

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MONTHLY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – FEBRUARY 23, 2021

**351 Wylie Drive – Training Room
Normal, Illinois 61761**

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on February 23, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. at Connect Transit in the Training Room 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 - Absent
Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus - Absent

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

The February monthly 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 recited.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of January 26, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes and Minutes of Special Board Meeting held on February 10, 2021
2. Disbursements for the month of January 2021
3. Monthly Statistical Report for January 2021
4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report

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

Chairman Whitehouse pointed out that January 2021 as compared to our ridership of January 2020, the numbers are down. He stated that pointing out to the Chamber last week, even though our numbers are down, we are still giving 1.7M rides in this community and with the pandemic and people concerned and all of the safety protocols that we have put in place and in a community our size, we are still giving 1.7M rides. He stated that to him, that still proves the value of transit in most communities and proves the value of Connect Transit to this community.

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 to Authorize Board Chairman to Execute Proterra Electric Bus and Infrastructure Contracts

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion for Recommendation to Authorize Board Chairman to Execute Proterra Electric Bus and Infrastructure Contracts*. Trustee McCue so moved, seconded by Trustee Foster.

Interim General Manager, Mark Peterson, stated that the Board has already approved in a prior action the purchase of the electric buses. At that time we did not have final pricing and contract. We have those now and this *Recommendation* is to approve the details even though the Board has already authorized in concept the acquisition of the buses. We have been working very closely with *Proterra* and Mr. Lange, in particular, has been the point person and Mr. Peterson asked if Mr. Lange would begin with introductory comments and respond to any questions the Board may have.

Mr. Brady Lange, Connect's Procurement officer, stated for those who were on the Board in September of 2019, you will recall the purchase of the *Proterra* electric buses. Since that time we have been working through all of the fine details of these buses and all of the specifications. It has taken quite a bit of time but we are finally there and *Proterra* has come back with our final pricing on the buses as well as the charging infrastructure that will be necessary. This contract will include both of those items and you will notice the total price is \$4,390,913.00. This will be funded by 65% through IDOT DOAP funding. You will also recall we have \$1.2M in *FTA Low or No Emissions Grant* that will fund another part of it and the remainder will be funded by the recent *IDOT Rebuild Illinois Capital Grant*.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Foster commented that she would like to congratulate Connect Transit for finding the money to fund this project through grants.

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 to Authorize Board Chairman to Execute Proterra Electric Bus and Infrastructure Contracts*

Ranking of Final Three (3) Sites for Downtown Transfer Center Facility

Chairman Whitehouse stated that that he wanted to put a process in play during this discussion so that everyone has the right and ability to speak and be heard. We will take our discussion today for this item in rounds of five minutes each. He asked the Trustees to rank each of the sites in order of their preference of first, second and third. Site 1 as the *Pantagraph*; Site 2 as the Market Street Garage; and Site 3 as the former CII East facility. The Chairman also asked the Trustees to share your thoughts and rationale of why you came up with that thought and opinion, and the third question is if you have any questions for staff or Farnsworth Group. He thanked the public for all of the input as a lot of feedback was received from the online survey. He stated he is confident that when a vote is taken tonight, we are doing it with a lot of information which each of us have analyzed and weighed all the options. He trusts that the right decision will be made and we can move forward with this project.

Trustee Buchanan relayed her excitement as the Board had been talking about this project for several years. There has been so much work and study and many elements of this project. She stated her rankings are informed by some of the considerations of the survey, the Union weighing-in; the City of Bloomington employees; technical advice individuals; as well as our staff. The funding is there which is phenomenal and she thanked the staff for all of their work to achieve that most important aspect. She stated she is ranking each in priority and her number 1 would be the *Pantagraph*; number 2 would be the Market Street Garage; and number 3 would be the CII East site. In terms of the pros for the *Pantagraph* building, she appreciates the historic reuse of the property. She stated that there is some additional development west of Main Street and things going on east of Main and it is good to see this on that side of our downtown corridor. However, that also raised a con that she became aware of in the surveys which is that there has been some recent housing and residential developments and they are concerned about the noise factor which she believes is something that can be addressed when reaching the design phase. With the flat terrain, access and egress, the property has room to grow in expansion as we look forward. It has the potential for partnering with other members of the community, retailers, and restaurateurs. In terms of the cons, regarding the vacating of the one block of Jefferson, she stated that she had been informed it will not be a significant barrier. Regarding the noise issue, she is confident that can be taken care of. Of course, whenever you are building and digging down, we don't know yet what might be underground that we might have to deal with. Site 2 is the Market Street

Garage and like most of you, the biggest comment that stuck out was the significant loss of parking and the number of people who park there daily, as well as visitors to the downtown corridor. The non-for-profits and some of the offices that many of our riders use, are close to the parking garage so that would be a plus with a little less residential in the area. However, it is cramped and has no expansion capability without the loss of parking. That is a major factor and she believed it to be a hurdle we could not get over. In addition, what would happen to the post office? There are people who live in the downtown corridor who use that post office. Site 3, the CII East building, the pro was we would finally tear down that eyesore of a building. However, that also is part of the con because that building on the property there that would be available is simply too small. The community partners that she talked to thought it would be very congested getting in and out and that was her initial thought. There would be no expansion, crowded, and seen as very inconvenient.

