

**CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
PUBLIC HEARING
ON**

“PROPOSED DISSOLUTION OF OLIVE ROUTE and PROPOSED NEW FARE STRUCTURE”

**March 26, 2019
3:30 p.m.**

**Town of Normal Council Chambers
11 Uptown Circle
Normal, Illinois 61761**

The Public Hearing held by the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit to hear Public Comments on the Proposed Fare Structure and Proposed Route Adjustments was held at the Town of Normal Council Chambers, 11 Uptown Circle, Normal, Illinois 61761 on March 26, 2019 at 3:30 p.m.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Secretary John Bowman (late arrival – 3:40 p.m.)
Trustee Judy Buchanan (late arrival – 3:40 p.m.)
Trustee Monica Bullington
Trustee Julie Hile

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

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

Chairman Mike McCurdy called the Public Hearing to order at 3:30 p.m. Roll call was taken.

Chairman McCurdy welcomed all attendees to the Connect Transit Board of Trustees' Public Hearing and stated that this meeting was being held to give the Connect Transit Board of Trustees the opportunity to listen to comments by the public community regarding two (2) Proposals: (1) a Fare Increase; and (2) Fixed Route changes. The Chairman requested that the public attendees center each comment on the two (2) proposals. Chairman McCurdy stated that the Board will also have a public comment session during the Regular meeting. The Chairman stated that Connect Transit Staff has held 15 Community Engagement Sessions, in addition to meetings held with various community organizations prior to today's Public Hearing and continued to state that today's Public Hearing is the second Public Hearing held to discuss these issues. The Chairman requested that commenters hold their comments to a five-minute limit to allow comments by others in attendance to address the Board.

General Manager Thorne provided context and background for each of the Proposals by stating that in 2015, Connect Transit contracted with *Nelson Nygaard Consulting Associates* to perform a Comprehensive Operational Analysis that led to a re-structured bus network which added 15-30 minute service frequency to most of Connect's bus routes. Before making these changes, Connect performed an *On-Board Survey*, as well as many customer and stake-holder input sessions. He stated that Customers expressed support for increased week-day service frequency and Sunday service. Additionally, he stated that customers requested improved on-time performance of routes because buses were running late and the service was not reliable.

The General Manager continued by stating that since 2016, on-time performance has improved from 70% to 93% today. Connect performed another *Rider Survey* in April of 2018 on each route and customers again listed "frequency and on-time performance of buses," as the two (2) most important services. The proposed route changes would increase frequency on the LIME Express and the RED Express to 15-minute service during peak hours. The Orlando/Northbrook area would still maintain service with the YELLOW route and would provide 15-30-minute service. Beech Street and ARC will also continue to have bus service provided on the current PINK Route. Customers traveling to Wal-Mart and Ft. Jesse Medical Center will also maintain the service. The Orlando/Northbrook area is not being singled out with this proposal by the elimination of the OLIVE Route. The YELLOW Route will continue serving this area with 15-30-minute service. To get to the bus stop, many will have to travel to it. Many areas throughout Bloomington-Normal are within a standard 5-10-minute walk to bus service. Manager Thorne then gave specific examples for individuals or customers having to walk $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to transit:

- Trader's Circle;
- North Meadow Village;
- Southgate;
- Alexander Estates;
- Hilltop; and
- Gettysburg area.

The General Manager stated that individuals that are living in the Orlando/Northbrook area are currently walking to the YELLOW or OLIVE bus route. Regarding the Fare Proposal, Connect has maintained flat one-way fares for both fixed route and Connect Mobility ("CM") for the last twelve (12) years.

General Manager Thorne continued by stating that concerning the Fare Proposal, Connect had maintained a flat-one-way fare for both fixed route and for Connect Mobility for the last twelve (12) years. The Fare Proposal would be a four (4) year plan to increase fares to help offset a small portion of the additional service that has been provided for the last few years. Connect added later service hours to the YELLOW, GREEN, RED, and LIME routes as well as providing increased frequency on most of the routes and by adding Sunday service in 2016. He continued to state that in 2018, premium service areas were added beyond $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from fixed route for Connect Mobility service. Continuing, General Manager Thorne stated that the Connect Mobility Fare Proposal replaces the thirty-day pass

with a Value Card. He continued by stating that this is a benefit to all customers and reduces the cost per trip and that in addition, only 5% of the 800 CM customers utilize the 30-day pass.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Twenty-two (22) members of the Public in attendance at the Public Hearing commented as follows:

1. Marie-Susanne – I have lived in Bloomington for 17 years. I am coming from a place of privilege. I am part of a 2-car family and a 2-bicycle family and an income and one-half in my family. My husband and I are both abled-bodied and I have never ridden the bus in Bloomington-Normal and if I were to ride it, it would be sort of a "local tourism" thing. My question for the Connect Transit Board Members here today is, "When was the last time you rode the bus because you had to – to get to work or to buy your groceries?" What seems fairly plain to me is that often the people who make the decisions are not the people who need the services most. That is my question to you all. Thank you.

Chairman McCurdy stated that it has not customary for the Board to respond in a Public Hearing but stated that he is a regular bus rider, residing in a 1-car household and a 5-bicycle household and rides the bus because the car is often engaged in other services. He stated that there are also other Board Members that ride the bus.

