

Connect Transit Board of Trustees
May 27, 2025, 4:30 p.m.
351 Wylie Drive, Normal, IL 61761 – Board Room
Regular Session Minutes – Approved at 6/24/25 Meeting

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Ryan Whitehouse called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL:

Board Clerk, Janice Crago, recorded attendance via roll call.

Trustees Present:

Trustee Gina Bianchi
Trustee Judy Buchanan (4:32)
Secretary Linda Foster
Vice Chair Julie Hile
Trustee Mandava Rao (4:32)
Trustee Elicssha Sanders
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

Trustees Absent:

None

City Managers Present:

City Manager Pam Reece

City Managers Absent:

City Manager Jeff Jurgens

Staff Present:

David Braun, Managing Director
Brady Lange, Deputy Managing Director
Ashley Strupek, Procurement Manager
Charlie Busse, Maintenance Manager
Lauren Bridgewater, Acting as Board Clerk
Mark Huffman, Marketing Manager
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director
Stephanie Butler, HR Manager
Steve Stockton, IT Manager

Guest(s) Present:

Julie Holts, Connect Transit
Mark Peterson
Greg Raymer, Regional Account Manager, Sunset Vans (Virtual)
Derek Murray, CEO, Sunset Vans (Virtual)
Terry Bland, National Sales Director, Sunset Vans (Virtual)
Keith Dobrolinsky, Sr. Vice President, Marsh McLennan (Virtual)
Deneen Castellon, Vice President, Marsh McLennan (Virtual)

C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND MISSION STATEMENT:

Chairman Whitehouse led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance and read the Connect Transit Mission Statement.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

Chairman Whitehouse welcome Trustee Elicssha Sanders to the Connect Transit Board of Trustees.

E. CONSENT AGENDA:

- a. Approval of Financial Information for April 2025
- b. Monthly Statistical Reports for April 2025
- c. Cardinal Infrastructure; Federal Report
- d. Cornerstone; Illinois Weekly Update

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

Trustee Foster motioned; seconded by Trustee Bianchi.

Discussion:

David Braun, Managing Director, explained the minutes were not included in the Consent Agenda because the Board Clerk had a death in the family and was not able to complete them prior to the meeting and that they will be included in next month's Consent Agenda.

Mr. Braun explained that nothing stood out in the financial report except for an expenditure to CDM Smith, which is a cash disbursement covered by grant funding. It shows in this report but will not show in the actual income statement. He explained we are on target with our budget and doing quite well exceeding revenue and short in expenditures.

Vice Chair Hile asked Mr. Braun asked what the CDM expenditure covered.

Mr. Braun stated they are our architect and engineering firm for the transit facility. This payment covered a portion of the design of the facility, with the redesign payments to come later.

Mr. Braun stated total ridership is down about 3%: FLEX continues to grow; Mobility is down to right about where we anticipated. He explained we continue to look at expenditures and how we are using some of the funds to make sure performance is meeting expectations.

Mr. Braun stated he was not going to read aloud the Cornerstone or Cardinal reports but that there are many things going on at the federal and state levels, and if they have any questions to please contact him.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there were other questions or comments for Mr. Braun.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a vote on the motion on the floor since there were no questions or comments and asked the Clerk to call the roll.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

The motion to approve the Consent Agenda was **approved**.

F. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Marketing and Communications Committee:

No report.

Finance Committee:

No report.

Operations and Planning Committee:

No report.

G. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. FY24 Audit Results – Informational
Mr. Braun explained the auditor was unable to give the results.
Chairman Whitehouse tabled the item until next meeting.
- b. Recommendation for Purchase of Service Vehicles – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the Managing Director to execute a contract with Sutton Ford, Inc. for the purchase of five 2025 Ford Explorer Active vehicles utilizing a State of Illinois contract. This contract award is contingent upon IDOT approval.

Trustee Rao motioned; seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

Discussion:

Ashley Strupek, Procurement Manager, explained that service vehicles are used in a variety of ways to support our services. The majority of the usage is to provide driver relief for lunch breaks and at the end of shifts. Using service vehicles in these situations drastically reduces costly deadhead time for buses. These vehicles are also used by Operations Supervisors to provide on-road support to drivers, and other staff for various other administrative functions.

