

**CONNECT TRANSIT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

MINUTES OF MONTHLY BOARD MEETING - MARCH 26, 2019

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

The monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held at the Town of Normal Council Chambers, 11 Uptown Circle, Normal, Illinois 61761 on March 26, 2019 at 5:10 p.m.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Secretary John Bowman
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

The monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was called to order by Chairman Mike McCurdy at 5:10 p.m. Roll call was taken.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were three (3) public comments.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Thalia Klunick for public comment.

Thalia Klunick: Ms. Thalia Klunick stated that an email was sent to all of the Trustees, but she did not believe it was received by them. She then read a written statement directed to the Board.

My name is Thalia Klunick, I am the President for our Union ATU Local 752 here at Connect Transit. I have worked at Connect Transit for 12-plus years. In those years I have learned so much and I am learning more and more every day. I have ridden public transit almost my whole life, growing up in Decatur, Illinois, and my family depended on public transportation to get to school, work, shopping and a multitude of other places. When I started at Connect, they gave me route sheets to learn. I was surprised at the places the buses went to including parking lots, nursing homes, shopping centers, etc.

In recent years we have endured many changes. Some for the good. Management and this Board has a duty to this community to do what is right and fair for all, as do I. It would be wrong of me not to speak up at this point. We provide a public service as do Police, Ambulance, and Fire departments. When the police don't get calls to certain areas of our cities they don't just stop servicing those areas, they still patrol those areas. Same with Ambulance and Fire Departments. We provide a service that is just as important. When the Board approved the route changes a few years ago, we had great hopes of making this a great transportation service and we thought that with all the experience of our drivers, some who have been here 40 plus years, we thought that management would want - at least to hear what we had to say in certain areas where we have expertise and corporate memory. But to no avail. Sure, they had meetings, so some could voice their opinions, but they did not listen. We told management the Olive Route needs to go to uptown Normal, it needs to go to Sam's Club/Menards area like the old Pink route. I personally know that passengers are getting off the Red and Purple Routes at Walmart in Normal to make the long trek to Sam's and Menards because that is where they work, and some are in wheel chairs. I challenge any of you to try that for five (5) days a week for a month in the middle of winter. This Olive Route has the time to accommodate these changes. Why not try it? Why just completely cut it out without even giving it a chance? The people proposing the changes I must believe have good intentions, but do not have the experience within the Transportation industry. Are they only looking at the numbers? The people who ride our buses, they need us, and not just in the areas where we have lots of ridership. We provide a service. I have watched this Transit Board rubber stamp everything that comes to them from management. We provide a service, or do we? Thank you.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Sarah Breeden for public comment.

Sarah Breeden: Ms. Breeden stated she had also emailed the Board of Trustees over the weekend. I would like to highlight something that I heard from the Board today during the Public Hearing that I think is important. Everyone here is talking about their need to use public transportation and you made it clear it was not a discussion and that you would not be answering questions, but you did as a point of pride, make sure that we all know that you ride the bus and that members here ride the bus, but I also got the distinct impression that you do that when it makes sense, not for everything that you need to do like the people here are talking about. So, if it is convenient to ride the bus or if you haven't figured out a way to share a vehicle between other drivers in your household, you ride the bus. These people here today are people who ride the bus for everything that they do and do not have the alternatives that I am assuming most of you have and that I know that I have. I think that is an important distinction that as you are making decisions, you are not really making decisions as fellow bus riders, you are making decisions as people who have the power over the low-income folks in our community and the disabled in our community who are going to be penalized even further and will make it harder to be poor and even harder to be disabled than it already is.

Chairman Mike McCurdy recognized Sarah Grammer for public comment.