2. Courtney Hummel - I am just concerned that other people will be paying more for Connect Transit every month instead of paying the monthly pass. This is ridiculous for it to go up every month. Why cannot we have a flat rate for a monthly pass for some people every month and then have a premium pass to...(inaudible). Thank you.
3. Mary Wuhrmann – I have been here before to speak. What I did this time was instead of – because there are a lot of people talking about the main issues about ridership, but what I did was go to your website and looked at the changes in that position. You have had an increase from 2016-2017 of 10.4% and a 17.4% increase from 2017 to 2018. My first question is: "Why are you wanting to increase rates, especially for people who cannot afford the increase of rates?" I think there is a lot of businesses in these two (2) towns that would like to have that percentage of income increase. I also looked at your Mission Statement. It says that

"Connect Transit provides safe, reliable transportation and access to opportunity to strengthen and enrich individual lives, our community, the economy and the environment."

So, I am going to address a few of those things. You have core values and I will not go through all of them as hopefully you all know what they are.

- Dedication to public service: As this is a "public service" for Bloomington-Normal and the areas that you serve. It is "public" not "private".

- Open-minded and eager to learn: That you are open-minded and eager to learn and appreciate that you have had lots and lots of forums and hearings and engagement sessions.
- Positive in attitude
- Focused on the good of the whole: So it has to be the "whole" community.

Your vision for 2021 – *"Connect Transit is a robust system of undeniable social, economic and environmental value to its stakeholders and the community."* You have five (5) "High-Level Goals" and I'm just going to talk about a few of those.

- 1) *"Sustainable, High-Performing System. – Define, design and fund a sustainable transit system tailored to optimally serve the Bloomington-Normal community."*
- 2) Action 1 under Strategy 2 – *"Design or adjust proposed system routes to ensure alignment with and performance toward transit objectives."* Have you tried to reach the public surrounding the OLIVE Route and to increase ridership. If the OLIVE route is not having enough ridership, have you gone out to see if more of that population that surrounds that route would start taking the bus? Maybe they do not know about the times; maybe they don't know where it can go to. Maybe they haven't looked into that aspect and maybe it would be more cost-effective than having a car. But have you reached out to that public – not just the ones who ride your bus, but those who live in that surrounding area?
- 3) Action 5 under Strategy 4 – *"Explore increased local funding support with local governments."* Have you asked Normal and Bloomington to increase their money to you? I would be glad to go to the meetings and speak up about the need for our public transit if you need help in doing something like that – but have you – progressively gone out to ask for more funds instead of putting it on the people who need the rides the most? Have you looked at local businesses – have you asked State Farm for support or Kohl's, or Target, or Wal-Mart, where a lot of these riders go and spend their money? Have you reached out to them to have some kind of support? Maybe they could help with advertising, I'm not sure. Maybe they could encourage their employees to use the bus system. You need to reach out to the businesses that are in this community and have you pursued any other grant opportunities?
- 4) Goal 2: *"Quality Customer Experience: ...'easy-to-use transportation services'..."* I am sure a lot of people here tonight are probably going to discuss that feature so I don't have to discuss that. But it says you are going to *"conduct periodic customer surveys, interviews or focus groups, to obtain suggestions and feedback, and gauge satisfaction."* I have never gotten any kind of a survey and I've lived here for 29 years. I don't use the bus – it might be something I need in the future, but I have never been contacted to take a survey. I think you need to go to your non-riders to ask information also.
- 5) Goal 2 – Strategy 3 – Action 3: *"Remain sensitive to service affordability for all riders."* I think that is what the major concern is right now besides the elimination of the OLIVE Route.

- 6) Goal 2 – Strategy 3 – Action 4: *“Ensure all riders are aware of the freedom and flexibility afforded by the fixed route system.”* Well, if you take some of these routes away, people are going to have a lot longer to walk. If I had to take a bus right now, I can’t walk much more than 1 block.
4. Deborah Presley: I spoke at the last Board Meeting about the inequity in the fare structure that was originally being proposed. My son uses the premium service bus routes and pays for each trip that he takes on the bus to get back and forth to work. Those using the premium service are not offered a 30-day pass like those on the regular routes. Because of the lack of the 30-day pass, his bus service back and forth to work was going to increase to \$46/month, and because he would pay more for each trip, the total cost would use over 40% of his income. In comparison, riders using the regular service are only going to experience the \$10/month increase because they have access to a 30-day pass. This was not equitable. Since that meeting, a more equitable fare structure has been proposed that offers a value discount card that offers up to a 15% discount on all para-transit fares. The Value Card makes the fare structure equitable in that everyone is paying for the amount of service that they use. Under the old proposal, those of us on the premium route and those using single regular fares, and those under-utilizing the 30-day pass, were subsidizing those who were using more rides than the 30-day pass cost. This was not fair or equitable. While the new Value Pass proposal addresses the issues of equitability, it does not address the different but larger issue of affordability. While I hope that the Value Pass is approved tonight, I equally hope that the Board will continue to work towards a long-term solution to the problem of affordability. A simple monthly fare cap on all para-transit rides, similar to what is offered on fixed routes, would help to alleviate the larger problem of affordability. Even with the Value Card discounts, individuals in the Premium Service areas will be forced to pay up to \$196/month just to get back and forth to work. As we move forward, I hope to work with Connect Transit Staff, the Board of Trustees, and community leaders to address this issue of affordability by finding new revenue sources to provide individuals with disabilities in our community affordable transportation. In the meantime, it is imperative that the fare structure provided by Connect Mobility be equitable for all para-transit riders whether they be in premium service or regular service riders. Thank you for creating and supporting a more equitable value pass proposal.
5. Kyle Ciani: I have lived in Normal for 18 years. I want to thank you for studying this issue here tonight to learn more about the issue and to support those individuals who depend on the bus. I do take the bus, I’ve ridden it for 18 years. I don’t depend on the bus or depend on the particular routes. I would be able to walk – I live on the OLIVE line and I would be able to walk to the YELLOW route, but I wouldn’t have been able to do that 18 years ago when I had a small child and when I depended on the bus to go to the grocery store with a small child and a toddler and stuffing grocery bags in my stroller. I also would not have been able to do so when I was taking care of an elderly individual and had to navigate that. I am no longer in those positions, but there are people here tonight who are in those positions and I would like to be able to speak for them. I’m in favor of sustaining the OLIVE line. I was pleased to hear that you have extended night service and Sunday service and that there is regular usage on the YELLOW line, but I do believe that the OLIVE line provides a service for individuals who cannot