Two vehicles in our fleet are currently past their useful life and will be replaced by the new vehicles. Often there are not enough vehicles to support the services we provide so the fleet of services vehicles is being increased by three additional vehicles. This will ensure a sufficient number of vehicles are available to avoid scheduling constraints.

As with previous maintenance service truck purchases, we are utilizing a State of Illinois contract to help expedite the procurement process and benefit from reduced pricing. Orders on these state contracts are managed through the specific dealership that was awarded the contract. In this case, Sutton Ford, located in Matteson, Illinois, was awarded the contract for these vehicles. Sutton Ford has been in business for over 30 years.

Connect Transit will utilize FTA Section 5307 and IDOT Debt Service funds for the purchase of these vehicles. The total cost per vehicle will be \$42,121.

Trustee Foster asked what will happen to the two vehicles that are past their useful life.

Ms. Strupek explained we will put them for sale on Gov.deals.

Trustee Foster said in the past we have donated old vehicles and asked that we consider donating them to someone in the community.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there were any other questions or comments for Ms. Strupek.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a vote on the motion on the floor since there were no more questions or comments and asked the Clerk to call the roll.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the Managing Director to execute a contract with Sutton Ford, Inc. for the purchase of five 2025 Ford Explorer Active vehicles utilizing a State of Illinois contract contingent upon IDOT approval was **approved**.

c. Recommendation for Purchase of Ram ProMaster Microtransit Vans – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the Managing Director to execute a contract with ABC Companies for the purchase of up to ten Ram ProMaster Sunset Minibus Low Floor Battery Electric or Gasoline Powered ADA vans.

Secretary Foster motioned; seconded by Trustee Rao.

Discussion:

Ms. Strupek explained that since Connect Transit launched the Connect FLEX service in July of 2023, we have served over 97,342 passengers and have received many requests for expansion of the service to different areas of the community. To continue to meet the needs of our community, staff has determined additional vehicles are needed to support the expansion of Connect FLEX services to future zones. We have received state and federal grant funding to support the purchase of these vehicles for microtransit use.

The APTA EXPO in fall of 2023 presented an opportunity to see the latest innovations in vehicles that fit our microtransit service needs. Our ideal vehicle for this service is a low floor, ramp equipped ADA accessible vehicle that is smaller than the typical cutaway type vehicle for paratransit services. The Ram ProMaster vehicles that we currently use to provide Connect FLEX service meet our definition of an ideal vehicle for this service. While looking at vehicles at the EXPO we discovered a fully electric Sunset Minibus Ram ProMaster being sold by ABC Companies that fits our needs and is also available as a gasoline powered model.

Further consideration of these vehicles revealed a contract that was competitively bid by the State of Georgia and awarded to ABC Companies. The contract is available for any transit agency to purchase vehicles and meets all FTA requirements. By using this contract, we were able to move through the procurement process more efficiently. Vehicle delivery is expected to take place four to six months after the execution of a contract, which further supports an expedited procurement schedule to meet the need of additional microtransit zones. Connect Transit staff determined it appropriate to seek IDOT approval for use of this contract. IDOT provided pre-award concurrence to purchase the vans utilizing the State of Georgia contract.

These vehicles feature eight passenger seats and two wheelchair locations. As a low floor vehicle, they are equipped with a fold-away wheelchair ramp for easy boarding of passengers requiring a mobility device. The vehicles include the original equipment manufacturer warranty of five-year / 60,000-mile.

The battery-electric power vehicles feature batteries that are appropriately sized at 75 kWh and will provide approximately 130 - 150 miles of range on an average day. Current industry studies suggest that cold weather days result in a loss of approximately 20% of the expected range, which still provides a range sufficient for our current needs. The propulsion systems and the battery include a standard three-year / 60,000-mile warranty.

Vehicles will be purchased throughout the next five years, dependent upon needs and service expansion. Staff will make decisions regarding fuel choice based upon the requirements of our funding sources and size of the areas in which service will be proposed.

