

**CONNECT TRANSIT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES ADVOCACY COMMITTEE
PROCEEDINGS OF DECEMBER 3, 2013**

The meeting of the Board of Trustees Advocacy Committee of Connect Transit was held at the Connect Transit Board Room #135, 351 Wylie Drive, Normal, Illinois 61761 at 4:30 p.m.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Judy Buchanan, Chairman
 Mike McCurdy, Secretary
 Felicia Shaw
 John Thomas

TRUSTEES ABSENT: Ryan Whitehouse

STAFF PRESENT: Andrew Johnson, General Manager

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman at 4:40 p.m. Roll call was taken.

Chairperson Judy Buchanan opened the meeting by noting that the agenda was light, but she was enthusiastic about the topic of discussion. She stated that Trustee Mike McCurdy participated in a discussion with Trustee Ryan Whitehouse previously regarding advocacy efforts. She requested that Trustee McCurdy elaborate on that discussion.

Trustee McCurdy stated that his meeting with Trustee Whitehouse included discussion of inviting Federal, State and Local Legislators to the Connect Transit facility for an onsite visit, and/or to participate in a ride along on the buses. He noted that Town of Normal Mayor, Chris Koos and Pantagraph columnist Bill Flick had recently participated on a ride along. Chairperson Buchanan stated that the City of Bloomington Mayor Tari Renner and several of the Bloomington City Council members were also interested in participating in a ride along. Trustee McCurdy added that Town Mayor Koos hoped to coordinate the ride along with City of Bloomington Mayor, Tari Renner.

Chairperson Buchanan thanked Trustee McCurdy for the update. She noted that it would be beneficial to discuss the purpose and intent of this meeting. Trustee McCurdy agreed, noting that familiarization was beneficial. This meeting was an opportunity to prepare some initial, rudimentary messaging. He stated that it was important that the message be purposeful, clear and consistent. Chairperson Buchanan agreed, and in addition, to convey that message to those in decision making roles such as the Federal, State and Municipal governments.

Trustee John Thomas questioned if decision makers were invited to attend events and meetings hosted by Connect Transit. Chairperson Buchanan responded that they are not invited to all events, however, the City and Town Councils are routinely provided with Connect Transit Board meeting agendas and packets. Connect Transit has invited the City and Town to share that information further within their organizations. Trustee Thomas questioned if there were any intentions of hosting any type of event in the future where decision makers from all levels of government would be invited.

Trustee Mike McCurdy responded that hosting a legislative breakfast had been discussed, and believed that hosting one would be worth the money spent. He further expressed that if enough lawmakers were to attend; it would garner the attention of the media, and would also be beneficial. He stated that it was not necessary to have a special reason for hosting such an event, however, if it were held in conjunction with a purpose, such as the purchase of new buses or a ribbon cutting, it may attract more attention. Chairperson Buchanan questioned if there would be any such opportunities within the near future.

Andrew Johnson, General Manager, responded that there were no immediate plans to purchase new buses; however, an opportunity in the near future would be completion of the architecture, cost estimates and plan for the update of the Front Street Transfer Station. Trustee McCurdy questioned if Mr. Johnson had been discussing architectural plans with any firms. Mr. Johnson responded that he had not, a Request for Proposal (RFP) process would be necessary.

Trustee McCurdy stated that he did not want to get too far off of the subject at hand, but questioned the status of the joint purchasing effort of buses. Mr. Johnson responded that the proposal would be moving forward into the next phase within the next week. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) would review the proposal, and he planned to prepare it to be reviewed by the Federal Transit Authority (FTA). He forecasted that he and Isaac Thorne, Procurement Director, would be travelling to Chicago to present and lay out the plan for the proposal.

