Guest(s) Present: Kevin Woodard, Cities 92.9

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to approve Trustee Singer to attend virtually due to reason three – other emergency, as stated in the by-laws.

Trustee Buchanan motioned; seconded by Secretary McCue.

Discussion:

There was no discussion.

Rollcall Vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice Chair Hile, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

Motion to approve Trustee Singer to attend virtually due to reason three – other 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 March 28, 2023, Strategic Plan Informational Session Minutes
- b. Approval of March 28, 2023, Regular Session Minutes
- c. Approval of Financial Information for March 2023
- d. Monthly Statistical Reports for March 2023
- e. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report
- f. Cornerstone – Illinois Weekly Update

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

Trustee Foster motioned; seconded by Trustee Rao.

Discussion:

David Braun, General Manager, stated the snow removal disbursement on the Cash Disbursement report is significantly lower than the previous year, however, the company comes whenever we receive two inches or more of snow and we did have that in February. Mr. Braun also noted the \$2m payment to Proterra for the electric buses is paid from our Capital account and is not part of our Operating cost.

Mr. Braun noted the Income Statement reflects that even though we are about 75% through the fiscal year we are only about 68% through our budget. He shared that Bus Operator Wages and Professional Services do exceed 68%, but that overall we are under budget at this point in the fiscal year. Mr. Braun explained Bus Operator Wages were higher due to overtime caused by the employee shortage and Professional Services was higher due to a contract with McLean County Regional Planning. There was an increase in the Employee Recruiting/Temp Help as well, which was due to our Interim HR Manager being a temp and her salary coming from this expense line. In addition, the Bus Repair Parts and Corporate Insurance are both higher due the supply chain issues being experienced.

Mr. Braun stated ridership continues to increase, with a 19% increase for the system and a 37% increase for Connect Mobility. Connect Mobility continues to increase at about a 12.8% month to month trend now, staying on track for the FY24 budget allocation.

Mr. Braun shared that the Cardinal report raises the issue of unobligated COVID related funds possibly being rescinded. Mr. Braun reassured the Board that Connect has obligated all COVID related funds so funding will not be rescinded from us. He informed the Board he is hoping to work with Heartland Community College to develop a curriculum for electric vehicle maintenance personnel through a Department of Labor grant from WorkForce Training found in the Cardinal report.

Mr. Braun stated the Cornerstone report primarily consists of House and Senate bills and updates on their progress, which will change over time. He shared the bills Connect was previously concerned with, such as concealed carry on buses, have died and are not moving forward. Mr. Braun stated the report also shared a public transportation \$2.5m grant through IDOT so we are working with McLean County Regional Planning to see how we can utilize that grant. He shared that one possible idea for the grant would be to coordinate Show Bus's services with Connect Transit's services or collar communities outside of our service area which have a need for our service. Mr. Braun stated the ideas

are just ideas to apply for the grant, not yet a plan and if we are awarded the grant we would move forward accordingly.

Chairman Whitehouse asked what the conversations with McLean County Regional Planning regarding the public transportation grant look like? Mr. Braun stated the next conversation would be with Show Bus, facilitated by McLean County Regional Planning Commission. The conversation would be focused on coordinating our services, to see if they can take their passengers to a certain point within Bloomington-Normal in order to save their valuable hours and miles, which they could then put back into their service.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if that would put them onto fixed route or Mobility? Mr. Braun stated it would put them onto whichever service they need, depending on where they connect.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if Show Bus can bring them into the city? Mr. Braun stated they can and do bring them into the city, and various locations with the city, so we would not have to go out and get them, they would already be here.

Chairman Whitehouse encourages partnerships but also encourages many conversations before committing financially. Mr. Braun explained the grant is strictly a planning grant to see if it is even feasible to pursue this type of partnership and how it would all come together.

Trustee Buchanan stated the planning conversations should include expectations of everyone's responsibilities. Mr. Braun confirmed the conversation would outline where the central location point would be located, how the funds would be distributed, if the monies received from the government can be blended, and if there is a true need for this to happen.

Chairman Whitehouse stated his pleasure in seeing the ridership numbers increasing but shared his concern over the steadily rising numbers in Connect Mobility, citing a 37% increase from last year, the cost that brings to Connect Transit and the worry it will not go away but further increase every year.

