

Connect Transit Board of Trustees
January 23, 2024, 4:30 p. m.
351 Wylie Drive, Normal, IL 61761 – Board Room
Regular Session Minutes – Approved at 2/27/24 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
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

Trustees Absent: Trustee Barbara Singer

City Managers Present: None

City Managers Absent: City Manager Pam Reece
City Manager Tim Gleason

Staff Present: David Braun, General Manager
Aubrey Staton, Marketing Manager
Brady Lange, Procurement Director
Janice Crago, Board Clerk
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director
Shelly Moss, Operations Director
Stephanie Butler, HR Manager
Steve Stockton, IT Manager

Guest(s) Present: Jennifer Schmid, Dovetail
Sydney Klarich, Dovetail
Dan Graney, Dovetail
Hunter Lansche, Dovetail

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 Regular Session Minutes for November 28, 2023
- b. Approval of Financial Information for November 2023
- c. Approval of Financial Information for December 2023
- d. Monthly Statistical Reports for November 2023
- e. Monthly Statistical Reports for December 2023

- f. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report
- g. Cornerstone – Illinois Weekly Update

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

Secretary McCue motioned; seconded by Trustee Foster.

Discussion:

David Braun, General Manager, stated that the November 2023 Financial Report reflects a \$50,000 Consultant Services payment and explained the payment was to IDOT for the McLean County Regional Planning Commission's (MCRPC) Veteran's Parkway planning project that was brought to the Board in October because IDOT is heading this project and will then provide services back to MCRPC.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if MCRPC had gotten back to Connect Transit about all of the items we have contracted with them and the studies they were going to do for us? Mr. Braun stated they had gotten back to us, but it was an insufficient response and that he will be following up with them.

Chairman Whitehouse stated he would like a better response from MCRPC or a refund of the \$150,000.

Mr. Braun shared that the December financials reflect a \$48,987 payment to GMV Syncromatics, which is our CAD AVL provider – our vehicle location service. He explained this payment is only once a year.

Trustee Buchanan stated it looks like we are on target for halfway through the year. Mr. Braun stated we are just below 50% of our budget.

Mr. Braun stated the December Performance Report shows ridership is up 11.76% through all of our services, with Mobility ridership continuing to increase. Mobility year-to-date is about 24% higher than this time last year, which is a little concerning because we budgeted for a 12.5% increase. He explained that we will continue to watch this but stated this is a demand management issue because we cannot deny trips under the Americans with Disabilities Act. He stated we are continuing to improve efficiency at the same time as we are trying to manage ridership. Mr. Braun stated we are recertifying Mobility riders to make sure the riders who were eligible three plus years ago are still eligible, and that process should be complete within the first quarter of the year.

Mr. Braun stated the year-to-date subsidy per passenger for fixed route is \$5.56, which is by far the most efficient service we provide; Mobility is \$24.91, and FLEX is \$14.14.

Mr. Braun stated the Cardinal Report included an FTA Procurement Tool and a Template for Benefit-Cost Analysis, which are great tools provided by the FTA and DOT. The report also includes information on a RAISE grant that we can use for infrastructure, which is due at the end of February, and Transit Vehicle Insurance, which is challenging for many agencies to get.

Mr. Braun stated the Cornerstone Report mentions an Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grant Program, which he shared with a local non-profit that we might collaborate with using microtransit funding and other energy programs.

Secretary McCue stated he doesn't always know what the statistical reports mean and asked if a glossary could be provided so the Trustees are better informed and more prepared? He also asked if we could have more conversations on how to better manage Connect Mobility, and what that would look like. Mr. Braun said a glossary could be provided and he understood how it could help because sometimes a high number is good, sometimes a high number is bad. He also said he would talk to staff about how to provide a regular report to the Board in regard to Connect Mobility ridership management efforts.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that in our last budget we thought that 12% would be enough so we will have to address Mobility, and balancing service and being able to afford the service. He stated he likes Secretary McCue's idea of having a glossary with the monthly reports.

Vice Chair Hile stated a three year rolling average on Mobility would be beneficial in the report so we can continue to track it and see if it is going to level out or if the reality is that it is a steadily increasingly popular service. We want to be able to afford to provide it and we want to do so responsibly.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that the population is aging and driving the need for the service.

