

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MONTHLY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – NOVEMBER 24, 2020

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

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on November 24, 2020 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
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

CITY MANAGERS: Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece – Present (arrived at 4:45 p.m.)
Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus – Present

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

The November 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 Minutes of October 27, 2020 Board Meeting
2. Disbursements for the month of October 2020
3. Monthly Statistical Report for October 2020
4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report
5. Cornerstone – Illinois Weekly Update

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

Interim General Manager Mark Peterson commented that in looking at the *Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report*, things are still at a moving target. We will be talking with the folks at *Cardinal* again tomorrow morning but we remain hopeful and optimistic that some additional federal stimulus funds will be allocated for public transit systems. Again, this is far from certain but it appears to be a lot of by-partisan support to help struggling public transit systems throughout the country.

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 for Approval of Project Manager Agreement for the Downtown Bloomington Transfer Center Project

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion for Recommendation of Project Manager Agreement for the Downtown Bloomington Transfer Center Project*. Secretary Buchanan so moved, seconded by Vice-Chairman Hile.

DISCUSSION

Chairman Whitehouse commented that this is one of the Board's priorities is to get this moving. We are fortunate that we have the funds to move forward on this project. Mr. Terry Reid has a phenomenal reputation across Central Illinois and this community.

Interim General Manager Peterson stated this is an important initiative and to start rolling in an expeditious way, this is the first item that Mr. Martin Glaze and he talked about when Martin was still here. Mr. Peterson believed that everyone acknowledges the importance of getting someone on board that has the skill and expertise to manage this complicated project given the location and the number of stakeholders that will be involved. We have a very experienced project manager in Terry Reid. Terry came to the community with the Mitsubishi facility and was the project manager for the design and construction of the original Mitsubishi plant. He has been here in the community ever since and has worked with various major institutions both public and private in Bloomington and Normal. Mr. Peterson stated that his references were contacted from prior projects and we received very good recommendations. Mr. Reid will be the "boots on the ground" for the Board and Staff and will be coordinating all the details from acquisition of the site through ground-breaking and eventually the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Mr. Peterson stated that the details are in the packet. We cannot estimate the cost of this engagement because we do not yet know the scope of the project and would evolve over the coming weeks and months, but this will allow us to move forward with the final site evaluation.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that \$18M is funded from federal and state grant money which is the taxpayers' money coming back into our local community. We are jump-starting this project with local money.

In response to Trustee McCue's question asking what it was about this project that caught his interest, Mr. Reid responded that the personnel involved make it a great relationship. It's great timing for the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal. There will be a lot of challenges in the site selection procedure. Just the size of the project and the overall scheme and the involvement of Farnsworth thus far is a lot of good things about the project.

Vice-Chairman Hile commented regarding the depth and breadth of Mr. Reid's pre-existing relationships with stakeholders in our community, this is not a simple project and coordinating across many agendas is going to be just as challenging as making certain our site is right and our trade-staffing is right. She believed that Mr. Reid was the right person to manage this project. Once we get underway and get our arms around this project, do you have any idea what that time frame would be? How soon will we be able to get an idea about the price tag we are talking about with local dollars?

Chairman Whitehouse responded that he is hoping that we can begin work on this soon. We were hoping that the fall of next year, hoping sooner rather than later.

Mr. Peterson stated that the site will have an impact of the scope but he doesn't believe we are able to present a reliable scope until we move into the design phase. We are now in a very preliminary phase and as part of Farnsworth's current engagement, which is on-going, they will provide for the three (3) sites that are judged to be the best sites that will be announced soon and evaluating. Farnsworth will be providing sketch plans of what this facility might look like on that site. As we get into appropriating the space, will there be any partners involved in the space with us is a real possibility. They would be resources to the table and that would also impact the scope. He estimated we are looking at late summer to fall as probably the earliest before we begin to narrow in on the scope that can be shared with the Board.

Trustee Presley asked if at some point in time in the future we could limit that and then have a new Project Management Agreement that would then be utilizing other dollars rather than sticking totally with local dollars for the entire project?

Chairman Whitehouse responded: yes. The Farnsworth Group, if you will remember, Connect received a state grant to perform that study. If the Board approves this contract tonight, we will be using local dollars to hire Terry to do the job so we can begin to move forward. There is a possibility to move forward in the future and go through the FTA's process to use federal dollars towards the project management. Right now, we are going to use local dollars for sole source.

Mr. Peterson stated that the Board has options and there is flexibility if the Board decides the cost is exceeding what we want to commit with local dollars, we can always pivot and at some point during the course of the project, complete a more formal solicitation process, but we are not certain that will be necessary but it gives us that flexibility.

