

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
AND PUBLIC HEARING**

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

**March 12, 2019
4:30 p.m.**

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

The Special Board Meeting of 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 12, 2019 at 4:30 p.m.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Chairman Mike McCurdy
Secretary John Bowman
Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Monica Bullington
Trustee Julie Hile – via tele-conference

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Vice Chairman Ryan Whitehouse - Excused

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

STAFF PRESENT: General Manager, Isaac Thorne
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director
Martin Glaze, Interim Chief Operating Officer/Operations Manager
Shelly Snider, Operations Supervisor
Brendan O’Neill, Community Outreach Coordinator
Jill Bower, Board Clerk

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE: There were 19 members of the Public in attendance.

Chairman Mike McCurdy called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. Roll call was taken.

Chairman McCurdy welcomed the public to the Special Board Meeting 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 that are being considered by the Connect Transit Board. Chairman McCurdy stated that the Board will not enter into a dialog during the Public Hearing, but the Board was there to listen to the public’s comments regarding the two (2) Proposals. Chairman

McCurdy stated that a vote on the Proposals would not be held at this meeting because of Trustee absences. The Chairman continued to state that another Public Hearing and vote on the Proposals will be held on March 26, 2019 at 3:30 p.m. at the Town of Normal Council Chambers. The Chairman stated that between March 12th and March 26th, there would be additional engagement sessions on March 15th at noon at the Connect Transit Offices; March 18th at 5-6:00 p.m. at the University Center Parking Lot; March 25th at 5-6:00 p.m. at Uptown Station; and another Public Hearing. A vote by the Board of Trustees on the Proposals will take place at the Town of Normal Council Chambers on March 26th with the Public Hearing to begin at 3:30 p.m.

Chairman McCurdy stated that the Board was here to listen to public comments on the Proposals. The Chairman continued to state that there would be benefits to each of the Proposals under consideration, which would be:

- Increased afternoon and evening frequency on the RED Route from Uptown to the Normal Wal-Mart and the LIME from Downtown Bloomington to the Bloomington Wal-Mart. Buses would run every 15 minutes instead of 30 minutes
- Fare Capping – Currently, riders who cannot afford the up-front cost of a monthly pass and pays one fare at a time may end up paying more than a person who bought the monthly pass. Soon Connect will be able to work with all customers to ensure that once a passenger hits the cost of a monthly pass – one fare at a time – the remainder of rides for that particular month would be free.

General Manager Thorne provided some 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 minutes 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 reported that customers had 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 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 proposed 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. Connect would continue to have bus service provided by the current PINK route. Wal-Mart and OSF Medical Center would maintain bus service with the RED Express and the RED route.

The General Manager stated 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 added Sunday service in 2016. He continued to state that in 2018, premium service areas were added beyond ¾ of a mile from fixed route for Connect Mobility service.

Chairman McCurdy again stated this was the Board's opportunity to listen to the Public and instructed the members of the public in attendance that if they had not filled out a comment card, one will need to be submitted to the Board to speak.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

(There were 19 members of the Public in attendance. Eight (8) members of the Public commented on Connect Transit's "Proposed Dissolution of the OLIVE route" and "Proposed New Fare Structure.")

