

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MONTHLY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – FEBRUARY 25, 2020

**Town of Normal, 11 Uptown Station, 4th Floor
in the Multipurpose Room #409
Normal, Illinois 61761**

The February regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on February 25, 2020 at 4:30 p.m. at the Town of Normal, 11 Uptown Station – 4th Floor, in the Multipurpose Room #409, Normal, Illinois 61761

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Trustee Julie Hile
Trustee John Bowman (left at 5:25 p.m.)
Trustee Judy Buchanan

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Secretary Monica Bullington

CITY MANAGERS: Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece – Present (arrived at 4:36 p.m.)
Bloomington City Manager Tim Gleason - Absent

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

The January monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was called to order by Chairman Mike McCurdy at 4:33 p.m. Roll call was taken.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was one (1) public comment. Ms. Aleda Diggins commented on the Working Group's *Recommendations* by stating that she is supportive and encouraged the Board of Trustees to vote in support of the *Recommendations*.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of January 28, 2020 Board Meeting *Minutes*
2. Disbursements for the month of January 2020
3. Monthly Statistical Report for January 2020
4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report

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

DISCUSSION

Trustee Hile commented on certain routes ridership numbers.

General Manager responded that month after month, Regional and National peers are seeing ridership decreases every month. The huge increase shown in January is because all the routes were up to almost double digits. A few routes had a decrease in ridership and ISU ridership bounced back a great deal. There was a large jump in ridership on the Green route this month and that has been continuing and we usually see a 2-4% increase in the Green route monthly. More people are inclined to take the bus during colder temperatures, especially on campus.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

The Board approved the *Consent Agenda*.

AWARD PRESENTATION

General Manager Thorne commented that this *Award* represents a significant achievement not only for Connect Transit, but also for our *Finance Director, Pat Kuebrich*. To be eligible for this *Award*, each budget document is submitted to the program and is evaluated by three (3) separate reviewers. The evaluation is based on 27 specific criteria and he thanked Pat Kuebrich for his hard work on the budget and in receiving this award of *Government Finance Officers Association Distinguished Budget Presentation Award*.

NEW BUSINESS

Recommendation for Cash Farm Lease

General Manager Thorne stated that this *Agreement* has been approved by the Board since 2010. Over the last ten (10) years, Mark Thompson has been the farmer that has leased this property from Connect to farm. He asked the Board's support of a three (3) year agreement with Mr. Thompson for the lease to farm.

Chairman McCurdy asked the Board for a *Motion of Recommendation for Cash Farm Lease*, moved by Trustee Whitehouse, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

DISCUSSION

Chairman McCurdy inquired of General Manager Thorne if the 3-year Lease precluded Connect Transit from using the land as we move forward to solar array for electric buses?

General Manager Thorne stated that the Lease does not preclude Connect from using the land. However, at this point Connect has no plans in the next three (3) years to use the property. In prior

years Connect contracted with Mr. Thompson on a year-to-year basis but we are ready to move forward with a 3-year agreement which gives more stability to the Lessee, as well as Connect Transit.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Recommendation for Cash Farm Lease* was approved by the Board.

Board Acceptance and Support of Connect to the Future Work Group Recommendations

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked for a *Motion on the Board Acceptance and Support of Connect to the future Work Group Recommendations*, moved by Trustee Whitehouse, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Whitehouse thanked the Working Group Members and commented that some of the things suggested in the *Recommendations* are items that the Board has made a priority for years. Continuing, Trustee Whitehouse stated that as a Board, we want to provide the best service possible to everyone in the community. However, the financial responsibilities are also a top priority and the Board wants to make certain it can keep the system running for a long time. He stated he is excited to support the *Recommendations* completely and encouraged the other Board Members to support the *Recommendations*. Trustee Whitehouse continued by stating that he will personally encourage elected Council members to place financial support behind this as well.

Trustee Bowman asked General Manager Thorne to walk the Board through some of the assumptions behind the "One Rate for All" calculations.

General Manager Thorne stated that on the bottom of the last page of the *Executive Summary*, the comparison shown is between fares based on FY2020 Budget (top chart) and fares based on the Working Group fare increase with increased investment (bottom chart). Clarifying the Federal Support Savings at the bottom of the page, that is not money that Connect will take out of the budget and place into a savings account, this is money Connect is not using (Federal Funds) inside our operating budget that should be used for capital projects such as buses, bus stop improvements, replacing buses that are beyond their useful life, etc. This is for capital use designated by the FTA.

General Manager Thorne stated that staff was very conservative with estimates for expenses and revenues for both proposals. The expenses are the same for each year. The last line of Federal Support Savings means that we would no longer be using this money inside the operating budget but for capital projects.