Rollcall vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation of Project Manager Agreement for the Downtown Bloomington Transfer Center Project* (Mr. Terry Reid).

Recommendation Pertaining to the Review and Release of Executive Session Minutes

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion for Recommendation Pertaining to the Review and Release of Executive Session Minutes*. Trustee McCue so moved, seconded by Trustee Foster.

Mr. Peterson stated that Illinois State Statute requires that twice a year every public body review the *Executive Session Minutes* and consider release of any of those *Minutes*. It is generally the practice of the transit system not to release *Executive Session Minutes* and are not required to do so but formal action must be taken twice a year in November and May of each year so that we are in compliance with the Statute. If for some reason you want to discuss this and would like more information on the *Executive Session Minutes*, it would be appropriate for the Board to turn to Executive Session for that conversation. Most are personnel-related or litigation-related topics that the Board does not recommend for release.

There was no request from any Trustee to open into Executive Session for discussion. No *Executive Session Minutes* were released.

Rollcall vote:

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

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation Pertaining to the Review and Release of Executive Session Minutes* (none released).

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Update on Better Bus Stop Campaign

Interim General Manager Peterson stated that we are making good progress. For those who do not think we are moving fast enough, it is important for everyone to understand how complicated each of these stops are. All of the stops have to have detailed engineering drawings for each site; have to have a NEPA (National Environment and Policy Act) study whether it is a project for \$1,500 or \$15M, as long as there are federal dollars involved, you have to have the NEPA study which is considered part of the engineering engagement that in addition to design. All of this information has to be sent to the FTA

for review which the FTA usually comes back with a request for more information, keeping in mind that we are coordinating with both City and Town engineering departments to be certain each are comfortable with the design. All federal accessibility requirements and standards must be met. Sometimes pouring a simple concrete pad is not so simple because there must be excavation and sometimes retaining walls to make sure that the slopes are appropriate. Staff members, Brady Lange and Shelly Perry have put a lot of time into this project and we are moving along as we speak. Even if some of these appear to be small projects, there are a lot of moving parts.

Brady Lange, Maintenance Manager, stated that from the funding side we recently received a large grant from the state-wide capital program for which \$516,000 is dedicated to the *Better Bus Stop Campaign*. That amount combined with the previously awarded \$500,000 federal grant provides a lot of funding to move this program forward. The grant funds combined with the IDOT DOAP Debt Service will provide us nearly \$3M in funding for the *Better Bus Stop Campaign*. The City and the Town have been great partners through this process to ensure that we are not duplicating infrastructure work and each engineering department has been very helpful. They have reviewed our plans on a timely basis to allow the process to move forward for which we are grateful. To date, we have completed construction on over 100 bus stops with the most recent wrapping up in the Town of Normal, 31 stops. We are also working on completing design work for the next 50 stops that construction will take place in the spring in the City of Bloomington. Regarding the internal NEPA review we have discovered it is an incredibly time-consuming but necessary process in order to use the federal funds. We are currently in the second round with the FTA. Looking past the spring, we are working right now for design work for the 100 stops that will be constructed in FY2022 and will be requesting bids for the design work.

Chairman Whitehouse congratulated the Board and Staff for making the *Better Bus Stop Campaign* a priority going years back and recognizing how important this is to our ridership and taken very seriously. With the grant money we have received, our system will have committed \$3M to this *Campaign*. One hundred bus stops have been completed to date and 50 are in design starting in the spring. This system takes ADA and our ridership very seriously. These are not small numbers.

DISCUSSION

Vice-Chairman Hile pointed out how helpful this month's report with the photos has been. She wondered if this could be somehow fixed to our website as this is a good tool for educating the public about the complexity of the project and our sustained commitment to getting this done. She pointed out that the \$3M spent is providing construction and engineering jobs. In a time when COVID has really set some people back, this idea of transit as an economic engine is really coming true. We have gotten some letters from the public in the last month or two expressing some mild anxiety about whether the CTF *Recommendations* are in fact, still top of mind and progressing. Eighty to one hundred stops a year is not small change. Other systems are not matching our transit system in this category. We are really a thought and action leader in the United States on this point. She appreciated the collaboration between Bloomington and Normal and the kind of consistency that is engineered into the sites unifies us visually and from a safety standpoint in the community.

Trustee Foster stated that as a community we should look at Bloomington and Normal as one community and thanked the Staff for displaying the consistency and regardless of where you live, the full commitment of Connect Transit remains the same.

Update on Solar Project

Mr. Peterson commented that Connect Transit has done a fabulous job of leveraging State and Federal dollars that are out there. Connect has a phenomenal track record of being able to attract those kinds of dollars that bring tremendous value to the community. He then turned over the floor to Brady Lange for an update on the Solar Project.