Sarah Grammer: Ms. Grammer stated that she is a Normal Township Supervisor and was in attendance today for many reasons. Not only do I run the Assistance Program out of our Township Hall in Mulberry, but I am also over the *ARC Senior Center* on Willow/Beech. I have heard from a lot of

seniors who like coming to the senior center and are concerned about the future possibility of disability and/or future loss of the ability to drive their own personal transportation and still need that viable socialization and the ability to get out and socialize with other seniors regardless of their ability to drive, so I am advocating to keep the OLIVE route. I am also here as a person who runs general and emergency systems for low-income people in Normal. I just want to share a brief story. I didn't know this population very well when I took this job. One of the first interactions I had that really shook me up about transit was about three (3) months on the job. We require people who receive general assistance at times to be a part of a work-fare program which means that they volunteer back into the community several hours a week up to six hours. There was a young man on our program who was assigned to Home Sweet Home Ministry for three (3) hours a day, twice a week. He lives in the Orlando/Northbrook apartments and it was taking him an hour to get to Home Sweet Home Ministries where he volunteered 3 hours and it took him 1 hour to get back home. Once he became employed on an evening shift, I told him good news that he wouldn't have to be part of the work-fare program anymore, work your job and you are going to be able to income out of our program within the next thirty (30) days you will be off the work-fare program and he asked not to take him off the program. This is 24 hours of your month back and you are giving with transit time – 8 hours a week – so why would you want to keep doing this? He said because Connect gives him the \$32 bus pass on top of his benefit money through this volunteer time and he could not maintain this job if he doesn't have the bus pass. He did not have cash and wouldn't be able to ride the bus without the pass. We ended up giving the pass on top of his benefits anyway because I could not sleep at night thinking that we were forcing him to do an extra 8 hours a week of community service time just to get a \$32 bus pass. I want you to think about people in our community who are living in conditions that are this desperate. My office works with people who have zero-\$500 a month worth of income individually. They do not have the luxury of paying more to ride. Many friends in the room here who are disabled, they too are on fixed income, about \$700 a month. They do not have the ability to pay more. In a town this wealthy and affluent we can come up with other ways to better fund our transit. I am a big supporter of public transit and I think it is very important to a community. We would love to see it grow and want to advocate for better funding for you. Thank you.

There were no additional public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular Meeting of February 26, 2019
2. Disbursements for the month February 2019
3. Financial Report for month of February 2019
4. Capital and Self Insurance Reserve Fund Balances for month of February 2019
5. Monthly Statistical Report for month of February 2019

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

There was no 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 of Fixed Route and Connect Mobility Fare Structure FY2020-FY2023

Chairman Mike McCurdy brought to the Board the *Recommendation of Fixed Route and Connect Mobility Fare Structure FY2020-FY2023* and asked for a Motion and a Second for the *Recommendation*. Chairman McCurdy recognized Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse.

Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse asked the Board to consider amending the Motion which was on the floor by amending the implementation date of the *Recommendation of Fixed Route and Connect Mobility Fare Structure FY2020-FY2023* until October 1, 2019, in order for Staff to continue to look for other sources of revenue. The Motion, as amended by Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse, was seconded by Trustee Monica Bullington.

DISCUSSION

Vice-Chairman Whitehouse stated that anyone on this Board, when listening to the comments we have heard today from the public, it is really hard to hear and not take these comments very seriously. Vice-Chairman Whitehouse then stated to the public in attendance that he was not an elected representative, but an appointed Trustee of this Board. Continuing, he stated that as a Board Member, it is our responsibility to look at the financial stability of the organization and to balance the Board's core beliefs as our customers are Connect's core partners. Vice-Chairman Whitehouse stated that the Board greatly values your ridership, but as one of the Trustees, he has to take a stance in order to make certain that the system is financially stable and can afford to operate down the road and that this is why he is amending the Motion and hoped that the Board will agree; however, he wanted to be clear that the Board would only be pushing back the date of implementation because if the Board cannot find other resources, we as the Trustees, will have to find and/or implement new ways to pay for this service. Vice-Chairman Whitehouse stated that he knew this change would be hard and pulls on everyone's heartstrings, but as a Trustee for the financial system, he did not see any other way.