Trustee Foster stated she would not repeat what Trustee Buchanan has stated as she had those also on her list as well. Ms. Foster stated that as a more viable choice for the community, her first choice was the *Pantagraph* building. Her second would be the Market Street Garage and the third would be CII East. Ms. Foster continued to state that before starting this process, she thought that the Market Street Garage was perfect and without doing any studies, she stated she thought that would be a great location adding that was without knowing what the other options were. Upon hearing the study, it has really helped her to hone-in on what she believed is the number one choice for her would be the *Pantagraph*. There is the square footage. We know that we don't want to be "land-locked". We want to get into a spot where we can expand and grow. We want to make certain we always have those options. In addition to and because of those options, we would be able to have private and governmental entities using that space as well so that it is not just a transit space but is a "community space". She believed that once this is in place, more people will come to that building for one reason or another and they will have a need to come there. She believed the traffic will be increased and knows that will be something we will have to address and deal with especially with the arena being so close in proximity. The idea that people can ride the bus to the arena, walk a block, and you are there. With those amenities, she also believed that in looking to the business owners and offices, there will be some challenges. The first thing coming to her mind is the lighting around the transit center not disturbing the surrounding community but we know we can work through those things. We want to make certain that all the businesses and residents are comfortable where they can utilize their space as they desire. She believed it is great for the area as it is the heart of Bloomington and close to other agencies and we are going to preserve history and have the least impact on tenants. She believed that the Market Street Garage would cause a lot more destruction and rebuilding ending up with less space, unless you continue to go up. In addition, with the CII East building, again, that is the smallest space. She believed that the position it is in, it is not conducive to get the big buses in and out. Her choice would allow us to do a lot more partnering and collaboration efforts that is community based and that this space will provide the things that we are thinking about now and for the future. We know that over time there are going to be more opportunities and we want to be ready for that. The *Pantagraph* building she believes stands out.

Trustee Presley expressed her appreciation for all the community members that responded to the survey for the sites as it really did help to provide a broader perspective on issues that face a variety of the members of the community and businesses. She stated that her ranking is similar and she ranked

the *Pantagraph* as number 1. It holds the most flexibility. It is in a location that will serve the downtown Bloomington area well. It looks towards future growth and is level and believes it will be the best choice of the three. Her second ranking was the Market Street Garage. The only way she would want to move forward on this location is if we would be able to develop some type of a partnership in order to create additional parking. She realizes that is not under our venue but would definitely be some kind of a partnership in order to replace the parking we would be taking away if that site were selected. This site would be my site number 2, with that caveat. Her third ranking was the CII East site and similar to everything else that has already been said, her only concern was that the site was just too small and doesn't provide for ease of use by the buses and would add to congestion in that area. She sees that as a safety issue for the buses and traffic.

Trustee McCue stated he would rank the sites similarly; ranking the *Pantagraph* building first; the Market Street site second; and the CII East site as third on his list. One of the things specifically mentioned about the *Pantagraph* site that he likes is the proximity within the existing Connect routes as they are. One of the things the public really benefits from; in terms of public transit is predictability; not having to change too much of their thinking about where the bus the routes are. He likes the proximity to the existing roads for sure. The reason he marked the Market Street site second had a lot to do with what Mr. Hart shared at our meeting in public comment a couple weeks ago. He believes we do need to be mindful of our impact on community parking. One of the things that has made Connect successful is that we have always worked to be a good member in the community and by listening to some of the potentially negative impacts the Market Street site would have on Mr. Hart's business and some of the other surviving businesses, Market Street is not the best option. Similarly, with CII East site, safety was his biggest concern for such a small and constricted space. The site lines are not good and he believes we are just inviting more traffic chaos than we would want. This site just doesn't give us the opportunity to grow. He believes that one of the things that has made Connect a successful organization and this Board successful, is our ability to always be looking forward and the *Pantagraph* site gives us the best opportunity to do what we want to do today but also be prepared for what might be in the future.

