

**CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**BOARD WORK SESSION MINUTES – FEBRUARY 21, 2020**

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

The Board of Trustees of Connect Transit held a Work Session on February 21, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. at the Town of Normal, 11 Uptown Station, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Multipurpose Room #409, Normal Illinois 61761.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy  
Secretary Monica Bullington  
Trustee Julie Hile  
Trustee Judy Buchanan

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse  
Trustee John Bowman

CITY MANAGERS: Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece – arrived at 4:05 p.m.  
Bloomington City Manager Tim Gleason – Absent

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

The Work Session of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was called to order by Chairman Mike McCurdy at 4:00 p.m. Roll call was taken.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were three (3) public comments.

Heidi Zimmerman stated that she has been working in disability services for over 20 years in the community. She confirmed that she is in support of the Working Group’s final *Recommendations* and stated that she was pleased Connect is attempting to comply with ADA regulations and has committed to a total compliance within the next four (4) years and that the *Recommendation* to charge Connect Mobility riders the exact same amount as people who ride the fixed route. She noted that the expansion of Connect Mobility’s service to the City and Town limits is crucial to allow people with disabilities to be included. Continuing, she stated that assuming the Board moves to approve the *Recommendations*, it will move forward to the City and Town Councils and subject to broader community approval. She stated that the Board will have assume accountability for the missteps that have been made to garner more public support and avoid further alienation from the supporting community. She and other advocates yearn for the chance to build a better relationship with Connect Transit but it cannot expect

it to extend our full support until the Board can show that the community can put trust in it. She stated that the community needs to trust that the Board will place financial priorities on meeting ADA regulations before projects like building a new Downtown Transfer Center.

Aleda Diggins commented on the Working Group's fare suggestions and the need to keep channels open to improve on past receptivity to community members' needs and input and stated that she was in support of the *Recommendations* with the adjustment to the fares and making them equal for everyone in the community. She stated that the *Recommendations* exceed what she expected from the Working Group. She hoped that both Councils would support them and pledged her support to work and communicate to her Council Members how important this is to members of the community.

Rebecca Brennan spoke representing the *Change to Independence Altogether* ("CIA"), a self-advocacy group, which is a group that meets and discusses how to make life better for those who have no voice. Sharing comments from some of the members of the CIA group who could not come to the Work Session, Ms. Brennan stated that CIA is in agreement with the "fair fare" structure as it is very hard for some of the group members to ride fixed routes due to accessibility. The group also liked the idea of expanding the system to the entire City and Town limits. She stated that the CIA members hoped that the Board will agree upon and vote to approve the *Recommendations*.

#### **REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF CONNECT TO THE FUTURE WORKING GROUP FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chairman McCurdy thanked the Working Group Members, Chair Judy Buchanan and Co-Chair Julie Hile for their time and effort in the final *Recommendations*. Continuing, he stated that the *Recommendations* are thoughtful, reasonable, and encouraging after the education and research taken by the Working Group Members and many of the *Recommendations* are things that Board Members have hoped for years and have discussed one-on-one or discussed as a group and believes that the Board is on the same page. Chairman McCurdy gave Trustee Buchanan and Trustee Hile the floor to discuss the *Recommendations*.

Trustee Hile acknowledged Members of the Working Group and subject matter experts thanking them for their work on the project.

Trustee Buchanan stated that the *Recommendations* speak to an outstanding system that is affordable, accessible and equitable. These three points came back from our Work Group Members as they did their research. Trustee Buchanan stated that the *Recommendations* are integrated and are a comprehensive look at what needs to happen collectively, adding that one of the *Recommendations* is to improve our ability to capture additional dollars from the State of Illinois and that many of the Work Group Members became intricately aware of the complexities of funding. The state is willing to fund to a certain percentage but you have to have money that you can leverage and local support in a certain amount, noting that if local support is there, the state will support Connect Transit in a greater measure. She continued by stating that Connect needs additional local income. Trustee Buchanan stated that there were four (4) major groups who worked on this. The combined additional investment from the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington will allow Connect Transit to leverage the Illinois Department of Transportation Downstate Operating Funds and IDOT will cover a greater portion. To

address the deficit, the Working Group's *Recommendations* were that we work towards capturing additional local investment.