Trustee Julie Hile stated that she is very much hearing the comments in the room and stated that she liked the idea of a delayed implementation and that perhaps by drawing on the delayed implementation, the delay may create some leverage for the Board to find another funding formula. Trustee Hile continued by stating that the Board had been talking quite a bit over the last few meetings

about the need for a stronger, more sustainable and reliable revenue stream. She continued by stating that today's community conversations endorse some of that conversation that the Board has been discussing. Trustee Hile stated that she is also mindful that the Board will be able to use the ensuing months to challenge Connect Transit as an organization and inviting the community into a better understanding and use of the system as it currently exists. Trustee Hile continued by stating to the public in attendance that we, as a Board, have more and different kinds of information than you do, and she stated that she was also hearing some confusion about how the system is supposed to work and she believed this conversation provides a good opportunity for us to improve potential ridership – potentially interface between fixed routes and Connect Mobility. Trustee Hile stated that she is a person who works in transit across the United States and travels for work to many places where she is a choice rider in some pretty sophisticated systems. She believes that as a community we have some challenges before us. It is one thing for us who are able-bodied to speak on behalf of those who are less fortunate than we are – differently abled than we are – choice ridership can help us create a funding stream that will also support this community. It sounds like we think it is something that is way down the line, but it would be very interesting if as a community during the course of the next few months to see what choice ridership looks like and feels like and how that might transform the system so that Isaac and his Staff have more resources to work with.

Trustee John Bowman stated that the marginal cost to add an additional rider to our routes today is virtually zero. It doesn't cost any more to put another rider on the bus. We do need more choice riders. He believes the challenge that we face is that our route structures do not necessarily get to all those choice riders who would be out there and might have an interest in riding the bus. He stated that he had been concerned for some time about our fare revenue recovery and personally performed an analysis to get a sense of how that is trended over time. Unfortunately, our revenue has tended to go down with the new routes so that we are 2.8 under where we were with the old routes. That tells me that we do have some work ahead of us to reach the folks who were perhaps riding the bus before and currently are not and bring them back into the system. We need those people and the fare revenue because my preferences for increasing fare revenue is not to increase the price of the fares. Trustee Bowman stated that his preference would be to have enough riders - lift the vote, and not have to do this. Alternatively, if we could add riders as opposed to increasing fares, he believed that should be the goal of the Board and as a system.

General Manager Isaac Thorne stated that farebox revenue has gone down. In FY2008, it was 16.72. It has essentially gone higher every single year and that is because of increasing expenses. Every year a transit agency must make a choice to either decrease expenses; or increase fares; or increase ridership. Transit agencies have to make one of these choices every year to keep the farebox recovery ratio flat.

Trustee Judy Buchanan thanked the public in attendance and stated that she wholeheartedly agreed with her colleagues and the comments they have made. She continued by stating that there has been a considerable investment of capital, time, and energy of the people sitting in this room and by others, to create the transit system that we have today. Connect has adapted and become much more reliable, trying to add value and we have tried to make it safer and more efficient to provide some access. Yes, we do hear you – that we do not have access everywhere as everyone would like. That is not easy for us to deal with. Trustee Buchanan stated that we are more than just sensitive to those needs, suggesting

that we continue to build on this investment and use the next three (3) months and even months beyond to continue to inform ourselves and all of our community to the greatest extent we can. Trustee Buchanan stated that as she listened, it is disheartening in some respects, not only that we are missing the need that you are sharing with us, but that there is so much mis-information. She continued to state that she was not pointing fingers or laying any blame but believes that we all need to do a better job in keeping the public discourse going to be more informed as transit Trustees, Staff, public and riders. She hoped that we could mount that effort with the community's support in the next few months and beyond.

Trustee Julie Hile stated that she wanted to say that she was grateful for the comments and all that has been shared and the pressure that the Board feels today could turn into something good and positive. She also stated that understands our fiscal responsibility to the organization but when mixing that with the community, there needs to be a balance. Allowing you, as the local community to give us pressure, can be used as leverage to give us more options moving forward.

