

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MONTHLY BOARD MEETING – APRIL 23, 2019

**Bloomington Police Department – Osborn Room
305 S. East Street Bloomington, IL 61701**

The monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held at the Bloomington Police Department in the Osborn Room, 305 S. East Street, Bloomington, Illinois 61701 on April 23, 2019 at 4:30 p.m.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Secretary John Bowman (Late Arrival 4:35 p.m.)
Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Monica Bullington
Trustee Julie Hile

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

STAFF PRESENT: General Manager, Isaac Thorne
Jill Bower, Board Clerk
Martin Glaze, Chief Operations Manager
Brady Lange, Maintenance Manager
Jeff Holtke, Marketing Manager
Brendan O'Neill, Community Outreach Coordinator
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director
Cassie Mosier, Procurement Specialist

The 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.

Chairman McCurdy then moved for a *Motion to Extend Public Comments Section* to suspend the public comment section rule and to extend an additional 15 minutes to hear all public comments submitted. Trustee Judy Buchanan moved to *Extend Public Comments Section*, seconded by Trustee Julie Hile

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried to *Extend Public Comments Section* by an additional 15 minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Cara McMorris for public comment.

Cara McMorris: Ms. McMorris stated that she lives in Normal and is the Associate Pastor at Hope United Methodist Church in Bloomington where she serves many people who make use of Connect Transit. She stated that recently many changes have taken place and people have bought homes or rented apartments specifically near bus stops for access to all Bloomington-Normal has to offer but now it is becoming more restrictive. The bus is a lifeline for these people. Some of the people she works with are dealing with mental illness and must get out of their homes and be out in the community. She continued by stating that many are without work on fixed incomes and when the stops are moved and when the fares are increased to the point they are not able to afford to ride, there needs to be other ways of funding the system that do not kick the people who are already down. These people are struggling to make it. We have the finances in the twin cities and have the ability to make one of their basic needs met.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Dr. E. Massier for public comment.

Dr. E. Massier: She thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and stated that she chose this community specifically for retirement. She stated she was here to advocate for other members of the community; specifically, to address the issues of the elimination of the Olive bus route and the fare increases. She stated she became aware of these issues after the Board's decisions. She is a gerontologist and the focus of her work has been promotion and maintenance of independence and self-reliance of adults and aging persons. Persons with disabilities and older adults are protected classes of persons in our country for a reason. Two top priorities of the older Americans are: access to transportation and access to congregate meal sites and nutrition because increased isolation has serious long-term consequences, not just for the individuals but also for the community, as social isolation can lead to cognitive issues and neglect of healthcare. Physical isolation can lead to poor nutrition and the inability to access healthcare before issues can become more serious and often leads to the use of more expensive healthcare at the public's expense. She stated that the more engaged and socially integrated persons are in our communities, the more likely they are to be productive, independent and self-reliant. The fare increase is a hardship on persons with limited resources because they have less to begin with. The Olive route also permits access to important places for residents including Wal-Mart in Normal. She stated that she drives by that route frequently and there are lots of people with big grocery bags needing that route for shopping. For these people, the ARC is a major site for nutrition, social and learning experiences and the ISU Speech and Hearing Clinic is housed in the ARC. Other important places for residents is Fairview Park, a site for wholesome recreation including water recreation during our hot season and an OSF Prompt Care site. Sometimes we need to revisit the decisions we make. It is not just about a bus route, it is what is best for the people you serve. She asked if the decisions about this sector of our community was made easier because it is a not well-organized and relatively politically powerless part of our community? She asked the Board if they would have made the decisions if this affected a more politically powerful segment even if ridership was low? Residents want to keep what they had and need it. She asked the Board to read their own Mission

Statement and stated that the Board has the skills and the resources to come up with a better plan than this.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Connie Kelly for public comment.

