

**CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
**MONTHLY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – JUNE 23, 2020**

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

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on June 23, 2020 at 4:30 p.m. at Connect Transit in the Training Room with Board Members participating in the meeting virtually.

TRUSTEES PRESENT:            Chairman Mike McCurdy  
   Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse  
   Secretary Monica Bullington  
   Trustee Judy Buchanan  
   Trustee Julie Hile – (arrived at 4:38 p.m.)  
   Trustee Linda Foster

CITY MANAGERS:                Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece – Present  
   Bloomington City Manager Tim Gleason - Absent

STAFF PRESENT:                General Manager, Isaac Thorne  
   Jill Baxter, Board Clerk

The June monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was called to order by Chairman Mike McCurdy at 4:30 p.m. Roll call was taken.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

1. Approval of Minutes of May 19, 2020 Work Session; May 26, 2020 Public Hearing; and May 26, 2020 Board Meeting
2. Disbursements for the month of May 2020
3. Monthly Statistical Report for May 2020
4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report (*Addendum*)

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

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

ABSTAINED: Trustee Julie Hile (late arrival)

The Board approved the *Consent Agenda*.

**NEW BUSINESS**

*Recommendation for Acquisition of Bus Shelters*

General Manager Thorne stated this *Recommendation* is for the proposed acquisition of ten (10) shelters which are identical to the shelters installed throughout the community. The shelters will be used as part of the Better Bus Stop Campaign and the total cost would be \$84,750.00 of which 80% would be paid for out of Federal funding (\$67,800.00) and 20% from Local Capital funding (\$16,950.00).

Chairman McCurdy called for a *Motion for Recommendation for Acquisition of Bus Shelters*. Trustee Bullington so moved, seconded by Trustee Foster.

**DISCUSSION**

There was no discussion.

Rollcall Vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Julie Hile; and Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Recommendation for Acquisition of Bus Shelters* was approved by the Board.

*Recommendation for Acquisition of Bus Stop Seats and Solar Lights*

General Manager Thorne stated this *Recommendation* is for the purchase of 25 Simme seats and 25 Urban Solar bus stop solar lights. The seats are identical to what are already installed in the community and the solar lights are newer models which provide twice the light and battery capacity than the current solar lights. The total cost is \$48,684.00. Connect will use a combination of Federal (80%) and Local Capital funding (20%) for this purchase.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked for a *Motion on the Recommendation for Acquisition of Bus Stop Seats and Solar Lights*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Foster.

**DISCUSSION**

Trustee Whitehouse asked if these would be temporary until we can get better infrastructure or a permanent structure?

General Manager Thorne stated that Connect is installing these specific seats and lights in locations where it cannot install a shelter. In addition, these will be installed where we are unable to obtain an *Easement Agreement* from a private property owner. In those types of situations, these seats and lighting are installed on the public right-of-way. We also use these seats and solar lights for our riders where we do not install a shelter due to ridership variance. The solar lights help our riders to feel safer while waiting at the stop. The drivers are also better able to see the riders at the stops where these are installed. The seats will be installed on ADA compliant bus pads.

In response to a question by Chairman McCurdy regarding the priorities of the *Better Bus Stop Campaign*, Martin Glaze, Connect's Chief Operating Officer stated that highest ridership stops are identified first. We look at areas with high ridership with wheelchair deployments and can also identify which stops a lift was used so that we know if customers are using a wheelchair or the bus lift in that area. Those are what we work on first ahead of other stops that do not garner any type of priority.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Julie Hile; and Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Recommendation for Acquisition of Bus Stop Seats and Solar Lights* was approved by the Board.

**Recommendation of Illinois State University Bus Service Agreement**

General Manager Thorne stated this *Recommendation* is for a 6-month revenue contract extension in the amount of \$289,068. Staff has met with ISU to discuss not only the current contract but also further contract negotiations and upcoming bus service for ISU as the fall semester kicks off.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked for a *Motion* on the *Recommendation of Illinois State University Bus Service Agreement*, moved by Trustee Bullington, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

**DISCUSSION**

Trustee Buchanan inquired whether this amount is consistent with the previous six months?

General Manager Thorne confirmed and added it is the same amount that the Board approved in December of 2019 for a 6-month duration. ISU and Connect are both looking towards a long-term contract anywhere from a 2-3 year or a 5-year contract. This will be determined on what we can agree on in terms of dollar amount and service.

Trustee Hile inquired what Connect is thinking of providing ISU as students come back in the context of the pandemic and Chairman McCurdy inquired how substantive have negotiations been so far based on the current situation.