Chairman Mike McCurdy stated that he agreed with the comments heard from Trustees and welcomed the opportunity to meet with Town Manager Pam Reece, City Manager Tim Gleason and Sarah Grammer, to explore any additional funding opportunities for transit in the community. The Chairman continued by stating that he believes the delay was a good idea and was willing to support the Motion, as amended, and also agreed to what Trustee Whitehouse had said about fiscal responsibility as Trustees of the organization, as it was one of the reasons he was in favor of a fare increase. Continuing, Chairman McCurdy stated that the Staff had also worked hard to provide fare-capping and for those who pay one fare at a time will ride free once they reach the \$36 of a monthly pass, which some people could pay for in advance. I think that is movement in the right direction. Also, the Chairman stated that Connect Mobility users who also choose a fixed route will now ride fixed routes for free and qualified low-income riders can still ride at half-price. The Staff worked successfully with advocates to establish a Connect Mobility Value Card for all tiers of para-transit service, providing discounts of up to 15%. Chairman McCurdy stated that Trustee Bowman has said that we need to attract more riders. We are seeing more riding – and I don't know if those are actual people, but we are seeing an increased use of the service. Chairman McCurdy stated that Connect has seen a 9% year-to-date increase in ridership and a 12% increase in ridership from February to February. Continuing, he stated that as other Trustees have pointed out, the on-time service has dramatically increased and with a reminder to all, it has also been twelve (12) years since a fixed route fare increase and hearing Rob Ballantini talking about expenses going up. Connect's expenses go up as well, so it is necessary for us to try to figure out how we can continue to run this system and be fair about it all at the same time and it is a difficult line to walk. Chairman McCurdy stated that he was hopeful that delaying the implementation of the fare increase will give Connect an opportunity to talk about additional sources of funding, but keeping in mind that we have to work with the numbers that we have in hand today and work within reality and work with real and reliable numbers, not working with what we wish or hope will happen in the future. I have great hope for the system and would like to see it expand, see additional frequency, but that all takes funding. Chairman McCurdy stated that he was very pleased to see the level of engagement from the community. However, he also wanted everyone to realize that this is not an election year issue, but a year-round issue and that everyone needs to stay engaged to advocate for reliable and stable sources of funding for transit in Bloomington-Normal.

There was no further discussion.

Chairman Mike McCurdy restated the Motion as amended by Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse and asked that the Board now vote on the Motion as amended which was on the floor; moving and/or restating the implementation date of the Recommendation of Fixed Route and Connect Mobility Fare Structure FY2020-FY2023 to October 1, 2019.

A rollcall vote was taken.

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Monica Bullington
Trustee Julie Hile

NAY: Trustee John Bowman

The Amended Motion was passed by a vote by the Trustees, 5-1. The Recommendation of Fixed Route and Connect Mobility Fare Structure FY2020-FY2023 as proposed to the Board with the implementation of the new fare structure to take effect on October 1, 2019, was approved by the Board.

Recommendation of Fixed Route Changes

Chairman McCurdy brought the next item on the *Agenda* to the Board: Recommendation of Fixed Route Changes and then asked General Manager Isaac Thorne to comment on the *Recommendation* that was on the floor.

General Manager Thorne stated that the recommended route changes would eliminate the OLIVE route with the YELLOW route still providing service to the Orlando/Northbrook area and the PINK route will still provide service to Beech Street and ARC. Savings from the OLIVE route will be used to increase service on the RED and LIME routes with the creation of the RED Express and the LIME Express. The RED Express will run Monday-Friday from 7:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., and customers will continue to have access to Wal-Mart and Ft. Jesse Medical Center. The LIME Express would operate from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. A fundamental requirement to use fixed route service is traveling to a bus stop. Many areas throughout Bloomington-Normal are within a standard 5-10-minute walk to bus service. We also know that customers traveling on these bus stops, even while they are well utilized that customers who live in the Orlando/Northbrook area are traveling to the bus stop on Main to ride the YELLOW route. The LIME and RED Express will increase service on the two (2) most utilized routes in the bus network. Customers have stated in two (2) separate rider surveys that frequency and on-time performance is the most important service to them. Frequency does matter. Connect ridership has increased 10% in the last 19 months while national peer agencies and regional agencies, ridership has decreased almost 5% in that same period. General

Manager Thorne asked the Board to approve the recommended route adjustments and stated that he would answer any questions that the Board may have.