Connie Kelly: Ms. Kelly stated that she lives in north Normal and that a 25% hike in transportation costs for people with the lowest incomes in our community is unacceptable. She does not know how anyone can debate this simple fact considering the recent 4 cents gas tax was just passed in Bloomington that might possibly increase the average person's transportation budget by 1%, was hotly contested. Rationalizing this by saying this is the first fare increase in many years does not in any way minimize the impact on the people in our community. She continued by stating that cutting routes pushes more people off the fixed routes and on to Connect Mobility and Connect Mobility Premium Services. She asked the Board to think about the number of times you get in your car in a week and imagine you are on a fixed budget spending ever-increasing amounts on medical care and prescriptions. Continuing, she stated that we all know it is expensive to have a disability in America. Consider if you had to pay \$4.50 each time you got behind the wheel and would you be prone to skipping that medical appointment or community event – would you be inclined to go to the Library or to your nephew's school play if it was going to cost you \$9 for the round trip? She stated that she read through the Board Packets and did not see a 25% in operating expenses and didn't see any cuts in funding or anything that justifies the fare increase. She stated that General Manager Thorne had said that the route cuts were not a cost-saving measure and that he also said that he expected to see a 7% drop in ridership after the fare increase. This Board is all volunteer and all appointed and is it disappointing that none of you are elected officials who are accountable to the voting public and it also appears that you are not low-income bus riders, but you have complete authority to decide who gets transit service and how much they pay for it. The problem is that there is no accountability built into this system of government and that is disturbing. The Transit Board should include transit riders and they should be overseen by an elected official who is accountable to the public. The Board's decision to condense the service area and increase the hours the buses are running has not brought ridership numbers back to the peak ridership in 2015 before your new approach began. She stated that continuing an unsuccessful course is madness and she hoped the Board would turn this bus around.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Aleda Diggins for public comment.

Aleda Diggins: Ms. Diggins stated that she lives in Normal just off the Lime route. She stated she is in favor of environmentally-friendly transportation. She stated that she is motivated by her desire to be an ally for people who find themselves trapped by circumstances beyond their control – circumstances like losing a job, having a low income, having a disability that exacts a toll that needs to be worked around – financially, geographically and emotionally. She stated that from the January Minutes of the Advisory Committee, anyone who qualifies for Connect Mobility, they can ride fixed route for free which is an effort to get more CM users to try the fixed route transit. She then questioned how can CM users try the fixed route if they are prevented from doing so because the bus stops are not accessible? Why is there a vacant Board of Trustees' seat in Normal and regarding that, why not put someone with a disability in that slot who uses the buses regularly. People with disabilities and their family members need to be part of the Connect Transit Board as they will have insight and vision that able-bodied

people lack. Habitual bus riders will have first-hand knowledge that Board Members who zip from their garage to their Trustee meetings lack. Criteria for appointment to the Connect Transit Board needs to be amended to include more than just the ability to read financial documents. Appointment to the Board should be rooted in a deeper relationship to the service not merely random social visibility or high-profile career expertise in an unrelated field and the ability to read financials. Board votes need to take these things into consideration because public transit is a lifeline and not a choice. She continued by stating that Trustee Whitehouse recently re-tweeted a quote from Dwight Eisenhower: "Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you are 1000 miles away from the cornfield." She stated that one of the bus drivers had also been quoted in *The Vidette* recently saying: "It is hard to drive a bus from behind a desk." Listening sessions could be used to listen and ask questions and she stated that much of the public feels unheard and unprioritized. She stated that there is already an Advisory Committee and what is their advice and has it been sought? Is the new Working Group going to solicit the opinions of the Advisory Committee? In closing she stated that it would be good to see the Board Members and Mr. Thorne get on the bus and have actual meetings with the people who ride it regularly.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Rob Ballantini, Jr. for public comment.

Rob Ballantini, Jr.: Mr. Ballantini stated that he had recently written a letter to the editor of *The Pantagraph* about the Connect Transit issues and stated: "This is about the unfairness of Connect Transit, the City and the City Council. The fare increases are going to hurt more people than help. Being a disabled rider in Bloomington on a fixed income is hard. The changes are going to force people to make a choice. Do I take my kids to a daycare or do I go to church? Do I go to work, or do I go get groceries? Do I pay my home or renter's insurance, or do I pay my health insurance? How do I tell my kids that they can't go to the sport camp they want to go to so that your daughter can go to a cheerleading camp?" He stated that getting rid of the 30-day Mobility Pass is completely wrong. In his opinion, they should keep it and offer a separate set rate for outside of the mobility route area and give them the same discount as they would on the Value Card as it would work the same way. Lastly, the Olive route changes are going to be very difficult for a mother of three toddlers to get to a bus stop. Elderly and disabled people won't be able to get to work, doctor's appointments, family and so forth. He stated again that he believes the Connect Transit issue isn't thinking of the people of Bloomington-Normal. It is estimated that the economic burden of Parkinson's disease is at least \$14.4 billion annually, including the indirect costs of patients and family members of \$6.3 billion. If you want to talk about numbers, let's talk about numbers.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Jen Morsch for public comment.