General Manager Thorne responded regarding the COVID-19 issue by stating that Connect will require all ISU riders to wear masks. We have to be concerned about social distancing on the REDBIRD EXPRESS route. Typically, when ISU is in-session, we have 5-7-minute service to Cardinal Court and Tri-Towers and we discussed those issues with ISU. Presently, ISU does not know how many students will be back on-campus and in the dorms when fall semester opens but has determined that all students will be wearing some type of face covering at all times when they are on campus or on the bus. We will do everything we can to enforce this while they are riding the bus. ISU just doesn't have answers on how many people will be using Connect Transit services when the fall semester starts because they do not know how many students they will have on campus and in the dorms. By the mid-July meeting, ISU should have more information on numbers and we will continue to have these discussions until we have the answers.

Trustee Hile inquired about the number of riders that Connect will allow to ride on the bus at any one time and what are the implications for its operators having to enforce the masking rule as the bus gets full?

General Manager Thorne stated that currently Connect is limiting the number of passengers to ten (10) before it goes into Stage 4 Reopening on Friday for passengers up to 50. The only route at issue is the REDBIRD EXPRESS route.

Mr. Glaze added that on many of the routes we were seeing with more than 10 riders, we added back service to which would include the GREEN and the LIME EXPRESS. These two routes are filling up. Across the rest of the system, at the beginning was about a 60% loss in ridership and the LIME dropped about 20%. Now it is back to close to its regular service numbers now. Many of the other routes are again gaining ridership. Last week we were only down 23% compared to last year's ridership. We have had stand-by buses but our hope is that on Friday when we enter Phase 4, the capacity issue will be lifted and the majority of our routes will see higher ridership. Our biggest concern is the REDBIRD as this route is usually shoulder-to-shoulder and we will have to watch it closely. Our safety director, Dave White, has instructed the operators to ask the customers if they are aware of the mandates regarding facemasks. If riders are not, the operators ask them to wear a facemask. If riders do not have one, we have issued disposable masks to every driver for their shift to provide them to riders if some riding do not have a facemask. This system has been going well so far but the hardest time we had was at the beginning. Since then most riders have become accustomed to it.

General Manager Thorne stated that all of our operators and employees are provided “de-escalation training” during the on-boarding process when they are hired but also receive a refresher training for de-escalation. This training teaches operators, front-line supervisors, and customer service representatives how to effectively and compassionately de-escalate virtually any situation from a bus rider to an openly hostile individual. The course was specifically designed for transportation professionals.

Trustee Whitehouse commented that he hopes that the University sees Connect Transit has been patient before and during COVID-19 and we are willing to work with them. However, when it comes time that life gets back to normal, the conversation needs to happen as we are both struggling with finances.

In response to a comment by Trustee Bullington, General Manager Thorne responded that as ridership increases after ISU goes back into its new year, we will have to add additional frequency which comes at an additional cost. We would have to agree upon a certain amount of money that ISU pays for Connect’s services which would come back to the Board for approval. What we are trying to do now is to get out in front of this. ISU just doesn’t have answers for us right now.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Julie Hile; and Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Recommendation of Illinois State University Bus Service Agreement* was approved by the Board.

*Recommendation to Continue Suspension of Fare Collection and Restore Full-Service Plan*

General Manager Thorne stated that the *Recommendation* is to continue the suspension of fare collection until August 2, 2020. Connect has already increased frequency on the LIME and GREEN routes to 15-minute service due to the increase in demand on those two routes. The Restore Full-Service Plan would have us restoring service completely on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Asking for feedback, General Manager Thorne asked the Board if it desires to continue to take a month-to-month approach on Connect’s suspension of fare collection or does it desire to start to implement fares beginning August 2<sup>nd</sup>? Continuing, he stated that we will hear back from IDOT regarding our operating budget and IDOT has stated that it will be able to reimburse Connect for expenses up to 65% for the first quarter of FY2021 (July, August and September). Knowing this, the General Manager recommended to the Board to continue approaching fare suspension on a month-to-month basis in terms of safety for the drivers/operators and riders. Riders can continue to enter through the rear door, but he wanted the Board to discuss what its thoughts were in restarting the collection of fares.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked for a *Motion on the Recommendation to Continue Suspension of Fare Collection and Restore Full-Service Plan*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Chairman McCurdy.

### **DISCUSSION**

Trustee Buchanan stated she believes the Board should continue to observe month-to-month. We don't know when we will be back in the "new normal" and what that might look like. This gives us a chance to stay current but yet be aware. In terms of the protective gear, what is the status of the upfront plexiglass barriers for the drivers?

General Manager Thorne stated we are planning to have all installations completed in late July as we ran into problems with our retro-fit's strength and durability. We want to make certain we have the proper infrastructure for the drivers before they start collecting fares again. Continuing, the General Manager stated that the end of the fare suspension and the restoration of the Full-Service Plan, there will be separate time schedules implemented. He stated that he believes that Connect will have to go back to its regular full-service by August 2<sup>nd</sup> due to some of the routes seeing an increase of more riders. Last week alone, Connect was 33% down on a majority of the routes, so as the economy begins to start opening up, we need to get back to regular service and placing regular frequency on the routes. However, masks will still be a requirement. We do not see face coverings going away on the buses in the foreseeable future.

