

Connect Transit Board of Trustees
January 25, 2022, 4:30pm
351 Wylie Drive, Normal, IL 61761 – Board Room
Minutes – Approved at 2/22/22 Board Meeting

Trustees Present: Chairman Ryan Whitehouse
Vice-Chair Julie Hile (arrived at 4:35pm)
Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Linda Foster
Trustee Tim McCue
Trustee Mandava Rao

City Managers Present: Bloomington Deputy City Manager Billy Tyus
Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece

Staff Present: David Braun, General Manager
Brady Lange, Maintenance/Procurement Manager
Germaine Walls, Interim HR Manager
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director
Shelly Perry, Operations Manager
Steve Stockton, IT Manager
Janice Crago, Board Clerk

Chairman Ryan Whitehouse called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. and read the Connect Transit Mission Statement.

Board Clerk, Janice Crago, recorded attendance via roll call.

Chairman Whitehouse led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a motion to allow Mandava Rao to attend virtually due to COVID protocol restrictions.

Trustee Buchanan motioned; seconded by Trustee Foster.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Trustee McCue, Chairman Whitehouse.

NAY: None.

Motion to allow Mandava Rao, to attend remotely was **approved**.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There were no public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- a. Approval of October 26, 2021, Regular Meeting Minutes
- b. Approval of December 10, 2021, Retreat Part 1 Meeting Minutes
- c. Approval of December 11, 2021, Retreat Part 2 Meeting Minutes
- d. Financial Information for October 2021 – December 2021

- e. Monthly Statistical Reports for October 2021 - December 2021
- f. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report
- g. Cornerstone – Illinois Weekly Update

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Approve the Consent Agenda.

Trustee Foster motioned; seconded by Trustee Buchanan.

Discussion: David Braun, General Manager, pointed out that the December 2021 Cash Disbursement reports reflect a much higher amount than in previous months. He explained that annual fees for software support and licensing, and a transfer of \$1,250,000.00 to our line of credit account caused the increased amount for December's cash disbursement. The transfer allowed Connect Transit the ability to do debt service as required to access IDOT funding. Trustee Buchanan stated that the income statement looks good. David Braun shared that the Cardinal Infrastructure report stated we will see the FTA funding for the Bus/Bus Facilities award is anticipated in February or March of 2022. We are waiting on that grant to move forward with our LED lighting project that will replace lighting in the garage to further reduce the cost of electricity. We will also purchase five vehicles and update facilities with this funding.

Trustee Buchanan asked if we will be able to apply for the RAISE grant.

David Braun stated we will pursue the RAISE grant if we do not get the funding for the vehicles, at this time we are waiting to see what happens with the Bus/Bus Facilities grant before applying for the RAISE grant.

David went on to point out that the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) allows government agencies to transfer their own property for affordable housing, and there is transit-oriented development issued within this act. If Connect Transit can participate in some of the housing decisions in the Bloomington-Normal area, we could help support that with some of the funding that is available for transit-oriented development. David also shared that the vaccine mandate has been blocked by the Supreme Court and the mask order is continuing until March 18, 2022.

Trustee Buchanan asked if the Electric Vehicle Charging Act and Complete Streets Act are flagged for our lobbyists in Springfield to keep us informed on.

David stated that they will be keeping us in the loop on these items. Trustee Buchanan stated there is potential for Connect Transit with these acts.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if the statistics for December 2021 reflect calendar years or fiscal years.

Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director, stated they are fiscal years. Chairman Whitehouse stated the report shows that we had more riders in December of 2020, when we were in the height of the pandemic, than in December of 2021, when we were returning to normal. Chairman Whitehouse asked if we could look at that to see what the possible reasons are for the difference. Vice-Chair Hile inquired if it could relate to the reduction in service, to which David said there was only a slight reduction in service at that time.

Vice-Chair Hile asked if David Braun is monitoring the Infrastructure Design Build bill.

