

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MONTHLY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – APRIL 28, 2020

**351 Wylie Drive
Normal, Illinois 61761
Connect Transit Training Room
(virtual meeting)**

A virtual Meeting was held by the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit on April 28, 2020 immediately following the Board’s Annual Meeting.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Secretary Monica Bullington
Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Julie Hile
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
Martin Glaze, Chief Operating Officer

The April regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was called to order by Chairman Mike McCurdy at 4:18 p.m. Roll call was taken.

Chairman McCurdy said a few words to the Board’s newest Member, Linda Foster, thanking her for a willingness to serve and welcomed her as a new Trustee to the Board. Trustee John Bowman was recognized by the Chairman for his years of service as a Trustee and publicly thanked him for his service.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

- D. Consent Agenda
 - 1. Approval of Minutes of February 21, 2020 Work Session and February 25, 2020 Board Meeting
 - 2. Disbursements for the month of February 2020 and March 2020
 - 3. Monthly Statistical Report for February 2020 and March 2020
 - 4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report

Chairman McCurdy called for a *Motion to Approve the Consent Agenda*. Trustee Buchanan so moved, seconded by Trustee Bullington. There was no discussion regarding the *Consent Agenda*.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

The Board approved the *Consent Agenda*.

NEW BUSINESS

Connect Transit Board of Trustees' Letter of Support – Bus and Bus Facilities Grant

General Manager Thorne stated that this *Recommendation* is for the Board's approval to a letter of support by the Trustees to support the *Downtown Bloomington Transit Center*. The *Bus and Bus Facilities Grant* is a competitive grant and Connect has been very successful in the last three (3) years in receiving this funding. The Board's *Letter of Support* is very important and will strengthen its application.

Chairman McCurdy asked the Board for a *Motion* to approve *Connect Transit Board of Trustees' Letter of Support – Bus and Bus Facilities Grant*, moved by Trustee Whitehouse, seconded by Trustee Hile.

DISCUSSION

Chairman McCurdy suggested that with projects of this magnitude which will impact the entire community, that in the future the Board should cast a wider net for letters of support.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Connect Transit Board of Trustees' Letter of Support – Bus and Bus Facilities Grant* was approved by the Board.

Connect Transit Board of Trustees' IDOT Capital Grant Resolution

General Manager Thorne stated that the proposed *Resolution* allows him the authority, as General Manager, to submit the grant application and to execute the Grant Agreement if Connect is awarded the capital grant.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked the Board for a *Motion* to approve the *Connect Transit Board of Trustees' IDOT Capital Grant Resolution*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Bullington.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Connect Transit Board of Trustees' IDOT Capital Grant Resolution* was approved by the Board.

Recommendation for Approval of Chairman Mike McCurdy's Travel Expenses

Chairman Mike McCurdy stated these travel expenses were for the *One Voice* trip and he will recuse himself from voting.

Motion to approve the Recommendation for Approval of Chairman Mike McCurdy's Travel Expenses, moved by Trustee Bullington, seconded by Trustee Buchanan. Rollcall vote was taken:

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

NAY: None.

RECUSED: Chairman Mike McCurdy

Motion carried and the *Recommendation for Approval of Chairman Mike McCurdy's Travel Expenses* was approved by the Board.

Recommendation for Suspension of Fare Collection and Reduced Service

General Manager Thorne stated that fare collection was suspended on March 18 and service was reduced on March 22, due to the *Covid-19* pandemic. The suspension of fare collection was implemented to reduce crowding at the door and the farebox and rear-door boarding was also implemented. The services were reduced as a result of reduced ridership that Connect has experienced over the last six weeks as passengers are limiting their travel.

Chairman McCurdy called for a *Motion for Recommendation for Suspension of Fare Collection and Reduced Service* (through June 7, 2020). Trustee Whitehouse so moved, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

Before voting on the *Recommendation*, Trustees asked General Manager Thorne to give a brief update on the reduced services overall. General Manager Thorne stated that the first couple of weeks of March prior to *Covid-19* hitting our local community, we were seeing large increases in February and going into March and the second week of March Connect started reducing service when the shelter-in-place *Order* was put in place by the Governor. Connect started seeing a large reduction in passengers. Connect was encouraging only riders with essential needs use public transit. Connect is now at a 65% reduction in ridership from March to the end of April.

Chairman McCurdy added that it is an upside-down world we are now living in as we now are actually asking passengers not to ride the bus unless it is essential.

General Manager Thorne confirmed that Connect is encouraging essential travel only for those individuals who need groceries, employment, medical facilities or to get to medical treatment such as chemotherapy or dialysis. Prior to the *Covid-19* pandemic, Connect was on-track toward its second-highest ridership year in its history.

Trustee Foster inquired whether Connect would receive any type of reimbursement from the Federal government to replace the lost fare revenue due to *Covid-19*?

General Manager Thorne stated that all transit agencies in North America were awarded assistance by the *CARES ACT* funding which he will go into greater detail in his Manager's Report. Connect will be able to replace the lost fare revenue with the *CARES ACT* funding. In response to questions from the Trustees regarding riders wearing face coverings, General Manager Thorne responded that beginning May 1st Connect will require all of its employees and customers riding the buses to wear face masks or coverings.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Board approved the *Motion for Recommendation for Suspension of Fare Collection and Reduced Service* (through June 7, 2020).