make it to the YELLOW or the RED lines that are near them in their vicinities, so I would like for you to reconsider how we might address that particular issue. I would also like to thank you for developing the Value Card fare. I think it is a good substitute for what you proposed before. I agree with the previous speaker that it is now more equitable, but I also agree with the previous speaker that it is pricey for individuals who live on a fixed income. So, I would encourage you to continue with the help of constituents to continue to look at ways in which we can maintain a cheaper way to take the bus.

6. Vincent Radcliffe: (Commenter stated he would withhold his comments as most have already expressed his concerns.)

7. Steven Kossman: I have lived in Normal for 25 years. I would like to start by saying that when you survey your ridership, you are very much limiting who you are getting information from. Twenty-five years ago, I co-chaired the Public Education portion of the Community Assessment and Needs for this county. In that process, we wanted to be very deliberate about getting input from the full range of people in this community and we realized we had to be deliberate about that or to get that. So, where we put surveys – not only did we mail surveys out, but we put them in convenient stores and laundry mats where people who typically maybe don't even look at their mail because they may be avoiding a bill that is coming through the mail, but where they are takes a deliberate effort. Also, I don't want to repeat what others are going to say, but I think that ridership and coverage are equally laudable goals and I don't think one should be the sole driver of how we make these decisions. It shouldn't just be ridership, it should be coverage and accessibility and there should be a deliberate process that you undertake to determine what percentage of your resources that you have you are going to allocate to each of those. How much towards ridership, accessibility and coverage. I think that is critical. I would call that a "service out-patient policy" and I would encourage you to move in that direction and identify the percentages of those resources. I will repeat something that someone else said, I believe there are resources out there. I believe that there are units of government who could be coerced and at least be asked to assist in these matters. My wife and I spent time in Europe and were blown away by how you can get from anywhere to anywhere – that is a priority so that everyone has access to everything which is part of being equal.

8. Payten Presley: I ride Connect Mobility buses. I like my job at Biaggi's. For years I ride the bus back and forth to work. There used to be a bus that went down my street, but the bus route was stopped and because of that, I am not going to have a bus ride anymore. But I am glad that you created a premium service so that I can still get to my job. The premium service costs a lot of money and now the card is not going up any more. I am glad that Connect Mobility is listening to me and my Mom about this. Thank you for creating a Value Card for riders just like me on the premium service. I hope you vote "yes" for the Value Card. Thank you.

9. Conan Calhoun: I am Conan Calhoun with the Life Center for Independent Living. I want to thank the audience for all the comments. Thank you, Board. I just have some brief comments

here, although the proposal for this is equitable, it is not for the long term as we have looked at different dynamics. We have had different consumers coming into our Center who have expressed to us some major concerns. We are not in support of the Value Card, but we are in support of "slowing this bus down" literally and looking at this a little bit more globally and using some of the minds we have here and behind me to come up with something that is a little bit more reasonable and is not going to be a burden. At this point in time, it is alarming to me that the national average on spending money on public transit is roughly about 10% - that is a threshold - that you normally don't want to break. Most of my consumers are sitting at 17%-34% in spending money on transport if we move into the new proposal. I am looking at real numbers. I am speaking about real people - these are not things that I just made up. I am a little agitated and I have already voiced my concerns many times. I don't know how many times I may have been put on record, but I have noticed that some of my stuff has been mis-quoted and I will definitely say again - we are not "in" with the Value Card system. I just wanted to have a moment of silence for those who are about to be buried in a more financial burden. It is a little scary to me. I don't know if the realistic aspect for some of you understand that \$771/month of fixed income is a tangible number to you, but it is to me. If you start ramping up that number, you are really putting a lot of people in a position where they must make bad decisions. That's hospital, groceries, that's food, clothing, kids, and the list can go on. Just have some humanistic approach. Look at it what it is - it is not a feasible proposal, there are other ways we can do it. We have already talked to the City Council members. We could go about this - we have big entities in this wonderful Bloomington-Normal community, but I truly want you guys to slow down. To me, it was very rushed. I got one (1) proposal and within seven (7) days, I got another proposal that I was looking at and I was saying: What are we doing? Where is the oversight? Have we had effective communication models going throughout our community? I don't know because I do not hear a lot about Connect Transit. I hear about you on WGLT, WJBC and other news, blasting your services, but I didn't hear much about these surveys and the public input. Just get a little bit more in-tuned, put your finger on the pulse of the community and get an understanding of what kind of people you are serving - it is a service. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