Secretary McCue stated the definition of disability keeps expanding also, further driving the service.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

Consent Agenda was **approved**.

NEW BUSINESS:

a. Messaging Consultant Update – Informational

Discussion:

Aubrey Staton, Marketing Manager, explained in September 2022, Connect Transit contracted with a strategic messaging consultant, Dovetail, and their subconsultant, Creative Entourage. Since engaging Dovetail and Creative Entourage, several presentations have been made to the Board detailing the research that has been conducted to provide sound backing to the information being shared today.

Dovetail presented their strategic messaging approach and several creative concepts for a campaign on screen; the presentation is available online as part of the January 2024 General Manager's Presentation.

Trustee Rao asked how we will measure the return on investment? Mr. Braun explained the process included measurement tools at the end, so we will need to talk through how to use the tools and what we want to get from the tools and develop the tools from there. Jennifer Schmid from Dovetail stated that David had explained it perfectly and that since Creative Entourage had

conducted the pretest, we would share the concept and direction we're headed because the tactics deployed will impact how they go back in the market and measure. Mr. Braun stated that perception is hard to quantify but our support in the community and how others are willing to partner with us will improve and we can quantify, and that while financially there might not be a rate of return there will be a rate of return in terms of support and ridership.

Trustee Foster asked how we draw the business partners in so they can contribute to our success? Mr. Braun explained the concepts presented can be tailored to a particular employer or part of town, after we identify and target our needs.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that as someone working for a large employer in the community, we do have to recognize that in a post COVID world many large employers are no longer bringing employees into the office, and that while those employers can be great spokespersons some of the other midsize organizations and manufacturers are the employers we need to rely on now.

Trustee Foster stated that supporting the community from point A to beyond, like the campaign stated, is important because there are other areas we can support like grocery stores and the mall. She stated the economy is affecting everyone.

Mr. Braun stated the challenge includes our service mix, in addition to just the messaging, the service we provide and how we provide it are going to be very impactful.

Ms. Staton stated that we have made great strides with Ferrero with the adoption of the FLEX zone because we now have spokespersons at Ferrero who have planted the seed to help increase ridership. She explained that having a messaging campaign developed around the Point A to Beyond is basically a plug and play, ready to identify individuals and now we have a great visual to share with others.

Chairman Whitehouse asked what is next for the Board in this campaign? Mr. Braun stated the next step is developing a plan for how we are going to use the concepts, what we are going to target and what we are looking for. He explained the initial plan at the beginning stages was for this to be a multi-tiered program. The way it is set up now makes that very easy to do, with Dovetail giving us tools to share how we fit into the community, how we support people, and how the stories we tell. Now we need to conceptualize what those look like, how we will use those and then bring those to the Board.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if we were voting to use one of the three concepts presented or if we were going to use all three concepts? Mr. Braun stated we would be using all three concepts, and how we use them is what the Board will see next.

Trustee Buchanan stated these are big picture concepts and we will be challenged to tap the smaller partners in the community because we already have support from some of the larger partners. She stated the next steps need to include guidance on how to begin to develop these partnerships. Mr. Braun stated the concepts can be used for both the smaller and larger partnerships in the community, depending on how we present them.

Chairman Whitehouse asked who is going to put the plan of action together, who is going to develop the next steps? Mr. Braun stated that the Marketing Committee helped develop the RFP for

the messaging consultant and he thinks it is time to convene that committee on a regular basis to figure out how we are moving forward. This committee would work closely with Aubrey Staton and Dovetail in developing a plan.

Chairman Whitehouse stated he is appreciative that Dovetail will be assisting Ms. Staton with this huge undertaking. He stated this is no reflection on Ms. Staton's abilities but that it will be a huge undertaking and wants her to have the support she needs in order to make the money we have invested worth the money we have invested.

Trustee Buchanan said working with the consultants will be imperative to make this a success. She asked what the time frame is for presenting a plan to the Board? Ms. Schmid stated that over the next two months they will need to hear back from Connect Transit on which concept they want to launch first so Dovetail can develop their plan accordingly.