David Braun stated the state funding available in this bill is more challenging to obtain but that Connect Transit will continue to see if there is anything we can do to obtain funding,

possibly for the Transit Center. Vice-Chair Hile stated it is a nice example of Connect Transit partnering with the City of Bloomington to become eligible.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice-Chair Hile, Trustee McCue, Trustee Rao, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

Consent Agenda was **approved**.

NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Financial Audit Presentation from CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (Informational):
Adam Pulley of CliftonLarsonAllen presented the results of Connect Transit's FY20 and FY21 Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports. The audit report stated one finding: During the audit, it was noted a material audit adjustment was necessary to increase capital assets and accounts payable by \$651, 183.00. This finding has already been resolved by the Finance Department: Going forward the System will process invoices from the line of credit through the general ledger software when received. When the check from the bank is written, the System will make an adjustment to AP to records the payment. No other findings were reported. Report available on the Connect Transit website.
- b. Recommendation to authorize the General Manager to approve the Heartland Community College Universal Access Contract for a six-month extension from January 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022 in the amount of \$48,000.00.

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Recommendation to authorize the General Manager to approve the Heartland Community College Universal Access Contract for a six-month extension from January 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022 in the amount of \$48,000.00.

Trustee Buchanan motioned; seconded by Trustee McCue.

Pat Kuebrich explained that we are asking for an extension of the current agreement, with Heartland Community College paying \$48,000.00 to Connect Transit, based on an estimate of 400 unique riders, at \$20 per month in six-month period of January 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022. The Universal Access Agreement allows students and employees of Heartland Community College to ride Connect Transit fixed route buses free of charge upon displaying their valid school ID. Connect Transit will provide established and regularly publicized public transportation service to the Bloomington-Normal community. David Braun shared that we are working with HCC to establish a long-term solution that will provide the same level of funding, if not more, working towards a University Pass for their students.

Discussion:

Chairman Whitehouse asked Pat Kuebrich to confirm that this extension is similar to what we've done in the past, Pat confirmed.

Trustee Buchanan asked if there are provisions to track increased cost or increased ridership.

David Braun answered that ideally there will be a partial rider formula, with an understanding that there will be a cost-of-living increase.

Trustee Buchanan asked if the expected 400 riders been close to the actual number of riders over the recent months.

Pat Kuebrich stated that prior to COVID this number was accurate. David Braun stated that with this service not being a unique to them service it would be hard to track increased cost of operation because it does serve other people.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that HCC has always been a good partner, having always been understanding of increased cost with explanation.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice-Chair Hile, Trustee McCue, Trustee Rao, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None

Recommendation to authorize the General Manager to approve the Heartland Community College Universal Access Contract for a six-month extension from January 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022 in the amount of \$48,000.00 **approved.**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Chairman Whitehouse asked the Board to please put the meetings, as shared via the handout, on their calendars. He also shared that we will be requesting RSVP status prior to the meeting in order to confirm we have a quorum and who will be attending virtually, etc. He reminded the Board that Connect Transit apparel orders are due by Monday, 1/31/22. Chairman Whitehouse shared that David Braun will be serving on the Economic Development Committee to represent the transit system.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT:

David Braun, General Manager, introduced Germaine Walls, the temporary HR Manager. Germaine has taken the burden off many of the staff and is doing a wonderful job. She is currently the Interim HR Manager, but he hopes she will become the permanent HR Manager and we will continue to work with her until she makes her decision.

Electric Bus Progress

David shared an update on the electric buses, stating we received four buses around Thanksgiving through the beginning of December. David then passed the floor to Brady Lange, Procurement Director and Interim Maintenance Manager, to continue the update. Brady shared that the Training Department has been training Operators on the proper operation and different nuances of operating an electric bus. At this time approximately 10 Operators left to be trained. Proterra, manufacturer of the electric buses, was on-site last week to train the Mechanics with great feedback received from them on the well-received training. Brady shared that the current supply chain issues are affecting the receipt of bus chargers, with a delay until April 25. Proterra has supplied us with two temporary chargers, allowing us to charge two buses at a time. We are working with them to secure two more chargers so we will be able to charge all four buses, but this is still developing. We currently plan to do a soft roll-out in the next few weeks, meaning we will run them in revenue services a couple of days a week. This will give us real-world data so we can plan which routes we can best utilize them in full revenue service. Once we have all chargers on site, we will plan the public roll-out and

ribbon cutting. We are already working on the configuration of the next eight electric buses, slated to begin production at the end of May 2022, with an anticipated delivery in late fall.