10. Carol Rueger: On the immediate topic at hand, the OLIVE route, I would like to say the discontinuation of that service to Orlando/Northbrook Estates, will literally turn a large number of the people in that neighborhood into shut-ins. They cannot, bodily, cannot take their wheelchairs and their walkers to Main Street and Raab Road to catch a bus. It can't be done. The sidewalks are not clear of snow in the winter and no one clears the snow heaps that the plows leave away from the bus stops. We would all be out in the street, if we could get there at all. We can't do it. You will be effectively making us shut-ins and for the record, I would like to remind everyone that even as shut-ins, we have the right to vote by mail. On the subject at whole, this entire community is suffering. It is not just those of us who ride the buses. We have kids out there getting in trouble because they can't get jobs. Job applications now have a question, "Do you have your own transportation?" Nobody used to look at that question, but they do now because they know that if those people do not have their own transportation, they are not going to be able to get to work. So those kids can't get jobs and they are out there getting in trouble. The people who are out there struggling to get to work are losing their jobs

because they can't make it or their employers are having to buy vehicles and transport their employees to work in order to get them there which raises the prices on everything else – getting your garage painted, getting your lawn done, because they are having to pay people overtime to go run around to pick up their employees at the beginning of the day and take them home when the day is over. These things are happening. It's not just the bus riders suffering. We have a community of able-bodied people out here who want to work, and they can't because our public transit system is broken. It just doesn't work. We have a community full of people who want to deliver public transit. We have bus drivers, mechanics, office workers, down here at Connect Transit, willing and able to do the job. They are hustling, they are busting their cans trying to provide us with public transit, but they can't because the system is broken. The broken parts aren't out here in the community as a whole. The broken parts are the ones up here making the decisions. We can't hold this community together forever with duct tape and baling wire. Sooner or later, we have to replace the part that doesn't work. It's just that simple.

11. **Nancy B. Littell:** I came to this community in 1961 and we lived in the rural area for 25 years and when we moved back to Bloomington-Normal, we needed public transportation. I was delighted that when I applied for ridership for Connect Transit that I could also use the fixed route for some kinds of errands because there were stops were relatively close and that were wheelchair accessible. However, before we actually got situated, those bus stops were taken away and the bus stops that are close to us are simply not assessible and the places where I need to go are not assessible for the fixed route buses. So, I am extremely grateful for Connect Transit. However, I still don't understand about the premium routes. I know that there is a 1 and a 2, so to go to church, it costs me \$8 round trip and by the time this is all phased in, it will be \$10 round trip. I don't quite understand why the fixed route was raised 25 cents, but those of us who are disabled, it was raised 50 cents immediately. I have friends who work in the community who are also disabled, and the 30-day pass is very important for them. Now the Value Pass will be useful for me because I must use the premium routes and the Value Pass will help with that, but for those who are working full-time and can use the fixed routes, that 30-day pass is very necessary for affordability. My request to you is that you please consider what you have currently proposed with the addition of the possibility of the 30-day pass as well. Thank you for listening.
12. **Margarite Brooks:** My name is Margarite Brooks and I am the Recording Secretary for *Citizens to Ensure Fair Transit* ("CEFT"). I would like to make the requests we are making and then give you some information as to why we feel this is necessary. We are requesting that the 30-day pass remains as it is. Because with the 30-day pass, people are using that pass. If they would get the Value Card, there are people who are dropping their children off at daycare and going to daycare to work and then coming back...(inaudible). On Saturday and Sundays going grocery shopping, the 30-day pass is very good. It is something we are not asking you to do it because you pity, but because it is the right thing to do. Let us have that. In 2015 the Transit System here was given an award by the *American Public Transportation Association* based on the way our buses were and I have a copy of that if someone wants to look at it. That is some information that Bloomington-Normal was getting an award because of the way our

transportation system worked. This was in 2015 and then changes started to take place by the Board administration...(inaudible)...and other disabilities came and talked at several Board Meetings and we also met with the Administration and the main people we met are no longer here. Changes that they made at that time, we said that they were trying to fix something that wasn't broken. It is evident now that it is broken, and it has to be fixed. At time larger buses were purchased with only 4-5 people riding them and because of the changes that you made, and the bus stops now being – as we talked about – there is a bus stop every ½ mile or so many miles, but they are not in convenient places for those with disabilities to ride them. There are a lot of people with disabilities who no longer use the public transportation system. We have been forced in many ways to use Connect Mobility so more Connect Mobility buses have been purchased. At that time when *Citizens Ensuring Fair Transit* ("CEFT") was leading to try to get some of these changes not to take place, that was at the time the Connect wages were threatened – it was a financial crisis because wages were not going to be paid as the government was holding back and at that time CEFT did an about-face and went on-board with public transportation with the public transportation system – Connect Transit – and we created an "Action Alert" through resources that we (CEFT) had and this is a letter that we sent to the editor to help keep Connect Transit going here in Bloomington with the Action Alert that we put on Connect Transit's website and that was one of the things that CEFT and our citizens would have the ability – that is what we did for you. What we are asking now is that you take consideration for the people, not just look at numbers. If you will look at the letter we (CEFT) sent, more than people with disabilities – more than people who ride the bus are affected by some of the changes. Please look at the people and not just as numbers. – Thank you.

13. Rob Ballantini, Jr.: I talked to several Bloomington Council Members and the City of Bloomington about this last night and I brought up the subject of the new plans. We are talking numbers here and let me ask you about this number. The City of Bloomington has given Connect \$690,000, where the Town of Normal gave them \$310,000. Well, it doesn't take a genius to figure out who is paying what there. Three hundred and eighty-thousand dollar difference (\$380,000) – why can't both cities put in \$690,000? I think that would help some of your income that you are seeking. Also, when you do this ridiculous plan for proposal and the Value Card, have you ever thought about this? Low income families that have to pay for daycare - daycare is astronomically high for a one-income family, and then you have to count in food, rent, housing payment, house tax, homeowner's insurance and not able to attend their church service. These are things that I am sure you overlooked on these prices. I made a comment last night to the Board at City Council and I said, "It is like the government taxing of the middle-income people and giving the upper billionaires a discount because – what – are they wealthy?" No, and now you guys are doing the same thing. I'm sorry but it is ridiculous. I ride the bus every day. I rode a bus here and I'll ride a bus back home. My girlfriend is an example – she rides the Mobility buses five (5) days a week to and from work. Now if you guys are going to a proposal on a Value Card, where as she would ride it 60 times month, she explained to me that's \$140/month as compared to \$65/month now. Well, do the math. It doesn't make sense. I heard people talk about the Premium service out here today. Wouldn't that make sense to do a premium card and do a 30-day card and everybody would be happy. You guys will be getting the money. The first proposal raising the CM to \$10 in the next three

(3) years and not doing the Value Card and providing a premium card for those who live in a premium area and keeping the 30-day card as proposed in the first proposal - \$75 by the end of 2022. That's what I think, and you guys probably have your determinations already made. I am on the Transportation Commission for the City of Bloomington and I talked to Tim Gleason myself, and Bill and Titus about this and none of us and probably a majority of the City Council is not in favor of this at all. Thank you for your time.

