

**CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
**BOARD MEETING MINUTES – APRIL 27, 2021**

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

A meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on April 27, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. at Connect Transit with Board Members participating in the meeting virtually.

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

CITY MANAGERS:           Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece – Present (arrived at 4:50 p.m.)  
                                  Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus - Absent

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

The regular Board Meeting of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees was called to order by Chairman Ryan Whitehouse at 4:00 p.m. Roll call was taken and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

1. Approval of March 23, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes and the Minutes of the 2021 Annual Meeting
2. Disbursements for the month of March 2021
3. Monthly Statistical Report for March 2021
4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report (*Addendum*)
5. Cornerstone Illinois Weekly Update (*Addendum*)

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

**DISCUSSION**

Trustee Buchanan inquired whether the Illinois Public Transit Association is looking at any particular bills or have alerted us to look at any legislation? Is it our practice to advise the Trustees so that we could make those individual contacts with legislators?

Interim General Manager Mark Peterson responded that they are very diligent with this process and would contact us and ask us to contact our local legislators about a particular bill. Anything that affects our system they will would give us a head's up. It would depend upon the degree of importance and mostly are fairly routine and staff would notify the representatives but if it is something of significant importance, we would have at the least, the Chairman representing the Board contact our representatives, whether at the state or federal level. Most of the alerts we get are routine kinds of things that are handled at the staff level.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board approved the *Consent Agenda*.

**NEW BUSINESS**

*Recommendation of the FY2022 Operating and Capital Budget*

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion* for approval of the *Recommendation of the FY2022 Operating and Capital Budget*. Trustee Rao so moved, seconded by Trustee Foster.

Chairman Whitehouse commented that the preliminary budget was presented to the Board last month. Pat Kuebrich was available for questions or comments, adding that this Budget was presented to the Bloomington City Council Committee of the Whole last Monday.

**DISCUSSION**

Trustee McCue inquired if at some point in time the budget will be presented to the Town of Normal?

Chairman Whitehouse stated that Ms. Reece has shared the budget with the Town while Bloomington asked that Connect Transit present it to the Council in a public meeting.

Interim General Manager Peterson stated he has shared with Pam Reece that if at any point the members of the Council would like a presentation at one of their meetings, Connect would be happy to do that.

Trustee Presley inquired if Connect received any feedback, positive or negative, from the Bloomington Council members?

Chairman Whitehouse stated that he was very happy with how the Council responded. Mr. Peterson added that the Council did ask some excellent questions and he believed they were satisfied with our responses.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board approved the *Recommendation of the FY2022 Operating and Capital Budget*.

*Recommendation for Website Redesign (Cybernautic Web Design)*

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation for Website Redesign (Cybernautic Web Design)*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Foster.

Interim General Manager Peterson stated that staff member Jeff Holtke and Steve Stockton have been working on this with other staff involved as well.

Mr. Jeff Holtke, Marketing Manager, took the floor and commented that Connect's current web design is not as "user-friendly" as we would like. We met with different groups with an initial meeting and two out of the three demonstrated the back-end of the site which we would be using. Mr. Holtke stated that he had prior experience with Cybernautic and one of the things he is excited about is the overall accessibility of options using Cybernautic. They have a really nice widget that is built into the website that has the capability of several different options: screen reader; contrast; text sizing; text spacing, etc. Cybernautic has a large client base in the community and our last redesign took place in 2015. In addition, this redesign will save Connect on overall hosting fees as Steve Stockton will discuss next.

Mr. Steve Stockton, IT Manager, stated that Connect is currently paying \$9,000 for hosting fees on our current website and with the redesign by Cybernautic, hosting fees will be cut by more than one-half. The redesign will be a much better experience for our customers as we will be able to modify the menu so that there is a better flow. Another item we are excited about is having an employee's portal for retrieval of various forms.

## **DISCUSSION**

Chairman Whitehouse commented that he is pleased that we are using a local vendor for the redesign.

Trustee Buchanan inquired if the hosting fee includes any maintenance or support and will there be any additional charges that we would expect to incur monthly?

Mr. Stockton explained that there would be no additional charges monthly and the package includes all maintenance, plus licensing for the customer manager system, which is the software that we would use to modify the website. In addition, Cybernautic has a 24-7 support line if we have any issues.

