

GET CONNECTED

January 2023

PEOPLE. COMMUNITY. ECONOMY. ENVIRONMENT.

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Here's what's
inside!

History of Public
Transit
Q&A with Dave White
Technology Through
the Years

GM Notes ~ David Braun

2023 marks Connect Transit's 50th year as a public agency with celebrations throughout the year. This edition will highlight some of the changes, most visibly in buses, but also in technology and services.

When we began service as a public agency in 1972, our buses provided service to those who could physically walk on board. We ended service earlier and did not operate at all on Sunday. We allowed passengers to wave their hands on any street corner when they wanted to board a bus, and provided charter and school services to those that wanted it.

Drivers needed to carry a simple chauffeurs license rather than a Commercial Driver's License, physicals and drug testing were unheard of. Over time, the needs of the community changed, society changed, and federal requirements changed.

We have become a service economy, with stores staying open later and opening on Sundays. The commercial district decentralized to the "outskirts" of town, as Veteran's Parkway was built, and the Eastland Mall and surrounding shopping centers and restaurants soon followed. Our service expanded to meet the demand of the riders, many of whom were workers, students, and shoppers.

As the City and Town boundaries expanded, so did our service, to provide a public transit option that was available to our growing community. As more people rode the bus and our routes became longer, it was necessary to establish fixed bus stops to help us remain on-time and ensure passengers were picked up at a safe location.

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Continued from front cover.

GM Notes ~ David Braun

In 1991, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act, which required public transit providers to make their buses accessible to people with disabilities, and to provide a complementary on-demand system during the same hours and days as the fixed route service to serve people who could not access or board the fixed route system. This opened a new market of riders who remain valuable patrons of our system.

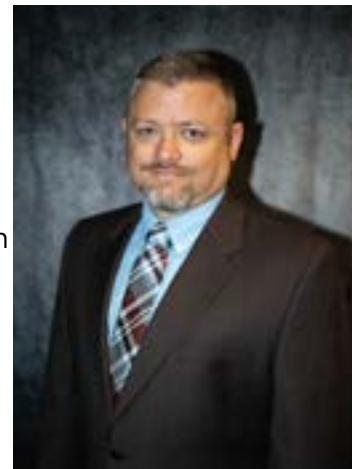
Connect Transit will remain responsive to the needs of the community while focusing on customer service and service efficiency. Digital technologies have created an expectation that customers have more control of their transportation, and we will be introducing services to meet that expectation. We are also exploring new technologies to improve the quality of life for our community, such as electric vehicles.

The nature of transportation will continue to change in the future. Some predict "for hire" autonomous vehicles that will replace auto ownership or alternative transportation solutions. There will, however, always be a need for affordable, accessible public transportation that can serve a broader population with efficient grouping of trips to destinations that employ or serve many people at the same time.

Q&A with Dave White - Safety and Training Director

Q: How has your role evolved throughout your career?

A: It has changed substantially in the 22 years I've been here. I originally began my career as a full-time Bus Operator and moved into the Operations area after a few years. I worked in Operations for about 11 years, doing everything from Dispatching and Scheduling to Bus Operator Training and Accident Investigation. I was fortunate to be selected as the first Safety and Training Director for BNPTS/Connect in November of 2014 and have been in that role for just over 8 years.



Q: How has Connect Transit changed throughout your career?

A: The biggest change is that it has grown... a lot. When I started in local transit we only ran until 7:00pm and had no service on Sunday. We now have about 3 times as many employees as we did in 2000, run much later service, have service on Sunday, and have had significant growth in our paratransit operations. We have also grown in our administrative staffing, something that was overlooked in the early years. The addition of key personnel, starting around 2013, has been instrumental in our success and growth.

Q: What has been your favorite change that you've seen for the organization?

A: One of my favorite things has been the addition of technology. This has been invaluable for us as staff trying to collect data, conduct ride scheduling, and increase communication both internally and externally. It has also been beneficial to the riding public, in that they have access to bus-tracking, trip planning, and rider announcements.

Q: What's your favorite part about working for Connect?