Trustee Buchanan asked if we have accounted for the Connect Mobility cost increase in the FY24 budget? Mr. Braun confirmed he has factored the cost into the budget.

Rollcall Vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice Chair Hile, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

Consent Agenda was **approved**.

NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Authorize the General Manager to execute a contract with Lauterbach & Amen, LLP. for financial auditing services for a term of five years.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the General Manager to execute a contract with Lauterbach & Amen, LLP. for financial auditing services for a term of five years.

Trustee Foster motioned; seconded by Trustee Rao.

Discussion:

Mr. Braun explained our most recent contract for financial auditing services expired this year. We asked our current auditor to extend their contract for one year, to which they declined, so we went out to bid.

Brady Lange, Procurement Director, explained Connect Transit is required by the Federal Transit Administration, Illinois Department of Transportation, and internal Connect Transit policies to complete an annual financial audit including the federally required single audit. For the past nine years we have been under contract with CliftonLarsonAllen, LLP (CLA) for these services. That contract has a single option year left, but CLA has indicated they no longer have sufficient staff to complete the audit requirements.

We released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for financial auditing services on January 11, 2023, and received no proposals in response. The RFP was sent directly to ten firms and was advertised publicly. Upon debriefing with potential proposers, all firms cited either insufficient staff or inability to complete government audits as the reason they were unable to submit a proposal.

We re-issued an RFP for auditing services on February 20, 2023, and adjusted the required timeline for requested services in hopes that it might provide some firms that had insufficient staff greater flexibility. As a result, we received a single proposal in response to the second issuance of the RFP.

As the single proposer, we are recommending that Lauterbach & Amen, LLP be awarded a five-year contract for financial auditing services. Lauterbach & Amen provides similar audit services for hundreds of municipalities and government agencies, including the Town of Normal, who highly recommends them. In addition, the price provided by Lauterbach & Amen has been determined to be fair and reasonable, averaging \$27, 578 per year while we have historically paid approximately \$25,000 per year.

This five-year contract provides for annual financial audits, which will be included as an operating expense totaling \$105,590. The contract also provides annual Single Audits each year, as required by Federal Transit Administration, totaling \$32,300 which will be funded with local funds. The total cost of this contract will be \$137,890 to be invoiced over the five-year term of the contract.

Trustee Buchanan asked if the \$27,578 is guaranteed for each of the five years? Mr. Lange explained the price starts low the first year and increases a little each year, with the average cost being \$27,578 per year.

Trustee Buchanan asked where the firm is located? Mr. Lange stated the firm is located in Naperville.

Chairman Whitehouse asked for better clarification on the Single Audit and total expenses. Mr. Lange explained a Single Audit is the name of the annual audit required by the FTA to audit all of our federal grants and will cost \$32,300 for all of the five years combined, approximately \$6,000 for each Single Audit.

Trustee Buchanan asked what the other cost will include? Mr. Lange explained the \$105,900 will include the standard required annual financial audits over the five years. All audits combined will cost \$137,890.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there has ever been talk in Washington, DC. to not require yearly audits for transit systems in “clean” standings since there are not a lot of available auditors and would save taxpayers money? Mr. Braun explained audits protect us by showing the public we are spending taxpayer money correctly, and because a lot of our spending is reported directly to federal agencies, we need to make sure everything is accurate. Mr. Lange explained IDOT leans on the yearly audits to make sure the IDOT funding portions are clean as well.

Rollcall Vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice Chair Hile, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the General Manager to execute a contract with Lauterbach & Amen, LLP. for financial auditing services for a term of five years was **approved**.

- b. Authorize the General Manager to execute a single-year contract extension with Cardinal Infrastructure to provide federal representation in Washington, DC.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the General Manager to execute a single-year contract extension with Cardinal Infrastructure to provide federal representation in Washington, DC.

Trustee Rao motioned; seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

Discussion:

Mr. Lange explained Connect Transit has contracted with Cardinal Infrastructure for seven years to provide federal representation in Washington, DC. Federal lobbying services help increase our return on federal dollars through grant programs, legislation, and regulatory actions. Lobbying services also helps Connect Transit maintain and develop relationships with our Congressional Delegation and federal agencies to promote and protect the interests of Connect Transit.