Jen Morsch: Ms. Morsch stated that she and her dog, Thor, ride CM so she was here not only to speak in solidarity with the Citizens to Ensure Fair Transit, but also as a disabled rider. She wanted to speak out against the Value Cards but also against the elimination of the Olive route. She appreciated the fact that the bus system exists because that is the main way she gets around. She appreciated the fact that the Board is listening to everybody that encompasses both – the people in the Premium zones as well as those who fall into the regular zones, but she did not believe that doing away with the 30-day pass is the answer. She stated that she knew that Mr. Ballantini suggested the notion of making

the Value Cards available for those in the Premium zones and keeping the 30-day pass for those in the regular zones, stating her thought was to extend the 30-day pass to everybody. Continuing, she stated the Olive route, as other people have said, cuts people off from vital services like getting to Wal-Mart and the ARC and other places. People shouldn't have to make choices between – are they going to pay this bill or pay for transportation. She believes that other sources of funding need to be considered.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Arlene Hosea for public comment.

Arlene Hosea: Ms. Hosea stated that it was very difficult for her to be here. Ms. Hosea is a native Bloomingtonian. She stated that she looked in this room and sees that she is the only black person and that looking at the Board - I don't see me. There was a quote in Sunday's paper and before this quote came out, she stated that she had laid low. She talked to Sarah Grammer and stated that she is a Normal Township Trustee. She stated that she had also talked to the Mayor of the Town of Normal, but she didn't want to go public because she didn't want it to be all about her. She stated she didn't want it to be about Sarah Grammer nor Mayor Koos. She wants this to be about the people in this community and privilege raised its ugly head on Sunday in the paper. She stated that she is not here to offend anyone or to blame anyone but was here to ask the Board to look and see her and think about what the Board is saying and what it is doing. She checked the quote from the paper and wanted to make certain it was real, and the quote said: "Nothing is accomplished as a result of Facebook and of bullhorns." Continuing, she stated that she stands before the Board because black people stood and they died with bullhorns, with marching, because when you don't have privilege, that is all you have. Facebook and Twitter, she stated are equalizers and equalize the playing field because sometimes that is all people have. She asked the Board to think about what was said to this community – you said you have made up your minds and the emails would not change our minds. How is that? She wanted to tell the Board about her nephew, Nino, and the bus drivers know Nino. Nino has an intellectual disability and his lifeline is called - the bus line. When you change the colors of the bus and the letters on the bus, my nephew cannot read or write but he knew those numbers. She and Nino have ridden the Blue E for 15 years. She wanted to say to the Board to please - see me – hear me – and understand – people march for a reason. She believed it is not shameful for the Board to go back and say let's revisit this and let's meet with these individuals – only those individuals who wrote those emails. Let's talk to them and show that we do care about the people. This is your moment and take off your lenses of privilege and understand what it is like for people who do not have the privilege to never have to go out and march.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Terry Lindberg for public comment.

Terry Lindberg: My name is Terry Lindberg and I live in Normal. He stated that he is not a transit expert but does have several years of public budget experience. The concerns that he has read about and heard today come down to budget decisions. Unfortunately, budget decisions almost always have people consequences. Your staff took a hard look at revenue and expenses and present a balanced budget – recommended the elimination of the Olive route and scheduled across-the-board fare increases which the Board approved. Why eliminate the Olive line? It costs over \$500,000 per year and has the lowest ridership and highest cost per passenger mile of any route. Most Olive route stops are very low passenger counts. The stop by the town's ARC averages less than 2 passengers per day.