Based in Florida, ABC Companies has been a long-time supplier of heavy-duty bus parts for Connect Transit. ABC Companies' total revenue per year is over \$500M from various business lines including parts sales, Van Hool Motorcoach, and specialty/cutaway vehicles sales. They have sold over 500 Ram Promaster vans with over 90 of those being fully electric vehicles. Importantly, there have been no major systemic problems with the electric vehicles causing excessive vehicle downtime. ABC has a full staff of Field Service Technicians to support these vehicles if issues arise.

Connect Transit will utilize FTA Section 5339 and IDOT Rebuild Illinois Grant funds awarded specifically for the purchase of these vehicles. The total cost per vehicle will be a maximum of \$309,626.11 depending on options chosen.

Greg Raymer, Derek Murray, and Terry Bland of Sunset Vans gave an onscreen presentation available as part of the Managing Director's Presentation online.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that when he first started on the Board you could buy a full-size bus for this price and encouraged staff to be mindful of costs.

Trustee Buchanan stated she understood that we are looking to purchase five right now and wanted to know if the funds will still be available for the other five when we are ready to purchase them.

Ms. Strupek said we will use IDOT funds first because we want to make sure that funding doesn't lapse and then we will use the FTA funds because we are obligating those funds right now so all funding is secure.

Trustee Buchanan asked if we will purchase gas or electric vehicles.

She said the grant from IDOT is for electric so we will be getting electric right now and hope to purchase gas with the second round through FTA funds.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there were any more questions or comments.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a vote on the motion on the floor since there were no more questions or comments and asked the Clerk to call the roll.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the Managing Director to execute a contract with ABC Companies for the purchase of up to ten Ram ProMaster Sunset Minibus Low Floor Battery Electric or Gasoline Powered ADA vans was **approved**.

d. Recommendation for FY26 Health Insurance Renewal – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the Managing Director to approve a contract with Connect Transit’s current healthcare insurance provider, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBS), for a term of July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026.

Secretary Foster motioned; seconded by Vice Chair Hile.

Discussion:

Stephanie Butler, HR Manager, stated the current health insurance policy with BCBS is set to be renewed July 1, 2025. Employees will have the choice of two (2) plans:

1. MICO3013: This plan offers a \$7500 individual deductible and a \$15,000 family deductible that is covered by the NonStop Visa Card that is used to pay for medical/Rx expenses.
 - a. CHANGES: This plan is entirely new. It includes a higher deductible insurance package from BCBS to help manage increases in costs but also includes NonStop Health that provides first dollar coverage so employees will have virtually no out-of-pocket expenses for covered in-network care.

2. MPEQ1Z0725: This plan is a high-deductible HSA. This plan offers a \$3,300 individual deductible and a \$6,600 family deductible.
 - a. CHANGES: The individual deductible under this plan will increase from \$3,200 to \$3,300 at renewal. Similarly, the family deductible under this plan will increase from \$6,400 to \$6,600 at renewal.

The entire ancillary insurance package, including Short-Term and Long-Term Disability, Life/AD&D, Dental and Vision coverage will be provided by Mutual of Omaha for our FY26 renewal.

The total increase for health insurance is 22.09% for the FY26 renewal. This increase was anticipated in our approved FY26 Budget.

Chairman Whitehouse asked what the percentage equates to in dollars.

Deneen Castellon with Marsh McLennan said it equates to approximately \$436,000 additional this year for medical.

Deneen Castellon gave a short background and explained Connect Transit has 11 large ongoing claims. Because of the ongoing claims, Aetna, United, and Insignia all declined to give quotes. Last year’s premium paid by Connect Transit totaled \$1.98m while BCBS paid out \$2.6m.

Vice Chair Hile asked what we are doing for wellness programs to help with health.