14. Gerald Moncelle: I am concerned about the OLIVE route. Are there going to be any changes to any other bus routes that cover the Activity Center at Beech and Willow Street? That was my concern about any changes to replace that OLIVE service.

15. Heidi Zimmerman: Good afternoon, my name is Heidi Zimmerman. I own and operate a local agency that provides support to people with developmental disabilities and I have lived in this community for 24 years. In the beginning of this process I was aware that some para-transit riders would be paying at most \$75/month while other para-transit riders would be paying upwards of \$230/month for the exact same service just because their home is a ¼ or ½ mile in the wrong direction. I was upset about this disparity; however, I was relieved to know that Connect Transit listened to the feedback and developed the Value Card to provide a more equitable situation across all para-transit riders. As the weeks have gone on though, I just had a moment of complete disgust because here I was celebrating that the Value Cards were some kind of "win" for people with disabilities paying between \$97-\$177/per month for transportation. We are talking about the poorest and the most vulnerable people in our community being forced to pay almost \$200/month. While people who do have the ability to ride the fixed route only have to pay \$40. That is why I became sick to my stomach...knowing that we are telling people who are either born with or have developed a disability, through no fault of their own, that if they want to work a job or visit with friends and family, it is just too bad. They don't have the ability to ride the fixed route and I know that they have proposed training through LifeCIL but for many folks that I support on the para-transit route, it is just not going to be a possibility for them to ride the fixed routes. I don't know about you, but I feel like punishing the people who already face so many struggles in their day-to-day life, it is absolutely not acceptable. I have heard from Connect Transit Staff and that I definitely understand there are legitimate financial concerns here, but I come here today to ask that you help us advocate for people with low income and disabilities by making a real effort to demand local tax dollars before you go taking from the pockets of the most vulnerable citizens in our community. The Town of Normal is paying \$500,000 a year to rent all the space for their Engineering Department instead of just using the old City Hall, meanwhile we are proposing increases that would bankrupt people with disabilities and cause low income communities from transportation options. How in the world can we say to the general public of Bloomington-Normal that we cannot spare any tax dollars for transit? We must hold our local representative accountable for making better priorities because it is about making priorities. That is why I am begging you to do today, as a professional in the disability services world, I am paralyzed with fear. My job is to help people to become more independent, find gainful employment, seek out meaningful relationships and become valued members of our community, but I cannot even begin to do any of that if they cannot leave their homes. Thank you for listening.

16. Jen Morsch: I am one of the people who utilizes the para-transit service. Others have made some of the points I was going to make. I understand the need to find an equitable solution for everybody but, as others have said, I don't know that all options have been explored as far as funding. As others have said, if the Monthly Pass is done away with and somebody has to use the Value Card, yes, that will make things easier in the premium zones but as others have also said, if somebody was using the Value Card and lives in the regular zones, then if they go just one (1) place like just to and from work every week – several days a week – that is going to use up a Value Card really fast and that's not to mention going anywhere else or doing anything else. If I spent \$85 for a \$100 value, for 40 rides, a ride is one-way – so I would use that up after 20 trips and that would be just going to one place. If I spent upwards to \$120-\$140, that is a good chunk of my monthly income and almost ½ of my rent. I just don't think that this is a feasible option. What if we considered having a monthly pass available to everybody? Instead of the Value Card – what if it was that everybody could have the option of the monthly pass? I just don't, as others have said, I just don't think it is fair if somebody's working and is on disability or if somebody is just on disability, to have more than 1/3 of their income – almost ½ of their income be devoted to their transportation. I don't think it is fair and I don't think people should have to make choices between – do they go to appointments they need to go to, do they get groceries, or do they ride the bus? Do they spend money on transit? I think other solutions could be sought out and that the Councils could be approached, and we have elections coming up. I agree with the woman who said that she felt that this decision was being made hastily – I agree with that - but I think waiting to see what new Council Members might propose. We have elections next week for both Town Councils – what other options are for funding. I just think something fair needs to be chosen. Thank you.
17. Mary Knightwright: I am Mary Knightwright and I live in Normal. I was born and raised in Normal. We moved away and then my spouse retired and since my Mom still lives in town, we returned to the community in 2015, and now I am here asking you to vote against the proposed changes. We are a two-car household with three adults who drive. We manage, we share. We plan when to go shopping and how to get my Mom and us to appointments and how to keep our older son's car in the right place to get to work and to get around – we can do this, and we do, but not everyone can. As you all know, often the buses supply that solution. Buses are often the best solution for household's, for incomes, and they are the green solution and the community solution, and they must be affordable, accessible and available. Our community also includes other households who have different needs, different expenses – families where the spouses must go to work – individuals who have appointments and jobs – seniors who realize that driving is no longer the safe option for them so buses, safe reliable and accessible are our community response. We have another son who is in graduate school and where he lives, he didn't get to take a car. He walks to school, to work and for fun. He walks the campus and as his parents, on the phone we say, "Be safe, be careful, be alert – take the bus." We also got him a bright orange hat to wear in the winter and we just got him - back on Spring Break – to take bright orange vest with him when he went back in the Spring. We could do that, and we did. He can walk safely, and I hope he does but not everyone can walk to the store or to work or to appointments, and certainly not everyone should. Roads, routes, weather, time