Trustee Foster stated that the August 2<sup>nd</sup> date with the protective gear, would riders then still get onto the bus from the rear?

We will not start collecting fares until the driver protective shields are installed. We need the barriers in place to protect the drivers.

Trustee Whitehouse stated we should look to other systems and see what they are doing. He is good with the month-to-month, but looking ahead to collecting fares again. If people are riding and going to work at places of business, the service that we provide should be paid for.

Chairman McCurdy inquired if the additional barriers could stay in place year-round unless they feel like it cuts them off from some sort of interaction with the customer.

General Manager Thorne stated that agencies that are collecting fares are collecting with the barrier installed and he sees this as a permanent barrier for all buses going forward in the foreseeable future and having long-lasting effects.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Julie Hile; and Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Recommendation to Continue Suspension of Fare Collection and Restore Full-Service Plan* was approved by the Board.

*Recommendation of McLean County Regional Planning Commission Annual Service Plan*

General Manager Thorne stated this *Recommendation* is for a 3-year contract with each year costing \$45,000. The Board will remember it contracted with the McLean County Regional Planning Commission ("MCRPC") in 2018 and Connect did not renew the contract for 2019. In 2018 the MCRPC created a *Short-Range Transit Plan* for Connect Transit and also provided a presentation to the Board at that time. With this new contract, MCRPC will not only be looking at some of the recommendations they provided in the *Short-Range Transit Plan* but also will combine with the recommendations coming out of the *Connect to the Future Working Group*. They will be looking at service gaps to identify new service modes that can be deployed to address some of the service gaps Connect currently has with its fixed route bus system. As Connect did not hire an internal Transit Planner, Connect contracted with MCRPC in 2018 to partner with it to be Connect's Transit Planner.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked for a *Motion on the Recommendation of McLean County Regional Planning Commission Annual Service Plan*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Hile.

**DISCUSSION**

Trustee Buchanan inquired if there was a time frame - specifically looking at the community engagement - and then developing that with Connect Transit going out to speak to public officials and governmental agencies.

General Manager Thorne responded that with the recommended MCRPC agreement there will be public engagement sessions and presentations to the Board and Councils. The first six (6) months due to the pandemic we are dealing with, there will be a lot of behind-the-scenes work in developing some of these ideas from now until December. Until we have the ability of meeting in a more public setting, it would be at that time that we would start our engagement sessions with the community to talk about some of these ideas and get feedback and then make a final presentation to the City Councils and the Board. He added that he will continue to be giving General Manager reports and transit updates to the Councils and also talking about our public input process and some of our service gaps, together with our ideas to fix those service gaps. That is where he sees MCRPC being part of this agreement by helping Connect identify some of those issues we are seeing and the best modes to fix them.

Trustee Bullington inquired what the Board would expect from MCRPC and would the Trustees be getting something from MCRPC in our monthly Board meetings?

General Manager Thorne stated that he did not see MCRPC giving something to the Board in the first 3 months. He believes MCRPC would be giving regular updates to the Board. After that, whether it be an actual presentation or an in-person dialogue about a certain recommendation, MCRPC will be a part of our Board process at our Board meetings moving forward as we are essentially using them as our "transit planners".

Chairman McCurdy stated that because Connect does not have an internal transit planner, we would be relying on the MCRPC for that expertise. Would we be able to pick up the phone and say we are thinking about XY and Z, what do you think of this?

General Manager Thorne confirmed and stated that phone calls and emails would be used as part of the relationship with MCRPC. He stated that MCRPC has been very involved in Connect's annual rider's survey and they have also been very involved the last few years by taking the actual raw data and reporting the information gained from those surveys. There is a lot of communication with staff and others with MCRPC weekly and sometimes on a daily basis with questions where we are asking them for information and guidance.

Trustee Bullington commented that this is very cost-effective as the alternative would be hiring a staff member with salary and benefits.

Trustee Hile commented we would be getting a team who is locally informed and experienced and are part of the system as they know Connect Transit well and the quality of their work is always excellent.

There was no further discussion.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Julie Hile; and Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Recommendation of McLean County Regional Planning Commission Annual Service Plan* was approved by the Board.

*Recommendation for ATU 752 Collective Bargaining Agreement One-Year Extension*

General Manager Thorne stated this is a 1-year extension of the *Collective Bargaining Agreement* with ATU 752. The extension provides a 1.5% increase in wages and a 5.98% increase in health insurance premiums. The health insurance increase is the exact increase provided for Connect Transit during its renewal process.



The Chairman asked for a *Motion on the Recommendation for ATU 752 Collective Bargaining Agreement One-Year Extension*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Foster.