Over the past several years Cardinal Infrastructure has helped Connect Transit build strategic relations with our Congressional Delegation and the Federal Transit Administration. In addition, they have provided valuable insight into the priorities of the current administration to assist Connect Transit’s ability to create competitive discretionary grant applications. Cardinal Infrastructure has been instrumental in our success with federal discretionary grants which have provided over \$31.73 million in capital funding coming back to Bloomington-Normal.

This single-year contract extension will cost \$78,000. This is the same annual fee as our current contract. Due to federal and state regulations, local funds must be utilized for this contract.

Chairman Whitehouse explained this recommendation is very important to him and representation in DC behooves us.

Trustee Buchanan stated the cost of the representation is a very good deal.

Vice Chair Hile agreed with Chairman Whitehouse in that you can tell when an agency has representation in DC and supports the recommendation. She asked if we had ever inquired with Cardinal about a multi-year contract? Mr. Lange explained we are asking to extend a multi-year contract with them at this time so we can continue working on several active projects with them.

Vice Chair Hile asked what constitutes a multi-year contract? Mr. Lange stated three or five years is the standard. Mr. Braun stated we often like to execute a three-year contract with two one year options to extend.

Chairman Whitehouse asked Billy Tyus if the City of Bloomington is supportive of outside lobbying projects to support our contracts? Mr. Tyus stated they were in support and that their Council had recently voted in favor of hiring a lobbyist, and their efforts have produced more than expected. Mr. Tyus stated his opinion that not having a presence in DC puts you behind in the possibility of funding for projects.

Rollcall Vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice Chair Hile, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the General Manager to execute a single-year contract extension with Cardinal Infrastructure to provide federal representation in Washington, DC. was **approved**.

- c. Authorize the staff to reduce service on the existing Sapphire Route and introduce the Sapphire Express, and the addition of one trip to the beginning of the Lime Route, as presented.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the staff to reduce service on the existing Sapphire Route and introduce the Sapphire Express, and the addition of one trip to the beginning of the Lime Route, as presented.

Secretary McCue motioned; seconded by Trustee Foster.

Discussion:

Mr. Braun explained that in our last meeting we discussed the need to modify the Sapphire Route, for the purpose of improving productivity because it is the lowest productive route; by increasing productivity on the route it will help the sustainability of our transit system and the sustainability of the Sapphire Route. As previously discussed, in order to improve productivity in a route we can either increase the number of riders or reduce the number of hours. We have chosen to reduce the number of hours because we have not been able to increase the number of riders, even after working with Rivian, and the ridership numbers have flattened out. Mr. Braun explained that staff developed a modified route and Jacob Smith, Transportation Planner, will elaborate.

Mr. Smith stated that since our March Board meeting, staff has held both internal and external engagement sessions, tested and timed the route, and explored all options for the proposed Sapphire Express from Walmart to Rivian.

Anytime changes are considered or proposed for a route, engagement sessions are held internally and externally to ensure that additional perspectives on those changes are available. To further explore the Sapphire Express, staff held five public engagement sessions and three internal engagement sessions. During internal engagement sessions, we received an overwhelmingly positive response to the change, with a primary request to avoid the left turn from Wylie Drive west onto College Avenue due to the high amounts of traffic.

Public engagement sessions were held in multiple locations, with two on the fourth floor of Uptown Station, two at Mid America Insurance's community meeting room in Downtown Bloomington, and one on-route for the entire day of service on the Sapphire Route. At the two meetings at Uptown Station, no members of the public attended. At the two meetings in Downtown Bloomington, one member of the public attended the second session and provided positive feedback. During the on-route engagement session, members of staff rode all four Sapphire buses engaging with approximately 240 riders. Reception to this change was mostly positive, with many eager to hear that service would be available all day, and that sustainable choices were made. The primary concern received on-route was that employees may have difficulty making it to Rivian for 6:00 a.m. shift starts.

With feedback primarily positive, the following route change is recommended based on received feedback.

Staff recommends that the Board approve a service reduction on the existing Sapphire Route and introduce the Sapphire Express to serve passengers traveling to Rivian and other points in west Bloomington-Normal from 5:45 a.m. to 9:45 p.m.

Staff recommends that the Sapphire Express Route begin its northbound trip at Bloomington Walmart and depart to the west on Market Street, then heading north on Rivian Motorway to arrive at Rivian. The Sapphire Express will then begin its southbound trip, leaving the Rivian facility heading south on Rivian Motorway, then east on College Avenue, south on Wylie Drive, and finally arriving at Walmart in Bloomington. Please see route maps for the northbound and southbound trips on the next page of this memo.