Recommendation for Purchase of Interior Bus Displays and Mobile Data Terminals

General Manager Thorne stated that Connect has been running a pilot for the last couple of months with a few of the buses that have acquired a new interior display which basically shows the passengers the time of the next stop and what it is called and also gives Connect the ability to run internal videos for customer service, safety, and the ability to advertise for additional revenue. This *Recommendation* is a result of the electric fare-box project being under-budget. To repurpose these funds onto another project, it must be within the original activity line-item code which is "bus support equipment". It is also important to know that these funds cannot be used to replace buses or bus stops because that falls under a completely different line-item code. If the funds are not repurposed, Connect will lose these Federal funds. General Manager Thorne gave the floor to Martin Glaze to discuss the *Recommendation* more fully.

Mr. Glaze stated that the infotainment screens are more than just the screens themselves. However, several buses will only receive new screens and others will be retrofitted for the new software. Everything that is going through the tablet (routes; GPS; and driver-login) will be in real time. Visuals will be added for those who have a problem hearing. We will also be able to display detours and announcements in real time. Currently, we have no way to inform passengers on a bus without going through the app. If passengers do not have a phone, this information is unavailable to them. Connect will be able to share Connect's Twitter feeds, Facebook feeds, with full control for editing to ensure that all content is appropriate. Training videos will also be able to be shown which cover different areas of "how-to's". The second part of the *Recommendation* is to update the mobile data terminals which is a more robust tablet that is the hub of the entire bus and controls the head signs, the farebox, and infotainment screens. Tablets usually have a 6-8-year lifespan and the current tablets are 4 years old, so we are wanting to

replace the current ones with new ones while Connect has the current funds. The current tablets would be upgraded to a version 2 model which has a better processor, increased GPS signal, including the wiring of the hardware allowing a greater overall productivity.

Chairman McCurdy called for a *Motion* on the *Recommendation for Purchase of Interior Bus Displays and Mobile Data Terminals*, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Foster.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Buchanan stated that this purchase would prove to be a good revenue source and resource for Connect, adding that especially for any riders who have limited sight.

Trustee Whitehouse added that this purchase will assist riders to be able to see what is coming up and will be a nice addition to the fleet for riders to be able to follow the stops.

Chairman McCurdy inquired if the *Recommendation* allows for more than one screen per bus.

Mr. Glaze stated that all of the newer buses will have a screen by the driver and one will hang from the middle of the bus.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Board approved the *Recommendation for Purchase of Interior Bus Displays and Mobile Data Terminals*.

Recommendation for Federal Legislative Consultant – Contract Extension

General Manager Thorne stated this *Recommendation* is for a contract extension of one (1) year with *Cardinal Infrastructure*, Connect Transit's Federal lobbyist. Over the last few years, Cardinal has helped Connect build relationships with our congressional delegation and the FTA and has been instrumental with its Federal Grant Applications in assisting us to be able to secure \$7,950,000 in discretionary grants. The total amount of the contract extension is \$72,000.

Chairman McCurdy called for a *Motion* on the *Recommendation for Federal Legislative Consultant – Contract Extension*, moved by Trustee Whitehouse, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Whitehouse stated that this is a great investment for Connect Transit. The investment in this contract extension will return to Connect by additional grant monies. He asked that we remember that the tax dollars are dollars that the people of this community pay to Washington, D.C., coming back to our community. The relationships Connect has with those in Washington, D.C. are cherished greatly and are rock-solid and he hopes that everyone on the Board will support this *Recommendation*.

Trustee Buchanan stated that it is phenomenal if you look at the return in the number of dollars that we have been successful in recapturing for Connect Transit.

Trustee Whitehouse stated that next year Connect should look at a longer-term contract with these individuals.

Trustee Hile stated that she is in support of the comments that have been made and would point out that as another small example, our investment in sending personnel and Board Members to the *One Voice* trip is greatly enhanced by the fact that *Cardinal Infrastructure* puts that trip together for the County, Town, and City, and that we are able to capitalize on the fact that we are there in Washington, D.C. and make additional visits with our elected officials and agency contacts while there on the *One Voice* agenda. She believes there is value in every direction with *Cardinal Infrastructure*.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Board approved the *Recommendation for Federal Legislative Consultant – Contract Extension*.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Better Bus Stops Campaign

General Manager Thorne stated that we are still making progress in the *Better Bus Stops Campaign* and we have several stops as we end this fiscal year on June 30th. General Manager Thorne turned the floor over to Mr. Glaze to update the Board on the *Better Bus Stops Campaign*.