For most Olive route riders, the walk to the next closest stop will increase by about 2 blocks. Mr. Lindberg stated that he understood the \$500,000 saved by the Olive route being eliminated when two places - \$350,000 went to improve service on the Lime and Red routes, which are two of the heaviest travel lines - \$150,000 went to balance the budget. He stated that the good news is that both the Lime and the Red routes go through significant pockets of poverty in areas where we have disabled riders. By increasing the frequency of trips on those lines, there will be welcomed improvement to a number of people who depend on those lines who find themselves in a poverty state or with disabilities. Why increase fares? They have remained largely the same since 2007, but the costs of labor, benefits, fuel, maintenance and equipment has gone up. Although federal and state subsidies have increased somewhat, the subsidies from the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal have nearly doubled in the past few years. The unfortunate consequences of these two changes that were necessary to balance the budget are that some low-income transit users may be hard pressed to pay the higher fares and some disabled riders may struggle to get the extra distance to the nearest stop. These users are not only found in the Orlando/Northbrook area but are found in many areas of the transit system. Insults and misinformation do not move people toward agreement and solutions. Normal Township does not give \$400,000 a year to the Town of Normal. The Town does receive a portion of road and bridge revenue but that levy comes directly from the County Treasurer and its use is restricted to roads and bridges. Last year the Township gave less than \$12,000 to the Town and those funds were also for street repair and maintenance. I commend this Board for listening to the citizen's concerns. Obviously, there is a great deal of interest in what you have done and what you are doing. I, like other speakers, know that you can find ways to address these. Thank you for your time.

There were no additional public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of Minutes of Public Hearings of March 12, 2019 and March 26, 2019; Approval of Minutes of Annual Meeting of March 26, 2019; and Regular Meeting of March 26, 2019
2. Disbursements for the month March 2019
3. Financial Report for month of March 2019
4. Capital and Self Insurance Reserve Fund Balances for month of March 2019
5. Monthly Statistical Report for month of March 2019
6. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report

Chairman McCurdy called for a *Motion to Approve the Consent Agenda*. Trustee Julie Hile moved to approve the *Consent Agenda*, seconded by Trustee Judy Buchanan.

DISCUSSION

Chairman McCurdy asked General Manager Isaac Thorne about ridership and stated that he sees it continues to grow.

General Manager Thorne stated that ridership was up 9.2% in March and 9.2% year-to-date.

There was no further discussion and the Board voted to approve the *Consent Agenda*.

AYE: All

NAY: None

Motion carried, and the *Consent Agenda* was approved by the Board.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Recommendation for Bus Stop Improvement – Site Designs

General Manager Isaac Thorne stated that Staff issued an RFQ for site designs for the bus stop improvements in conjunction with the *Better Bus Stops Campaign*. Two (2) proposals were received through a 2-step procurement process with Lewis Yockey & Brown submitting the lowest bid for the design work. They will provide 53 bus stops with site designs and General Manager Thorne asked the Board to approve the Contract with Lewis Yockey & Brown for a total amount not to exceed \$78,880.

Chairman McCurdy asked the Board for a Motion for approval. Trustee Monica Bullington moved to approve the *Recommendation for Bus Stop Improvement – Site Designs*, seconded by Trustee Ryan Whitehouse.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Judy Buchanan asked the General Manager if this cost was coming from the capital fund to which General Manager Thorne confirmed.

Trustee Ryan Whitehouse stated a point that Staff has carried out what the Board has asked for years now to make certain that our bus stop facilities are becoming better and more accessible for individual riders. We value that as a Board and as an organization. Money is not always there and these things are very expensive so he appreciated the Staff finding the resources and taking the time to work with agencies to make certain we can make our bus stops more accessible for our riders.

There was no further discussion.

Chairman Mike McCurdy restated the Motion and asked that the Board vote on the approval of the *Recommendation for Bus Stop Improvement – Site Designs* to be awarded to Lewis Yockey & Brown.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

The Motion on the *Recommendation for Bus Stop Improvement – Site Designs* to be awarded to Lewis Yockey & Brown was approved by the Board.