Ms. Butler said she will be working with Marsh to take advantage of their new wellness programs.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there were any more questions or comments.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a vote on the motion on the floor since there were no more questions or comments and asked the Clerk to call the roll.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the Managing Director to approve a contract with Connect Transit's current healthcare insurance provider, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBS), for a term of July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026, was **approved**.

e. Recommendation for FY26 Property and Casualty Insurance Renewal – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the Managing Director to renew property and casualty insurance effective July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

Vice Chair Hile motioned; seconded by Trustee Rao.

Discussion:

Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director, explained that Connect Transit is renewing the property and casualty insurance for the term of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. This renewal covers the following insurance coverage: workers' compensation, property and equipment, general liability and employee benefits, automobile, umbrella, directors' and officers' liability and employment practices, fiduciary liability, crime, cyber liability, and business travel accident.

The premium for the workers' compensation insurance renewal will decrease \$7,007 (from \$343,979 FY25 to \$336,972 FY26). The decrease is due to moving to Encova for insurance coverage for FY26.

The premium for the property and casualty insurance renewal will increase. The total increase is \$68,918 (from \$612,161 FY25 to \$681,079 FY26). The majority of this premium increase (\$65,598) is from the automotive liability and comprehensive coverage. This increase is due to a change in market conditions and the resulting risk exposure.

Even though this is a significant increase, we feel this is a reasonable renewal. We will be working with Marsh MMA, our insurance broker, to receive assistance and service that will help mitigate our claims in the future.

The total cost for this renewal of all policies shown in the table below is \$1,018,051, a \$61,911 (6.5%) increase over FY25. The increase was anticipated and included in the FY26 Operating Budget.

Keith Dobrolinsky with Marsh McLennan gave a brief onscreen presentation.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there were any questions or comments for Mr. Braun.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a vote on the motion on the floor since there were no more questions or comments and asked the Clerk to call the roll.

Rollcall Vote:

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

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the Managing Director to renew property and casualty insurance effective July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, was **approved**.

f. Marketing Plan Presentation – Informational

Mr. Braun stated that part of the strategic plan was to create and define a community-wide communications plan which included a marketing plan with a campaign, target, purpose, communications, and more. He stated that he had shared the plan with each Trustee last week to give them an opportunity to provide feedback and now Trustee Buchanan and Mark Huffman, Marketing Manager, will speak about the plan and demonstrate what the plan will do for us.

Trustee Buchanan reminded the Board that this has been informed from as far back as Connect to the Future and in progress for 12-18 months. It has a common theme to educate, inform, engage, and help our community understand that we can do a good job.

Mr. Huffman stated the purpose of this marketing plan is to provide guidance to the activities of the Marketing Department and provide a focus on the initiatives Connect Transit will be taking on the next fiscal year.

Mr. Huffman referred to an onscreen presentation available as part of the Managing Director's Presentation online.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if there were any questions or comments.

Vice Chair Hile stated she appreciates how home grown the plan is and that she respects the care he has taken to get to know the system and to build from there. She shared she loved the cool videos and suggested he continue those and that she agrees with connecting with specific kinds of champions in building out network. She suggested that the idea of educating ISU students, and their families is something we can adapt to other areas of the community and asked that he continue to look for those places.

Trustee Foster asked Mr. Huffman to make sure we connect all parts of the communities, not just the colleges.

Mr. Braun stated that Mr. Huffman is going to all sorts of events, including non-profit tabling events that reach the people they serve and the people who support the non-profit organizations.

Trustee Sanders asked how we find the people who don't know about the service as well as places like ARC.

Mr. Huffman explained it is a multi-phase approach because we don't serve all parts of the community where someone may live or be going, or it is just not convenient for them to ride, but for everyone else we spend a lot of energy educating them. We are also bringing back the Blue/Purple peak frequency, which will help many people. He explained all the events he is attending in those areas to educate the riders in those areas.

Trustee Bianchi asked what a disruption in ridership means.

Mr. Huffman explained it refers to long-term detours, which causes riders to find an alternative form of transportation that works for them, such as riding with a friend or riding their bike.

Chairman Whitehouse thanked Mr. Huffman for his presentation.

H. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

No report.

I. MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Mr. Braun shared his monthly Managing Director's report available online as part of the Managing Director's Presentation.