In addition to changes to the Sapphire Route, staff recommends the addition of one trip to the beginning of the Lime Route, which departs Uptown Station at 5:10 a.m. and Downtown Bloomington at 5:20 a.m. direct to Rivian to assist with 6:00 a.m. shift start times. The Lime Route currently starts at the Bloomington Walmart heading towards Downtown Bloomington at 5:40 a.m. and starts at Cardinal Court heading to Uptown Station at 5:52 a.m.

This change will reduce resource utilization on this route by 52% and saves 8,269 service hours and 85,650 service miles.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if the change would impact riders currently riding the bus to get to work for the early shift at Walmart? Shelly Perry, Operations Manager, stated it will not impact them because we are adding service at that time of day, not taking away.

Trustee Foster thanked staff for going out and getting input from the community that this change will actually impact. She asked what the downfall or challenge of this change might be? Mr. Smith stated the biggest challenge riders will have with this change is that some riders will now have to make a transfer or possibly experience a four minute slower trip.

Chairman Whitehouse congratulated staff for launching the Sapphire Route, seeing adjustments need to be made, and coming up with a new innovative plan to make the route more efficient and while remaining user friendly.

Vice Chair Hile shared her appreciation for a well chiseled route to accommodate the schedules of our riders.

Rollcall Vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice Chair Hile, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the staff to reduce service on the existing Sapphire Route and introduce the Sapphire Express, and the addition of one trip to the beginning of the Lime Route, as presented was **approved**.

d. That the Fiscal Year 2024 Operating and Capital Budget be adopted.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to adopt the FY24 Operating and Capital Budget.

Vice Chair Hile motioned; seconded by Trustee Rao.

Discussion:

Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director, shared that our Draft FY24 Budget was presented for your review and consideration at the Connect Transit Board of Trustees March meeting.

The FY24 budget includes 127,532 revenue hours for fixed route service (up 7.2% from FY23) and includes 13,608 hours for new microtransit services. The FY24 budget also includes 40,483 revenue hours for Connect Mobility (up 21.8% from FY23) and assumes an increase of 12.5% increase in the number of Connect Mobility trips.

The total FY24 budget of \$18,946,747 is 6.7% higher than the FY23 budget.

Mr. Braun shared a presentation on screen (also included in the meeting packet) to review the changes to the FY24 draft budget shared at the March meeting.

Mr. Braun stated he was able to decrease the draft Operating Budget by \$120,637, bringing it to a less than 7% increase over the FY23 Operating Budget. He stated he was able to achieve this decrease by taking a harder look at the budget and focusing on what we needed to do, what we could pass on, and where we could find larger savings. He stated that even though our hours increased by 7.6%, our budget, although driven by hours and miles, increased less than that.

Mr. Braun pointed out the staff changes we originally requested had been modified by removing the IT Specialist position, deciding to re-evaluate the need for that position next year. He explained the need for the Operations Manager for Paratransit and Demand Response was very real and invited Shelly Perry, Operations Manager, to elaborate.

Ms. Perry explained the paratransit service was more intensive in the actual service provided and in the customer service level provided by the driver. This new Operations Manager for Paratransit and Demand Response will work closely with Ms. Perry to ensure they manage all levels of service provided, monitor KPIs, and control expenses by balancing them with the KPIs. Ms. Perry stated this position will be vital to her in ensuring we continue to provide the level of service we currently provide but also in helping her roll out the new microtransit service and the management of that new service.

Mr. Braun added that we budgeted paratransit at 2.75 passengers per hour for FY24, which is very good for a system of our size, and that for every .01 passengers per hour it costs approximately \$6,000.00. Our goal is to increase our passengers per hour to reduce that cost, if we fall below the budgeted passenger per hour consistently, we will need to find a way to improve our budget. He stated this new position will be critical in monitoring the numbers and making sure we are maximizing the number of passengers on the vehicles while still providing the same quality of service.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if we are currently tracking KPIs? Mr. Braun stated we are but the current growth has lead us to focus on this more than we ever have, and over the last year we have not been very concerned about going over budget because we reduced our fixed route service and had extra funds in the budget. However, we fully plan on restoring full service and know we need to watch every penny.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if this new position will be responsible for making sure Connect Mobility is performing within a desired range? Mr. Braun stated they will be doing so from a KPI and quality of service perspective.