1. **Carol Rueger:** I was not actually ready to speak on those particular issues. I didn't know we were doing specific topics. The main two (2) topics that I want to address was the fact that the bus drivers cannot communicate with each other anymore which causes a lot of issues for passengers. This afternoon I missed a doctor's appointment because the bus I needed left while I was being unloaded from the bus I was on. This happens all the time and is very hard on people trying to get back and forth to work on the bus. The drivers need to be able to talk to each other. I also want to discuss the proposed discontinuation of the OLIVE bus. That bus is really necessary. It is not a surprise that the ridership has dropped off on that bus because the bus route has been made very near to useless. It is still necessary because the neighborhood it serves, the Orlando/Northbrook area, is basically all elderly, disabled, or young people with families that are trying to get back and forth to work. They are already struggling right now to do that because that bus route makes it so complicated, they cannot connect with other buses and that kind of thing. If you take that away from them, you need to call Public Aid and warn them that you are sending them a few hundred more clients because those kids will not be able to keep trying to work. They just won't be able to do it. It will be impossible for them to get back and forth to work without a bus. Not everybody can make it all the way up to Main Street or Raab Road, especially in bad weather, and especially if you are dragging small children back and forth with you. It is just not feasible. That bus is really necessary to that neighborhood. It has already turned the disabled people very nearly into shut-ins because it is so hard to get around now. It takes 4-5 transfers to get somewhere, when it used to only take 1-2 transfers. Since the buses do not meet up anymore, that means you get on this bus, you wait 15 minutes for it to start moving, you ride it for 10 minutes, you get off and wait 25 minutes for another bus to go somewhere and get off and wait 15 minutes for another bus and it can take you 2-3 hours to get from Point A to Point B. If you have 2 or 3 or maybe 5 things to get done, it is an all-day job to run 2-3 errands now. It is complex and really difficult, so most of us do not even try anymore unless we must. We do what is absolutely necessary because it is so exhausting to try to do anything else. I cannot go out and spend 6-8 hours in a day to run errands. I am not physically able to do it, but that is what it takes if I have 3 errands to run, it is going to take me all day on those buses to do it. It's just not possible, so we give up and we just don't go. I do know of two very easy fixes for the OLIVE bus that would help so much. One is - it takes 10 minutes from where the OLIVE bus goes by to make a jog here to Uptown Station and back. It

could easily be added in each way and would still leave 5 minutes at each end of the route for the bus to sit if it wanted. At least that bus would connect with more buses that you could get transfers for. The other easier fix that would not require any re-routing, would be to just let the bus run the route. It is a 30-minute route, but it only runs the route every 60 minutes. It sits for 15 minutes and it drives for 15 minutes and it sits for 15 minutes and it drives for 15 minutes. I'm sorry that I cannot think of a more prolific way to say that "it is stupid", but I cannot. It's just "stupid" that the bus spends 50% of its time just sitting, not moving. If it just went ahead and ran the route twice an hour instead of once an hour, it would make it a little bit easier to make those connections. I can get to my doctor's office in 45 minutes, but it takes 3 hours to get home if I don't need to stop for a prescription. That is crazy, but that is how the connections are. It takes me 2-3 hours just to get home depending on whether or not I miss that connection. It's just not working, and it would be so easy to correct. Discontinuing the bus because the route is screwed up is not the solution.

2. **Deb Presley:** Thank you for the opportunity to address the Board concerning the proposed fare increases. As Connect Transit continues to eliminate fixed routes, they in turn reduce the areas served by Connect Mobility. As the Connect Mobility area shrinks, more individuals with disabilities are forced to use the more costly Connect Mobility Premium Service. When pricing for the Premium Service was established in July of 2017, there was no "monthly pass" offer. When the rates were set we discussed how difficult that amount would be on the disabled adults' budget. Currently, Connect Mobility rider fares account for 8% of a disabled adult's budget. Whereas, the Premium Service takes up nearly 25% of their monthly income. One of the major problems with the current proposed rate increase is that riders on the Connect Mobility Premium Services will experience a disproportionate rate increase to all their riders in the system. This is because Premium Service passengers are not offered a monthly pass. Under the Proposed Fare Increase, Connect Mobility riders will pay at the most - \$75/month; whereas, a Premium Service rider, just using the bus to get back and forth to work, will pay \$230/month. Then if they need to use the service for trips to the doctor or groceries or recreation, that increase will continue to grow. The discrepancy in monthly transportation cost of \$75 versus \$230 is not acceptable. It is not fair that Connect Mobility riders will experience an increase of \$10/month; whereas, individuals riding the Premium Service back and forth to work will experience a \$46/month increase. Given that individuals with disabilities are on a fixed income and that the jobs they typically have are minimum wage, this increase is not affordable by any means. Based on average employment statistics for individuals with disabilities, a person working 5 days per week at minimum wage will be forced to spend a whopping 40% of their wages for transportation. See if you can do that. Offering a service that is unaffordable is tantamount to not offering it at all. As a community we need to continue to realize that para-transit service is a quality of life issue and will never pay for itself. Where you live in our community shouldn't dictate whether you have transportation service or how much it costs. It is crucial that this Board recognize the rights of the adults with disabilities to be full members of our community by making sure that they can afford to get work, shopping, and recreation in our Town. In order to keep the Connect Mobility Premium service rate increase in line with all other rate increases, the Board of Trustees needs to review the Fare Increase and adopt a fare structure that includes a reasonably priced monthly pass option for those using the