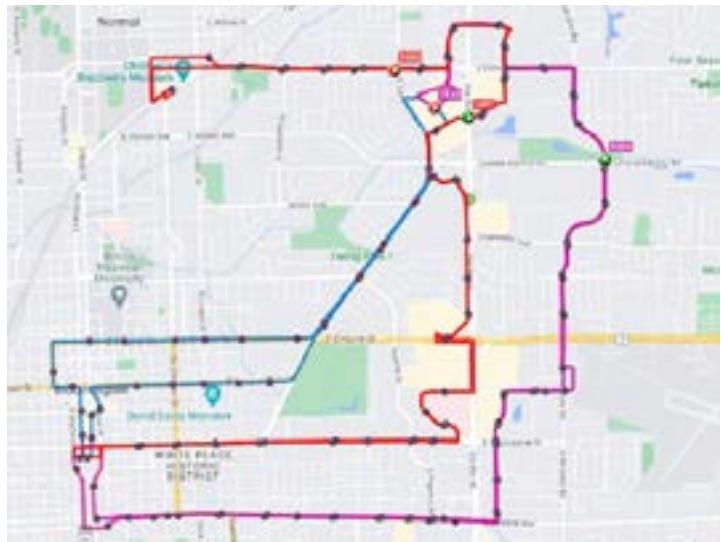
A: Every day is something new. One might think that there would not be anything unusual that could come up after 20+ years, but it does, and it keeps you on your toes.

Q: Looking back at the last 50 years of Connect, what do you think the next 50 hold?

A: Continued exploration of new ways to serve the community. We have folks here with a lot of great ideas and unique perspectives that can, and I'm sure will, lead to innovative approaches to public transit.

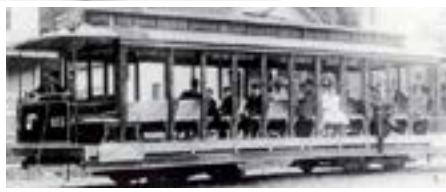
Technology Changes

The changes in technology within the last 10 years, let alone 50 years, has been substantial. Every single part of our operation has changed with the advancement of technology. Bus tracking has gone from radio communication to GPS signals. Fareboxes have gone from cash and tokens only, to swipe passes, to being able to pay with a smartphone. Dispatching has evolved from manually coordinated, handwritten schedules to applications using algorithms to schedule all Connect Mobility trips. Technology storage has gone from 500gb to 5tb in just 5 years! We can't even begin to imagine what technology will look like when we celebrate our 100th anniversary!



Public Transportation Through the Years

Public transportation started in Bloomington-Normal in 1867 with the Bloomington & Normal Street Railway. The system was a horse-drawn railway and covered 26 miles in route coverage. The transportation system changed hands to the Bloomington-Normal City Lines Inc. in 1938, another privately owned and operated company. City Lines was the first system to introduce buses to Bloomington-Normal with a mixed fleet of buses and street cars, eventually moving solely to buses. In 1972, Bloomington-Normal City Lines discontinued operations due to lack of profitability, like other private transit companies around the country. An Intergovernmental Agreement between the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal created the Bloomington-Normal Public Transit System, the community's first public transportation agency. This is still the same system we have today, rebranded as "Connect Transit". Now public transportation is seeing an advancement in technology and sustainability with the implementation of electric buses. Public transportation has come a long way since the horse-drawn railways established in 1867!



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Dear Connect Abby,

If public transportation has been in Bloomington-Normal so long, why are you guys still making changes? I think you should have it figured out by now.

Sincerely,
WhyAdapt

Dear WhyAdapt,

As with everything, time doesn't equal proficiency. As time passes, our community's wants and needs change and we do our best to change with it. New shops, manufacturers, and housing developments are always popping up and we aim to serve everyone the best we can. The times change and so should Connect! We make changes on an "as-needed" basis, hoping to continually improve our system for all of our riders.

See you on the bus!

Connect Abby

Thank you to everyone who supported Stuff the Bus this year. We were able to collect nearly 12,000 pounds of items for Children's Home & Aid!

