

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
BOARD MEETING MINUTES – AUGUST 24, 2021

351 Wylie Drive
Connect Transit – Board Room
Normal, Illinois 61761

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on August 24, 2021, at 4:30 p.m. in the Connect Transit Board Room.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Linda Foster
Vice-Chairman Julie Hile
Trustee Tim McCue
Trustee Deb Presley
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

CITY MANAGERS: Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece - Present
Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus - Present

STAFF PRESENT: David Braun, General Manager
Jill Baxter, Board Clerk
Steve Stockton, IT Manager
Patrick Kuebrich, Finance Director
Jeff Holtke, Marketing Manager
Brendan O'Neill, Outreach Coordinator
Brady Lange, Maintenance Manager / Procurement
Dave White, Safety/Training Director

The regular monthly Board Meeting of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees was called to order by Chairman Ryan Whitehouse at 4:30 p.m. Roll call was taken and Trustee Buchanan led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of the *Minutes* of the July 12, 2021, Special Board Meeting and the July 27, 2021, Regular Board Meeting *Minutes*.
2. Financial Information for the month of June and July, 2021
3. Monthly Statistical Report for July, 2021
4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report

5. Cornerstone Illinois Weekly Update

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion to Approve the Consent Agenda*. Trustee McCue so moved, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Buchanan commented that it looks like we are either having more riders who are presenting Medicare/Medicaid or are we recovering more and is that what is making the difference – or a combination of the two?

Mr. Kuebrich commented that we are having more regular riders.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board approved the *Consent Agenda*.

NEW BUSINESS

Recommendation and Board Resolution of Capital Assistance Grant Application, Electric Buses, Electric Bus Charging, and Maintenance Facility Improvements

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation and Board Resolution of Capital Assistance Grant Application, Electric Buses, Electric Bus Charging, and Maintenance Facility Improvements*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Vice-Chairman Hile.

Mr. Brady Lange, *Maintenance Manager/Procurement* stated that this is a request for authorization to apply for a Capital Assistance Grant Application for Electric Buses, Electric Bus Charging and Maintenance Facility Improvements. We will be requesting additional funds for electric buses, as well as the charging infrastructure to go on-route to increase the range of the buses, together with in-ground vehicle lifts to increase efficiency and safety in the Maintenance Department.

There was no discussion from the Trustees.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation and Board Resolution of Capital Assistance Grant Application, Electric Buses, Electric Bus Charging, and Maintenance Facility Improvements*

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There was no discussion from the Trustees.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation and Board Resolution of Capital Assistance Grant Application, Electric Buses, Electric Bus Charging, and Maintenance Facility Improvements*

Recommendation to Authorize Contract for Heavy-Duty Driver Protective Barriers

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion to Authorize Contract for Heavy-Duty Driver Protective Barriers*, moved by Trustee Foster, seconded by Vice-Chairman Hile.

Mr. Brady Lange, *Maintenance Manager/Procurement* stated that in June of 2020, Connect Transit installed Plexiglas driver's shields to mitigate the risks due to COVID. While they served their purpose, we have identified the fact that it is going to become a much longer-term need, as well as the fact that the industry seems to be going that route. While a lot of local agencies have done so, as well as other local agencies that are looking at doing so. We put out an *Information for Bid* ("IFB") for purchase and installation of driver barriers. We are looking at something that is much more substantial than the solution we now have in place. We requested a barrier that has a window that can be slid or rolled down to allow the driver to communicate with passengers. We are not walling the driver completely off so that they are not able to communicate. This will also provide mitigation of airborne contaminants such as COVID as well as provide a barrier in the case of an assaulted driver situation. We received four (4) bids and you will notice that we are making a *Recommendation* for Midwest Bus Corporation which is not the lowest bid. Upon evaluation of the bidders, the lowest bidder did not have a solution

that met all of our specifications such as the window that provides access and ventilation fans for driver comfort, as well as safety glass. The proposed solution has safety glass rather than Plexiglas, which is more easily scratched, causing visibility issues for drivers. The proposed solution does meet all of the criteria and there is a brochure behind the *Recommendation* that details some of the specifics about the barrier. One hundred percent (100%) of this funding will come from the *FTA Cares Act*, which will be \$175,259.20 (purchase and installation).