Premium Connect Mobility Service. Without this option, the riders using the Premium Service will be bearing an unfair and disproportionate rate increase and many may no longer be able to afford to use public transportation to live and work in our community.

3. Ursula Loercher: I am a career coach for Goodwill. I am here not only to represent Goodwill and the Career Center, but I am also representing CareerLink and IDES-One Stop Service. All three (3) of these organizations are non-profit organizations and we do service the community, not only in Normal but in Bloomington. We are on the OLIVE route. The Goodwill Career Center in Normal also has access by the RED route. CareerLink and IDES-One Stop Service does not have any other access but by the OLIVE route. They can take the PINK route, but they are walking 8 blocks to be in the CareerLink area for services. Those organizations provide services to people who are looking for advancements in their jobs, looking for employment and trying to obtain skills for employment or gaining new skills for that employment. Eliminating the OLIVE route is affecting a lot of the employment services within this community. All three (3) organizations are on the OLIVE route so ultimately that would eliminate a lot of client accessibility to our services. At Goodwill we have people that need the Connect Mobility bus also because we have people who perform volunteer work at Goodwill. We have employees that use the OLIVE bus line to get to and from work. Eliminating that service would jeopardize the community.
4. Deb Skillrud: I am the Supervisor of the City of Bloomington Township. This elimination of the OLIVE route also affects those in Bloomington and not just Normal participants, who are served by the OLIVE route. We also require access to IDES and CareerLink, as well. We have many individuals that participate in the *Activity and Recreation Center ("ARC")* which is in Normal Township, a center for seniors. By eliminating this route, you are affecting a lot of individuals that do not have a vehicle to be transported. We have a Work Fair Program as part of the City of Bloomington Township where we serve many different non-profit organizations in the community. By limiting the bus services for those individuals, we are limiting the potential for sustainable employment to those individuals. Instead, we should be developing and enhancing ride services so that we can have those individuals that are unemployed access to that employment. I thank you for all that you have done in terms of developing this system. I just really feel strongly about the elimination of the OLIVE route and maybe partnerships are needed to develop ways of funding these sources. I understand from Sarah Grammar at Normal Township, the disability line (Connect Mobility) – by increasing the cost of that, Connect Transit is able to generate \$7,000 more in revenue. Is \$7,000 in revenue really worth the trouble that it is going to go through for all the individuals that are affected by that? The same would go for our client base that do not have the route service to their employment. You take away their ability to do that and you are actually generating more taxpayer dollars to help service those individuals because they will be on Normal Township rolls needing assistance at \$265 (soon to be \$304/month). We need to work together to make this happen so that we can enhance the services.
5. Mulakh Dua: I am an 85-year old senior and I am a widow and I live with a daughter in a house. Last year I used to take the TEAL route where there were two (2) stops. Now for some