Trustee Foster thanked the staff for bringing this to the Board and stated that this will be recognized by the community and will enhance its ability to navigate the system.

Trustee Presley inquired whether or not the redesign will integrate into any of the mobile ticketing which we have in-process? With the redesign, she is excited that it will be more ADA accessible. Do we know some of the complaints we have had by our current customers with our site and will those be addressed specifically with Cybernautics?

Mr. Holtke stated that one of the biggest complaints received with the current site is that it is not user-friendly. We have not addressed integrating with our mobile ticketing but we are still in the very early stages of planning. Cybernautics is very excited to work with us and help us get Connect's website up to speed. Other complaints have been the ADA side of the website but the built-in widget will really be nice compared to what we have now.

Chairman Whitehouse questioned the statement that we do not know yet whether the new website will work with the mobile apps?

Mr. Stockton explained that the mobile ticketing app is totally separate. We can place a link to it from our website but that app is totally separated from our actual website. We will have the editing capabilities to integrate that site into our current site but will be a totally different URL.

Trustee Presley stated that as long as both of them would work together so that if customers are on our website, it is very easy to click into the mobile app and vice versa – eliminating two separate experiences.

Mr. Holtke stated that it will be a much more enjoyable experience if for some reason a customer is in our mobile ticketing app and they are trying to pull up a map, the customer goes to our website, and the user experience on our website will be hands-down better than what it is currently and much easier to navigate.

Trustee Rao stated that the mobile app is very important so the customers can see when the bus is coming.

Vice-Chairman Hile stated that she is very interested in how well we are accessing and user-testing with our riders and getting feedback from them. This is a perfect opportunity to engage the citizen's advisory group.

Mr. Holtke stated that we have begun pushing out a survey by gathering information on rider's priorities on the site whether it be accessibility or what riders use as a main function on the website. Of course, we are also open to input from the Board if you have other ideas or have seen other transit websites or websites in general that have a good feature that you would like to see integrated into Connect's website. The survey will help gather what riders find difficult on our current site and what they would like to see on the new website.

Mr. Stockton added that we have looked at other transit agencies websites and we have a good idea of what we believe would work well with our site but public input will be very important. As far as a timeline on a switchover, we have yet to get to that phase. Cybernautic will farm over everything that is on our site and transfer it over to the new site; i.e. past Board Packets, etc. All of that information will still be available and there will not be any downtime as far as access to the site.

Mr. Peterson and the Chairman agreed that a "soft launch" is a good idea as we progress to get feedback from those that are likely to be regular users of our site. Mr. Peterson added that the good news with this particular platform is that it will make it a lot easier for us to adjust and modify. As we receive feedback from current users once the site goes live, if something is not working right, it will be much easier on our end to make changes to address those issues. He also commented that we are looking across the board at technology opportunities. There are a lot of things we are looking at internally to take advantage of some new technologies as well that can improve our customer experience and create some efficiencies and improved information gathering and processing for staff.

Trustee Presley stated that she believed it important that as we get into the design work, that we do reach out to the disability advocates because there are so many technical things that happen with people who are vision impaired and hearing impaired that we may think it works but when it gets to reality, it doesn't. When we get to that process, having that tested first, rather than launching and having customers come with complaints, let's get them into the process at the appropriate time for them to test it and give us feedback before we ever get to the launch.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation for Website Redesign (Cybernautic Web Design)*.

*Recommendation for Approval of Agreement Extension with Cardinal Infrastructure*

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Recommendation for Approval of Agreement Extension with Cardinal Infrastructure*, moved by Vice-Chairman Hile, seconded by Trustee McCue.

Mr. Brady Lange stated that this *Recommendation* will authorize the General Manager to commit to a 2-year contract extension with *Cardinal Infrastructure* to provide our Federal Lobbying Services in Washington, DC. Connect Transit has been successful in applying and receiving discretionary capital grants to provide funding for projects such as our electric bus replacements, the Better Bus Stops Campaign, and the Downtown Bloomington Transfer Center. Over the past several *years* *Cardinal Infrastructure* has assisted Connect Transit in building strategic relationships with our Congressional delegation and the FTA which has led to our being able to secure nearly \$16M in federal discretionary grants. The total annual cost of this contract extension will be \$72,000 per year. This is the same fee as past contracts with *Cardinal Infrastructure*. Additionally, due to Federal and State regulations, the funds for these services must be provided by the local share account.