Trustee Buchanan stated she is pleased to hear quality is always important in our evaluations.

Mr. Braun explained managing demand will be important in this role and asked Ms. Perry to explain.

Ms. Perry explained the Operations Department will be going through the recertification process for all current paratransit eligible individuals, which was put on hold during COVID. We currently have approximately 1,500 people in our system who are eligible for paratransit services and will start with anyone who has not used the service in the last three years, evaluate why they have not used the service and possibly move them to inactive. Ms. Perry explained moving them to inactive will still keep them in our system and able to use or system if needed, just mark them inactive for our purposes. The goal is to be done with the recertification process or new rider process by the end of the year.

Mr. Braun stated the new Operations Manager for Paratransit and Demand Response will be helpful in optimizing paratransit with microtransit, because this person will be able to determine if a rider is better suited for microtransit instead of Connect Mobility, possibly offsetting some of the paratransit demand.

Trustee Buchanan asked how the increase in Connect Mobility riders equates to the increase in the number of trips? Ms. Perry said we don't regulate their trips so we don't know how many trips they will take until they get into the system and start using it, but we have seen a higher number of trips by individuals who are approved for both essential trips and quality of life trips.

Chairman Whitehouse asked what the expectation is for the person to improve the KPIs and what is the accountability to make sure the KPIs go in the right direction? Ms. Perry stated the very detailed KPIs are being developed now, and this person will be managing those as well as the incoming calls, how quickly the calls are being answered, if we are meeting ADA guidelines for those calls, and will be evaluated on these.

Chairman Whitehouse asked what the appropriate expectation of the Board would be to see those KPIs? Mr. Braun stated we can report on them quarterly when we report on the other information.

Trustee Rao stated KPIs are good but asked what other tools will be used to improve the KPIs? Mr. Braun stated this person will use software tools for scheduling, performance changes for the system, integration with microtransit, but finding out why a KPI number is changing will determine the best tool for the person to use.

Trustee Foster asked what skills and qualifications we are looking for when searching for this person? Ms. Perry stated we are looking for someone who is currently working in the operations of paratransit with three to five years of experience because it is such a unique field. Mr. Braun stated he would also like the person to have experience with the software scheduling system we use, Ecolane or similar.

Vice Chair Hile stated her relief to see this position coming to fruition due to the consistent growth of Connect Mobility and her concern for the service. She stated she loves the single point of contact and that we are getting more paratransit experience service on the team because the rest of the country is really struggling with this issue.

Mr. Braun stated our Connect Mobility ridership is at 109% of pre-COVID ridership, and many systems are experiencing the same thing but cannot explain it.

Chairman Whitehouse stated he was under the impression our increase was due to the one fare for all but if most transit systems are experiencing the same thing, it cannot be the one fare for all. Mr. Braun stated he believes for us, one fare for all is the reason but it changes for every transit system experiencing it. COVID has caused damage to some people, making them eligible for paratransit services when they weren't prior to COVID. He stated many systems went fare free during the crisis, which increased ridership and now they are accustomed to it and continue to ride now.

Trustee Buchanan asked what happens if we are not able to recruit a person with the skills and qualifications she is looking for? Ms. Perry stated we have possible internal candidates who may fit the criteria, then we will expand to external candidates. If the applicants don't fit all the criteria, we have in-house knowledge to train them.

Trustee Rao asked if there is any way to combine the Operations Manager and IT Specialist positions? Ms. Perry stated that didn't seem feasible because the Operations Manager position had a full job description that she hadn't completely gone into here and the IT Specialist position would not get the attention it deserved.

Mr. Braun stated the next staff change involves adding a Marketing Assistant, which is a position we did have until the FY23 year.

Aubrey Staton, Marketing Manager, explained the Marketing Assistant will support her community education campaigns and outreach efforts, including internal, and external. Ms. Staton stated this position will also share in the management of all the new projects coming to Connect Transit, as well as managing the current projects.

