

**CONNECT TRANSIT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
PROCEEDINGS OF SPECIAL MEETING OF NOVEMBER 9, 2013**

A Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held at Eastland Suites Hotel, Eastland Room, located at 1801 Eastland Drive, Bloomington, Illinois on November 9, 2013 at 8:00 a.m.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Judy Buchanan, Chairman
 Bill Wilson, Vice-Chairman
 Mike McCurdy, Secretary
 John Bowman
 Ryan Whitehouse

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Felicia Shaw
 John Thomas

STAFF PRESENT: Andrew Johnson, General Manager

OTHERS PRESENT: Kay Titchenal – Goranson Consulting
 Dave Goranson – Goranson Consulting

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman at 8:11 a.m. Roll call was taken.

The following was presented:

The Board of Trustees and Connect Transit General Manager, Andrew Johnson reconvened to continue discussions for the three (3) year Strategic Plan. The topics for discussion at this meeting would continue on the SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results) path, and would include opportunities, strengths, constraints, regulations, mandates and leads.

Ms. Titchenal opened the discussion by refreshing the group on discussions from the prior session. Trustee Whitehouse questioned the thought process and conclusion for the use of the word *communities* vs. *community*. Dave Goranson, Goranson Consulting, explained that the thought process included the variety of communities served such as the higher education, health care, service, and entertainment communities.

Trustee McCurdy questioned the use of the word *safe* in the mission statement and how it might be impacted by the Federal Transit Administration. Andrew Johnson, General Manager explained that upon further research, he learned that additional regulation would be handed down that would require that the word *safe*, *safely* or *safety* in the vision and mission statement. He noted that the word *safe* was already used in the mission statement.

Trustee Bowman had concerns regarding the vision statement. He stated that a vision statement should include an aspiration. He believed that the current vision statement sounded more like a tag line or an ad slogan, and did not include an aspirational tone. The vision statement stated what Connect Transit currently provides. He questioned whether the vision statement should denote what Connect Transit wanted to become in the future. A vision statement should convey future aspirations. Ms. Titchenal explained that the vision statement is the current vision and how Connect Transit would like to be viewed by the public. She reminded the group that part of the day's focus would be aspirations, which may lead the group to revisit the vision statement as it currently exists. Value statements could be added to the vision statement.

The day's discussion would concern strengths and how Connect Transit's strength fell into relationships. She had created four (4) subject areas for discussion: 1.) Management and staff, 2.) General Corporate, 3.) Facilities and equipment, and 4.) Customers and Riders. These were the subject areas of relationships that allowed Connect Transit to function. She had listed these categories on a display board and had several items listed under each category. She noted that she had moved Route Restructuring out of the Management and Staff category as she believed that it fell more into the General Corporate category. She further explained the reasoning behind the move as it was a part of the planning process of the organization.

In the Management and Staff category, Connect Transit was very fortunate to have a strong staff with strong knowledge and expertise. A common theme among all staff members were making sure that the buses were leaving the facility on time, making sure that everyone was happy with Connect Transits goals, making sure that the busses were safe and timely, and making sure that the community was served. Connect Transit's staff looked at the "big picture" and she believed that spoke very highly of them.

Regarding the Facilities and Equipment category, she stated that the vehicles and equipment were in good shape and safe. The technology that Connect Transit was embracing was solid. Finally, regarding the Customers and Riders category, she believed that the 2.1 Million customers served in the last year to be remarkable. She informed the group that Connect Transit has some very strong relationships upon which to build.

Ms. Titchenal directed the group to begin focusing on the opportunities piece of the session. She began by noting mandates that impact public transit systems. She reminded the group of the earlier comment by Mr. Johnson regarding the word *safe* and how it would be mandated that the word be used in a vision statement. These were the things that the group should consider. These things could change or impact how Connect Transit served its customers.

Other opportunity items to consider included union negotiations, an aging population, the image of the riders (who is using the system), major employers moving operations out of the community, were all key relationships. She suggested consideration of any other industries and trends; the transfer stations and how they relate to Connect Transit.

She noted that all of these items could impact, disrupt or bump into Connect Transit's current operations, but could be viewed as opportunities if planned for in advance. There would always be surprises, but by planning for opportunities in advance the organization could be ahead of the curve.

She reminded the group of the purpose of the three (3) year strategic plan. It is a tool to help Connect Transit have a strategy, stay on path and be better prepared for the changes that are surely to come in the future.