Trustee Buchanan asked how long after Dovetail hears back from Connect Transit with which concept they want to move forward with until we receive a plan? Ms. Schmid said it would be approximately one to two months, depending on the concept and approval processes.

Mr. Braun asked the Board to what extent they want to be involved because Marketing is a management function of the system. However, it represents the system that the Trustees represent. He asked if they would prefer Ms. Staton to pull the committee together regularly and report to the Board or is it something we would vote on as a collective, which would be more challenging? Chairman Whitehouse stated he would prefer a committee process and Trustees concurred.

Chairman Whitehouse stated it was a new year so he would be making new committee appointments and asked that Trustees please let him know if they were interested in serving on the messaging committee. He stated he would let everyone know which committee they are assigned to by the end of next week. Vice Chair Hile asked everyone to assume regular involvement in their committee.

Mr. Braun stated that the messaging committee will not have to come up with the concept, there will already be a concept for consideration.

Trustee Foster asked if everyone will still have the opportunity to share input on the concepts? Chairman Whitehouse stated that once there is considerable movement, he would ask that Ms. Staton, Mr. Braun, or their Board colleagues share that information with them in order to help move the process forward quickly without an up or down vote.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if that process would work for everyone? The group agreed by consensus.

Vice Chair Hile asked how much of the work we are talking about is included and when we would begin to add extra funding to the project? Mr. Braun stated that has yet to be defined and that we will circle back to see how much of the contract has been spent to date, and what can be fit into the remainder. Ms. Staton added that we have funding set aside in the budget for implementation and production.

Vice Chair Hile asked how realistic it is to have landed on a first concept roll out and equipped ourselves with materials, bus wraps, copy, etc., within the time frame laid out earlier? Ms. Schmid said they feel good about the two months of development and a few weeks of materials, but that the vendor timing will need to be discussed once they receive approval and feedback from Connect Transit.

Trustee Rao asked if we will be using our buses for advertising our messaging campaign? Mr. Braun stated we do have the opportunity to use our buses, with none of our electric buses currently wrapped and some of our other buses being reserved for our own use.

Vice Chair Hile stated she likes all three concepts and thanked Dovetail and Entourage for their work.

b. Vice Chair Hile Travel Reimbursement for APTA Conference – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to reimburse Vice Chair Hile the \$1,431.76 for out-of-pocket travel expenses she incurred during the October 2023 APTA Conference and Expo.

Trustee Foster motioned; seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

Discussion:

David Braun, General Manager, shared that as Vice Chair of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees Ms. Hile represented Connect Transit at the APTA Conference and Expo in Orlando, FL October 7-9, 2023. Ms. Hile incurred out of pocket travel-related expenses that may be reimbursed by Connect Transit. The total reimbursement is \$1,431.76 and has been budgeted for in the FY24 travel expenses.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Vice Chair Hile

Motion to reimburse Vice Chair Hile the \$1,431.76 for out-of-pocket travel expenses she incurred during the October 2023 APTA Conference and Expo was **approved**.

c. Clarification of By-Laws Pertaining to Executive Session Attendance by Other Means – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion for Clarification of By-Laws Pertaining to Executive Session Attendance by Other Means.

Secretary McCue motioned; seconded by Trustee Foster.

Discussion:

Chairman Whitehouse explained that since neither City Managers were present and some staff were missing, he was going to ask for a motion to table this conversation.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to table the Clarification of By-Laws Pertaining to Executive Session Attendance by Other Means.

Trustee Buchanan motioned; seconded by Trustee Foster.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

Motion to table the Clarification of By-Laws Pertaining to Executive Session Attendance by Other Means was **approved**.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Chairman Whitehouse thanked for their participation in the January 19 Strategic Plan Workshop. He acknowledged it was a long day but that we came out with a good plan to move forward with. He shared that he and Vice Chair Hile would be representing the Board with Congressman Sorenson's visit to Connect Transit on Friday and report back to the Board.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT:

Mr. Braun shared his monthly General Manager report.