Recommendation of Connect Transit Advisory Committee

Chairman McCurdy brought the next item on the *Agenda: Recommendation of Connect Transit Advisory Board* and turned the floor over to General Manager Thorne. General Manager Thorne stated that the Board approved the creation of the *Connect Transit Advisory Committee* ("CTAC") in 2014 and the current 2017-2019 appointments for CTAC Members have expired. The General Manager recommended that the Board approve the two (2) year re-appointment of service to the following Members:

Evelyn Johnson;
Noha Shawki;
John Corey;
Shirley Craig;
Emory Davis;
Linda Foster;
Elaina Von Qualen; and
Leon Kaeb, a new appointment to the *Committee*.

Trustee Ryan Whitehouse moved to approve the *Recommendation of Connect Transit Advisory Committee*, seconded by Monica Bullington.

Trustee Ryan Whitehouse stated that the Board takes this *Committee* very serious and these Members are individuals who are transit riders, some who are employed by universities and ride to and from work on Connect Transit, and some are riders who work at Human Service Agencies within the community. This is a great *Committee* that understands the inner workings of the system and what it means to them and the Board values their opinion very much.

There was no further discussion

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

The Motion carried and the *Recommendation of Connect Transit Advisory Committee* was approved by the Board.

Recommendation of Auditor Selection and Rotation Policy

General Manager Thorne stated that this *Policy* will formalize the auditor selection process and will require Connect Transit to rotate the lead auditor and review auditor every five (5) years to enhance audit independence. This is a policy the Board of Trustees requested at the February Board Meeting and he asked the Board to approve the *Auditor Selection and Rotation Policy*.

Trustee Judy Buchanan moved to approve the *Recommendation of Auditor Selection and Rotation Policy*, seconded by Trustee Julie Hile.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

The Motion carried and the *Recommendation of Auditor Selection and Rotation Policy* was approved by the Board.

Recommendation of FY2020 Operating and Capital Budget

General Manager Thorne stated that there were several items to walk the Board through and he began on (see *Board Packet*):

- Page 13, *Figure 1.1*
- Page 15, *Figure 1.3*
- Page 16, *Figure 1.4*
- Page 17, *Figure 1.5*
- Page 22, *FY 2019 – 2020 Operating Budget*
- Page 23, *FY 2021 – 2024 Seven Year Operating Budget* – General Manager Thorne stated that Connect will receive \$3.153M in Federal formula funds in FY2020. Connect will use 67% of this funding on operations. Connect received an increase in formula funds for the *Federal Transportation Bill* and the current *Federal Transportation Bill* which expires this year. Connect is expected to receive a continue *Resolution*. There were 2-4 continued *Resolutions* before a Transportation Bill was worked out. While Connect is in continued *Resolution*, more than likely Connect's Federal funding will stay flat on the Federal side. If Connect' Federal funding does not increase in the next *Federal Transportation Bill*, Connect will use 95% of its Federal formula funds in operating expenses by 2024, the last column of that page. Continuing, General Manager Thorne stated this is one of the reasons why Connect is looking at increasing its revenue through fares and advertising revenue and by looking at the Medicaid program revenue which Connect introduced recently as well, to bring in additional revenue.
- Page 24, *Capital Budget Summary* – Connect Transit will start using IDOT DOAP Debt Service for funding for a Capital Budget which will allow Connect to leverage 65% of its capital expenses and leverage its Federal discretionary grants that it won totaling \$7.45M. Lastly, the use of IDOT Debt Service and Federal discretionary grants allows Connect to conserve local capital dollars received from the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington to ensure Connect has reserves

to cover its debt service any unforeseen IDOT funding issues. Conserving Connect's local funds to build a reserve of \$8M is important over the next five (5) years because the operating budget is projected to be \$16.5M by FY2024. As a note, General Manager Thorne explained that Connect uses its local capital funds not only to purchase capital items through the Federal government and our Federal funds but Connect also uses this as an emergency fund. If IDOT funding does not come through, Connect must use its local capital dollars. Therefore, it is important that Connect conserves those dollars and put up a reserve of at least \$8M as Connect's budget grows to \$16.5M.