constraint, health issues, small children dependence, accessibility concerns, and sidewalk conditions, an orange hat do not fix crooked pavement and it doesn't make it possible for a senior to get senior services in bad weather. In December, we got a phone call. Our son, the graduate student, had missed his bus or maybe it missed him or whatever or however it happened, he missed the one that would get him to the bus station to take the train to the train station to get to Chicago, to get to Normal on Amtrak. Oh, that bus. So, he called and we called him a cab. We charged the payment and said you handle the tip and next time you must make multiple stops and connections that you must make, leave earlier. We could do this, and it worked, and our son arrived safely and on time. But not everyone can do this and not everyone should. We could afford the cab and he could afford to leave on time or skip a video game or go home from work earlier – finish his other projects on the bus and on the train, but for other people from other households for other individuals – missing a bus and having to wait – either in the Illinois winter or the Illinois summer is coming – missing that could mean missing their appointment and incurring a “missing appointment fee” or missing a treatment or getting a job or not getting a job, or going to work, are very simply and very importantly, missing the community connection of attending a senior gathering or looking towards that event and what that might mean for them in the community. Please vote against the proposed changes. Vote against the fixed route changes, the increased fares, rather than reduce or deny services to our community, let us be the community. We are the community. We can be – everybody can be – and we should be. Thank you.

18. **James Knightwright:** I'm James Knightwright and I live in Normal, Illinois and I have been an advocate for public transit for at least 50 years. I am concerned about the proposed changes to Connect Transit services. I know many here today are speaking about the direct impact of these changes. I am concerned that the route to be eliminated – the OLIVE route – will affect people and access to community services. I just completed a Master's Program here at Illinois State and for a good part of that time I spent in civic engagement. I think this is a good example of a study of civic disengagement, even to the point of hold this Public Hearing at a time when many of the people affected by the changes are at work, in fact, some of the Trustees couldn't even make it here. Let me make three (3) quick points and let some other people have time to speak.

- Your responsibility is for service to the community and ridership is only one (1) measurement of that service. Another is a service and the people who need that service – the people in the community that need it most.
- Eliminating the OLIVE route which provides service to community services is a disservice to this community – to the whole community.
- Why you haven't had a fare increase in over ten (10) years, the cost of living also hasn't changed that much in those ten (10) years and many in this community have not had an increase in salary over that period. Not having raised your rates is not a justification to raise rates.

I urge you to send this proposal back to Staff to develop a better plan which serves the whole community. – Thank you.

19. Marc Tiritilli: Good afternoon everybody. I am Marc Tiritilli and thank you for holding this meeting for everybody. I want to thank you for the increase in "on-time" performance. That is commendable. So, we are hearing from a lot of people who do not want a fare increase and don't want their service adjusted and as the previous gentleman mentioned, the job of the Trustees is to represent the people – are these people being represented out here. Hopefully, they are coming out to speak for themselves, but you represent them in the vote. Hopefully we are listening here to what everybody has to say. It seems to me that these issues of fare increases and route changes are really kind of side-stepping some of the core issues here. If you look at this increase, fares represented by 11% of your total operating costs, so if you are going to increase – a 2%-3% increase total in the overall budget...In other words, if you were able to find a 2%-3% savings in operating expenses, this increase would be completely unnecessary. I would put it to you that there are plenty of opportunities to do that. I want to focus on two (2) key things that would be basically significant structural changes to the organization:

- Routes – I have lived in Chicago and depended on public transportation; I have lived in Philadelphia for five (5) years and my livelihood depended on getting to work on public transportation, so I understand the concerns about these things. But if you go to most major metropolitan areas and even smaller ones, the routes run along the major arteries. When the fire plan was proposed for all the redevelopment took place in Uptown, one of their core principals was that all roads lead to Uptown. Every bus had to originate and terminate here in this complex we are sitting in today. It is not an efficient way to run a public transportation organization. Later on, Bloomington decided to get a piece of the pie, so we have got buses originating and departing from Downtown Bloomington. Hence, the push for the transfer station. To me, this runs counter to the way buses should be running. You have heard these people saying that there are all kinds of places that you should be going. We should have East/West and North/South buses in an efficient and low-cost way to transfer between them, so people can get wherever they want to go from wherever they want to start. So, we need to fundamentally look at the routes and I think you can find that not only service improvements, but changes to the cost structure that would result in savings. The other side of this is capacity. It is abundantly clear that Connect Transit has way too much capacity. People have mentioned the empty buses. A couple of years ago when you had the route changes and you spent three (3) weeks giving away free rides on the buses they were still mostly empty. That's your baseline – that's the market availability for this service. So, to go out and purchase bus after bus after bus for this community – it has far too many seats is grossly inefficient. The usual answer is spare parts. We have these buses and we need to maintain a standardized fleet, but that just doesn't hold water. We have several different models of large buses and you are just buying electric buses, which are completely different. You already have the smaller buses so what is wrong with selling off the big buses and getting a fleet of smaller buses to cover most of the routes? They are much more efficient on fuel. For buses to be the green solution, you have to have at least seven (7) people on board at all times or you are wasting it. It less efficient on cars, and we are clearly not doing that. So, these are the

areas that we really need to focus. We need to have more efficient delivery of this service. We need to have a more logical approach to where these services are provided. If you do these things, if you are able to save 10% of your costs and expenditures, you would be able to give away bus service. If the fares represent 11% - if you could save 11% of your operating costs, you could make bus service free for the community. I think that this is sort of a distraction to the real problems of Connect Transit. I thank you for your service and I hope that you will really dig into these issues and tackle these problems. Thank you.