Chairperson Buchanan questioned if McLean County had been approached concerning the update of the Front Street Transfer Station. Mr. Johnson replied that discussions with McLean County had not begun. He believed that the best strategy would be to have a proposal in place before approaching the McLean County Board. If a proposal were in place, the McLean County Board would have something tangible to review and consider. He noted that he had a couple of architectural firms in mind to prepare a concept plan. Chairperson Buchanan reminded the group that McLean County and the City of Bloomington would be stakeholders in this project. Mr. Johnson agreed, and stated that there would be some cost sharing involved. Chairperson Buchanan reminded the group that The City of Bloomington Mayor, Tari Renner was focused on revitalizing The Downtown.

Discussion turned to the changing demographics across the country. Trustee Mike McCurdy stated that the transportation habits of this changing demographic, namely "The Millennials" should be considered. He noted that many communities were experiencing their younger citizens moving out or their communities due to the lack of transportation options. They were moving to more heavily populated communities because of the public transportation appeal. Chairperson Buchanan concurred, stating that rural communities have been especially impacted. Trustee McCurdy noted that the Bloomington-Normal communities were having difficulty attracting and retaining the 25 to 30 year old demographic group. He stated that State Farm was also feeling the effects of this trend. Andrew Johnson, General Manager agreed, and stated that when State Farm was researching the communities to expand in, transportation options played a major role in the decision making process. Mr. Johnson provided the examples of Phoenix, Arizona and Dallas, Texas. These communities are attractive to this younger demographic group.

State Farm would be building very large office complexes in these communities which would both attract and retain these younger people, and their transportation habits would have a direct impact on the transit systems.

Chairperson Buchanan stated that as part of the advocacy focus, the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the Economic Development Council and Chamber of Commerce should be approached. Mr. Johnson agreed, and stated that it would be beneficial for Connect Transit to host a transportation summit. Connect Transit would provide information to these groups and others about every service it has available and encourage cross marketing.

Trustee John Thomas stated that he had a discussion with some of State Farm's Human Resources employees and discovered that they were unaware of many of the services that Connect Transit offers. He noted that there seemed to be some disconnect. State Farm was considering the public transit systems in these other communities where it is expanding but painfully unaware of the public transit options in its own backyard. Trustee Felicia Shaw agreed. She pointed out that she and Andrew Johnson, General Manager participated in discussions with State Farm's Public Affairs department. She advised that the Public Affairs department was also unaware of the services provided by Connect Transit. Through this discussion, State Farm has agreed to promote awareness of Connect Transit and the services provided, internally in January of 2014.

Chairperson Judy Buchanan addressed the topic of Connect Transit hosting a transportation summit. She stated that hosting a transportation summit with decision makers would be a wonderful educational and advocacy opportunity. Mr. Johnson agreed, however, it would be important to gather some statistical data and hone the Connect Transit "story" beforehand. Some time needed to be blocked in order to prepare information. A location would need to be determined. He did not believe that the Board Room at the Connect Transit facility would be a large enough space to accommodate such an event.

Mr. Johnson stated that a summit would familiarize the decision makers about the services Connect Transit provides and familiarize them with Connect Transit's vehicles. He believed that it would be appropriate to host the event at another location, which would offer the opportunity to provide transportation to and from the event by bus. It would offer the opportunity to show how the bike racks on the front of the buses are utilized. A summit would also offer an opportunity to show the impact that Connect Transit has on the community. He believed that hosting a transportation summit would be a great opportunity to start a dialogue.

Trustee John Thomas questioned if it might be beneficial to host a "Bloomington Normal Transit Day" with both the communities of the Town of Normal and City of Bloomington. Trustee Mike McCurdy agreed and perhaps both communities would pass a resolution naming a specific day as "Bloomington Normal Transit Day". In addition, Trustee Thomas noted that there were a number of ways that information could be incorporated into the summit. He gave the example of the history of public transportation within the communities, leading up to the current. Another example would be to show how the two (2) communities developed around transportation, which could steer into future plans.

Chairperson Buchanan questioned if the group believed that a transportation summit would be a full day affair. Trustee Thomas responded that it would not need to be, that a few hours would suffice. There would need to be time to give presentations, take questions and answer, offer refreshments, and time to mingle with participants.