- Page 27, *2019-2020 Capital Budget* – General Manager Thorne stated that Connect's Capital Budget for FY2020 will be \$1,979,000. Most of the FY2020 Capital Budget will be funded through IDOT Debt Service. The largest project in the Capital Budget for FY2020 is the electric infrastructure and solar array project. IDOT just provided Connect with pre-bid concurrence last week and the IFP was issued yesterday. Cassie Mosier, Connect's Procurement Specialist, has been coordinating with IDOT on many of these projects and has done a great job in pushing them to provide procurements.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked for a Motion to approve the *Recommendation of FY2020 Operating and Capital Budget*.

Trustee Judy Buchanan moved to approve the *Recommendation of FY2020 Operating and Capital Budget*, seconded by John Bowman.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Ryan Whitehouse commented that he appreciated the work that went into this and putting Connect at a conservative level so that it can still operate the system but also not extend itself in the future. Trustee Whitehouse stated that he believed it was very smart and appreciated what Staff will do in working with a local bank system to leverage to achieve more state dollars, adding that he appreciates the fact that the Board is looking at these numbers long-term and not just on a year-to-year basis and by budgeting in a conservative way to get the most out of every dollar it receives.

Chairman McCurdy asked General Manager Isaac Thorne to talk more about the financial issues that are facing the transit system in 2023-2024.

General Manager Thorne stated that this ties back into the federal support that Connect Transit receives. If it does not grow past \$3.1M by FY2024, Connect will use 95% of its federal funds on operation which lowers the amount of money it can use on capital items. On the IDOT funding situation, can the State of Illinois continue to increase transit funding 10% every year and we are uncertain if that will be sustainable. This is one of our fears and we are searching for ideas on how Connect can increase its current allocation by 10%.

Trustee Ryan Whitehouse stated that the capital dollars are very important and if we have to spend 95% of federal funds on operation, how do we invest in buses or new pads at the facilities? Connect Transit has been very fortunate this last year due to the receipt of federal grants. Without the help of

that extra money coming in to purchase some of the new buses, we would have been in a different situation a lot earlier.

Trustee Julie Hile asked General Manager Thorne to explain what specific items the transit system uses capital dollars for.

General Manager Thorne listed bus stop shelters, bus stop infrastructures, buses, facilities, service vehicles are all capital items. Continuing, he stated that also repairs to the roof of the facility is an item that falls under a capital expenditure.

Trustee John Bowman asked the General Manager to report on the status of the fleet and where Connect is with replacements.

General Manager Thorne stated that within the next four (4) years Connect will be replacing sixteen (16) vehicles. Connect has the funding right now to replace twelve (12) of the vehicles over the next three (3) years starting in 2021. Connect has a \$7.45M discretionary Grant received from FTA and Connect is also using IDOT Debt Service for a majority of those. IDOT Debt Service will pickup 65% of that cost and the discretionary Grant will pick up the other 35%. Electric vehicles cost about \$1M per bus. IDOT will be picking up 65% of the electric vehicles costs and as mentioned earlier, the discretionary Grant will pick up 35%. These buses will have a lower operating cost for the life of the vehicle with the expectation of a longer operational life. There are higher upfront capital costs for the electric vehicles but with the lower operating costs Connect should see a savings of \$265,000 per vehicle over the total life of the vehicle.

Trustee Monica Bullington asked about the infrastructure for the electric buses and how that goes in together with the timeline.

General Manager Thorne stated that the infrastructure will be installed in the Maintenance facility with about 300KW solar array which will help Connect to store the solar electric energy coming in to battery packs and to also help offset energy costs for Connect's entire facility to almost near zero, also charging the batteries as well. Connect also wants to work with its current utility company to sell back some of the solar electric energy to further the return of investment on the maintenance facility.

Trustee John Bowman asked for an update on the capital improvements at Wal-Mart.

General Manager Thorne stated that the *Better Bus Stops Campaign* is currently in action at Wal-Mart in Normal by putting in a bus lane and two (2) shelters and we are hoping that by the end of next week the concrete work will be completed to provide a much-improved bus stop for Connect's customers at the Wal-Mart stop. Wal-Mart is also financially participating in the project and it will be a great improvement. Typically, a bus stop shelter costs around \$9,600 with the actual infrastructure on average costing around \$3,500 for the concrete and pad connecting to the sidewalk and curb and then the shelter which is around \$9,500, with total estimated project costs of around \$68,000.

