

Connect Transit Board of Trustees
July 22, 2025, 4:30 p.m.
351 Wylie Drive, Normal, IL 61761 – Board Room
Regular Session Minutes – Approved at 8/26/25 Meeting

A. CALL TO ORDER:

Secretary Linda Foster 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
Secretary Linda Foster
Vice Chair Julie Hile
Trustee Mandava Rao
Trustee Elicssha Sanders
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

Trustees Absent:

None

City Managers Present:

City Manager Jeff Jurgens

City Managers Absent:

City Manager Pam Reece

Staff Present:

David Braun, Managing Director
Alex Giantamidis, Transit Planner
Ashley Strupek, Procurement Manager
Brandon Miles, Rural Service Coordinator
Charlie Busse, Maintenance Manager
Janice Crago, Board Clerk
Mark Huffman, Marketing Manager
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director
Shelly Moss, Operations Director
Steve Stockton, IT Manager

Guest(s) Present:

Mark Peterson

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

E. CONSENT AGENDA:

- a. Approval of Minutes for June 24, 2025 – Regular Session
- b. ~~Approval of Financial Information for June 2025~~ – delayed due to year end closing
- c. Monthly Statistical Report
- d. Cardinal Infrastructure; Federal Report
- e. Cornerstone; Illinois Weekly Update

Secretary Foster called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Vice Chair Hile motioned; seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

Discussion:

David Braun, Managing Director, explained we do not have a financial report this month due to year end closing. He stated the June statistical report reflects year end statistics with a slight drop in ridership, mostly on the fixed route side; Mobility and FLEX increased. For the year, we expected approximately 60,000 FLEX riders and had approximately 57,000 and Mobility ended up being the same as last year, but we anticipated 150,000. Mobility fell below our expectations, which were based on the growth in the previous year. He explained the fixed route changes were likely due to the reduction of peak service and the significant detours that affected ridership on some of the main routes. He explained efficiency in Mobility went down from 2.35 to 2.33; Operator Pay Service Hours/Service hours went from 1.31 to 1.32. Mr. Braun explained we will continue to track these efficiency measures and work to get them as low as we can.

Vice Chair Hile noted that we are up in ridership for the month of June but down for the year and asked what might be contributing to the increase for the month since students are away.

Mr. Braun stated Mark Huffman, Marketing Manager, has been promoting the green line and some of the other routes, and we've had some good press due to the addition of the rural transit service and the community realizing we are a stable service.

Mr. Braun stated the Cardinal Infrastructure report reflects the Big Beautiful Bill was enacted into law. He stated that while it did have some financial claw backs, those claw backs will not affect us, and it fully funded transit formula funds. He stated the report reflects the Supreme Court did allow mass layoffs, which has caused the FTA in Chicago to be reduced by about 50%. He shared the reduction has not slowed things down for us yet but that we can tell there is stress on the system.

Mr. Braun stated the Cornerstone Government Affairs report states they continue to pursue the release of the \$3m awarded for the transit center in 2020, and we are moving in the right direction. He shared the report stated the prevailing wage rates have gone up again, which means the longer we delay on projects, the more cost increase we will experience in terms of materials and labor.

Vice Chair Hile thanked the Trustees and staff for understanding the value of the lobbyist.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if the Trustees had any 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. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Recommendation for Route Modifications – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the Managing Director to modify routes as outlined.

Trustee Rao motioned; seconded by Trustee Bianchi.

Discussion:

Mr. Braun stated this recommendation supports our strategic plan and gave the floor to Alex Giantamidis, Transit Planner.

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

He explained that staff recommends that the Board approve the replacement of the Red Express Route with a new circulator route, currently named the Mint Route and approve the restoration of peak-hour service on the Purple and Blue Routes.

Staff also withdraws their proposal to realign the Yellow/Pink Route after receiving public input that provided more information about the needs of the people using the route. We are currently reconsidering how to best serve the area and the people using the route.

Connect Transit's Strategic Plan Goal #4 states that Connect Transit will operate efficiently without sacrificing quality. Objective #3 states that we should "position Connect Transit to provide solutions for changing service demands", specifically by "continually analyzing service performance,... large employer locations and work shifts, and changing demographics to identify appropriate methods to meet the various needs..."

The Red Express currently runs on weekdays, only during peak morning and afternoon hours. It serves Uptown Station, College Avenue, Landmark Drive, Walmart, OSF on Ft. Jesse Road, and Lifelong Access.

The Purple and Blue Routes are interlined, and both connect Downtown Bloomington to Target, serving areas in eastern Bloomington and Normal. These routes currently run every 60 minutes but previously operated every 30 minutes during weekday peak hours.

Peak service was discontinued in January 2024.