Trustee Buchanan stated that another *Recommendation* was to continue to engage our community to inform and grow support for a transit system that cares for all our citizens, particularly those who rely on transit in daily living. New developments, existing developments and businesses should begin their planning by looking for a desirable location near or on a bus route allowing businesses to grow and providing them with employees who have easy access to get to work.

Trustee Buchanan added that looking at global warming, Connect Transit wants to keep its footprint as clean as possible. We are here to transport people and demonstrating to our community that we are in this together and we do care and want to be a part of economic development and exhibit fairness and affordability as the community's transit system. The *Recommendations* encourage an expansion of the Connect Transit Advisory Committee ("CTAC") to include members of the business sector and representatives of local college student communities.

Trustee Hile stated that over the Group's course of the work, the sense of strong community support for an exceptional system beyond what we have now made possible a rethinking of the fare structure. After considerable calculus, when we are able to rely on a greater investment from our municipalities, the remaining financial needs for the system could be distributed across the full ridership, keeping our appeal to the community for people to ride because it is part of our community. With this kind of framework, the Group came to the consensus to:

- reduce the fixed route fare to \$1.25;
- reduce the CM fare to \$1.25;
- provide unlimited passes for CM and fixed routes at \$40 with
- fare capping for all; and
- modify fares of premium zone areas for CM.

Trustee Hile stated that the *Recommendation* of the Green Route Pilot will take place over the period of one (1) year and the study would include: (1) total ridership; (2) number of first-time paratransit riders; and (3) the number of first-time general population riders while maintaining rider satisfaction and on-time service.

Trustee Hile stated that the project emboldened the Working Group to recommend that CM service be extended to the City and Town limits.

Trustee Buchanan stated that one of the *Recommendations* the Working Group recommended was a regular review of the IGA to "ensure it is current and reflects the intentions" of the comprehensive *Recommendations* that are being brought by the Working Group to the Board of Trustees.

Trustee Buchanan stated that continuing the *Better Bus Stop Campaign* has always been a priority of Connect Transit and the Board of Trustees to improve the ADA accessibility by improving connections



and local sidewalks. Connect Transit has a 100% completion goal of this work by 2024. Meeting that goal will require help from our partners, stakeholders and from the community.

Trustee Buchanan stated that a new Downtown Transit Center will allow the efficient and timely disbursement of buses and riders will be able to easily access it as well. The *One Voice* trip this year has chosen to take to Washington D.C. the need for a Downtown Transit Center. The D.C. trip will involve people from local government, business, Connect Transit and others. In addition, IDOT has awarded a grant to Connect Transit to begin to look at a Technical Advisory Committee to identify potential sites as it moves forward towards the prospect of a new Downtown Transit Center.

Trustee Buchanan stated that Connect Transit is moving toward and is reminded by the *Recommendations* to have a seat at the table as land use and new developments are being discussed so that the review of ordinances and zoning in the construction plans of new development can factor in the availability of a transit route near or at any new development.

Trustee Hile stated that that it is her understanding from staff that the commitment to the *Better Bus Stop Campaign* is not a goal but a plan with protected dollars to make the goal. Connect would be the first municipality in the entire country that would reach this goal. Trustee Buchanan stated that the *Better Bus Stop Campaign* is on the website and the community can now view and interact with the map to see where work is currently being performed and/or various stages or status of each of the targeted stops.