Chairman Whitehouse inquired that if this is approved, how soon can these be installed?

Mr. Lange stated that his recollection was around 90 days from contract, they can be here to install.

Trustee Presley inquired if this would include the new buses that we are purchasing and will it include our entire fleet?

Mr. Lange explained that all of the new buses will arrive with the new barriers. The entire fleet will utilize these but we will not install them on our 2003 buses because the 2003 buses will be going away starting in November. What we will do is use the shields previously purchased for spare parts on the 2003 fleet until the 2003 buses are replaced.

Trustee Buchanan commented that she was glad we were using the *Cares Act* money for these new barriers. Is there any expected life for these?

Mr. Lange replied that the expected life on the new barriers is similar to that of a transit bus. They are expected to last 12-14 years which is the typical life of one of our buses.

Trustee Foster asked how the barriers will be maintained and cleaned and how often they will be cleaned and who will be cleaning them? Would it be the drivers' responsibility?

Mr. Lange responded that no, our cleaning staff will make certain that the windows are specifically cleaned. He is expecting that nightly we will have the staff inspect the glass and clean anything that could cause a vision issue.

Trustee McCue asked as a point of clarification, if we as a Board have an obligation to go with the lowest bid or do we have freedom to go outside of that?

Mr. Lange explained that it depends on the type of procurement. In this case, it was an IFB, which is based on bid. However, in this case, it did not meet all of the specification that we defined and that is why we were able to not have to use the lowest bid. The other 3 bidders did meet all of the specifications and we are choosing the lowest bidder.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that traditionally, haven't we also in the past had a team from staff scoring these? We haven't always gone with the lowest as sometimes there are other circumstances that come into play.

Mr. Lange responded, that is correct. That would be for an RFP which is a *Request for Proposal* which has a defined evaluation criteria so that you can look at things such as price, the qualifications of the team, the products being proposed, and then you would provide a weighted score based on those. You certainly can't have a situation where you don't have to go with the lowest bidder. In this particular procurement, we went with an IFB, simply because it is a straight-forward process so that we are evaluating on the lowest bidder for the product that meets all of our required specifications.

Vice-Chairman Hile commented that she thanks the staff for taking the long view for getting our equipment together and believes it is really smart. She appreciates the fact that we are taking care of our operators.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation to Authorize Contract for Heavy-Duty Driver Protective Barriers*.

Recommendation for Purchase of Oils and Lubricants

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation for Purchase of Oils and Lubricants*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Foster.

Mr. Brady Lange, *Maintenance Manager/Procurement* stated that this is another IFB where we solicited bids on products. Anything that meets our specifications, we will choose the lowest bidder. This is for oil and lubricants used for our maintenance services. Since 2016 we have been under contract with one vendor. That agreement is ending so we released another IFB. Typically, we would release or ask for a multi-year contract. We had multiple bidders who came back and said that the current market is really difficult to nail down pricing so they requested a one (1) year contract and we agreed that would be fine. The concern was that we could have higher pricing if we were doing a multi-year deal because folks just don't know where the market is headed. We will do a one (1) year contract for this and as you can see, we received four (4) bids on this and we are recommending *Evergreen FS*, which was the lowest bidder outside of *Birkey's Farm Store*, but you will note that *Birkey's* only proposed two of the eight products that were requested. All the products meet our specifications and we are recommending a one (1) year contract with *Evergreen FS*. We will use regular operating funds for this contract with an estimated annual expense of around \$47,000 based on our annual usage.

Chairman Whitehouse noted that *Evergreen FS* is part of his employer's family of companies so he will be abstaining his vote on this *Recommendation*.