20. **Rebecca Cook:** I don't even live around here. I live 20 miles on the other side of Peoria, but I am here to speak for some or even a few people that live at Orlando that I have ridden on the bus with to a horrible drop-off spot by the Wal-Mart. No one can say, "Well, we are going to do something," but that's the way it's been - the efficiency. The efficiency of buses - I don't know who operates that. But the bus that sits on Orlando for several minutes empty for 15 minutes or 18 minutes, whatever it is, and sits back over on Susan Drive or back behind the Wal-Mart - that sits empty to keep the bus in line. My Mom, who runs Orlando, hopefully gets to speak as well. She has said, "Why not take that bus Uptown? Why not drop it off?" Allow people to go Uptown. I just parked in the third level of a parking deck across the street. It's downtown Normal. I go to the hospital in downtown Peoria and those hospital decks are all filled. Where I parked, that parking deck is empty. There is no one Uptown. I don't understand where things are going with the - and you don't understand where I am coming from either - why would a girl be 60 miles away, but I have ridden that bus with somebody who is paralyzed and has been paralyzed his whole life and takes the bus to Wal-Mart, back and forth, and that is about the only place he can go. He'd love to go to Meijer. I think things changed years ago. Somebody I brought up the other day said, "Oh, well, that bus never ran. That bus never ran more than 30 minutes." It did run for 30 minutes - there was a service that came in over in that area but now it doesn't - it runs on the hour and he doesn't take the Mobility Bus with a lift, he takes a regular bus that everybody else gets on. But when he gets over there, it is a muddy mess. There isn't even a pad of concrete that you go across. So, when he gets back to his apartment, how does he wipe off the wheels of his wheelchair? He has to wait around in those elements out there and to show up on-time. The bus that didn't show up on time the other day as we were waiting out there for the meeting - it showed up at 1111 U.S. 51, and maybe it was a deterrent on where to go, but we waiting out there in the parking lot for the bus to show up and there was an excuse like - "Well, the Maintenance Department had to bring that bus over." Why not plan it so that it was there so we weren't waiting outside. Yes, it was 45 or 48 degrees, maybe it wasn't even that high, but we waited outside for the bus to receive tootsie rolls. There was a table with a basket of Tootsie Rolls and they had to take down the table for everybody to get on and there wasn't even enough room for everybody to get on the bus. So, we got on the bus at 6 minutes after and we were off the bus at 5:37 pm. It was a 30-minute meeting. I have no more to say. I do have this lady's comments that I said I would gladly read or go over, but I think she will probably say it best when you guys listen. You know I think the Cubs won in 2016 and they didn't print like they were going to win the World Series, but this already says that you discontinued it.

21. Karen Cook: I'm Karen Cook, and I am the Manager at Orlando/Northbrook Estates. We have 116 families that range from 18 years of age with a newborn baby to 90 years old. I have been there 15 years going on 16 years. It has the worst crime rate that you can even imagine – it was a ghetto 15 years ago. They begged me to take that property and I was terrified. We have worked hard and made it a village and the bus has been one of the major blessings of that property. When I got there, we had 32 units that are senior and disabled in the big building and they are all drawing minimum Social Security basically. A few have been able to work through the years and they have a larger Social Security. The other 76 families in the family units, there was one (1) family that worked out of the 76. The others were at zero income and zero rent. I don't want a star, I don't want anything. Those people changed things when they finally got some faith in themselves and others, and that bus route was part of that. They helped turn that property from the criminal aspect that it was because there were so many people on zero rent. We went down to the point where I only had 20 of those 76 families that were not working and of that 20, 10-15 of those were drawing Social Security/Disability and raising their children. They had an income, they just weren't working, and they weren't using the bus forward. I was only handing out a few utility checks which I know you don't understand and so forth, but when people have zero income, they get a utility check to help pay their light bills and so forth. I was handing out 20 of them until 2015. Somewhere around 2015 when the bus routes changed, when everything changed. When my people couldn't go, and they gave up their jobs because they couldn't get there on time. We had the GREEN A, and anybody can tell you whatever they want, but that bus did not come on every hour, it came on every half hour – quarter til – quarter after, and it was full and yes, we had a Redbird bus and the GREEN A did go to Heartland and it picked up students. Sometimes my residents, handicapped or not, standing in 104 degrees with no shade tree. By the way, it stopped at all six (6) buildings in my property on our paved road that I've never complained about that we have invested \$60-\$70,000 worth of concrete repairs in that ten years because of the bus weights. There are no semis out there, but we don't complain because we are supplying a home for people who need low-income housing. That bus came every half hour and it was full. Then came the REDBIRD bus. I have a lot of business taking care of Orlando right on the bus stop. I will tell you though, it eased up and people didn't have to stand and wait for the next bus. Now I'm lucky if 10 people a day get on that OLIVE because it goes nowhere but Wal-Mart and you can only buy milk and bread so many times. When you are standing there 23 years old with a child with a fever, and you are trying to get to that hospital to that Prompt Care, to the Public Aid office and try to get there and get back before school gets out while your children are in school. Our children had to go to school down on the east end of Raab – the bus didn't even go over there. I have driven so many parents over there because their child started running a fever or started vomiting and they couldn't get there - they can't afford a car...(inaudible). Now you are dropping the OLIVE route which almost connects them. Number one – I'm not wanting an apartment complex or a business or car dealership – it doesn't matter. If I don't have sales and you don't have sales, there is nobody on your bus – there is nobody buying tickets. It's empty and you need to fix that. Don't expect these people to pay your bills, to fix your route, you fix your route.