Trustee Rao stated that he agrees with all the Board members having the *Pantagraph* as the first option because almost everyone has covered his points. In his view, with respect to the safety and the bus turnings and traffic, this site is a very large site and it is a good approach for the buses for coming and going. Second thing as he looked at the downtown area, more potential riders live in the downtown area nearby or walking distance around that area. If we take it positively, he can see the downtown of Bloomington becoming livelier with this setup of the downtown transfer center. Those are all the good things and his preference is the *Pantagraph* building. Second, he sees with the Market Street site the issue is the parking and with the current businesses utilizing this parking lot and the need to keep this parking for their facilities, his second preference would be the Market Street site. The CII East site is very small and safety-wise it is not good. All of the other comments the Board members have given, he is receptive to all of them.

Vice-Chairman Hile stated that her ranking matches that of the rest of the Board's. *Pantagraph* is first; Market Street Parking Deck is second; and CII East would be third. She had been listening carefully and very much appreciated the perspective the other Board members brought to the discussion. Like others, she wanted to express her appreciation for the input received from the community as it was

most helpful. She had one question for Farnsworth Group which had to do with safety. When the time comes, she is hoping that Farnsworth Group will comment on such things as clearance and turning lane space. She was interested in the comment received from a member of the community about pull-thru lanes like we have in Uptown versus the diagonal parking spaces shown on the drawings. She stated she is a big fan of pull-thru and does not like any kind of vehicle backing if we can prevent it. She also questioned whether Farnsworth had any thoughts at all about the considerable pedestrian traffic that we would be creating crossing N. Madison and what the possibilities might be. She added that the reasons for the *Pantagraph* building are straight forward suggesting that this location presents a connection to downtown. There is something about the visual scape as you come up to the *Pantagraph* building and look to the left, you can see the many things there are to do there. The *Pantagraph* building, its size taking up more space in the sky and pulls your eye up and over. It suggests connection to downtown and might well help us not only take the best possible care of our transit-reliant riders but also attract choice riders. The coliseum is right there so there are obvious connections that can help us continue with this interest we have in choice ridership.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that those questions for Farnsworth sound like design questions that we can take up at a later time. The Chairman stated his rankings are the same as others; *Pantagraph*; Market Street Garage; and CII East. He believes everyone's comments are good and for him it comes down to the *Pantagraph* having the most space and possibility of keeping a historic building that is known to the community. That is our hope. It is a westside development which is attractive. If we are going to place a \$20M investment, he believes it should be attractive that it is on a street that visitors to our community drive by and see that our community makes serious investments into our community. He also liked the safety aspect of the *Pantagraph* building. He liked that it is flat, stating that in some of surveys and some of the work in the original study, inclines and grade-changes can sometimes be a little bit worrisome. He believes that we are all on the same page. He turned the floor over to the Interim General Manager, Mark Peterson, for any additional comments.

Mr. Peterson stated that in general, staff is in agreement with the Board. There are a variety of reasons that we feel that the *Pantagraph* site is the best overall. Each of these sites have a unique set of advantages and a unique set of disadvantages, including the *Pantagraph* site. Overall, the *Pantagraph* site makes the most sense. Hopefully, we will be successful in acquiring that site as this appears to be the direction we are going. If not, we do have other options which is always important as you go into negotiations with property owners. He agreed that some of the questions Vice-Chair Hile had are very legitimate and are important design questions but some of them may be key as it relates to pedestrian circulation, as he is certain was considered during the site evaluation process and Farnsworth Group could add some clarity.

Farnsworth Group stated that safety is certainly one of the upfront concerns and items we have considered. The design at this point is a preliminary vision and all those items we will take into consideration as we look at the next set of tasks that we need to complete. Down the road once you move on to that next step of actual construction, etc. Nonetheless, in talking about clearance and turning movements you will see on all three layouts we have shown what is referred to as a "sawtooth" design where the buses are somewhat offset as they turn into each space which allows for them to still pull through as noted and turn out away from the pedestrian pickup zone. That was very important as

opposed to lining them back to front which creates some sightline concerns. Looking at the sawtooth design was something we have shown at the current time to help with any of those concerns. Additionally, pedestrian is also a large concern from the standpoint of loading/unloading and getting into the transfer center itself. In most of the designs we have tried to keep that more centrally located where it is one main loading/unloading zone, minimizing amount of pedestrian traffic across the bus traffic. Further into design, we can look further and again take these questions into consideration. Hopefully that explanation, although summarized, will present a little more clarity.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that he wanted the public to know that in our packet for the public, those are renderings that Farnsworth Group has placed some conceptual ideas together based on other projects they have seen and is by no means what we are deciding on today or that is the route we are taking. If we choose the *Pantagraph* site, we are not committing to the design shown in the rendering. Continuing, the Chairman wanted to make certain that Ex-officios had the opportunity to give input or make any comments.

City of Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus, commented that he really appreciated the process which involved a number of different entities as part of the decision-making process and making the extra effort to involve the public and he appreciated the fact that this Board, and that the Chairman and the staff, incorporated the thoughts of our elected body as well. He believed that was important and believes there was transparency that helped with the process. He stated that he wanted the Board to know how excited Bloomington is about this project happening.

