

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES – JULY 12, 2021

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

A Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on July 12, 2021, at 5:15 p.m. at Connect Transit.

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

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Trustee Deb Presley

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

STAFF PRESENT: Mark Peterson, Interim General Manager
Jill Baxter, Board Clerk
Steve Stockton, IT Manager
Brady Lange, Maintenance / Procurement Manager

The Special 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 the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Trustee Rao.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

ADJOURNMENT INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion to Adjourn into Executive Session*, moved by Trustee McCue, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Special Board meeting adjourned into Executive Session at 5:16 p.m.

RETURN TO REGULAR SESSION

The Board returned to Regular Session at 6:04 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS

Recommendation for NEPA Environmental Assessment Services – Downtown Transfer Center

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation for NEPA Environmental Assessment Services – Downtown Transfer Center*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee McCue.

Interim General Manager Peterson stated that Brady Lange will give an overview of this *Recommendation*.

Mr. Lange stated that this is the next step in moving forward with our *Downtown Transfer Center* project. If you are not familiar with the NEPA process, it is a review process that must be conducted and is a requirement by the FTA. Any Federal agency, including the FTA, use the NEPA process to determine potential environmental impacts of any federally funded projects. At its most basic level, the NEPA requires government agencies to engage in a review process intended to discover any significant environmental or public health impacts before the decision is made to purchase the property. Some of the things that it seeks to identify are transportation issues; traffic; parking; community and social impacts; physical and environmental impacts; air quality; visual quality; cultural impacts; hazardous waste; noise vibration; and also as part of the process, the performance of community outreach. As you can understand from all of the different aspects that it touches, it is a pretty complex process and the firm we are looking to contract with has indicated that it could potentially take between 12-18 months to perform the study. On May 20, 2021, we released a *Request for Qualifications* and we received a response from four (4) firms. Some of them were sought out based on a recommendation by another transit agency. As you can see, CDM Smith, Inc. has been chosen as the most qualified firm. They have a long history of very similar projects. It's proposed team has completed many contracts and they work directly with FTA Region 5. They have a staff of over 105 in the Chicagoland area and they also have very diverse transit experience nationwide. Their senior staff has extensive experience with NEPA and have done a lot of work with Chicago Transit Authority, PACE Suburban Bus, INDIGO and METRA. They are uniquely positioned to guide us through the process as it is very complex and we will need someone to assist us with this process. The financial aspect of this will be funded by FTA grant funds that are earmarked specifically for the Downtown project, as well as IDOT Rebuild Illinois Capital funds. They have indicated the anticipated cost is in the range between \$100,000-\$325,000. The cost range is wide because the scope can vary. A lot of the drivers of the timeline and the costs are part of the process itself. As part of the process they have to determine the class of action. There are 3 potential classes of action; categorical exclusion – which is the quickest process or environmental assessment which looking at it at a high level is probably what our project is going to be; or an Environmental Impact Statement which is much more detailed and for projects that will have a very significant environmental impact, as well as a possible 106 Consultation which is related to historical preservation if the project could be considered historical significance.

Mr. Peterson stated that you are probably all wondering why the huge range of expenses. We have communicated with other transit agencies who have been through this process and they have stated that is the way it is done. We don't really know the extent of some of the work until they start the analysis and they will be communicating with the FTA Regional Office throughout this and getting feedback from FTA. Champaign went through a very similar process which is how we found out it took them 18 months. We are certainly hoping that this can be done quicker and we are certainly hoping that it can be done for less money but Champaign was in the \$300,000 range for a very similar project. It is a little disconcerting to have this kind of range but all of this cost will be covered by Federal and State money so we have no local dollars in it. Obviously, during this process, the FTA has to sign off on everything.

Trustee Buchanan asked from what we know at this time, are there any early red flags that they might anticipate in the process that would cause us to have some indication of a problem?

Mr. Lange stated there were no early red flags but they have not done any research into the property other than just what they have read in the media. There is nothing that indicates a major issue. You have to get into the process to understand exactly what is going to be necessary.

Trustee Buchanan also asked if it included the crossing on Jefferson Street to the next block?

Mr. Lange stated that this process will be completed on any potentially purchased property as well as the impact of any neighboring properties.