Andrew Johnson, General Manager stated that he believed that all of these things could be accomplished with hosting a transportation summit. He noted that on the Federal level, transportation funding was not a big issue. There were larger issues facing the legislators at the current time. It was his hope to at least keep funding public transportation on their radar. Focusing on State level funding was more important. The Illinois Public Transportation Association (IPTA) has been working on a new “Downstate Operations Assistance Program” proposal. The purpose of this proposal is to maintain existing funding levels. A mandate handed down by the previous State Administration to assist transporting seniors and disabled citizens included a 10% funding allotment. The current State Administration is targeting the existing funding allotment for such programs. The “Downstate Operations Assistance Program” proposes to eliminate the 10% funding allotment, but ensures a designated funding increase that would keep the existing funding allotment flat.

Mr. Johnson further advised that the IPTA proposal would be completed in January, 2014 and it was imperative that Connect Transit’s State legislators be made aware of it. Chairperson Buchanan questioned if IPTA would be preparing a packet of information to provide to the legislators. Mr. Johnson replied that IPTA was working on the final language and offered to email the Board a draft copy.

Further discussion involved the timing of providing copies of the proposal to the State and local legislators. The State Legislature’s regular session would begin shortly after the Governor’s State of the State address, and a few sessions would be held. In March, the State Legislature would be in full session. Chairperson Buchanan noted that Connect Transit should focus on both State and Local municipal governments with its approach.

Discussion turned back to the Front Street Transfer Station and how revitalizing it could be used as a platform to advocate for Connect Transit to its State and Local governments. Trustee McCurdy questioned the timeline for the process of revitalizing the transfer station. Andrew Johnson, General Manager replied that McLean County Board would need to be approached first, as right of way would be needed. Chairperson Buchanan agreed, and stated that if the McLean County Board were to agree to providing right of way, a concept drawing could be created. The City of Bloomington Council and McLean County Board members could be approached with the concept. Trustee McCurdy questioned if funding would need to be in place for the revitalized transfer station prior to holding a press conference announcing the plan. Mr. Johnson confirmed.

Trustee John Thomas questioned if anyone was aware of the City of Bloomington Mayor, Tari Renner’s vision for the revitalization of The Downtown. This would be important component with the development of the concept drawing. Mr. Johnson stated that it was his belief that Mayor Renner’s vision was a modern approach, and encouraged one of the Committee members

to meet with Mayor Renner to discuss what style would be most compatible with his vision for The Downtown revitalization.

This would go far with the Bloomington City Council if the concept plan were tailored around the Mayor's vision. Trustee McCurdy questioned the cost of a concept drawing. Mr. Johnson responded that it would be roughly two thousand dollars (\$2,000). Trustee Felicia Shaw questioned how quickly a concept drawing could be completed. Mr. Johnson responded that it would not require a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, that he would select a firm to complete it, and it would take a relatively short period of time to complete. Chairperson Judy Buchanan stated that she would take the responsibility of reaching out to City of Bloomington Mayor, Tari Renner.

Chairperson Buchanan stated that the Committee had discussed several great ideas for advocacy, messaging and education. She recounted the process for the Front Street Transfer Station and questioned if the outreach to City of Bloomington Mayor, McLean County Board, and a concept drawing could be started by the end of January, 2014. She noted that there was not a real sense of urgency, and that perhaps February, 2014 might be a more realistic expectation. Andrew Johnson, General Manager replied that a firm to start the concept drawing could be hired quickly. Chairperson Buchanan noted that this would be one piece of the advocacy process, as the second piece would involve the State Legislators and the IPTA "Downstate Operations Assistance Proposal".

Trustee Mike McCurdy questioned if these two (2) pieces would be separate. Chairperson Buchanan confirmed and noted that the State Legislators could be invited to both presentations, however, it was her belief that the "Downstate Operations Assistance Proposal" should be presented independently, and as soon as the final proposal was complete.

Trustee McCurdy questioned if it would be beneficial to request that the McLean County Board and Bloomington City Council write a letter of support of the proposal. Chairperson Buchanan stated that it could never hurt their efforts.