Strategic Plan Scorecard:

Mr. Braun gave an update on the Strategic Plan, noting that he had indicated changes or updates to the scorecard with an "X" on the far left. (Updates included as part of the Managing Director's Presentation available online.)

Community Outreach:

- Be Content Senior Expo (Tabling Event)
- Dreams are Possible Shuttle
- Best Buddies Friendship Walk (Sponsor and Tabling Event)
- Twin Cities Showcase (Tabling Event)
- Day of Hope Outdoor (Tabling Event)
- YWCA Circle Lunch (Sponsor)
- Business Before Hours at Carle Medical
- BN by the Numbers

Professional Development:

- APTA Legislative Conference
 - Washington DC; May 17-20, 2025
 - Attended by: David Braun, Managing Director
 - I joined members of the Illinois Public Transit Association (IPTA) to meet with our federal delegation and speak to the needs of Illinois Transit Agencies as well as ourselves. We offered ideas to reduce regulation and increase efficiency that should be included in the Transportation Reauthorization bill.

- We heard from Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, Acting FTA Administrator Tariq Bokhari, and several notable Senators and Congresspeople. All agreed that public transit is a bi-partisan issue that most people holding office can support.
- APTA is encouraging Congress to combine the Low Emission-No Emission Grant Program (Low-No) program with the Bus and Bus Facilities Grant Program and allow us to buy vehicles that meet our local interests and requirements in the reauthorization. We have never been a recipient of funds from the Low-No program. Our electric buses were funded by the Bus and Bus Facilities program.
- The focus of this administration will be safety, families, rural America, and infrastructure investment. This will guide the narrative of our grants.
- APTA's guidance was that we focus on the economic value of our projects both locally (jobs, education, access to healthcare), and nationally (where do our parts, building materials, etc. come from and which states/regions benefit).

Recruiting:

- Positions Open
 - Bus Operator (6)
 - Mechanic (3)
 - Rural Service Coordinator (1)
 - Service Delivery Manager (1)
- Positions Filled
 - Bus Operator (3)
 - Mechanic (1)
 - Maintenance Supervisor (1)

Reminders:

- Strategic Planning Workshop Friday, June 13, 2025, 12:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Chairman Whitehouse asked Mr. Braun for an update on rural transit.

Mr. Braun stated that staff have been working on everything from the type of vehicle we are going to provide, communication systems, the level of service we will provide, and much more. He stated that we have discovered we cannot mirror the service being provided because theirs was a multi-county service and we will focus on one county. Their ridership was very low and when they don't have passengers calling, they cancel the trip entirely. We hope to make the service available to the entire county every day on an on-demand basis, very similar to our Mobility service. He explained we will learn as we go and make enhancements where and when we can. Mr. Braun stated we have already been contacted by health services and veterans' services to contract with for them. The budget is the maximum available without any public contribution or contribution from McLean County.

Chairman Whitehouse stated he had received calls from mayor's and knew Mr. Braun would be attending the mayor's meeting, along with Chairwoman Johnston and that it will be a great opportunity to hear their thoughts and concerns.

J. TRUSTEE COMMENTS:

Vice Chair Hile shared her appreciation of the ways the staff brings in FTA and IDOT funds for the community, such as the service vehicles and Sunset vans. She shared her thanks for the rural transit expansion and the news coming out of Washington.

Trustee Foster shared her appreciation for the work the staff is doing towards our mission and focus.

K. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

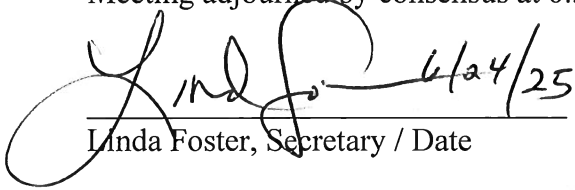
None

L. ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Adjourn.

Secretary Foster motioned; seconded by Trustee Bianchi.

Meeting adjourned by consensus at 6:32 p.m.


Linda Foster, Secretary / Date


Janice Crago, Board Clerk / Date

[CONNECT TRANSIT SEAL]