Trustee Foster stated that you never know so it is good to have some contingencies in place and hopefully will not go over that amount. The process is there for a reason and is for our protection so she believes that if it takes 18 months, it takes 18 months. She appreciated all the efforts with this and following the rules, regulations, and processes and she is looking forward to the results and hopefully we will be able to move forward.

Mr. Peterson stated that is a great point as there is a reason they require you do this before you buy the property so that you are not purchasing property without the full knowledge of any liabilities that may exist.

Vice-Chairman Hile commented that she appreciates that we have taken on the Pantagraph Building as a community building and as a historic property and she understands that may make this process a little bit more complex. She actually likes this range a lot and is a little surprised it is not higher.

Trustee Buchanan asked if the Pantagraph property is on the historical registry?

Chairman Whitehouse replied, no.

There was no further discussion.

AYE: All.
NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation for NEPA Environmental Assessment Services – Downtown Transfer Center*.

Recommendation for Approval of Proterra Contract Change Order

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation for Approval of Proterra Contract Change Order*, moved by Vice-Chairman Hile, seconded by Trustee Rao.

Mr. Lange stated that as you are all aware, on February 23 of this year, this Board voted to sign a Contract with Proterra for the purchase of four (4) 35' battery-electric buses; 2 charging units; and four (4) dispensers for the charging units together with the installation of all the necessary electrical infrastructure. The funding for the purchase is being provided by IDOT DOAP Debt Service and *FTA Low or No Emissions Competitive Grant*, as well as the *FTA Bus and Bus Facilities Competitive Grant*. Since that time, the charger technology has continued to improve. Staff has recently identified a superior charging solution that was not available when we first went down this path. As staff looked at that a little more closely, we decided it would probably be a good idea to investigate it thoroughly and it started to raise some questions that maybe it might be a good idea to investigate further. As the system was originally designed, the infrastructure that is to be installed provided the necessary infrastructure for up to 17 charging units which can charge 2 buses a piece for a total of 34 buses. The initial plan was to purchase 4 buses with 2 chargers and 4 dispensers. The new charging solution is one (1) large unit that replaces all of the smaller individual charging units. The large unit can charge up to 40 buses – 20 simultaneously – and sequentially charge another 20. Staff evaluated the benefits of the new charging technology as well as any potential cost savings. While there is a larger initial investment the first year with the new charging technology, future contracts will be significantly decreased due to not needing to purchase the smaller chargers in the future. In addition to the financial impact of the change order, we also realized that with the new larger charging technology, there are a lot of things included in the charger that are beneficial. It has the capability for vehicle-to-grid technology, which is something that is quite interesting. We are not there yet so we still need to do a lot of research on that but it excites our utility provider which is interesting as well. This new technology has a real potential to decrease maintenance costs in the future as it is much easier to maintain than a number of individual charging units. Most other agencies that are currently installing charging infrastructure are going this route. This change order will also dictate a change order on the solar project. The General Manager is able to administratively approve that project as well, upon approval of this change order. The Board approved the initial contract with Proterra for \$4,390,913.00, and this change order will increase the Proterra contract by \$211,468.00. However, by approving this change order, our future contracts will decrease by approximately \$200,000.00 per year. Keeping in mind, we do not know the exact numbers but it will be close to that amount. We have contracted with Proterra for the purchase of 12 buses and the related infrastructure and with all of these changes, at the end of the purchase of the 12 buses, we will save \$50,000 over the entire scope of the project. If we decide to execute our option for an additional 5 buses, we will save \$325,000 by executing this change order.

The funding mechanisms will be the same for this portion of the project with IDOT DOAP Debt Service, FTA Low or No Emissions and the Bus and Bus Facilities Grants.

DISCUSSION

Chairman Whitehouse stated that on the charging infrastructure, we are going to save \$200,000 a year? Can you explain that again?

Mr. Lange clarified that there is an initial expense the first year of \$200,000 and the subsequent years, approximately \$200,000. If you total all 12 buses – including the additional expense of the charger right now, the total savings is about \$50,000. There is an additional expense on the solar charge order that does account for that because we are looking at that as a wholistic price.