Mr. Glaze reported that 21 stops had been completed for FY2019. We started with stops in Normal in FY2020 and will have completed 11 of those by this Fall. However, we are still waiting on 11 more *Easements* out of that group. Those are properties that we must obtain an *Agreement* from the property owner to be able to build either a bump-out (if a sidewalk is too close to the curb) or a shelter or simme seats. Twenty (20) Bloomington stops are ready to go this Spring. Two (2) additional stops in Normal were recently approved and we have received a preliminary "verbal agreement" for another stop. We continue to move forward with many of these. Eighty-three (83) stops are ready to go for FY2021. These have been "in design" and do not need anything further in order to proceed. There are an additional 7-10 stops that we are working through and some will need *Easement Agreements* and several are difficult locations that we are working on with the City, Town or IDOT.

Over the course of the three (3) years, Connect is on-track to complete 156 stops. Planning has already begun for FY2022 to complete 110 stops. Beginning in FY2022, Connect will start to use IDOT Debt Services to utilize the \$500,000 Grant we received from the Federal government. Much of the funding of these stops are coming out of local funds but moving forward, Connect has submitted a "pre-approval" to use IDOT Debt Services for the construction of FY2021 and design of FY2022.

DISCUSSION

In response to a question by Trustee Hile, Mr. Glaze responded that the interactive map for status updates on stops is on the website at "Riding"; then under the "Infrastructure" tab.

Chairman McCurdy inquired whether the reduced service routes have interfered with the priority list of the *Better Bus Stops Campaign*. General Manager Thorne responded that Connect is looking at the bus stops data in 6-month intervals because our goal for so many bus stops completed within one (1) fiscal year, we are already planning for FY2021, so we are always looking ahead by trying to get site plans completed now for the next fiscal year. The next few months we will be looking at FY2022 and the ridership that may come up at individual bus stops where data may change for priority stops. Data may change from the last fiscal year or even in a shorter period of time.

Coronavirus Response Update

General Manager Thorne updated the Board on what we have been doing over the last six (6) weeks to protect employees and passengers.

- Suspension of fare collection which the Board voted tonight to extend that to June 7th. This prevents crowding at the front door for drivers the customers.
- Implemented a rear-door boarding policy which encourages customers to use the rear door to enter and exit the bus.
- Cleaning of buses and facilities at regular intervals; disinfecting buses every four (4) hours (drivers have assisted in the disinfection and cleaning of buses). The community should know that our buses are cleaned and disinfected every four (4) hours; sending out clean buses every shift.
- Every bus operator is equipped with disinfectant, paper towels and hand sanitizer (which is also available to all employees as well)
- Ordered 12,000 masks but those have yet to arrive; a Supervisor, Madeleine Lehman, made washable masks for all employees
- Limited fixed route buses to 10 passengers;
- Required all employees and passengers to wear a face mask/covering while on the bus.

General Manager Thorne updated the Board on the CARES ACT funding. Connect was very fortunate to receive Federal funding (\$1.9M) to help respond to the Coronavirus. Like all other transit agencies, Connect has been seriously impacted by the Coronavirus. In the past 45 days Connect has seen a dramatic decrease in ridership and revenue but at the same time, to provide essential service to essential workers, Connect has incurred extra costs – roughly \$6,000/week – to ensure our buses and facilities are clean, sanitized and safe for our riders and operators. The one-time CARES ACT funding will help cover the extra costs incurred but also will replace lost fare revenue. Additionally, Connect is heavily relying on State sales tax revenue. Unknown at this time is the exact impact the State sales tax revenue will have on the

Downstate Transit Fund, but for certain this will have an impact on all of the downstate transit agencies. The Federal funding will also offer a funding backstop until the economy comes back online. We are very appreciative of the work of Senator Durbin, Senator Duckworth, Congressman Davis, and Congressman LaHood for advocating for aid for public transportation providers. However, we are uncertain how the State sales tax revenue will impact Connect over the long-term. Again, 65% of Connect's funding comes from IDOT.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Trustees welcomed the newly appointed Trustee, Linda Foster, who as a Board Member represents the City of Bloomington.

Trustee Buchanan stated that *Connect to the Future* is still being discussed with the City and Town. As we are struggling, so are the City and Town with challenges to move forward. Amidst the pandemic, we are continuing our discussion by one-on-one communications so that our elected officials and city leaders are aware of the needs and the importance. We recognize the extreme challenges each entity is experiencing. Once we are out from underneath our "sheltered environment" there will be an opportunity for the CTTF Work Group Members to present themselves and the *Recommendations* to our city leaders, regardless of when that might take place.

Trustee Whitehouse inquired of the General Manager the status and delivery date of the electric buses. General Manager Thorne relayed that the delivery target date for the electric buses is the Summer of 2021. The Board will still need to approve the Contract and currently we are waiting to hold a pre-production meeting which has been pushed back. As far as we know the plan is still up and operating and we have not heard of any delays yet, but those could be coming.

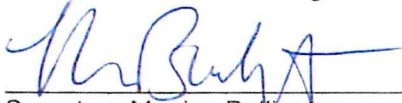
ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Mike McCurdy entertained a *Motion for Adjournment*. Trustee Whitehouse moved to adjourn, seconded by Trustee Linda Foster.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the regular monthly Board meeting adjourned at 5:31 p.m.



Secretary Monica Bullington

[SEAL]



Jill Baxter – Board Clerk