Town of Normal Manager, Pam Reece, commented to reiterate Mr. Tyus's comment and stated that "it is a big deal" and it is nice to see this project moving forward and she appreciated everyone's thoughtfulness in expressing their opinion on the preferred site and that she agreed with the Board's comments.

Chairman Whitehouse opened the floor for a second round and inquired if there were any other comments, questions and/or concerns that need to be shared.

Trustee Buchanan stated what a rich process this has been and how it has informed all of us. So many people have responded to the survey across the board and all of us have talked to people from downtown and other areas. She believed that going forward we can be proud that we are doing something that she believes has our community behind us.

Trustee Foster stated that all of the input we received was well-written and that we have seriously taken everything into consideration. Every thought that people have shared with us was examined and looked at. She thanked the community for sharing with the Board what the community in general is thinking. Everyone's voice matters.

Trustee Presley stated that she is excited to move forward and the consensus we have reached through a variety of means is a testament to how the data really converged for those decisions and she thanked the community for help with that process.

Trustee Rao thanked all the public who have submitted responses to the survey and many detailed responses were given to us. Mr. Rao stated that it is not only the decision making, which was built on some of those reports and he thanked everyone for doing an excellent job.

Vice-Chairman Hile stated that the value of this process and how it has allowed us to come together as a Board of Trustees. We have a lot of new talent in our group who seem like they have been on this Board for quite a while. We have had some serious work to do. She believed that the consensus that we have developed on the basis of really good analysis and working with the community and our staff as partners, bode well as our future as a Board.

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion for Ranking of Final Three (3) Sites for Downtown Transfer Center Facility*, moved by Bloomington Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Foster.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Ranking of Final Three (3) Sites for Downtown Transfer Center Facility* (Site 1: preferred; Site 2: second preferred; Site 3: third preferred).

INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Mr. Peterson stated that in the process we just went through, he has seen first-hand the work the Chairman has put into this project and acknowledged Ryan Whitehouse. He stated that the Chairman has gone above and beyond in making certain we are getting information by making countless personal connections with elected officials and other stakeholders in the community. He stated that staff will now move as quickly as possible as there are a lot of things to do. The acquisition process since we are using state and federal dollars is very prescriptive and must carefully follow the procurement rules of both the federal and state governments which are complicated. We will be reaching out to the property owner of the selected property right away and beginning the process of appraisals and doing an environmental analysis and probably a building evaluation before we come back to the Board for final action when we are prepared to make an offer.

In addition, the matter to extend the fare suspension policy will be brought in front of the Board next month as a formal action. You have all indicated that you want to extend that for an indefinite period. Finally, the staff is working very hard. The fact that there is not a full-time GM, there is no COO, there is no Procurement Officer, and no HR Director, the work is still getting done and that means everybody on staff is doing extra work. He wanted to acknowledge the staff and state what a great job they are doing.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Whitehouse thanked the Farnsworth Group for assisting Connect Transit with this process. He also thanked the Connect Transit system during the snowstorm last week as some of our sister operations took the day off. Our system had a delayed start but our drivers and operations delivered service to the community. He recognized and appreciated it and extended thanks to all of the workers within the system. Regarding the job search for a new GM, as Mark shared with you that everything is going as planned. We have some good interest and the Board will receive Chris's report that he will be bringing some names to us in mid-to-late March that we can start looking into. Hopefully, we will have a new GM sooner rather than later.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Trustee Foster appreciated the leadership of our Chairman. The ability to talk through things and any questions other Board members may have, we know that our connection is due to the Chairman's connection and we appreciate what he is doing to make certain we stay connected.

Vice-Chairman Hile reiterated Trustee Foster's comment. She stated that on a separate topic, APTA is holding on the 3rd of March a webinar from 1:30-3:30 pm (EST), and the session is entitled "*Transit Board Member Orientation and Transit 101.*" It is particularly useful for those who are newer to the table, and she is attending, if possible. She finds these things very helpful and you would have the chance to meet other folks who are in the Transit Board Member community. No registration is needed and she will forward the information to the Board members.

Chairman Whitehouse encouraged the Trustees to attend the webinar. Any other comments?

Trustee Rao stated that he is happy to be a part of this Board as it is very active, hard-working and passionate.

Normal Town Manager, Pam Reece, commented that she appreciated Connect Transit a couple weeks ago when we experienced a train derailment in Uptown Normal. The Town of Normal appreciated the flexibility the drivers had shown and also the support of the Town's crews.

ADJOURNMENT

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 regular monthly Board meeting of February 23, 2021 adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary



Jill Baxter, Board Clerk

[SEAL]