Mr. Peterson added that we also have the option for 5 additional buses and if we go with those 5, then the savings will be even greater because we made that one big upfront investment in the bigger charging unit and that will continue to accrue value. Theoretically, that charging unit, if we converted our entire fleet to electric – the bigger charging unit would cover our entire fleet. It is definitely the right move but we debated whether we should pursue this now because we are already down another pathway but in the long run, it is the right move to make now. Plus, it is such a much more sophisticated charging technology. We could have stayed with what we already started but this is the better move and in the long run it could save us quite a bit of money.

Mr. Lange commented that every year the savings adds up over many years.

Trustee Foster inquired what is the life of the bigger charging unit? If we put all those buses on it and we charge it all the time, what is the life expectancy of this?

Mr. Lange stated that the life expectancy of the charging unit is beyond the buses which is 14 years. The charging technology is going to last many years and as it improves, it will only get cheaper. In the future when it is time for an upgrade, the technology is going to become more economical in the future.

Trustee Rao inquired about the delivery of the electric buses.

Mr. Lange responded that currently the delivery schedule is mid to late October for the first four (4).

Mr. Peterson added that every year we will receive 4 more buses until we reach 12. Then we have the option to purchase 5 additional buses, but only if we choose that option.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that COVID has pushed that back substantially because we were supposed to get some last year.

Mr. Lange stated that in this situation it worked out because now we have the opportunity to take advantage of the new charging technology.

There was no further discussion.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation for Approval of Proterra Contract Change Order*.

Recommendation for Approval of General Manager Employment Agreement

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation for Approval of General Manager Employment Agreement*, moved by Trustee McCue, seconded by Trustee Foster.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Foster stated that it has been a long time coming and we have been at this for a while. She thanked the Board for remaining focused to make certain we found someone whom we believe will take Connect Transit to the next level. She was proud to have Mr. Braun in our City and Town to be our General Manager here at Connect. He brings a wealth of experience and talent.

Chairman Whitehouse asked that we save comments for the Trustee's Comments portion of the meeting.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation for Approval of General Manager Employment Agreement*.

Chairman Whitehouse announced to the Board that Connect Transit's new General Manager is Mr. David Braun. As GM, he will start on Monday, August 9, 2021, and a *Press Release* will be sent out to the media immediately.

Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus, left the meeting at 6:04 p.m.

This Board feels very fortunate to have been able to attract a candidate as experienced and accomplished as David Braun. Members of the Board of Trustees are confident that Mr. Braun will find ways to make our already outstanding transit system even better. Mr. Braun has over 25 years of experience in the public transit industry, serving in the private industry and also other public transit systems including CityLink in Peoria where he served as both the Assistant General Manager and the

General Manager from 1996-2002. The Chairman stated that Mr. Braun is excited about coming and joining our team.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Whitehouse stated he had no items to report. However, he did report that tomorrow Connect Transit will welcome a visit from Shoun Reese as the Deputy Director of Public Transit. She will be visiting with our staff. The Chairman stated he will visit with her to welcome her and then she will be meeting with the staff on the logistics of everything. In addition, we will be having a regular Board meeting in July as well.

INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Echoing the Chairman, Mr. Peterson stated that we are excited to host Shoun Reese who is the new top person at IDOT for Public Transportation. She reached out and wanted to come visit and she will be spending the morning in Peoria and then come to Connect to spend a couple of hours with us in the afternoon. Staff is already preparing some information for her and we will use that opportunity to educate her about Connect Transit, as well as some things she can help us with. She will also be bringing a couple of her staff members with her.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Trustee McCue wanted to thank Mr. Peterson for his work in steering the ship this far.

Trustee Foster also recognized Mr. Peterson, Chairman Whitehouse and also the staff. Trustee Foster stated that we knew this was not going to be easy but at the end, we would be better off for it. We have been looking forward to this day and we now have the opportunity to get to see what is out there and we have learned many things along the way. We are better equipped, educated, and more focused on moving ahead.

Trustee Rao also thanked Mr. Peterson and the other Board Members.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a Motion to Adjourn, moved by Trustee Foster, seconded by Trustee Rao.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Board meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.


Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary

[SEAL]


Jill Baxter, Board Clerk