Chairman Whitehouse asked if we could arrange a tour of the electric buses right before our next Board of Trustees meeting, allowing all Trustees the opportunity to see the buses.

Brady confirmed this could be arranged. David stated we will need to discuss the ribbon cutting details once we are ready to go into full service with them. Trustee Hile stated she was pleased we received the buses, considering the supply chain issues. David agreed and stated we modified our electric bus plan because of this, with the hopes of receiving all remaining eight buses this year.

Recruiting and Training Update

David stated we have faced some challenges with losing some valuable staff members and as a result we are recruiting for a Maintenance Manager, a Maintenance Supervisor, Bus Operators, Service Technicians, a Transportation Planner, and a Marketing and Business Development Manager. He shared that we have extended an offer for the Transportation Planner position and await her response. He looks forward to having new staff on board, but it has been a challenge to fill the positions. He shared that we are constantly recruiting for Bus Operators and looking to change the messaging for this position, focusing on the community service and career aspect, with the hopes of attracting candidates who are interested in serving the community while receiving great pay and benefits in a career position.

Trustee Buchanan asked how many more Operators we are looking to hire, other than the four in training right now.

David stated that we are still lacking more than 10 Operators due to retirements and terminations. Shelly Perry, Operations Manager, stated we are planning to hold classes in March, April, and May, with the hopes of having ten trainees in each class knowing about half will successfully complete the training. Trustee Buchanan expressed her pleasure in the direction we are taking the campaign to hire more Operators.

Trustee Foster asked what challenges in service we are facing with the reduction of staff.

David replied we cut back peak service, changing many of them to hourly service and we reduced our late-night service. He shared that some of these reductions were due to COVID protocols and that we hope to return to restore late-night service the first week of February, but that we will continue to run at a reduced frequency service until we are able to hire the necessary staff.

David shared that we are looking at adding new services and that will require additional Operators, which will be reflected in the upcoming FY23 budget proposal. David stated that what we need today may not reflect what we need tomorrow and that we must constantly re-evaluate that. David also stated that Bloomington and Normal first responders attended an on-site Proterra training, teaching them how to respond to an electric bus emergency, especially the high voltage areas to avoid and how to disable the bus if needed. He also shared that Proterra has been training the Mechanics to give them a better understanding of the electrical component locations and how to approach working on the bus, and we have been training the Operators on the differences in the electric bus and a diesel bus.

COVID and Vaccination Update

David reminded everyone that we reimplemented the COVID protocols on January 8, 2022 with no major pushback from the community, and that the Operators seem to appreciate our taking steps to protect their health. He shared that 86 employees (63%) have shared their vaccination record and taken advantage of the gift card incentive.

Stuff the Bus

David shared that our 2021 Stuff the Bus campaign collected 6.29 tons of donations, more than prior years due to the additional locations and vehicles, with 100% participation from the administrative staff.

2021 Strategic Plan Status Report

David stated that our Strategic Plan expired in 2021, with many of the goals and plans hindered by the COVID pandemic. He shared that for our next Strategic Plan we need to revisit our mission statement and core values and look at what we have defined as goals in the recently expired Strategic Plan. He shared that many of the goals were very vague and not well defined, using the terms “sustainable” and “optimally” as examples. He stated that in our next Strategic Plan he would like to see us take into consideration what we ended up accomplishing with our expired plan and move forward from there. Chairman Whitehouse agreed with David’s thoughts and explained he would look to David’s expertise to guide us through the new plan. David shared that he would like to involve Kristen Joyner, the facilitator from our Board Retreat, in the discussions needed to start the plan because she has valuable knowledge and an expertise in this area.