Chairman Mike McCurdy then reminded the attendees they should hold their comments to the purpose of the Public Hearing which was the fare increase and the changes on the OLIVE route. The Chairman stated that the comments being made are straying away from our focus a little bit here.

22. Joel Studebaker: Hello, my name is Joel Studebaker and I am a bus rider. I do not have a vehicle, so I ride the bus to get to work, the store, to get to everywhere I go in Bloomington-Normal. I am fortunate in a sense that I can afford Lyft or Uber when I need one, when I miss the bus or when I am going somewhere that would require an hour and a half or more on the bus, but Connect Transit is how I get around. I live on the OLIVE route and the PINK route at Shelbourne and Larry(?). For me, the OLIVE line is what I call the "Ft. Jesse Express" as it takes me to the Ft. Jesse Café, but for my neighbor who lives next door, it is how she gets to work and for other neighbors, it is how they get to the Wal-Mart transfer center to transfer to the PURPLE line, which takes significantly longer when instead, need to rely on the PINK to get into Uptown and then a RED to get to Wal-Mart, which now will be more complicated and leaves more room for error. It makes it more difficult to get to work. Today you are considering two (2) things; one is to eliminate the OLIVE route, which is certainly not ideal. The route is not great, but it is what we have got. I am very disappointed that the proposal before you today is not to improve the route so that the people who can access it can actually get to where they need to go in an efficient way but is instead – to eliminate it. The ridership problem is not fault of the people who depend on the OLIVE line. It is a problem created by a badly designed route. The second thing you are considering today are fare increases, fare increases who depend on Connect Transit more than anybody who have fewer options than anybody else. It is easy to justify both of these things because of a financial predicament that Connect Transit is in. I understand that. It is also easy, as I know, as a Member of the Board, to believe that you have no other choice, except for the fact that you do, because you are not only hear to vote yes or no on what Staff presents to you, you are also hear to advocate for your riders and to advocate for those who will be your riders, either when they age or their needs change or they just decide they are done with the car, like I did. So today, I would ask that you do a few things: (1) I hope that you postpone this vote and then over the next month you seek additional funding sources from our two Townships, Normal Town Council and the Bloomington City Council. I am disappointed to see very few City Council candidates and current Council Members here but I hope that many of them will support increasing the amount of support that Connect Transit gets every year; and (2) I hope that when you come back to this issue you will instead of considering two separate fare structures for Premium service and Connect Mobility users that you consider consolidating those. It may not require you to give similar service to all of those riders, but you can decide to anyway. Consolidate that and offer a 30-day unlimited pass to every single user who rides on Connect Mobility and ask the local governments who can fund it to do so. It may not be popular, and it may be difficult, but it can be done. Finally, I hope that in the future when you engage in these listening sessions, when you come to the Public, that you do a better job of making sure you are not only hearing from the people who can make it to your sessions and from the people who already use your service. Do better in the future at making sure that you hear from people who do not use the service today because that is not convenient, probably because they are not capable or because they cannot afford it. I worry that you have missed too many people in this process.

23. Laurie Bell: Hi, my name is Laurie Bell. First of all, I want to say thank you to people who have different kinds of abilities for providing such leadership. When you see people in Washington D.C. at the forefront fighting for all of us to have health care, there are people with disabilities leading the way. When it comes to public transportation, there are people with disabilities leading the way. We are so indebted to people and people can speak and have spoken eloquently for if they do not have a transportation route, especially if people cannot afford to take the public transportation, what it will mean for them and their lives if they have a disability...(inaudible)...distance to the bus, they can speak about that, but as a person who has my abilities, what I want to say is that every single time a person does not attend church because they cannot get there because of public transportation inadequacy, it is our community that is diminished. It is our church community that is diminished. Every single time a person with a disability does not go and attend a community meeting or go to a restaurant or go to a movie or meet with a friend or do anything in our community, it is our community that is diminished. The second thing that I want to say is that I was going to take the bus here that we are running here today from my house, but it only runs once an hour and right as I was leaving to get the bus, my son called and for him to call in the middle of the day, I knew it must have been something important, and I had to make the decision between taking that phone call for my son – missing the bus – and it cost me \$7 to get here. I'm getting text messages from my wife, who is messaging me from work now as she is off from work now – now I've got to figure out my way home. Thirdly, the U.S. Report on climate change that came out in December, and I know there is an upcoming report on carbon emissions, the latest report on carbon emissions in McLean County, is about to be released. The smart money says that the communities who are being proactive to get into public transportation and out of high carbon emission private transportation, are the ones – not in 50 years – not in 30 years – but in 10 years – that is going to be the communities that make now -who made these decisions now – and the communities that went the other way that way – in the next 10 years is going to be decided. So, for those three (3) reasons; (i) inclusion; (ii) my own experience of the difficulty of trying to be a bus rider; and (iii) dealing with carbon emissions, I would really like us to become a leader in public transportation. Follow the people with disabilities who are already being our leaders. Thank you so much.

Chairman Mike McCurdy stated that this is a Public Comment session for anyone who would like to make a comment and if you have not spoken or perhaps you have anything additional to say, please do. Chairman Mike McCurdy stated that our Public Hearing is now concluded as there were no additional Public Comments made by the attendees at the Public Hearing.

Chairman McCurdy then asked the Trustees for a Motion for to adjourn the Public Hearing Session of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees.

Trustee Judy Buchanan moved to adjourn the Public Hearing Session of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees, seconded by Trustee Monica Bullington.

AYE: All.
NAY: None.

The Board voted unanimously to adjourn the Public Hearing of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees at 4:55 p.m.


Jill Bower - Connect Transit Board Clerk


John Bowman - Secretary