There was no discussion from the Trustees.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;

ABSTENTION: Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board approved the *Recommendation for Purchase of Oils and Lubricants*.

Recommendation for Purchase of Filters

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation for Purchase of Filters*, moved by Trustee Foster, seconded by Trustee McCue.

Mr. Brady Lange, *Maintenance Manager/Procurement* stated that this is precisely the same process that we used on the oil. We asked for bidders to supply pricing for oil filters and air filters on our revenue fleet. Very similarly, the bidders came back and asked for a single year contract for a similar reason. The metals market is strange and fluctuating these days so it was hard for them to declare pricing for a multi-year contract. So we will do a one (1) year contract. We have been under contract with *Ken's Oil Service* since 2016 and as you will note, they submitted the lowest pricing so we are recommending *Ken's Oil Service* for a one (1) year agreement and we will use regular operating funds to pay for this contract as well. The approximate value being \$16,000 annually.

There was no discussion from the Trustees.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation for Purchase of Filters*.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman stated that he doesn't have a lot to report except that he offered the new General Manager, David Braun, an official welcome as this was his first Board meeting as General Manager of Connect Transit.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Assessment of First Two-Weeks in Position

General Manager, David Braun, stated that this is the beginning of his third week and he wanted to first thank the Board for the opportunity to serve as the new General Manager. He has really enjoyed everything that he has seen so far and working with the staff has been phenomenal. Staff has been really open about their acceptance of him as the new GM but also willing to share their opinions and thoughts and are willing to listen to his thoughts and ideas. He appreciates the openness in the culture that we have here and he hopes to continue that into the future as he believes it is really working for this agency. He also had a chance to meet with the operators and maintenance employees. What he found was that so many of them are really committed to serving this community. Again, as an agency of our size, operating a public transportation is so important. They are not just here for a paycheck; they are here to serve their passengers and to serve this community. He stated that has been refreshing to hear.

Driver and Service Technician Recruiting Initiative

One of the things he wanted to mention was the fact that we are low on employees. We have about 10-18 open driver positions that we could fill. We decided to do a recruitment incentive. Part of that incentive is a \$1,000 signing bonus for all new employees and they would receive that after the first six (6) months and then after the first year of employee. We are also doing a recruitment incentive for our existing employees. If they refer someone, they will receive \$250 for each employee that they refer and they would receive that with the new employee's first paycheck, as well as after the 90-day probation. We also changed some internal policies. We had a policy in the past that we were not going to hire employee's family members. It wasn't a supervisory situation, it was a situation that if anyone's family member applied, we would not hire them and we have changed that. We modified the policy that we will not allow a family member to supervise another family member but we will hire another family member. We are hoping that will encourage people to apply who have the same caliber of fine operators and maintenance workers that we currently have. We will advertise this widely and Jeff is working on social media campaigns and putting things on the bus and on the exterior of the bus so we will be communicating this community wide. We have increased our spending on *Indeed* to get our listing promoted further. We are also looking at some other opportunities such as *Craig's List* that are free so that we can get the communication out. Hopefully, in the next few weeks we will also have some "Now Hiring" flags on the property.

Marketing Manager, Jeff Holtke, commented that in addition to the flags, we will be creating some other smaller signs to put along our property here. We also created some signage to go on the inside of the buses that are right behind the driver that say, "We saved the best seat for you..." and then lists all of the jobs currently open. We are also hosting a job fair on Saturday, September 18th. We have been promoting nonstop to try to get the hiring classes full so that we can get drivers on the road.

Chairman Whitehouse asked the General Manager where we are with drivers and how many drivers could we take in if we could fill to capacity.

General Manager Braun responded that we have 88 drivers now and we could go up to 105 and that would cover all of the work with extras for people who call in sick. Ninety-five (95) would be good place to be and 105 would be ideal. We are looking forward to seeing what type of reaction we get through this campaign and we'll report on the number of applications as the result.