There was no further discussion

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

The Motion carried and the *Recommendation of FY2020 Operating and Capital Budget* was approved by the Board.

Recommendation of "Connect to the Future" Working Group

Chairman McCurdy brought the next item on the *Agenda* to the floor and began by moving to amend the *Motion* by recommending Trustee Judy Buchanan as Chair and Trustee Julie Hile as Member, and the *Motion*, as amended, was seconded by Monica Bullington.

DISCUSSION

Chairman Mike McCurdy stated that he is excited that there is a community conversation happening in Bloomington-Normal about transit and stated that he is hopeful that the Working Group which will be discussed, will harness the current energy of the community and result in a meaningful and productive dialog. The Group will talk about the issues facing transit in Bloomington-Normal and will bring back concrete recommendations to guide local transit into the future. The Working Group will review the public planning documents which represent hours of thoughtful work of the transit system and these documents have helped guide the Board and its decisions. The Planning Reports include the *2015 Comprehensive Operational Analysis* which includes the Board's guiding principles and was the basis of its successful 2016 route restructure, the *Strategic Plan*, Budget Reports that paint a picture of some of the issues ahead that have been talked about this evening, and the forth-coming *Short-Range Transportation Plan* as developed by the McLean County Regional Planning Commission. Trustee Judy Buchanan will chair this Working Group and Trustee Julie Hile will serve as a Member of the Group. At that time the floor was turned over to Trustees Buchanan and Hile for additional details.

Trustee Judy Buchanan stated that the operative words are "Connect" and "Future". Continuing, Trustee Buchanan stated that there had been more conversation in the local community about local transit in the recent months which is very encouraging. She stated however, there would be some challenges. She continued by stating that we want to take advantage of this opportunity to engage in looking at the resource documents we have – there are studies – figures and facts that the Working Group can garner. What we want to do is look at what kind of a transit system do we all want here in Bloomington-Normal to meet our needs and wants, reflecting our values and where we are. You have already heard about some of the budgetary challenges our transit system face and we will have to message and instruct this in a way that it will be possible. We will be looking at a lot of possibilities: what is valued; what do we want it to look like; and then how can we afford it and how can we make it sustainable. The Working Group will be guided by the input throughout the community as well as the documents that are already in place.

Trustee Julie Hile stated that she joins Trustee Buchanan and enthusiastically welcomed this opportunity. Trustee Hile stated that the Board appreciates the public interest in a system that has been very important for those of us who have been working on the Board. We are interested in structuring that conversation such that there is good listening, genuine collaboration and relationship-building. Trustee Hile continued by stating that the community we all know, and love is capable of coming up with great solutions to the problems we face.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked for an explanation on how meetings will proceed and facilitated so that everyone will have a voice.

Trustee Julie Hile stated that we have yet to configure that group and what we want to be careful to do is to make certain that we have a nice representative mix of riders, taxpayers and community members. We will hold the meetings at times that are congenial to all comers but at this time we cannot state where the meetings will be held but these will be open meetings.

Chairman Mike McCurdy stated that the membership will be announced at a Special Meeting tentatively planned for May 14, 2019 and asked the Board Members to check their schedules.

Trustee Buchanan added that the estimated timeframe will be May-October, depending on the process, and October will not be a stopping point for the Group, but hopefully by the end of the year. A larger group would meet monthly and smaller groups in between. Once it is together and confirmed it will be on Connect's website.

Trustee Hile added that one of the things we are excited about is reaching out to other communities of like size and like means and perhaps with similar social and economic issues as those we face.

Trustee Bullington asked how this Group will interact with the CTAC group?

Trustee Hile stated that there will be a Member from CTAC in the Working Group and prior to any recommendations being brought to the Working Group, recommendations will be reviewed by CTAC, as well as both Town and City Councils.