Trustee Hile stated that we will be seeking a combined annual increased investment from the Town and the City of \$500,000, proposing a phased approach whereby in the first year there would be a \$250,000 combined investment and in the second year a \$500,000 combined investment, setting a new bar of investment from the municipalities. Beyond the \$500,000 we are looking ahead to:

- Pilot additional fixed route and/or on-demand service to select high-density areas;
  - prioritize target areas - using as a base the McLean County Regional Planning Commission's Short-Range Transit Plan and density map; and
  - efforts to continue to partner with social service agencies

Trustee Hile recognized the five (5) Working Group Members in attendance and opened the floor to them for any additional comments.

Working Group Member Deb Presley clarified a point on the One-Rate Fare Structure that the *Recommendation* is to reduce the CM fares that are currently \$2, \$3 and \$4; although the rates that were approved were \$3, \$4, and \$5 and all would decrease to the \$1.25 fee. The bullet that indicated the elimination of the Premium Service would only change the fare of the Premium Service and is not eliminating the service. Ultimately, service would be expanded to all Bloomington-Normal.

Working Group Member Steven Kossman stated that it was important for people to understand that during the process, we divided into sub-groups and the sub-groups worked independently of each other. When each sub-group brought their recommendations back, we were all manifesting the same

set of values: (i) who are we as a community and what do we value; (ii) how to we want people who are a part of our community to be treated with equity, fairness and respect. He stated that he was very proud of the work done.

General Manager Thorne thanked the Working Group Members in attendance and stated he appreciated the time each member devoted to the project.

## **DISCUSSION**

Trustee Bullington commented that now that we have the information, we need staff to discuss the numbers so that we can understand and move forward.

Chairman McCurdy echoed the prior comment. While we are all on the same page, we must be able to afford it. To help pay for it, a request to increase funds will need to be introduced to both the City and Town.

General Manager Thorne commented he had prepared an *Executive Summary* of the *Recommendations* presenting each item in terms of budget detail.

Chairman McCurdy commented that he was glad to see in the Land Use segment a commitment to transit-supported development which is a fundamental building block of public transit that gets lost in the community and is a foundational part of transit in any community. Trustee Buchanan commented that it also speaks to economic development.

Background: General Manager Thorne spent a few minutes going over budget details and last year's background wherein a rate increase was proposed knowing the issue that in the coming years Connect would be using all its federal funds in the operating budget. In terms of increased revenue or additional local investment, Connect would have to drastically reduce service in 2025-2026. The intent was to increase revenue to offset the federal dollars.

One Rate for All: In terms of the *Recommendations*, the One-Rate for All structure - the fixed route would generate \$87,254 of revenue. There would be an increase in the revenue side for CM of \$58,100 which in turn would create a net gain of \$49,154 in revenue, keeping in mind these are all estimates. Staff is estimating an increase CM ridership due to the reduced fare. Connect is estimating an increase in costs of \$166,000, looking at a 5.5% increase in ridership. The increase in ridership is estimated at 5,500 rides or trips. Of the \$166,000 in costs, 65% would be offset by IDOT and that is an expense. Connect's portion of that would be 35% or \$58,100, taking the revenue gained and offsetting that against the expenses creates a difference of \$28,946, which is a small offset.

Zero Fare Green Route 12-Month Pilot: In terms of the zero fare Green route 12-month pilot, Connect is estimating a loss of \$20,000 in fares for 12 months. However, this is would be a great tool in terms of ridership by getting people out of their cars in terms of environmental justice.



Better Bus Stop Campaign 100% ADA Compliance: General Manager Thorne stated that the *Better Bus Stop Campaign* would be 100% ADA compliant. This goal is an aggressive goal but we have a plan which is 90 stops in FY2021, increasing stops by 10% every year until 2024. Connect has already been awarded \$500,000 in federal grant money that will be leveraged for an additional \$900,000 of IDOT money for a total of \$1.4M. Connect is estimating that to complete the rest of the current stops will cost \$2.5M, exhibiting a funding gap. Part of the Working Group *Recommendations* asks Connect to explore leveraging additional DOAP funding through municipalities by transferring sidewalk dollars adjacent to bus stops and we are exploring that by having conversations with both the Town and City. Continuing, he stated that Connect's goal of 100% ADA compliance by 2024, that Connect cannot do this alone and needs partners, stakeholders, and residents of the community involved in this process. Connect needs all its partners working with it to be able to accomplish this goal.