The Red Express has ongoing issues with on-time performance and overall efficiency, resulting in unreliable service. Connect Transit proposes replacing it with the Mint Route, which would improve reliability, extend service hours and days, and expand coverage to include major employers

Menard's and Sam's Club; multi- and single-family residential areas along Greenbriar Drive; and employers and social services, such as Goodwill Industries on Landmark Drive. The proposed Mint Route will operate every 30 minutes from approximately 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and will also operate on weekends.

The reduction in frequency of the Blue/Purple Route has led to lower ridership, longer wait times, and transfer challenges. To improve reliability and convenience, Connect Transit recommends reinstating 30-minute service during weekday peak hours on both routes.

Connect Transit held four public input sessions over two days at various times during the day and evening to give people the opportunity to attend at least one session. During the public input sessions, people were strongly in favor of the restoration of peak service on the Blue/Purple Routes. After people learned about the replacement strategy for the Red Express, they were in favor of the expansion of service to Sam's, Menard's and Goodwill, as well as the improved frequency, operating times and days of service on the new Mint Route.

The anticipated financial impact of the Red Express Replacement/Mint Route is net change of (\$133,653). The modification was not included in the FY26 budget; however, we are unable to begin the Connect FLEX service in the timeline anticipated due to a delay in vehicle procurement and will use the savings of not operating the FLEX to fund the Mint Route.

The anticipated financial impact of the Blue/Purple Route peak restoration is \$228,391 and was included in the FY26 budget.

Trustee Bianchi stated she was glad to see the feedback from the community caused the recommendation to be adjusted because while it looked good to her, but she wasn't a rider.

Trustee Buchanan stated she was glad that we would be serving the Greenbrier area and asked if there was a reason we had not been going there.

Mr. Giantamidis stated we previously served that area.

Chairman Whitehouse stated the stoplight helps that area now.

Chairman Whitehouse stated the Blue/Purple makes sense to him and he understands we will not get the peak riders back immediately. He asked how long until we will evaluate to see if bringing these services back is worth it financially.

Mr. Braun stated that we evaluate it every month but that we will evaluate these changes in six months to a year.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if the Gold Route ridership is still low.

Mr. Braun stated it is low, but it serves a need by taking riders to hospital, going to the neighborhoods and is close to Chestnut Health.

Chairman Whitehouse asked what the final cost will be for these changes.

Mr. Braun stated the Red Express replacement will be approximately \$170,000 and was not in the budget but the delay in starting the new FLEX zone covers it. The cost of the Purple/Blue is \$200,000 and was in the budget.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if the Trustees had 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 modify routes as outlined was **approved**.

b. Recommendation for Via Contract Extension – Roll Call Vote

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to authorize the Managing Director amend our contract with Via Transportation to add paratransit and rural dispatch, and customer-facing software.

Vice Chair Hile motioned; seconded by Trustee Sanders.

Discussion:

Mr. Braun stated this recommendation aligns with Strategic Plan Goal #3 for improving the passenger experience; objective 2, optimizing the user experience. It also aligns with Goal #4 for operating efficiently without sacrificing quality; objective 2, regularly evaluate and utilize technology and data driven solutions for long term optimization.

Ashley Strupek, Procurement Manager, explained we are under contract with Via Transportation to use their scheduling and dispatch software to support our Connect FLEX service. During the contracting process in 2023, Connect Transit included the option to add paratransit scheduling and dispatch software in the future. The original contract with Via was approved by the Board on February 22, 2023. In that Board recommendation, it was stated that Via's software-as-a-service (SaaS) platform could also support our paratransit services. Furthermore, the recommendation stated that upon the expiration of the contract with our current provider, if staff determines that providing consistent software for both services is advantageous for our operations and passengers, we would explore the option to add the paratransit software solution to the existing contract with Via.

Our contract with Ecolane expires on October 31, 2025. The current cost of Ecolane has averaged \$32,212.73 annually over the last three years. In advance of the expiration, Operations Department staff completed demonstrations and testing with the Via software to evaluate its suitability for our Connect Mobility service.

Through testing, the team determined that Via's app is more user-friendly for our riders. The app enables riders to request rides independently and track their vehicles in real-time. Our goal is to

provide one app for all riders, and this transition will bring us significantly closer to achieving that goal.

The backend system used by Dispatchers is also more intuitive. Via's system allows Dispatch to optimize routes without alerting riders until their pickup window is near, allowing for smoother and more efficient trip coordination. In addition, Via offers a more robust scheduling algorithm than our current vendor. Based on testing and user feedback, Connect Transit staff believes this transition will increase operational efficiency, allowing for additional service capacity and an improved rider experience.

The McLean County Connect GO service will also be included in this contract and paid for under a separate budget to maintain consistency between urban and rural dispatch.

The addition of the paratransit software will require a one-time implementation fee of \$25,000 and an annual service fee of \$63,600 based on anticipated utilization of 17 vehicles in maximum service. Additional vehicles, if needed, will cost \$275 per month. Annual fees will increase 4.7% each subsequent year, maxing out at \$84,077 in the seventh year.