time, I think for two (2) years now, those stops have been eliminated and I have now to take the RED from Rainbow Avenue that takes me to this place (Uptown Station) and from here there is no direct road taking me back to the same place. What I do is, I walk down the distance but now it is sub-zero temperature, I can't do it in this climate. I can't do it because my doctor will not permit me to do it. So, on Mondays and Tuesdays is when I come. I will tell you I do not like any ...(inaudible)... from here. I was teaching in California University for some time – I am from India - but then I grew old and now I depend on family relations. Right now, my wife is no more, and I have three (3) daughters who are all working here, and they are all citizens, but I don't want to depend upon them – self-esteem, you know. Anyway, to make a long story short, I wanted to suggest two (2) things; (1) restore the TEAL from Barnes; (2) could somebody... (inaudible)...then I could take TEAL and then BROWN to E. Morris station and go to come here (Uptown Station), then from here take BLUE E, but as I said the last 2 or 3 years, I haven't done so as it is done away with so I have no way to depend upon it. My son-in-law who is a doctor lives...(inaudible)..., he leaves at 6:30-7:00 a.m., so I say what will I do? There are only three (3) places that I go to: the Normal Public Library, Bloomington Public Library and the ISU Library and ...(inaudible), all these places I could go to, but it is really hard. I don't know how this problem can be solved but I will put it to you to see if something could be done to bring the Connect Transit closer to my place, not in front of my house, but closer to my house to which I can walk home by a 5-10-minute distance. So that is my question.

6. Joe Ramholz: (ARC – Advisory Board Member) First of all, I have lived in the Town of Normal for 47 years. I have used the bus service in the past and I wanted to take the bus to come to this meeting but unfortunately, the bus route that was near my subdivision has been cancelled. The BLUE route served the Pinehurst Subdivision and I appreciated that. When I bought the house there six (6) years ago, there was bus service and I considered that an asset. As I am getting up in years, I would more likely depend upon a bus route. I was disappointed to find out that the BLUE route didn't come to Uptown Normal. I shop and do business in Uptown Normal and go to the Post Office and the Library, but I can't get anywhere from my house to Uptown Normal without going all the way to Downtown Bloomington and coming back on the GREEN route. I don't why the bus services do not have hubs at Uptown Station and Downtown Bloomington. I think this has decreased the value of my house in my neighborhood because I am no longer serviced by the BLUE route and I cannot get to anywhere in my northeast portion of Normal to Uptown Normal to transact any business. I am on the ARC Senior Center Advisory Board and I am a representative of over 4,300 that go to ARC. Between 750-850 per day use the ARC building. That is 4,300 members that come at some time during the week to use the facilities there. By cancelling the OLIVE route, you are doing to ARC what you have done to me in my neighborhood. You are not making ARC assessible to people who would like to take public transportation. The BLUE route wouldn't have solved my problem in the past anyway because it came from my neighborhood and went Downtown Bloomington and then I had to take another bus to come to Uptown Normal. The only route that serves ARC is the OLIVE route. Your survey that you took was only for your on-board riders, you didn't talk with the community and say, "where do you live" and "where do you want the bus route service"? You only asked the people that were on your buses about the routes. I don't think that - as I have been a taxpayer for 47 years, and now an elderly member of the ARC Senior Center - is fair to

all of us that have paved the way for the Town of Normal to make wonderful improvements. My kids all went to Unit 5 schools and we are still active in the school system in Normal. I don't think it is right for the bus company to look at this from just the profit-making standpoint because ARC is not a profit-making organization. We are a non-profit organization and we provide a service. The \$30/per person at ARC per year is not adequate to provide those services that everybody who is a member enjoys. I think that everybody ought to be serviced by the community bus service, including the ARC, Willow Street and Beech Street. I would also like to have some kind of BLUE bus route reinstated. I must walk a long way to get on the RED route from my subdivision. That is what I am asking you to do – but don't do to ARC what you did to my neighborhood, because of my real estate values. We have owned two (2) other multi-story houses in Normal. My wife and I are getting old and we moved six (6) years ago because we wanted a one-story house on a bus route. I noticed that Connect Transit buses are huge and when I see them every day, they are almost empty, one or two passengers at the most. Why can't Connect Transit purchase some smaller van-type buses, not with a lift, but just a typical smaller and more economical vehicle rather than running the big buses - the expense of gas and maintenance - buy some smaller buses and run them on the lower traffic routes? I've gone from driving a big van to a Japanese car. It gets more than 20 miles per gallon and maintenance is almost insignificant compared to my old van. That just means you need to run some smaller buses.