Chairman Mike McCurdy then asked the Board for a Motion and a second on the Recommendation of Fixed Route Changes. Trustee Judy Buchanan made the Motion to approve the Recommendation of Fixed Route Changes, which was seconded by Trustee Monica Bullington.

DISCUSSION

Trustee John Bowman asked the Board for a reasonable explanation as to why additional service on routes that are not at capacity are needed and to acquire that service by taking service away from an area that needs it? The RED and the LIME both have 30-minute service and they run three (3) buses every hour. We do not need that capacity on those routes today. Sure, it would be convenient for those who happen to live on the route to have 15-minute frequency, but that is not taking care of the rest of the community. Trustee Bowman stated that this was not a good use of Connect Transit resources and was not a good route proposal and felt that it needed to be revised.

General Manager Thorne stated that the RED and LIME are the most utilized routes. They have over 40 boardings per revenue hour during peak service on Monday-Friday. We are not looking at this from a "total utilization" of a 40-foot bus. We know that when we have increased frequency on routes, the increase in frequency drives ridership. When we decreased the frequency on the TAN and BROWN routes, year-to-date, they are down 11% and 13%, respectively. We know that frequency does matter and drives ridership.

Trustee Bowman stated that he would add that coverage matters as well and we have not had that discussion effectively that one of our commenters made today to share with them a percentage of what those should be: coverage vs. ridership routes. Through the route structure, I think that we have turned our backs on areas of the community and by not providing service to them anymore. As a result, our ridership in comparison to the prior years is down. When the new routes were introduced in FY2017, ridership dropped from 26.3 "trips" per revenue hour in the previous year to 19.73 in FY2017. We have seen a slow rebound in ridership, but we are still under the numbers we were at in 2016 and prior. That tells me, along with the most frequently heard complaint that I hear about the system from members of the community about driving empty buses, we have service that needs to be adjusted to get into places where it can do more good and not eliminating routes and putting additional service on routes that are already well-served. Trustee Bowman stated that he understands, but the 40-foot buses do seat 42 people and I think that is adequate by what we are hearing today.

General Manager Thorne responded that there has been no agency in the last few years that has had a rebound in ridership to the 2015-2016 level, including us. I know that Champaign-Urbana were doing 13M trips in 2014-2015, and now they are doing \$11M. They are still down year-to-date by 4%-5%. We are the only agency in Illinois that has had a 9% increase in ridership in the last year.

Chairman McCurdy commented - do we not know the general percentage of coverage versus frequency?

General Manager Thorne stated coverage is 40% and frequency is 60%.

Trustee Bowman asked how that is determined and have we had a dialogue with this community? He stated that he has heard from several folks that Connect is not reaching out to them enough to find out what their desires are about coverage vs. frequency and he did not think the Board should be approving these kinds of changes until we have a better grasp of what the service in this community needs to be.

Chairman McCurdy disagreed and stated that Connect went through that process in 2016 with a *Comprehensive Operational Analysis* which looked at the entire community and performed a detailed analysis of the community and (i) where the service would be; (ii) where the population centers are; and (iii) how this service would be best put on the street efficiently. Chairman McCurdy stated that he believed it had been a proven winner with the ridership that we have seen since then.

Trustee Bowman stated that when you have buses sitting idle for 10-12 minutes at an end point and that happens at multiple points in this system today, it is an under-utilization of resources when those minutes that add up to hours could be used to perform productive service. Those are the kinds of things that we need to be addressing instead of looking at route counts to determine what route can we cut in the next round of cuts, in order to have more frequency on fewer and fewer routes.