**DISCUSSION**

Chairman Whitehouse commented that this is a no-brainer with having almost \$16M returned to the taxpayers of Bloomington-Normal and stated he is a stronger supporter of this type of service on behalf of our local transit.

Vice-Chairman Hile commented that having seen this team in action, she believes they make the difference between our receiving funding and our not receiving funding. *Cardinal Infrastructure* know the people to connect to and how to connect and she believes this is money very well spent.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation for Approval of Agreement Extension with Cardinal Infrastructure*.

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

*Discussion of Fare Implementation Plan for June 1, 2021*

Chairman Whitehouse stated that if we are going to go back to fares on June 1, we should make that decision tonight or obtain a consensus as it gives us 30 days to get this message back to the community. He believed that it is time to go back to collecting fares. The "one-rate-for-all" was a recommendation

from the Community Working Group. While we were fortunate enough to receive funding to pay and cover the losses of revenue due to COVID, it is time that we go back to collecting fares for the system.

Trustee Buchanan commented that she agrees. If we see some change in the pandemic and what the landscape of such looks like, we can always reconsider. It appears to her that some of the transit organizations here in Central Illinois have already resumed charging for fares. We have been particularly sensitive and she is proud of that but it is probably time to resume collecting fares.

Chairman Whitehouse added that Peoria has also begun collecting fares again.

Trustee Presley agreed that this is an opportune time to make that move as long as our community metrics stay in the direction they are heading. She would encourage us to perform additional advertising by reaching out to the community in order to get the message out that fares are resuming and even more importantly, get the message out to the community about "One Rate For All" and how that will impact the community. This was a huge step taken one year ago and it was met with a lot of joy by community members and this is a recognition that in transportation, everybody is being treated the same with regard to fares and she wants the community to see this as a positive. Whatever we can do to get that message out is important.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that we have money in the *Cares Act* so let's get the message out that fares are coming back as well as the "One Rate For All".

Trustee Foster inquired whether we were ready as staff and will we be at capacity or less than capacity and what is the plan to receiving our riders. We want to make certain our drivers are comfortable and ready to begin.

Chairman Whitehouse responded that staff will adhere to CDC Guidelines; mask-wearing will still be mandatory; and everything that CDC is recommending, we will adhere to.

Trustee Buchanan was reminded of the Work Group and the importance of telling our story in communication and as we discussed with the website redesign, the implementation of this decision is very important. We have taken a difficult situation and tried to accommodate a number of people so she hopes that as we work toward implementation, we take all of that into account and be sure we are telling our story.

*Discussion of Possible Implementation of In-Person Board Meetings  
Starting on June 22, 2021*

Chairman Whitehouse extended to Trustees that if your comfort level is there, we are going to start implementing in June and you are welcome to come to Connect Transit. If you do not feel comfortable, we will continue to do the Zoom meetings; however, sooner or later we will discontinue virtual meetings as our By-laws state in-person meetings. We have allowed the exception during COVID.

### **INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT**

Mr. Peterson stated that the solar project is moving along well. We hope to have that wrapped up this current fiscal year even with a few delays on the front-end. Mr. Lange stated that since the first of the year, the weather has been fighting us daily with inclement weather since January. We are finally getting there and activity will be kicking up very rapidly as we move into better weather and we are currently on-track to have that project finalized by June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Peterson stated that our first four (4) electric buses are under contract and are in the very early stages of the build. Connect will eventually send someone from our shop to the manufacturing facility to monitor the bus build which is standard procedure. Mr. Lange stated that the current schedule is to begin production on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July and a final delivery on September 26<sup>th</sup>. We should start seeing electric buses on the property in September.

Mr. Peterson stated we will receive four (4) a year from that point forward for four years. We have been talking to our Federal representatives and there may be some additional funding that we might be able to obtain for some additional electric buses.

Mr. Peterson credited the staff for keeping things moving while he was out of the office.

### **TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS**

There were no comments by the Trustees.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

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

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Board meeting adjourned into *Executive Session* at 5:06 p.m. and resumed the regular meeting at 5:49 p.m.

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

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

NAY: None.



Motion carried and the Board meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

Judy Buchanan  
Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary

Jill Baxter  
Jill Baxter, Board Clerk