Updated Federal Mask Requirements for Public Transportation

General Manager Braun stated that as you might have heard, the TSA has upgraded its mask requirement and the feds have extended the mask requirement now until January 18, 2022, so we will also be letting the public know that is the continuing mandate. It was supposed to end September 13, 2021, and the TSA has extended it now to January 2022. We will be doing some advertising on that as well.

Dave White, Safety/Training Director, stated that we are in talks now and will share those plans with finalized.

Open Administrative Position Status

General Manager Braun reported that Jill, our Administrative Assistant and Board Clerk, will be retiring and this will be her last official Board Meeting with us. We have had some interviews for that position and have extended an offer to an applicant today and hopefully we will know more by the end of the week.

Electric Buses

General Manager Braun stated that we have a number of electric buses on order. The first will be delivered in November 2021 and the next were due to be delivered in November 2022 and the next delivery in November 2023. We have also 2003 buses, as Brady mentioned, that are in horrible condition and really need to be replaced. For the benefit of our passengers, operators, and maintenance employees, we reached out to Proterra, the manufacturer of the vehicles to see if we could move up the bus order. Rather than having delivery in November 2022, and 2023, we asked to move that up to an eight (8) bus order and Proterra went one step further to say that they can start manufacturing the order in March of 2022 and we should be able to take delivery in June/July 2022. Rather than spreading the 2003's out and trying to run them as long as we possibly can, we are going to try to replace those as soon as we can with the newer electric vehicles that will be cleaner, easier to maintain, and provide a much better service for our passengers. We were excited that Proterra was able to do that.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that to confirm, we will get four (4) this next November and in the spring, we will get eight (8) buses.

General Manager Braun confirmed. He is very excited about this and thanked Brady and Pat for making that happen. We will be shifting some funds around but we feel comfortable that we will have plenty capital in the future for bus replacement.

Chairman Whitehouse wanted to confirm they will be paid for through Federal grants, correct?

Patrick Kuebrich responded yes, through Federal and some State.

Chairman Whitehouse inquired whether there were any questions or comments for the General Manager.

Vice-Chairman Hile stated that she was happy to hear from you and all of the staff the measures you are taking to see whether we can attract some additional operators. She wondered if he could also update the Board on other types of employees that we need to recruit and the second thing was if he could talk to us about what is the current impact on our available staff on being short-handed.

General Manager Braun stated that at the administration level, we have an Assistant General Manager and a Human Resources Manager that we are recruiting for. We haven't begun with the Assistant General Manager yet and we want the HR Manager to come in first and allow that process to take place after he or she comes in. We also have some Service Technicians that we are recruiting for. The Service Technician takes care of the smaller maintenance of the bus such as cleaning, bulb replacement, tires, etc. We have been challenged to find a candidate for that position so the GM reached out to one of the local community agencies to see if they would be interested in a job training program for some of their constituents. We will be meeting this week to talk about that and what the opportunities are. With our next report, the GM will report back to the Board on the status of that conversation. He believes it would be a wonderful opportunity and a good partnership between us and the community agency to provide skilled workers and job training for their folks.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Vice-Chairman Hile welcomed the new GM and stated that it sounds like a very exciting first couple of weeks. She hoped that Mr. Braun is finding the community welcoming and congenial and to let us know how we can help you settle in. She also thanked the Board Clerk for her service.

Trustee Foster also thanked the Board Clerk for her assistance and service to the Board. She thanked the new GM for reaching out with the one-on-one meeting with her and it is her hope that not only the community to be welcoming, but also this great agency. These folks have done some great things and have kept transit on the forefront impeccable.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board did not enter into *Executive Session*.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a Motion to Adjourn, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Vice-Chairman Hile.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Board meeting adjourned at 5:03 p.m.

Judy Buchanan
Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary

Jamie Crago for Jill Baxter
Jill Baxter, Board Clerk

[SEAL]