**DISCUSSION**

There was no discussion.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Julie Hile; and Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Recommendation for ATU 752 Collective Bargaining Agreement One-Year Extension* was approved by the Board.

**GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT**

*Better Bus Stops Campaign Update*

Martin Glaze, Connect's Chief Operating Officer, offered a quick overview stating two (2) stops were completed last month which were from the fall group of planned Normal stops. There are 14 stops in Bloomington that have been scheduled for construction but we are now waiting for the construction company to give us a date certain and expect that within the next two (2) weeks construction will start on those. Mr. Glaze highlighted a particular stop at Washington Street in front of Wesley West Church. This stop is highly visible and shows how it is sometimes out of our control to move forward to make simple improvements at times. Because of the height of the current sidewalk compared to the height of the current curb, it was impossible to place an ADA accessible ramp without heavy demolition. With assistance from Lewis Yockey & Brown and in conversations with the representatives of the Church, we were able to negotiate terms of demolition and modifying some of the Church's property. To complete this one stop, it took almost a year to complete with the stop only needed an ADA accessible pad. For FY2021, we have 30 stops that are already designed and in the hands of the Town and IDOT and are currently in the approval process. After approval, hopefully in the next couple of weeks and would proceed to construction as soon as possible. The list of Bloomington stops is larger that we are working on for the Spring. If these are able to be constructed in this season, Connect will put those out for the bidding process prior to cooler weather. In cooperation with the City and Town, the City has given us a list of 10-12 stops that they are completing sidewalk work. Two of those are at Oakland Avenue between Center Street, the City has completed a pad at Mason/Oakland and one in front of the Urban Apartments.

In response to a question from Trustee Buchanan regarding the placement and maintenance of trash receptacles at the new stops, Mr. Glaze responded this is the first of a round of stops to include a

trashcan spec in the shelters. The contractor is including an additional square of concrete where the trashcan will sit on or to the side of the shelter. Going forward, every stop will have a trashcan. Connect will be maintaining them as much as possible and are trying to coordinate with nearby businesses as a mutual understanding. Connect's Maintenance Department custodians will monitor and maintain the trashcan. As we build up more infrastructure, Connect may need more personnel in order to handle this down the road. One option might be to work with the Parks Department and get those into its normal rotation.

Chairman McCurdy commented that the stop at McLean/Washington has needed attention for a long time and that he appreciated the fact that Mr. Glaze explained how complicated some of the sites can be and then going the extra mile for the improvements to happen.

#### *Future Agenda Items*

General Manager Thorne brought attention to fact that the June financials will not be part of the Board Packet next month. Traditionally, in June we do not include our June financials because we are closing out the Fiscal Year in preparation of our financial audit for 2020. The Board will receive both June and July's financials at the August Board Meeting.

#### *Employee Appreciation*

General Manager Thorne stated that the Board has expressed the desire to honor the employees for their work during the pandemic. He and staff believe that having food trucks visit to provide meals for employees would be best but he wanted to get the Board's input. Rather than having food catered for the workers and because we are still dealing with COVID-19, the workers can order a meal from the food truck and have it made in front of them.

#### **TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS**

Trustee Foster commented there has been a lot of good and positive press lately and many folks in the community are talking about the role that transit is playing. She appreciated what Connect Transit is doing to stay connected and engaged with the community.

Chairman McCurdy added that the shuttle to the COVID-19 testing center was a great way to step up and help the community.

Trustee Hile inquired regarding the status of the Economic Impact Study from the ISU Stevenson Center.

General Manager Thorne stated that we received an email today and a draft of the Study has been promised to be completed by July 8. In terms of the data, the numbers are being taken from Connect's 2019 financial audit so the data they are using for the Study is as current as it can be. His intention is to bring the Impact Study to the Board at our July meeting for its review.

Chairman McCurdy stated that this meeting would be his last as Board Chair and stated that he had been honored to serve as Secretary and also as Vice Chair. He added that this system is stronger and better prepared for what comes next than when he started as a Board Member or an officer. His goal has been customer service and reliable transportation and his personal interest has been in customer amenities, real-time bus app, more shelters, on-board charging for smart devices – those types of things that make everyday users lives easier which attracts new riders. He stated that he knows the new officers and the rest of the Board share these goals of expectations of excellence for the system and he is honored to have served as Chairman.

Other Trustees voiced to Chairman McCurdy appreciation for his service as Chairman.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman McCurdy entertained a *Motion to Adjourn*, moved by Trustee Foster, seconded by Trustee Bullington.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy; Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse; Secretary Monica Bullington; Trustee Judy Buchanan; Trustee Julie Hile; and Trustee Linda Foster

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the regular monthly Board meeting adjourned at 5:36 p.m.

  
Secretary Monica Bullington

  
Jill Baxter – Board Clerk

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