The cost for the addition of Connect GO is allocated to the rural budget. There is a one-time implementation cost of \$5,000 and anticipated annual cost for the first year is \$10,400 based on two vehicles in service. Additional service hours are billed at the existing contracts rates. Annual fees in subsequent years are consistent with the current contract.

Mr. Braun shared an onscreen presentation available as part of the Managing Director's Presentation online.

Vice Chair Hile asked if we would save any money by combining services with Via.

Mr. Braun stated we would not save money, that as trips grow, so do the number of vehicles and the cost.

Trustee Buchanan asked if there is verbiage in the contract to monitor performance metrics.

Mr. Braun stated that we do not have that in the contract, but we will measure that in our reports, and that we have option years in the contract so if it is not working, we could pursue another vendor if there is one available.

Chairman Whitehouse explained we often hear about having four different apps for the same service and asked how the price compares to the four apps.

Mr. Braun explained there is a separate app that will get us closer to having one app, and we aren't proposing that change yet, but that this recommendation gets us much closer to that by removing Ecolane. He explained the goal is to have one app to do everything for us, but right now we are moving closer to that with this step.

Vice Chair Hile stated we will reduce the number of apps, improve the utility in many ways and ultimately the price will go up.

Mr. Braun stated the price will go up an additional \$36,000 annually and then it will go up slightly each year.

Mr. Braun explained that we are not ready to roll out the fareboxes, so we are not including the fare collection app yet.

Vice Chair Hile stated that City Mapper is an excellent app and looks forward to Connect Transit having it.

Mr. Braun clarified that we aren't replacing four apps, we are getting rid of one app and using Via to take the remaining three apps on through an API, so it appears to be one app to the end user.

Trustee Rao asked who will be managing the maintenance on apps.

Mr. Braun stated each app will still be responsible for its own maintenance because we are still paying for their services.

Trustee Foster asked if the increase from the four companies we currently use would amount to \$36,000.

Mr. Braun stated that it would not be but that the benefits to the riders and staff outweigh the cost.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if the Trustees had 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

NAY: None

The motion to authorize the Managing to execute a single-year contract extension with Cornerstone Government Affairs to provide state representation in Illinois was **approved**.

G. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Marketing and Communications Committee:

No report.

Finance Committee:

No report.

Operations and Planning Committee:

No report.

Mr. Braun stated that he would like to start holding monthly committee meetings and asked them to reply to the email last week with a good day and time for their meetings.

H. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

None.

I. MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

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

Connect GO:

Mr. Braun welcomed Brandon Miles into his new role of Rural Service Coordinator.

Stats for soft launch:

- Week 1 = 29 trips
- Week 2 – 30 trips
- Week 3 = 40 trips

Community Outreach:

- Connect GO Launch
- Presented Connect GO stats to McLean County Board
- Public Engagement Sessions
- McLean County PIO Meeting Social
- Life CIL Presentation
- Kite Fest

Employee Outreach:

- July Employee Birthday and Work Anniversary Celebrations
- Food truck event
- New Admin branded apparel vendor

Route Numbering:

Mr. Braun shared the route numbering convention Connect Transit will be using when the route modifications are rolled out in August.

Recruiting:

- Positions Open
 - Bus Operator (6)
 - Dispatcher (1)
 - Mechanic (1)
 - Microtransit Operator (1)
 - Service Delivery Manager (1)
- Positions Filled
 - Bus Operator (7)
 - Rural Service Coordinator (1)

Strategic Plan Scorecard:

Mr. Braun shared a handout of a Gantt chart showing the new way he would be reporting progress made on the Strategic Plan goals and objectives, as requested by the Board. The Trustees agreed this report would be shared quarterly going forward.

Vice Chair Hile stated the wide timelines for the objectives within the strategic plans would need to be reexamined.

Mr. Braun stated he agreed they would need tightening up. He stated he also integrated the marketing plan into the handout with those timelines.

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

Seeing no other questions or comments, Chairman Whitehouse moved to the next agenda item.

J. TRUSTEE COMMENTS:

Secretary Foster shared her appreciation for the color coding of the new bus naming system shared at the public engagement sessions and how well the engagement session went. She stated she also enjoyed the employee luncheon and getting to know the employees.

Chairman Whitehouse thanked Secretary Foster for leading the June Board meeting.

Trustee Sanders thanked the staff for the employee luncheon and the opportunity to get to know the employees.

Chairman Whitehouse reminded the Trustees it is County Fair week.

K. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

None

L. ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Adjourn.

Vice Chair Hile motioned; seconded by Secretary Foster.

The motion to adjourn the meeting was **approved by consensus at 5:22 p.m.**


Linda Foster, Secretary / Date


Janice Crago, Board Clerk / Date

[CONNECT TRANSIT SEAL]