Connect to the Future Working Group Recommendations Status Report

David reviewed the CTF Working Group Recommendations report shared within the meeting packet, adding that many of the incomplete items could be incorporated into our new Strategic Plan. He recalled conversations with Vice-Chair Hile pondering what transit will look like when we emerge from COVID and how it has impacted our ridership, and that we need to consider that when we move forward.

Board Retreat Summary

David reminded everyone that at their seats they would find a summary of the Board Retreat discussions, provided by Kristen Joyner. He asked that everyone also consider these when we move forward with the next Strategic Plan.

Strategic Planning Discussion

David informed everyone that he will poll everyone on their availability for a meeting to begin discussions on the Strategic Plan, including both workday and evening options. He shared that he will be including Connect Transit Leadership in this meeting due to their positions and investment to Connect Transit.

Chairman Whitehouse asked everyone to please review the Board Retreat Summary and share with David their thoughts, and that we will look to the expertise of David Braun and Kristen Joyner. Chairman Whitehouse expressed his appreciation of the Board Retreat and Kristen, adding that the videos provided should be on our website. He stated that he would like David Braun and Kristen Joyner to come to the Strategic Planning meeting with a plan and guidance on what the next steps should be.

Vice-Chair Hile asked David Braun and Kristen Joyner please provide them with framing questions to assist in the next steps at the Strategic Planning meeting. She also stated that having Kristen Joyner facilitate the meeting is a wonderful idea, allowing David Braun to participate in the discussions instead of leading the meeting. Vice-Chair Hile thanked David Braun for moving them forward with the Strategic Plan and the direction of Connect Transit.

Fare Revenue

David shared that due to the COVID protocols we lost approximately \$53,000.00 in fare revenue, but that we saved approximately \$30,000.00 in operating cost.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS:

Trustee Foster stated she thoroughly enjoyed the Board Retreat and provided well needed direction and thanked David Braun for putting it together. She also expressed her appreciation to Connect Transit for providing support to the Jelani Day march.

Chairman Whitehouse also expressed his appreciation of our support in the Jelani Day march and how Connect Transit supports the community in many ways.

Trustee Foster also shared her happiness in being a member of the Board and serving the community. She shared an idea to have bus stops named after someone and asked that we consider that in future discussions because she feels it will engage our community more.

Trustee Buchanan shared her appreciation for the Board Retreat and the knowledge and empowerment it shared. David Braun concurred and thanked the staff for putting everything together.

Trustee Rao thanked David Braun for his reports and the information they provide.

Trustee McCue stated that the ISU community shared some pushback on the reduction in service on the Redbird Express due to student safety in colder weather, expressed his appreciation that we will restore service when safely allowable.

Chairman Whitehouse thanked Trustee McCue for sharing his input and appreciated their conversation on this topic. He also expressed the concern for student safety and that we are doing our best to resume service as soon as possible.

Vice-Chair Hile shared her appreciation for the Board Retreat, the book provided, and education on the staff role she received at the Retreat. She thanked Chairman Whitehouse for his leadership at the Retreat. She shared that the authors of the book shared at the Retreat are on the program for the virtual APTA conference and encouraged everyone to attend whatever sessions they can.

Chairman Whitehouse asked City Manager Reece and Deputy City Manager Tyus if they had anything to share.

Deputy City Manager Tyus shared that the City of Bloomington will be implementing a downtown streetscape program in the next couple of months, keeping Connect Transit informed of meetings so they can be involved in the planning with how it pertains to Connect Transit.

City Manager Reece shared that they will be holding their annual budget work session with their City Council to present their proposed FY22/23 budget and five-year projection.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

No Executive Session held.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Whitehouse called for a Motion to Adjourn.

Trustee Foster motioned; seconded by Vice-Chair Hile.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan, Trustee Foster, Vice-Chair Hile, Trustee McCue, Trustee Rao, Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

Motion to adjourn the Board of Trustees meeting was **approved**; meeting adjourned at 5:38 p.m.


Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary


Janice Crago, Board Clerk

[SEAL]