Trustee Bowman asked General Manager Thorne to walk the Board through the revenues and expenses calculations.

General Manager Thorne responded that the increased revenue of \$87,254 for fixed route is the increase of the 30-day pass changing from \$32 to \$40, with the \$1 fare changing to \$1.25. That does not include any Universal Access Agreement increases, this is directed specifically to passes and cash. Regarding the decrease of \$58,100 in CM, again, we are specifically talking about passes and cash. The \$3 and \$4 for Premium Service is eliminated and the reduction of the \$2 fare to \$1.25. The current 30-day pass at \$65 would be reduced to \$40, which is why we are seeing a reduction of revenue for CM of \$58,100.

Trustee Bowman inquired what percentage or factor was used for fixed route?

General Manager Thorne stated that last year when engagement sessions were held for the community on proposed new fares for fixed routes going from \$1 to \$1.25, the community did not complain or comment about increasing the fare to \$1.25, which is probably due to no increases in fixed route fares for 12 years. We did assume for CM since we are lowering the cost per ride, eliminating the \$3 and \$4 for Premium Service, reducing the fare to \$1.25, we believe there will be a 5.5% increase in ridership on CM.

Trustee Hile asked what information this was based on?

General Manager Thorne responded that Connect used the TCRP report on fares, which is typically used with an increase in fares but is also used for decreasing fares. The \$166,000 increase is counting the additional riders but also eliminating the Premium Zones and expanding CM service to the entire community.

Trustee Bowman inquired as to the method used to arrive at \$166,000.

General Manager Thorne stated that taking the actual increase in ridership of 5,500, keeping in mind it is difficult to calculate how many more people are going to use it if CM service is expanded beyond 1.25 miles. We know that there are many of those users in the Premium Zone areas that are currently using it and will continue to use it, about 36 individuals, but beyond that we don't know how many individuals are going to use it when we expand it all the way to the Town and City limits. However, he stated that it was very important that we do because there are people are stuck in these zones where there is no transportation at all. *Show Bus* which operates in the county cannot serve them. It's very important for Connect to step up and serve the entire community with CM service as this is a quality of life issue for these individuals.

Trustee Bowman stated the only pass that was addressed in the proposal was the monthly pass. There are other fare mediums that are currently used so what happens to those?

General Manager Thorne stated that the many one-ride tickets that we sell are sold to social service and human service agencies and those will have to remain. The one-day pass is also bought by social service and human service agencies throughout Bloomington-Normal. These two (2) passes should remain inside the fare structure to benefit them as they are purchased for their customers. The 7-day pass would be eliminated under this proposal.

Trustee Bowman asked why would we eliminate the 7-day pass?

General Manager Thorne stated that is a question for the Working Group but he believed what the Group wants to do is to offer a 30-day pass for all. There is also an option for all individuals to be able to use mobile ticketing and be able to pay as they go - up to the fare capping option to reach the \$40. If we have heavy users, the fare capping option can be used to pay for their 30-day pass which will be very beneficial for low-income individuals which we know we are serving by using the data from Customer Surveys and Rider Surveys.

Trustee Bowman commented on the zero-fare route by stating there is not a lot of detail on the decrease in fare revenue of \$20,000. How would that work in practice? A lot of people riding the Green come to it by transfer off another route for which they have already paid a fare. Trustee Bowman also inquired how metrics can be captured that have meaning? If you have transfers, are you going to separate those out and not count transfers in the ridership on the Green for the experiment?

General Manager Thorne stated that what we are looking at is how many first-time users are going to be riding the Green route and getting out of their cars and using transit? What economic benefits will we have from the Green route in terms of businesses and employers taking transit to get to their jobs? How we find that information is through a Rider Survey on a monthly basis.

Trustee Hile stated that the Work Group understands that there are several other communities in the United States that are experimenting with free routes at this time. Those communities have the same kinds of challenges that we have so we want those pilots to be very well designed. The *Recommendation* includes the expectation that this will be a carefully designed and measured study based on a pre-demonstrated performance metric. We will work with demonstrated strategies for getting good numbers.

Trustee Whitehouse inquired that when we pull that data off the Green route, we report to FTA which is a standard across the country the way FTA demands we do it.

Trustee Bowman inquired with the changes in the CM route fare structure, are we looking at a net leftover of around \$50,000?

General Manager Thorne stated the \$500,000 investment we are seeking from the City and Town would pay for that and the decreased Federal money going into the operating budget we can use for capital projects.