She instructed the group to work together and discuss what might be the largest opportunities that could impact first. She challenged them to consider which things could be viewed as the largest opportunities for Connect Transit. She suggested that the group come up with 3 to 5 ideas for discussion.

After a brief period of discussing different ideas the group came up with 5 ideas as opportunities: 1.) Funding, 2.) Improvements, 3.) Marketing, 4.) Key Relationships, and 5.) Service. Additional discussion centered around ideas and opportunities that could fall into more than one of the categories. Ms. Titchenal questioned what obstacles Connect Transit might encounter that would prevent it from seizing upon these opportunities.

Trustee Bowman stated that he had visited a local major grocery store that is on the bus route. While inside the store he was unable to locate any information regarding fees, schedules, or routes that would educate people about bus services. He believed this to be a major obstacle to partnerships and education opportunity. Andrew Johnson, General Manager explained that the option to purchase fare tokens along with route maps were available at the customer service counter at this grocery store. Connect Transit's new Community Relations Manager was in the process of devising new marketing materials to be placed in this location and others like it, along with uniformity requirements. In addition, the Community Relations Manager was tasked with putting Connect Transit's logo and service information on various community websites such as the Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Economic Development Council, and Central Illinois Regional Airport.

Trustee Bowman added that Financial Development was an important opportunity. The community's largest employer, State Farm Insurance Co. had recently made an announcement that a large number of employees currently in the community were temporary. The purpose of the announcement was to ensure that the communities as a whole were not misled into believing that there was permanent growth. These people were currently using community services such as Connect Transit, taxis, etc., and once they left the community, there would be a void. It was important that Connect Transit stay focused on finding replacements and that it continue to be portrayed as an amenity.

Mr. Johnson agreed, with the large number of people employed by State Farm Insurance Co. there was a false sense of security. Though State Farm has committed to staying within the community, it was important for Connect Transit to ramp up its presence. Any vibrant community must have available public transportation.

Trustee McCurdy agreed. Strong bicycle and public transit amenities were strong economic tools. He cited an example of Google placing an office in a location specifically because there was a safe bicycle lane that passed in front of the building. The company was very cognizant of its employees' bicycle use to and from work.

Trustee Whitehouse reiterated that educating the public about Connect Transit as an amenity was important. Andrew Johnson, General Manager agreed. It was also important to be a convenient source of transportation and that it should be touted.

Ms. Titchenal thanked the group for the discussion. A lot of great ideas had been discussed. She instructed the group to begin focusing on the aspirations portion of the session. She explained that aspirations could be viewed as Connect Transit's preferred future. The group should discuss the aspirations for each of the five opportunities beginning with funding.

Trustee Bowman stated that the first idea that came to mind regarding funding was sustainability. He questioned if there were limits to the capital that Connect Transit could hold that impacted funding assistance. Andrew Johnson, General Manager explained that there were no limits. Chairperson Buchanan noted that at one point Connect Transit had a large capital holding while preparing to build its new facility. Mr. Johnson stated that Federal funding was primary, State funding secondary, and the remaining funding sources were local. It was his hope that there would be more local funding in the future from both private and tax sources.

Trustee Whitehouse stated that it was his hope that Connect Transit could work closely with the City of Bloomington and the Town of normal to find ways to increase funding without a tax increase. He questioned if Connect Transit had approached the municipalities regarding increased local funding. Mr. Johnson responded that the topic would be discussed at an upcoming Work Session.

Trustee Bowman questioned if Mr. Johnson believed that sustainability would come from increased local funding control. Mr. Johnson affirmed, from both partnerships and municipal dollars. Discussion continued regarding Federal and State funding, and how more local funding would increase sustainability in the event that Federal and/or State funding levels decreased or ceased. There was some misperception by the community at large that Connect Transit's funding came primarily through purchased fares.

Ms. Titchenal questioned if the main aspiration for funding would be "Sustainable funding sources by Federal, State and Local Sources". The group agreed. Additional discussion involved the various approaches of Connect Transit to ensure that sustainability.

Options included approaching the municipalities for dedicated funding and changing fare structures. Andrew Johnson, General Manager noted that generally about 20% of a public transit systems funding comes from the fare box. Only 14% of Connect Transit's funding comes from the fare box, which includes the existing partnerships with the Universities. He stated that he hoped that with increased services and convenience that the value added would justify a modified fee structure.