Chairman McCurdy stated that he is voting in favor of the service realignment and fixed route changes and that believed for transit to be successful in this community it needs to serve riders near and along corridors, such as the RED and the LIME routes. Chairman McCurdy continued to state that he believed it is an irresponsible use of resources to put service on a street that is not well-utilized which is what Connect is seeing with the OLIVE route. Continuing, he stated that today we heard from people advocating that service be maintained to serve IDES or the ARC along the OLIVE route; however, the OLIVE route averages that only 1 rider per day uses the stop nearest the *Illinois Department of Employment Security* and averages 1.25 customers per day using the stop nearest the ARC. He stated that he did not see that as an efficient use of the resources available to Connect Transit. Chairman McCurdy continued by stating that during this process, the Staff and the Board have been characterized about not caring about individual riders and were only concerned about the bottom line, which is patently untrue. Chairman McCurdy stated he had attended three (3) of the community engagement sessions and witnessed Staff talking with customers as long as they wanted to talk about the proposed changes. Continuing, he stated this isn't about the OLIVE route or about the bottom line or about the opportunity to reduce the budget, but providing more and convenient frequent service on the street where people will continue to utilize it and using that approach has worked for Connect Transit and then he cited the ridership numbers again – a little over 9% year-to-date from July 1 to today and 12% February to February because frequency works and it does matter. People will gravitate towards more frequent service and he believed this is a great opportunity as Trustee Hile said – to make this a starting point for further conversation about funding and not the "end" of a conversation about how this system is funded and how we can find a reliable, effective and sustainable source of funding for transit because

there are pressures ahead. Board Members are aware of this pressure and we are going to have to find additional sources of funding to maintain the service we currently have in outlying fiscal years. Chairman McCurdy closed his statement by stating that he hopes that everyone that attended this meeting will continue to advocate for their transit system and will be as engaged as they were today as Connect continues to look for sources of funding.

There was no further discussion.

A rollcall vote was taken:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Monica Bullington
Trustee Julie Hile

NAY: Trustee John Bowman

The Recommendation of Fixed Route Changes as proposed was approved by the Board of Trustees by a vote of 5-1.

Recommendation of Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse's Travel Expenses

Chairman McCurdy moved to the next item on the Agenda, Recommendation of Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse's Travel Expenses for Trustee Whitehouse's travel expenses and attendance at *One Voice* in Washington, D.C.

General Manager Isaac Thorne stated that it is a state requirement that all Trustee's expenses be approved by the Board by a rollcall vote. He then asked the Board to approve the Vice-Chairman's expenses of \$2,619.32.

Trustee John Bowman moved to approve the Recommendation of Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse's Travel Expenses, seconded by Chairman Mike McCurdy.

A rollcall vote was then taken:

AYE: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Secretary John Bowman
Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Monica Bullington
Trustee Julie Hile

ABSTAINED: Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

NAY: None.

Motion carried, and the Recommendation of Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse's Travel Expenses was approved by the Board of Trustees with Vice-Chairman abstaining from the vote.

Chairman McCurdy then moved to the next item on the *Agenda*.

Recommendation of Cash Farm Lease

Chairman McCurdy stated that a *Recommendation of Cash Farm Lease* is next on the *Agenda* for approval by the Board. The Chairman added that this Lease is for farm land owned by Connect and located around the Connect Transit facility and then asked the Board for a Motion.

Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse moved that the *Recommendation of Cash Farm Lease* be approved by the Board, seconded by Monica Bullington.

DISCUSSION

General Manager Thorne stated that this is a one (1) year Lease for farm land that is owned by Connect Transit in which the Lease Term will begin on April 1, 2019 through March 21, 2020. He continued by stating that last year Connect increased the per acre amount to \$200 which will remain unchanged and that revenue brought in from this land Lease on a yearly basis is \$1,000 and asked that the Board approve the Lease.

Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse stated that sometimes farmers want longer-termed leases, so they see a return on investment with the costs put into the farming. He encouraged Staff to talk to the Lessor to see if he would be willing to put more into the property; such as fertilizer, etc., to sign a longer Lease term.