Mr. Braun stated the last change to the FY24 draft budget since last month was the replacement of a Dispatcher position with a Customer Service Representative (CSR) position. He stated we recently lost a Dispatcher and have decided not to fill the position, but instead add another CSR position due to the anticipated increase in calls for paratransit and microtransit. The two CSR positions we currently have answer about 57 calls per day, in addition to bus pass sales and front desk assistance. We expect the calls will increase to 73 calls per day at only two CSR positions, and with their continued bus pass sales and other duties. When we introduce the third CSR position, calls will decrease to about 49 per CSR position and calls will not roll over to Dispatchers as often, leaving Dispatchers to focus on dispatching and CSRs to focus on customer service.

Ms. Perry explained her goal is to internally separate Connect Mobility and fixed route services. She stated the CSR positions are primarily responsible for Connect Mobility reservations and do take some fixed route calls but those should be transferred to the Dispatch Office. She explained Dispatch is meant to support fixed route and does end up handling Connect Mobility calls because as it is set up now, some Connect Mobility calls end up on hold and roll over to the Dispatch Office, taking the Dispatchers away from dispatching. She stated this will allow both positions to focus on their KPIs and where they need to be.

Trustee McCue asked what the regional or national call average is for a CSR position? Mr. Braun his experience in business development taught him the range is 50 – 70 calls per day.

Chairman Whitehouse asked how long the average call takes? Ms. Perry stated the length of the call depends on how many trips the caller is making. Some callers are making one trip, but some callers are making multiple trips and those calls can take longer than 10 minutes.

Mr. Braun stated we are re delegating the calls and placing them in the front area with the Customer Service Representative, replacing a Dispatcher position with a Customer Service position, a lower paying position, making it more cost effective and allowing our efficiency to improve.

Vice Chair Hile stated she supports letting someone do their job and the distinction of jobs is appealing to her, especially when it comes to the needs of customer service.

Ms. Perry stated we currently do not have anyone to cover the weekends and this person will change that and allow us to have weekend coverage.

Trustee Foster agreed with Vice Chair Hile's statement.

Billy Tyus asked what goes into the type of calls the CSR takes? Mr. Braun stated they are making reservations for the paratransit services, booking the call so it goes into the scheduling

system. He explained this means they have to determine where the person is, where they need to go, what time they need to be there, how many trips, sometimes listen to the stories the callers tell them, etc. He stated the purpose of replacing the Dispatcher position with the CSR position is in anticipation of the increased calls due to continued Connect Mobility growth and the new microtransit service but also to reduce the number of calls rolling back to the Dispatch Office.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that while he doesn't necessarily understand the day to day of the position, 73 calls a day at five minutes each is only six hours. Mr. Braun stated you have to factor in walk ins, bus pass sales, break times, longer calls, and other things that come up.

Vice Chair Hile stated we are anticipating a significant increase in calls.

Mr. Braun stated what the data isn't showing is the number of calls transferred to Dispatch, and we don't know those numbers.

Vice Chair Hile says we have month to month data that shows increased use of a quality service that we are providing, and we would be ahead of the game in getting this position seated.

Trustee Buchanan added we are also talking about recertification of our riders and we don't know how many new riders that will bring but we can track the data and see where it leads us.

Mr. Braun clarified that when we put the FY24 draft budget together we included nine Dispatchers and were asking for one additional Dispatcher, since then we lost one Dispatcher and we do not plan to fill it. This is a net zero increase in staff and a net decrease in cost.

Mr. Braun went on to state the Service Hours decreased from 6,500 to 5,979 hours and our Service Miles decreased from 83,100 to 74,138 miles since our March presentation. He stated our Labor and Benefits decreased by \$106,323 because we removed the IT position and updated some Seniority due to known retirements; Fuel and Lubricants decreased by \$14,625 because we reduced the Cost Per Mile assumption for electric buses due to implementation of Charge Management Software; Bus Repair and Maintenance reduced by \$28,035 because we removed the proximity lock upgrade due to a grant opportunity; Professional Services increased by \$39,500 because we added APC management service, updated accounting and auditing services and added Green Energy Consultant services; IT expenses increased by \$26,995 because we reduced REMIX by \$7,000 but we added charge management software costs and corporate credit card management software; Marketing/Training/Misc. reduced by \$38,150 because we removed the seasonal bus wraps and adjusted conference attendance.

Vice Chair Hile stated she did not expect a reduction in Fuel and Lubricants and thanked staff for that surprise.