Trustee Bowman asked if you are saying we would be looking to the \$500,000 to make up the \$50,000 difference, then what is the actual potential for the Councils' investment being realized? We've given up \$100,000 in fare recovery when going to the new route structure and we're talking about giving up \$50,000 more which strains the system even further without an ironclad guaranty that money would be coming in.

Trustee Whitehouse stated that is a good question but we have some of the Council Members in the audience and hope they will assist on our behalf trying to get the Councils to support this. The goals we are looking at tonight, if funding is not there some of the *Recommendations* will have to be rolled back. These are *Recommendations* that we are supporting but if the funding is not there, I hope the Working Group would understand if we cannot find funding, then a conversation with the community should be made with setting the priorities on which *Recommendations* to fund.

Chairman McCurdy stated that is the situation we were in before the Working Group was organized. There were a lot of things we had discussed that the Working Group has come back with and we would always hit that stumbling block which was "we would like to do that" but we know we have an operating deficit in 2024-2025. We must be concerned about that and the health of the system and making sure we are able to maintain what we have. We now have this document and there is new thinking in this with new approaches but the *Recommendations* hinge on additional the funding.

Trustee Whitehouse stated we are in a partnership with Connect Transit and both Councils. They wanted the community to make recommendations. If we approve this, which I plan to do, we have fulfilled our obligation to try to make the system better for what the community wants and it is up to the Councils now.

Chairman McCurdy stated it doesn't make our work end as we will continue to advocate on behalf of these *Recommendations*.

General Manager Thorne added there are additional steps beyond this. He is asking the Board to accept and support the *Recommendations*, but when the presentations are given to the Councils, if the Councils decide they are going to approve the funding request and accept the *Recommendations*, we have to move forward with community engagement sessions on the One Rate for All fare proposal and a public hearing before it is actually adopted by the Board.

Trustee Buchanan added that in addition to the enhancements and improvements in the system, in the absence of the additional funding, that underscores a problem that was discussed a lot in our Work Group which was the potential inability to capture more of the state dollars that are available to us, is a strong argument as well as continuing on the trajectory we are on and continue to use Federal capital dollars for operations. If there comes a time when our operations may be fine but we can't buy a new bus or we can't do a new sign, etc. There are some considerations that mean we must move with this or there will be issues resulting in a substantially greater change.

Trustee Bowman inquired if there was a target date on implementation?

General Manager Thorne stated that would be left up to the Councils when and if they approve the *Recommendations*, including the funding request. We would like to implement by July 1st if possible. Connect would need time in the background to prepare.

Trustee Whitehouse stated that he would caution placing timelines. We would like to see this move quickly but cautioned that we do this the right way and that we talk to the elected officials and if the

community is on board with this, we need to give it the due diligence it needs. We all know something could be thrown in at the last minute that may cause a hiccup.

Chairman McCurdy stated that if we get commitments for additional funding from the Councils doesn't mean we couldn't move forward. The funds could trail some of our actions based on what we hear from both Councils.

Trustee Hile stated that the first step would be a community campaign. If we can get a commitment from our Councils, then the listening sessions with the community become an excellent opportunity to dovetail with a community campaign. We owe it to the rest of the community to hear about the good work that this Group has done and we want to give the community a chance to get on-board.

Trustee Bowman stated that the last published data on the FTA's National Transportation Database had the fixed route recovery for this system at \$1,169,000. Why haven't we gone back and looked at the routes to see how we can capture some of the ridership that was bringing us fare revenue back in 2015 and 2016 that we are missing today because it's leaving us shorthanded.

General Manager Thorne stated that ridership nationally has dropped tremendously. Our first year we lost 200,000 rides but we have made that difference up from 2016. Nationally, ridership is decreasing in almost every agency in North America. Back to your point, we had record ridership in those years where we had a tremendous amount of fare recovery.

Trustee Bowman stated that the numbers of the five (5) systems used as comps for the fare proposal that was submitted back in March, none of those dropped nearly the rate that ours did between FY2016 and FY2017. That was the new routes. We had 27.8 in 2014 and 29.1 boardings per revenue hour in 2015. We need to get more riders back on the buses who are willing to pay a fare.

General Manager Thorne asserted that Peoria has dropped almost 1M rides since their highest ridership.

Trustee Buchanan stated these concerns speak very much to what some of the people in this room helped us do and that was look at how do we capture riders that left us and how to we get new riders? Making transit accessible, timely, affordable and fair, that premise is the underpinning of our work and literally hundreds of hours were voluntarily given to look at that.

Trustee Whitehouse spoke directly to Trustee Bowman asking what problems, if any, did he see with the *Recommendations*?