Strategic Plan Development:

- Mr. Braun thanked the Trustees for attending the Strategic Planning Workshop on January 19, 2024.
- The Strategic Plan is a blend of:
 - Customer Focus
 - Political
 - Financial
 - Operational
- Next Steps:
 - Activities
 - KPIs
 - Regular Follow-up
- Timeline:
 - Develop and submit DRAFT Strategic Plan document to Board for review and input.
 - Friday, March 1, 2024
 - Board feedback received and incorporated
 - March 1 – March 15
 - Final DRAFT to Board for final review and comment
 - March 15 – 21
 - Final Strategic Plan document presented to Board for approval
 - Board Meeting – March 26, 2024

Chairman Whitehouse stated this timeline had already been shared with himself and Vice Chair Hile and asked if the Trustees agree with this timeline? Trustee Buchanan stated it is an aggressive timeline but that she appreciates Mr. Braun acting quickly to put this together.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if everyone else agreed? The Board agreed by consensus.

Vice Chair Hile asked that as part of the draft plan Mr. Braun provide them with a cover guiding the Board to the type of feedback he is seeking.

Community:

Outreach

- Stuff the Bus
- Presentation to Court Services

Employee Morale

- Employee Holiday Celebration

Professional Development:

- Bus Operators
 - One training class of new Bus Operators is currently underway.
 - Actively recruiting for next class
- Additional Training
 - Dave White and Justin Allen attended the APTA Safety and Risk Management Seminar in Austin, TX in December. Topics addressed at the seminar included:
 - Battery Electric Bus Safety: Prevention/Management of BEB Fires
 - Fentanyl/Illicit Drug Use and Recent Studies
 - Cybersecurity
 - Transit Worker Assaults: Data Collection, Crime Prevention and Mitigation Strategies
 - FTA Updates
 - Collision Avoidance

Recruiting:

Positions Filled

- Bus Operator (1)
 - Carol Tribble
- Dispatcher (2)
 - Emily Pyle
 - Jeremy Schou
- Maintenance Supervisor (1)
 - Jamie Schwoerer
- Operations Analyst (1)
 - Carrie Bailey (Promotion)
- Service Technician (1)
 - Eric Myer

Positions Open

- Bus Operator (8)
- Customer Service Representative (1)
- Dispatcher (2)
- Mechanic (1)
- Microtransit Operator, FT (1)
- Microtransit Operator, PT (1)
- Operations Supervisor (1)
- Planning & Grants Coordinator (1)
(FKA Transportation Planner)
- Service Technician (2)

Chairman Whitehouse asked how the microtransit drivers are doing and if they were liking their jobs? Mr. Braun stated that microtransit drivers were very open, wanted the system to succeed, shared feedback and monthly Town Hall meetings and seem to enjoy their job.

Secretary McCue asked how we did the last few days with the icy weather? Mr. Braun stated we did very well with no significant accidents and only a few vehicles were stuck but we were able to pull them out of those situations.

TRUSTEE COMMENTS:

Chairman Whitehouse asked Trustees to please let him know if they would like to serve on the Budget Committee. Vice Chair Hile suggested we review all committees and reassess where Trustees fit.

Trustee Foster stated the Strategic Planning meeting was well run and well informed, thanked everyone for their time. She also stated the money invested in the messaging consultant campaign was well invested so far and she appreciates the time and energy staff put forth.

Vice Chair Hile stated the Strategic Planning Workshop was well enjoyed and appreciated working with the Trustees on a vision forward but cautioned Trustees in not getting too far out on their Strategic Plan Activities; a plan that is more than three years out is obsolete. She stated she is pleased with the messaging results and looks forward to the coming concepts.

Trustee Buchanan agreed the Strategic Plan Workshop had substance and looks forward to the final product. She also congratulated Trustee Foster for her recognition of her contribution to her community.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

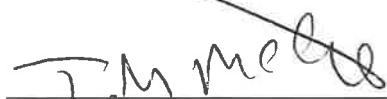
N/A

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Adjourn.

Trustee Buchanan motioned; seconded by Trustee Foster.

Meeting adjourned by consensus at 6:02 p.m.



Trustee Tim McCue, Board Secretary



Janice Crago, Board Clerk

[SEAL]