Rollcall Vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice Chair Hile, Secretary McCue, Trustee Rao, Trustee Singer, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

The motion to adopt the FY24 Operating and Capital Budget was **approved**.

e. Return to Weekend Service – Informational

Discussion:

Ms. Perry, Operations Manager, stated during the summer and fall of 2022 Connect Transit, like many other transit agencies across the U.S., experienced a strain on its workforce due to prolonged employee shortages. Due to these shortages the decision was made to reduce peak service, late night service, and weekend service. This reduction was meant to prevent “burnout” of our existing employees, reduce safety risks, and allow staff time to recruit and onboard new employees, especially Bus Operators.

Since reducing service in 2022 the Operations Department has been monitoring our progress onboarding the Bus Operators needed to begin restoring scheduled service to routine levels. Hiring incentives, increased starting wages, and an increased frequency of New Bus Operator training classes have helped us increase the number of Bus Operators in our ranks. Recent reviews of our staffing levels against the amount of work shifts available indicate that we can take the first step to restoring full service by restoring weekend service by June 4, 2023.

We will continue to monitor staffing levels and update the Board on our progress in restoring peak and late night service.

Trustee McCue asked if we have room for error with the number of employees, so we don’t have to come back in a few weeks and ask to suspend service again? Ms. Perry said she is very comfortable with the number of employees we have now and not having to suspend service.

Vice Chair Hile asked how many Operators we have? Ms. Perry said we have 92 Operators who are through their 90 days.

f. Managers on Board – Informational

Discussion:

Ms. Staton, Marketing Manager, explained that the internal Managers on Board (MoB) Program provides a guided opportunity for staff members to feel the true customer experience using our system. This program is not designed to be an observation of drivers, but instead to provide a better understanding of the full customer experience, positive or negative, to identify potential changes in our processes. In addition, the MoB Program can be used as an educational tool when implementing changes to existing services.

The purpose of this program is to put leadership and administrative staff in touch with our operation and recognize the experiences our customers have in order to make the best decisions for our system. In doing this, we will also establish a rapport with customers and drivers and continue an open dialogue surrounding our system and customer experiences.

The following positions are required to complete this program:

General Manager	Marketing Manager
Finance Director	Operations Manager
HR Manager	Procurement Director
IT Manager	Safety & Training Director
Maintenance Manager	

The following positions are encouraged to participate in this program, but not required:

Accountant	Operations Supervisors
Data Management Specialist	Purchasing Agent
Executive Assistant	Safety & Training Coordinator
HR/Payroll Administrator	Scheduler
Maintenance Supervisors	Transportation Planner
Medicaid Billing Specialist	

Program Requirements:

- Complete a trip on Connect Mobility, Connect Flex, and each Connect Transit fixed route within a 12-month period
- Participate at least once a month for one hour
- Utilize the fixed route system for one entire workday every six months - arriving to work, conducting business, returning home (if possible)
- Fill out the Managers on Board form located on Connecteam to demonstrate completion of requirements. To find the form on Connecteam, select “Assets” → “Forms” → “Managers on Board”.

Mr. Braun explained this is not a new program, but a more structured program with captured data we can use to improve the system.

Trustee Buchanan asked if any of the groups she was speaking with at APTA required their Board members to participate? Ms. Staton said she is sure they extended the offer but didn't require them and if any of our Trustees wanted to participate, she could get them the form to fill out.

Vice Chair Hile shared her pleasure that the program is not an audit but a ride and cautioned the team to be careful about the questions. She suggested the required positions be treated as a pilot, with the expectation that everyone be required eventually.

Trustee Foster asked if the Operators have been told about the influx of staff riding the buses and what their comfort level is? Ms. Staton said this program will alleviate the discomfort of having random staff riding the bus and in time they will be comfortable, but that we have not yet had the conversation with the Operators to let them know we will be riding the bus.

Trustee Foster asked if the information will be shared with the Operators? Ms. Staton said the information will not be shared with them and that we don't even ask for the name of the driver, just the bus number and this is only in case there is a mechanical issue that needs to be reported.

Trustee Foster expressed her concern the Operators will not be comfortable when staff starts riding the bus, and would like to know how complaints or compliments will be shared with the Operators? Ms. Staton said we have Gold Star forms to share compliments with staff members and if a staff member had a complaint to share then each of them has a relationship with Ms. Perry to speak openly with her.