General Manager Thorne explained that this year and last year, the Lease term was only a one (1) year agreement because Connect is uncertain what will transpire with the land that Connect leases for farming and added that later this year we may ask for a 2-year Lease. General Manager Thorne reminded the Board that there is the potential for this land to be used for solar panels or Connect may lease the acreage to a company that will place solar panels on the property which will give Connect a much higher return.

There was no further discussion and the Board voted on the *Recommendation*.

AYE: All.

NAY: None.

Motion carried, and the Recommendation of Cash Farm Lease was approved by the Board of Trustees.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Update on Connect Transit Audit Policy

General Manager Thorne stated that Connect contacted Clifton Allen Larson to confirm that it's Peoria office will perform Connect's financial audit this year. They agreed. Connect will not be using the Champaign office for its audit. Connect will have a new Principal and Manager for the upcoming financial audit from the Peoria office. In addition, General Manager Thorne stated that he will be bringing to the Board at the next monthly meeting for approval a Policy that Connect will limit the use of the same auditing firm to a period of five (5) consecutive years.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse thanked all the participants that had come to the Public Hearing. He encouraged those in attendance to come to Connect Transit meetings more often to talk about the things that we are doing right and so that you know we are working on your behalf. It would be nice from time to time to have people come throughout the year and either say what they do like or share concerns throughout the year and not wait until we are proposing changes. Again, he thanked the attendees for their participation.

Trustee Julie Hile echoed Vice-Chairman Whitehouse's gratitude for the attendees who came to help work through these issues, adding that the Board would appreciate their help with outreach. We have driven buses into neighborhoods to have listening and discussion sessions where no one attended. We have done what we know to do and any ideas you have for us and recommendations you can make in helping us with the outreach, the Board would be very interested.

Vice-Chairman Ryan Whitehouse also thanked General Manager Isaac Thorne and his Staff for all of the work that went into this process and for taking the time to listen to the people. As a Trustee, I value all that you have done.

Chairman McCurdy agreed with Trustee Whitehouse and stated that a lot of work went into all of the proposals, putting together the Transit budget and looking at how all the pieces fit together was not an easy job.

Trustee Pam Reece stated that on behalf of the Town of Normal, she wanted to clarify a reference that was made earlier in terms of the Town's share of funding for Connect Transit. On an annual basis, the Town of Normal contributes about \$850,000 to Connect Transit and approximately \$400,000 goes to the Operating Budget and the balance as she understands it, goes to funding the capital portion of the Connect Transit budget. The capital portion funds buses and improvements to transfer stations, etc. She then directed a question to Connect's General Manager and stated that some of the comments we heard this evening were that those who were employed and working, were unable to attend the Public Hearings and had no opportunity to share their opinion, so I would presume there is an opportunity for people to share their opinion if they are unable to attend a Public Hearing. Can you explain?

General Manager Isaac Thorne stated that prior to the Public Hearing held today, Connect held 12 Community Engagement Sessions and also held other Sessions at ARC and LifeCIL. There were 14 total Sessions of which 12 were public Community Engagement Sessions available for public attendance and to give feedback.

Chairman McCurdy added that there was always an opportunity to share your thoughts with Connect Transit via email or simply by calling Connect Transit.

Trustee Judy Buchanan stated that to follow-up on what Pam Reece had said, regarding the amount of "inaccurate" information, these type of forums as you either email or call or contacting the Staff at Connect Transit will help dismy some of the false or inaccurate information. With our decisions as a Board, we must deal with facts that are accurate and to the extent that you can, help us with that. It will serve as well in terms of providing services that are good for you as well.

Chairman McCurdy thanked the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington for the financial support provided by each as it is vital to the system and as a Board, we look forward to having future conversations regarding transit.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Trustee Ryan Whitehouse moved to adjourn, seconded by Trustee Judy Buchanan.

AYE: All

NAY: None

Motion carried, and the Board of Trustees adjourned its regular monthly meeting at 5:50 p.m.



Jill Bower – Board Clerk



Secretary - John Bowman