Trustee Bowman questioned whether ridership would decrease with a fare increase. Mr. Johnson responded that decrease in ridership was certain. He further explained that there is currently not a good model to predict this. There was once a model that would show that for every percentage of increased fare resulted in a specific decrease in ridership. He cited an example of this with changes that were made to the service to Heartland Community College. The I.D. was changed and the old invalid I.D.'s no longer worked. Connect Transit saw a significant decrease in ridership as a result of the elimination of the old I.D.'s. However, Connect Transit did see an increase in revenue since those that continued to use the service were actually paying the fare. Although there would be a decrease in ridership, if frequency on key routes, during peak times were increased, the decrease in ridership could be limited, and ridership may even increase.

The second item for discussion regarding aspiration opportunities was Improvements. The group discussion centered around several evolution enhancements. The enhancements included improved shelters and transfer points, park and ride options, expanded service, (days and times) and expanding service areas. Trustee Bowman noted that education was another aspiration opportunity under this category. It was key to have a transportation savvy community. Other discussion included centered around value added technology. Connect Transit should aspire to increase its presence through technology with items such as Google applications/maps.

Ms. Titchenal inquired if there was any other discussion regarding the improvements aspiration. There being none, the group proceeded with discussion on the third aspiration, Marketing (branding and image/community awareness).

The group believed that there were several components that fit into the Marketing (branding and image/community awareness) aspiration. The components included updating Connect Transit's website, making it more user friendly and incorporating social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Other components included community outreach, for example, inviting Community Unit School Districts 5 and 87 to tour Connect Transit's bus facility, and riding the bus system, such as "Ride the Bus to School Day". This would encourage and would be a part of building a transit savvy community. Trustee McCurdy stated that this educational piece would provide the students with the skill, and perhaps remove some of the fear associated with utilizing public transit systems in other, and maybe larger communities such as Chicago or St. Louis.

Andrew Johnson, General Manager stated that in addition to the community awareness piece there was also the formal marketing and the market research aspect of branding and image to help Connect Transit better promote awareness.

He mentioned some of the current marketing campaigns currently underway. An example is the Holiday Express shuttle which will take passengers between Eastland Mall and The Shoppes at College Hills, fare-free, between November 30th and December 28, 2013. He noted that Connect Transit is looking for sponsors for campaigns such as these, however, this particular one currently does not have a sponsor. Trustee Bowman mentioned the Economic Development Council's Community Breakfasts. It would be an opportunity to invite community leaders to ride the bus. Mr. Johnson stated that it might not be feasible for a single event such as those, however, it would not be entirely out of the realm of possibility. The group went on to discuss additional ways that Connect Transit could market itself within the community.

Ms. Titchenal stated that the last item to discuss for aspirations were Key Relationships and Partnerships.

Andrew Johnson, General Manager stated that strategic relationships with higher education institutions, corporations and political advocacy fell into this category. Chairperson Buchanan stated that in addition, this category included a greater engagement with entities such as the Economic Development Council and the Chamber of Commerce and other partnerships with key community groups. Mr. Johnson agreed. Additional strategic relationships should include retail/hospitality/convention operations and primary/secondary educational institutions. Ms. Titchenal reminded the group that this tied into the Marketing (branding and image/community awareness) aspiration.

The group discussed strengthening existing relationships with local elected officials, community leaders and various community groups such as neighborhood associations, etc. Trustee McCurdy agreed. Building and enhancing these key relationships and partnerships with the various community groups, organizations, and other transportation entities such as the Central Illinois Regional Airport would greatly improve Connect Transit's ability to maintain sustainability.

Ms. Titchenal stated that the opportunities and aspirations had been identified, which encompass what Connect Transit aspires to be. The next session would encompass the final piece of the Strategic Planning, Results. Discussion would include whether the goals and aspirations were attainable, and if they were within the vision the Board, General Manager and staff saw them. Andrew Johnson, General Manager stated that he believed them to be within the realm of reality. He noted that the bar would need to be set high, but not so high that if every goal was not met within the three (3) year plan it constituted failure.

Ms. Titchenal stated that the next session would include ideas for measuring the goals and how to determine if the goals were being achieved. In addition, the Vision and Mission Statements would be revisited to ensure that they were polished and encompassed all of the values. She noted that the Board had been a wonderful group to work with and that the next session would be held on December 14, 2013. She stated that at the conclusion of the Strategic Planning Sessions a report would be provided to them. She thanked them for their participation and inquired if any of them had any additional questions before concluding the session.

There being no further business, Chairperson Buchanan requested that a formal motion to adjourn be made.

Motion by Trustee McCurdy, seconded by Trustee Whitehouse that the meeting be adjourned.

Motion passed.

Mike McCurdy, Secretary