Trustee Bowman commented that he thought that it is a good thing to have community input and to actually listen to that. He stated that he didn't have a problem with the proposal but in the way the system is being run today, and the fact that we're not reaching the community the way we did with the old structuring. There are ways to do more than we are doing now with what we have without increasing costs. We can do more with the will to do it and that is what is missing in this system. It is the will to go out and do what the community needs done to reach as much of the community as possible.

Chairman McCurdy stated that he is fundamentally in disagreement. We had our fourth best ridership last year and are headed toward our second-best ridership this year, but because we are not recovering the fare revenue means we are serving the people who need it. These are people who cannot pay to ride the bus. He disagreed with Trustee Bowman and his statement that we are not serving the community was fundamentally untrue.

Trustee Bowman disagreed with Chairman Mike McCurdy stating that frequency is not the only answer in a community like this that is low density.

Chairman McCurdy responded that we need the mixture of frequency and coverage.

Chairman McCurdy inquired if there were any additional comments or questions about the Working Group *Recommendations*?

There were no additional comments.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the *Board Acceptance and Support of Connect to the Future Work Group Recommendations* was unanimously approved by the Board.

Trustee Hile stated that since Trustee Bullington is not present, she is very interested in the vote being unanimous.

Chairman McCurdy stated that he had spoken to Trustee Bullington and indicated to him that she would vote aye for this *Recommendation* if she were able to be here. She is traveling for business and unable to attend.

Trustee Hile again thanked the Working Group Members. She appreciated what the project has done for us as a Board in terms of connecting with the community. The Working Group has given us a leg up in terms of legitimate asks of our elected officials and we ask for your continued help in delivering that message.

Trustee Buchanan stated it has opened communications and in communications with Council Members today she shared with them the number of hours our Working Group Members had put into their research when they were looking at how they could help us define improvements. This has given us, as a Board, the opportunity for expanded communication.

Chairman McCurdy echoed Trustee Whitehouse's comment that there were items in the *Recommendations* that the Trustees had talked about before and he was excited by the *Recommendations*. We can now move forward and advocate for the *Recommendations* by having educational sessions to get everyone up to speed to see if we can move this system forward.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Better Bus Stops Campaign

General Manager Thorne stated that staff had launched the *Better Bus Stops Campaign* interactive map last week. The map allows Connect to be more transparent with our progress and shows stops that are completed, in progress, and those that are scheduled for work. We are also already working with Lewis Yockey & Brown, our surveyors, for bus stops for FY2021 and site plans are being designed. We are hoping to have something back from the surveyors in the next few months. We would like to be ready to go on July 1st with a start on construction of our plan for FY2021.

Downtown Transfer Center

The D.C. *One Voice* trip is next week and the Downtown Transfer Center is a project on that trip. We will be advocating for Federal dollars for the Transfer Center which is also part of the Work Group *Recommendations*. Connect Transit will be represented on the *One Voice* trip by multiple Board Members. We are looking forward to talking with our Representatives and Senators about our plans.

Medicaid Trips and Revenue

Connect Transit has provided 3,285 Medicaid trips and has generated \$34,000 in Medicaid revenue. We budgeted \$50,000 in FY2020 so we are almost at our goal through January. This program is truly beneficial to individuals and is helping them by reducing their transportation costs. General Manager Thorne thanked staff member Angela Pearl, Connect Transit's Medicaid Specialist, and has done a great job in expanding the program and benefitting individual lives.

ADJOURNMENT OF REGULAR SESSION

Chairman Mike McCurdy entertained a *Motion for Adjournment* to move into *Executive Session*.

Trustee Hile moved to adjourn regular session to move into *Executive Session*, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried, and the Board of Trustees adjourned regular session and moved into *Executive Session* at 5:25 p.m.

REGULAR SESSION CONTINUED

Chairman McCurdy called regular session back to order at 5:55 p.m. Roll call was taken.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Trustee Julie Hile
Trustee Judy Buchanan

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Secretary Monica Bullington
Trustee John Bowman

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

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

Chairman McCurdy stated that no action will be taken on *Agenda* item J at this time.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

General Manager Thorne stated that Members of the Board have been asking about Connect Transit logo gear and would like to know if the Board would be open to that.

All were in favor and General Manager Thorne stated he would forward the on-line CT Store link to each of the Trustees.

ADJOURNMENT OF REGULAR SESSION

Chairman McCurdy entertained a *Motion to Adjourn* regular session, moved by Trustee Hile, seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the regular monthly Board meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.


Secretary Monica Bullington


Jill Baxter – Board Clerk