Mr. Lange stated that the Board approved a contract in August with Wilcox Electric to install Connect's solar infrastructure and other infrastructure necessary for charging the new electric buses. As a reminder for this funding, Connect was awarded a "Low or No Emissions Grant" in FY2017 in the amount of \$1.45M. We will utilize just over \$600,000 of that Grant and the remaining funding will be coming from the IDOT DOAP Debt Service as well. An update on the project in general is that Cornbelt Electric's portion of the project will be to supply the energy for the bus charging and the transformer work and we are nearly ready to start that portion. The solar part of the project will be starting any day as we are receiving the last submittals from all of the subcontractors and they are being approved by Connect and our engineering team. Proterra will be here on-site soon to conduct a site visit to put their scope together for its portion of the project: the charging units to the dispensing units to charge the buses. Construction will begin very soon and will take place as weather permits throughout the winter and we are on schedule for a summertime launch with our electric buses. The solar array will cover the entire roof of the parking garage. As a reminder, that will provide enough energy to offset all of Connect's energy usage for a year for our entire facility.

Update on Stuff the Bus Annual Event

Mr. Peterson stated that this is Connect Transit's 18th year to participate in the *Stuff the Bus Annual Event*. This is probably one of the largest community outreach program initiatives. Jeff Holtke, Connect's Marketing Manager, reported that this community outreach will begin next Monday at the Normal Walmart entailing around six (6) hours each day on the bus to receive items for donation. We will be at the two (2) Walmarts and the Kroger on College on various days from 10:00 am – 8:00 pm. This year will be a little different than other years and we have created bigger banners for the buses and doing a lot more on-line and with radio ads. We held four (4) early dates at *Donnie B's Popcorn* on Towanda Avenue which proved to be a success. *Donnie B's Popcorn* offered up a chance to win popcorn for a year which enticed customers not only to visit his store but visit our bus also. We are doing anything and everything this year to make it a success. Hopefully this effort will help supply the Nursery and those in need here in our community.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Update on Selection of Recruitment Firm for General Manager Position

Chairman Whitehouse stated that at the last Board meeting, the Board gave the Chairman the authority to put a Committee together of himself, Vice-Chairman Hile, Billy Tyus and Pam Reece, to look over the firms and decide which ones meet our criteria. We did receive multiple proposals from some firms. The four of us have decided to rank the top three (3). We will interview each of these over the phone to get a sense of what they are doing and each track record. The Chairman stated that most likely sometime in December we will call a Special Board Meeting so the *Recommendation* will come before the Board and that the firm that the Board chooses can begin to move forward with candidates. Each Board Member will be made aware and will have all of the information to review in advance of the Special Board Meeting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board did not enter into *Executive Session*.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Vice-Chairman Hile stated that the terrific teamwork, professionalism, hard work and quality of work we are getting from transit Staff, she was really struck as we are looking at the responses to the RFP put out for firms that are interested in assisting Connect in finding a new General Manager search, the quality of those firms is exceptional which she believes is in response to our excellent RFP itself. Our RFP was strong and distribution was strong. We have such a high-functioning Staff and she desired that the Staff hear the Board's gratitude, extending also to all of our operators, dispatch, and maintenance.

Trustee Foster commented that in our last meeting we talked about the website design and asked if there are any updates for the Board regarding the rework of Connect's website?

Mr. Peterson stated that we have a number of technology issues going on and the website design project. He had instructed Connect's IT Director, Steve Stockton, to place this project on the back burner with the permission of the Board Chairman. If that is not something the Board wants, we can move this up as a priority.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that recognizing that we have Staff without a COO, he did give permission to Mr. Peterson and Staff to place this project on the back burner. If that is the wrong direction, the Board needs to let him know otherwise.

Mr. Peterson commented that getting a feature on the website for the *Better Bus Stop Campaign*, Jeff Holtke, Connect's Marketing Manager was going to go out and take some pictures of some of the sites and mentioned that all of the email addresses of each Trustee are now available on the website.

Trustee Presley commented that the Board Packet for today's meeting was outstanding. She knows that the Staff is doing a lot to pick up the slack and wanted to also acknowledge the Staff. Speaking about the article recently published in the *Pantagraph*, she found that it highlighted a lot of the best things that were happening. The more we can work together in our community, the better our community will be.

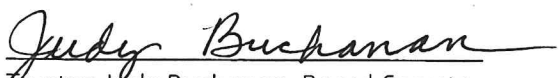
ADJOURNMENT

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

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

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the regular monthly Board meeting for November adjourned at 5:37 p.m.


Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary


Jill Baxter, Board Clerk