Trustee John Thomas questioned revitalization of the College Hills Transfer Station and whether it would be beneficial to approach the owners of The Shoppes at College Hills regarding its upgrade. Andrew Johnson, General Manager confirmed. Chairperson Buchanan stated that it would be a more strategic approach to garner support and begin the process of updating the Front Street Transfer Station first but that it would not hurt to begin discussions with the Town of Normal Mayor to at least inform them of Connect Transit's intentions.

Chairperson Buchanan questioned if it would be beneficial to move forward with hiring a firm to create the concept plan prior to meeting with McLean County, City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal. Mr. Johnson responded that the meeting with the City of Bloomington Mayor should be before the concept plan was started so that the firm could be given a scope of work.

Discussion then turned to hosting a legislative breakfast with the State Legislators when presenting the "Downstate Operating Assistance Proposal". Chairperson Buchanan stated that she would contact the offices of all of the legislators to request that the date be put on their

calendars, and an official invitation would be sent on behalf of the Board of Trustees. Trustee Felicia Shaw concurred. Trustee John Thomas stated that approval of the legislative breakfast should appear on the January 28, 2014 regular Board of Trustees meeting for approval. Chairperson Buchanan agreed.

Trustee Mike McCurdy stated that the conversation garnered several great ideas. He questioned how Connect Transit could further its message about the benefits of Connect Transit. Andrew Johnson, General Manager stated that putting a “face” on the transit system for elected officials was very important. He noted that many of them did not utilize public transit systems and he often wondered how legislation to cut funding could be passed by them when they were often times acutely unaware of the impact public transit has on a community.

Mr. Johnson stated that it was important to have Connect Transit’s message in both writing and to also have an ambassador that could articulate the benefits of Connect Transit’s service, and the issues facing it. Trustee Mike McCurdy agreed and mentioned a meeting that he attended while at the American Public Transit Association (APTA) conference which discussed the need for public transit system ambassadors for community outreach. Chairperson Judy Buchanan agreed. She reminded the group that the new Community Relations Manager hired by Connect Transit would be fulfilling this role.

Trustee McCurdy stated that it would also be beneficial to have citizen ambassadors, but it would take some time to find the right people. Trustee John Thomas agreed and stated that perhaps holding a contest might be a tool for discovering the right people. The contest would challenge bus riders to write down their story about their experiences with Connect Transit and how beneficial and important the service is to them. Chairperson Buchanan liked the idea.

Trustee John Thomas questioned when some of the technical improvements, such as the bus tracking system, on board announcements and passenger information displays would be installed. Andrew Johnson, General Manager replied that the improvements would begin with the passenger information displays at the Town of Normal Uptown Station starting in January of 2014. It was his belief that this portion would be completed by the end of that month. Chairperson Buchanan stated that once the passenger information displays were installed at the Uptown Station, it would be a perfect opportunity to showcase them to the Normal Town Council. Mr. Johnson concurred.

The group then reviewed all of the plans that had been discussed throughout the meeting, and Chairperson Buchanan noted that it would be important to begin the processes of implementing them as soon as possible. Trustee Ryan Whitehouse was delegated to start the conversation process of contacting the Federal Legislators, since he was most frequently in contact with them. Trustee Mike McCurdy questioned if Chairperson Buchanan and General Manager Andrew Johnson should participate in the ride along with the local legislators. Mr. Johnson responded that at least one Board member and Connect Transit staff should be present. Chairperson Buchanan requested that Trustee Mike McCurdy inform the Advocacy Committee when the ride alongs were scheduled with Town Council members and any of the Board members that were available could participate.

Chairperson Judy Buchanan reiterated that several good ideas and plans had been discussed at this meeting. She was looking forward to beginning the processes. She questioned if anyone had any additional comments or questions. There being none, she requested a motion to adjourn.

Motion by Trustee Mike McCurdy, seconded by Trustee Felicia Shaw that the meeting be adjourned.

Motion passed.

Mike McCurdy, Secretary