Sustainable Funding Detail: General Manager Thorne stated that the combined \$500,000 investment request from the City and Town will address the deficit and supports the Working Group *Recommendations*. Fiscal year 2021, federal funding would be \$2.3M that Connect would have to pay into the operating budget. Out of the \$250,000 from the City and Town, the federal dollars decrease to \$2.1M. With a \$500,000 investment, the federal funding decreases to \$1.8M. We would be reducing our federal funding but increasing funding with local dollars.

Following the same analysis for FY 2021, with very conservative numbers, in an analysis for FY2026 Connect would see an increase of 5% per year for all expenses.

Trustee Bullington stated that going back to the discussion about sidewalks, are you saying the municipalities have money for sidewalks and you are saying that if they give that to us, it is the same money that would be spent but extra would still come to Connect?

General Manager Thorne stated that under the *Recommendations* Connect will be exploring the possibility of using municipality sidewalk dollars to leverage IDOT dollars and would be separate from the increase we talked about.

Chairman McCurdy inquired if we would lose DOAP funds because of the loss of the \$20,000 in the Green Route Pilot?

General Manager Thorne responded, no, because it will be made up from local investment.

Chairman McCurdy posed a question to City Manager Pam Reece by inquiring what the outlook might be for additional investment from the Town and is this within the realm of possibility?

City Manager Reece stated that once the Town Council has been presented the *Recommendations*, then we will know, adding that the Town Council is very excited to hear from Connect Transit regarding the *Recommendations*.

General Manager Thorne stated that the acceptance and support of the Working Group's *Recommendations* will appear as an *Agenda* item on the Board's February regular meeting and added

that if the Board chooses to accept and support the *Recommendations*, Connect will still need to go to the Councils. If the Councils accept and support the *Recommendations*, the next step would be public engagement on the fare structure.

Trustee Bullington requested a simplistic spreadsheet showing the numbers of the system as approved before engaging the Working Group - in comparison with how the numbers would affect the system upon instituting the *Recommendations*.

General Manager Thorne stated the comparison will look very different when an investment of \$500,000 is taken into consideration as additional local support.

Chairman McCurdy stated that logistically, Connect is currently behind on its budget schedule and is very late in asking the municipalities for new money. Is there anything we should move forward on now as a system and staff implementing some of the work in advance, a possibility?

General Manager Thorne stated that typically at the end of March, the Board votes on the budget as IDOT wants our budget by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Connect has already been in contact with IDOT because that is not going to happen. However; to be cautious, Connect does not want to lose out on IDOT funding. There is still a necessity to have a budget approved by the end of April, delaying it by one (1) month.

Trustee Hile stated there has been very good conversation regarding the use of our Advisory Committee to maximize its effectiveness. Do we want to revitalize the way the group functions and update the opportunities to comment? We may want to take a hard look at that group and the ways in which they have access to information, etc. The group that is currently empaneled has regular riders and riders with disabilities. The idea is to open it up and give them even more opportunity.

Chairman McCurdy thanked Trustees Buchanan and Hile for the amount of time and work each had invested in the Working Group and he also thanked all the Working Group Members for their hard work in accomplishing final *Recommendations*.


#### **ADJOURNMENT**

As there was no further discussion, Chairman McCurdy asked for a Motion to adjourn, moved by Trustee Buchanan, seconded by Trustee Bullington.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried, and the Board of Trustees adjourned the Work Session at 5:07 p.m.

  
Secretary Monica Bullington

  
Jill Baxter – Board Clerk

[SEAL]