There was no further discussion.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried as amended, that Trustee Judy Buchanan would Chair the Group and Trustee Julie Hile would serve as an initial Member of the *Connect to the Future Working Group*.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Strategic Plan Update

Short-range Transit Plan

General Manager Thorne stated that Staff has been working with the *McLean County Regional Planning Commission* on a short-range transportation plan which will focus on service enhancements that would provide a more frequent bus service network and will also give the community an understanding of where the frequent bus network will be located and what the bus system network will look like in five (5) years based on population growth, housing, and business development. The drafted Short-range Transit Plan will be brought to the Board in May for review and community engagement sessions will be held in the community to discuss the Plan before final adoption.

The objectives will be:

- To design or adjust proposed routes to ensure alignment
- Explore fare restructuring of strategic planning goal 1
- Staff propose a new fare structure to include FY2020-FY2023
- To build a Downtown Transfer Center
- To examine all existing revenue sources for stability, growth potential, and research new and alternative revenue streams for operations and capital
- Heighten awareness about placement of land uses requiring high levels of service, the necessity of mobility options and evaluate sidewalks, shelters and other amenities
- To ensure all riders aware of the freedom of flexibility afforded by the fixed route system
- A formal training program for fixed routes is being developed and should be finalized in June of 2019 – naming it "*ConnectU*"
- To vividly portray the transit benefit sales and commerce transports for work forces that control individual's livelihoods diverse in our region's employer/employee base

Staff has proposed an economic impact study with Illinois State University Stephenson Center. The economic impact study will focus on the following:

- Travel time cost impacts both Connect Transit riders and car travelers save time and costs because of the existence of transit services
- Access impacts workers' income and business productivity increase by expanding job market access and business clusters that public transit enables
- Spending impacts transit capital investment and operation spending stimulates the economy
- Other economic impacts - transit service can affect property values

Currently Connect is waiting on a cost to submit for this study; however, it would not be completed until October of 2019.

Chairman McCurdy asked the General Manager to give the Board a little more information on *ConnectU* and what Connect Transit hopes to gain from the program.

General Manager Thorne responded that it is directed to the individual(s) who have never ridden transit before and/or someone who is currently riding transit or CM but does not feel comfortable riding fixed route transit. It will be training on how to get onto the bus; how to read the rider's guide; how to use the app if they have a smart phone; how to use the website; how to get off at a stop; and going into more detail on how to ride the routes to make the customer feel more comfortable.

Email Correspondence to Board

General Manager Thorne stated that he takes full responsibility for the emails that did not go to the Board of Trustees before the March 26th public meeting and that he had been admonished for this oversight by both Chairman McCurdy and Vice Chairman Whitehouse. The emails were not viewed by him nor by Staff prior to the Board Meeting and stated that he did not instruct Staff to withhold the emails. The General Manager continued to state that Chairman McCurdy did not read or view the emails, nor did Chairman McCurdy instruct the General Manager to withhold them. He stated that he contacted other transit agencies to understand how email correspondence to the Board from the public was handled. He stated that he will provide a recommendation to the Board on the best practices for email correspondence in a later Board Meeting.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Trustee John Bowman stated that he wanted to add clarity about his comments on ridership at the last meeting. Trustee Bowman stated that the data that he was looking at indicated that while there was a drop between FY2015-2016 for Connect Transit in the range of 9%, peers that were named in the *Fare Increase Proposal* were at about 7.33%. In FY2017 as compared to FY2016, Connect Transit's ridership dropped on the boardings-per-revenue-hour basis by 25.6% which was dramatic in relation to the rest of the peer reports of 6.6%. Connect was 19 points under the industry at that point.

General Manager Thorne stated that most of Connect's peer agencies were down 2-3% year-to-date versus last year. Connect right now is set, if the current trend continues, to beat 2016 ridership which is its third best year. Looking at year-to-date ridership through March and comparing it to 2015 – the best ridership year ever – Connect is down 10% through March. Comparative to both regional and national agencies, Connect is on an upward trend.

Trustee discussion continued regarding bus transfers and the new Working Group.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business or discussion, Chairman Mike McCurdy entertained a *Motion for Adjournment*.

Trustee Judy Buchanan moved to adjourn, seconded by Trustee John Bowman.

AYE: All

NAY: None

Motion carried, and the Board of Trustees adjourned the April regular monthly meeting at 5:58 p.m.


Jill Bower – Board Clerk


Trustee John Bowman - Secretary