Trustee Buchanan asked if Ms. Staton was saying she has not shared this program with the Operators? Ms. Staton stated that the program had not been shared with them but not with the

intention of keeping it from them, it just didn't seem like something that needed to be done because it isn't truly new.

Trustee Buchanan stated she was surprised that all of a sudden this is being done and the Operators have not been informed. Mr. Braun stated that it is not all of a sudden, it has been done in the past but we are just adding structure to it now. He stated it is not an evaluation of the driver in any way, but an evaluation of the stop, the cleanliness, the full rider experience.

Ms. Staton said she would be happy to share the program with them if that is something the Trustees would like.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Chairman Whitehouse thanked staff and Trustees for supporting Mr. Braun in his budget presentations to the City and Town over the last week. He also thanked the City of Bloomington Mayor, Council Members, City Manager Gleason, and Deputy City Manager Tyus for getting the resolution for the Market Street Garage location passed last night. Chairman Whitehouse stated we look forward to the collaboration going forward.

Billy Tyus stated the resolution was a great step and there are still many conversations to be had but that they are excited about it.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT:

Mr. Braun shared his monthly General Manager report.

Community:

Transit Center Approved – Official

The Market Street Garage is going to be the location for the Downtown Bloomington Transit Center

- 10 Bus Bays
- Climate Controlled Waiting Area
- Benches
- Trash Receptacles
- Bike Storage & Amenities
- Customer Service & Reception Area
- Public Restrooms
- Vending Machines
- Secured Employee Breakroom
- Remote Server Room
- Security Office
- Conference Room
- 5,700 SF Available Lease Space
- Minimum 350 Parking Spaces
- Elevator & ADA Access to Parking Structure
- Public EV Charging
- Rideshare Drop Off Location
- ADA Drop Off Location

Outreach

- IPTA/TFIC Legislative Day in Springfield

- HCC Electric Vehicle Spotlight
- Marketing Intern Senior Expo
- Interview with ISU TV10
- CT Job Fair
- HCC Transition Fair
- Sapphire Realignment Input Sessions
 - Two in Normal
 - Two in Bloomington
 - One on Sapphire Route – All Trips
- Messaging Consultant Input Sessions
 - Non-profits
 - College Students
 - Limited mobility

Employee Development:

- Maintenance Foreman – Chris Sharkey, and Mechanics – Brett Kinsley, Zeke Marquez, John Crago, Billy Basham, and Dustin Nalley completed a two-day Thermo King A/C training.
 - Chris Sharkey will also be certified as our in-house trainer, which will allow him to give the training to other employees that were not present for the training, as well as any new employees.
- Justin Allen, Safety and Training Coordinator, has completed FEMA EMI Course IS-1300: Introduction to Continuity of Operations. This course was conducted online and aids students in understanding the definition of Continuity, the importance of Continuity Planning, and understanding the key elements of a continuity program.
- Bus Operator Training
 - Class 2302 started with seven trainees. We have four who are now solo Bus Operators.
 - Class 2303 started with four trainees. We have three that have completed their CDL testing and started Route Familiarization Training on April 20, 2023. RFT should be completed by May 5, 2023.
- Maintenance personnel are receiving training for Forklift Certification. Training is conducted on-site through online and hands-on instruction and evaluation. This training is required for new Mechanics and Service Technicians.

Recruiting:

Positions Filled:

- HR/Payroll Administrator (1)

Positions Open:

- Bus Operator (10)
- Customer Service Representative (1)
- Purchasing Agent (1)
- Service Technician (1)
- Scheduler (1)

Upcoming:

Vehicle procurement special meeting request for five new microtransit vans and three used Connect Mobility vehicles.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

No Executive Session was held.

TRUSTEE COMMENTS:

Trustee Foster thanked the officers elected for the FY24 year and Mr. Braun for his presentations to the City and Town.

Billy Tyus stated this is his last meeting with Connect Transit's Board because City Manager Tim Gleason will be returning to the Board starting with the May meeting. He expressed his joy in serving our Board and how much he learned about transit and everything that goes into it. He stated Connect Transit is a jewel for the community and he will continue to tell everyone about our services.

Chairman Whitehouse thanked Mr. Tyus for his service.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Adjourn.

Trustee Foster motioned; seconded by Secretary McCue.

Meeting adjourned by consensus at 6: 19 p.m.



Trustee Tim McCue, Board Secretary



Janice Crago, Board Clerk

[SEAL]