7. Sally Pyne: Thank you for this listening session. I also wanted to re-thank Connect Transit for the conversation that you allowed us to have with Connect Transit at the ARC. I, too, am concerned about the elimination of the OLIVE route. I serve as a Normal Township Trustee. I thought there was an excellent and possible solution to the OLIVE route elimination that came up at the ARC Forum and it also sounds like it might be part of a solution to Mr. Ramholz's BLUE route as well, which is the possibility of intermittent routes. I was hoping that today you perhaps would consider the possibility of a couple of intermittent routes. The way I understand those is that the OLIVE route might only stop at the ARC four (4) times a day and that would give people an opportunity to get there in the morning, come for lunch, leave after lunch and get home. In my head I see something like that and maybe partner up with the BLUE route solution as well. Maybe it's a hub concept like Mr. Ramholz suggested that could get him from his neighborhood to Uptown Normal and then hop on the OLIVE route a few times a day to get to the ARC. I believe our members would be able to schedule their visits to the ARC around a bus route. I know the bus routes are always planned to be convenient for people, but I think people would adjust their behavior in order to give the kind of transportation needs that they are looking for. I would just like to see a proposal that would include an intermittent route. There might be other pockets of routes that people are concerned about that could be built into that and might end up being a complete route of some sort.
8. Mary Whurmann: I am not a bus rider right now because I have the ability to drive. I am a Town of Normal citizen for quite a while, but I may not be able to drive in the future. I don't know what will happen. Nobody knows. When I heard that this line that goes through ARC is being terminated, I started thinking what else does it affect? It affects the very low-income residents that want to get them to other places. So, it is not just getting from Orlando to

WalMart. They may have stops in-between that they need to do, and they rely upon the bus services to do that because a lot of them cannot afford cars. This does affect ARC. I know the Town has spent lots and lots of hours and money in having this wonderful facility for seniors and the primary goal for them is socialization. If people cannot get out of their house to go visit with other seniors, then they are not getting their socialization. I also ask the Board, "How do you find your ridership?" They said they did a survey on the buses. Well, I never got a survey and I have lived here for 27 years and I never received any survey about Connect Transit and what their needs are. I think you need your Marketing Department to reach out and see what other people who might like to ride the bus want. Maybe they don't know what is available. Maybe they haven't thought about it as an economical way of transport. You need to try to find out who might like to ride your bus. You are public transportation and that means you are supposed to treat or reach the public and we are the public – you need more ridership. I also wanted to know if you have asked your drivers what kind of input they are getting from the riders that are taking this ride? They are the ones who have a direct contact with the riders. I'm sure people getting on the bus and getting off the bus have probably made comments. Have you even asked them for their opinion? The drivers are your first line of contact. I was a teacher for 27 years and what I found is that the further and further away that somebody gets from the actual children, they become numbers. Their principals – they start to be numbers – to Superintendents – they start to be numbers. How many kids at this school and how many kids at this other school? These are not numbers when you talk about 15 people getting on at this hour and 10 people getting off at that hour. These are actual people, people who need transportation to do what they need to do and maybe it's to get food for their family. You have to think of them: This is your public venture in serving and they are actual people.

Chairman Mike McCurdy asked if there were any additional public comments. There were no other individuals that wished to speak.

Chairman McCurdy stated that the Board's Public Hearing and Public Comment session was concluded. The Chairman then asked for a Motion to close the Special Meeting of Connect Transit Board of Trustees.

Trustee Judy Buchannan moved to close the Special Meeting of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees, seconded by Trustee Monica Bullington.

AYE: All.
NAY: None.

The Board voted unanimously to adjourn the Special Meeting at 5:10 p.m.



Jill Bower, Connect Transit Board Clerk



John Bowman, Secretary

