

## Notes: Meeting of the Connect to the Future Working Group

August 17, 2019

### Overview of topics covered at the August 17 Working Group Meeting

The following major topics were covered during the meeting:

- Report-out on homework from the last meeting: use transit in a new way and make observations.
- Brainstorming goals for the future of the community's transit system.
- Presentation and discussion of Connect Transit's current priorities and strategies for achieving those priorities.
- Discussion of how transit is currently funded in Bloomington-Normal, how other communities fund transit, and what funding options would and would not work in this community.

### Meeting Summary

#### **In attendance**

Chair Judy Buchanan – Connect Transit  
Board Trustee  
Julie Hile – Connect Transit Board  
Trustee  
Josh W Barnett  
Tim Bassett  
Marty Eckert  
Linda Foster

Dylan Hile-Broad  
Katy Killian  
Kimberly Klepec  
Steven P. Kossman  
Jose Antonio Patino  
Deb Presley (via phone)  
De Urban

#### **Public Comment**

No public comments submitted.

#### **Report out on homework from the previous meeting: take transit in a new way and make observations**

Working Group members each reported on how they chose to take transit and what stood out to them from the experience. The following are major commonalities and themes:

- The most common approach was taking transit to a medical appointment (5 Working Group members). Several members traveled with or talked to other riders. Some attempted to use transit to take a trip they or someone in their life would typically take by car.
- Working Group members consistently noted the friendliness, helpfulness, and professionalism of Connect Transit drivers.

- Several experienced difficulty accessing stops or observed likely difficulty for people with mobility or vision impairment due to traffic, underdeveloped bus stops etc.
- Several members noted timely service and quick, easy rides.
- Members who made transfers had mixed experiences with bus route timing and predictability—some had no issues whereas others missed their transfers.
- Members who used available services to access transit info (calling to confirm schedule, using the app, etc.) generally found these services accurate and helpful.
- A couple members were unable to complete their intended trip via transit.

### **Discussion: Goals for the future**

Facilitator Beth Osborne asked members of the Working Group to start the discussion of goals for the system by briefly brainstorming the qualities that make a good goal.

*Members said that a good goal is:*

- Attainable yet ambitious
- Clear—for both implementers and the public
- Measurable—quantitative and/or qualitative
- Includes steps and strategies
- Time-bound
- Outcome oriented
- Outwardly focused

Working Group members then discussed potential goals that this group believes are important for the future of transit, reflecting on Connect Transit’s existing goals in its strategic plan. Beth Osborne summarized the brainstormed goals as follows at the end of the discussion. The full list of goals is provided below.

*Summary of goals:*

- Provide access to jobs and services (including for low-income residents)
- Attract choice riders
- Keep the system affordable
- Provide safe access to transit stops

*All goals brainstormed:*

- Get people where they need to go
- Build community trust
- If you live or work within the city/town limits you should be able to access your destinations by bus (need to define “access”—length of trip, length of walk to a bus stop, etc.)
- Reduce the need for residents of this community to own cars

- Make transit a sustainable option over the long term despite changing technology
- Improve public safety
- Provide affordable access for people with disabilities and very poor residents
- Increase local funding for transit

### **Presentation & discussion: Connect Transit goals, operations, and funding**

General Manager Isaac Thorne briefly presented on Connect Transit's current priorities and strategies for achieving them: 1) Become the mobility provider of choice, 2) Quality customer experience, and 3) Economic/environmental impact (slides provided separately).

A facilitated discussion followed, including the following major points:

- Sprawling development poses a significant barrier.
  - As development becomes spread out, the cost to provide transit service for everyone in the community increases substantially.
  - Land use decisions impact transit access, including for riders who are poor or have disabilities (for example, locating medical facilities on the outskirts of town and/or all on the east side of town).
  - The local jurisdictions are aware of this challenge and trying to coordinate, However, Connect Transit typically does not have input on decisions about smaller development projects.
- Bus stop accessibility and safety are key issues:
  - Three factors involved: the quality of the stops themselves, presence of sidewalks, and speed of traffic.
  - Connect Transit is upgrading bus stops, but years from completion. Even with more funding, the approval and construction process would still be lengthy. Need ways to expedite.
- This community needs more local funding for transit:
  - Many other localities receive a significantly larger share of their funds from local sources.
  - This is likely because the State of Illinois provides more funding for transit than many other states.
  - However, this community should not cap its local funding at the bare minimum needed just because it has the advantage of more state funding.
- Serving transit dependent versus choice riders is the wrong question:
  - Making transit affordable for the very poor requires stable funding.
  - In some communities, attracting choice riders has helped provide the funding needed to keep fares affordable for low-income riders.

- In other communities, non-riders subsidize transit by voting for a tax increase at the ballot because they see the broader value it provides to their community.
- Either instance requires building the case that the rest of the community benefits from transit.

**Discussion: Options for funding transit**

The Working Group then discussed observations about transit funding in other communities and options that would or would not work in Bloomington-Normal. This discussion is summarized below.

*Takeaways from the materials provided about other transit systems:*

- Everyone funds transit differently.
- This community needs a culture shift—transit should be an investment we make as taxpayers, not an afterthought. Need to build the will to increase local funding.
- Need to look at how other communities have kept transit affordable, and which peer communities are able to levy which taxes for comparison.

*What qualities should transit funding have?*

- Funding diversity—multiple sources
- Dedicated funding
- Flexibility
- Transparency

*What could potentially work here?*

- Go through an engagement process to evaluate what the community values first
- Use current sales tax on gasoline for transit (transit should count as “infrastructure”)
- Sales tax—increase it or give a greater portion of existing revenues to transit
  - Increase: Current caps pose a barrier.
  - Dedicate a portion of existing revenue to transit: If either town gave more they would be eligible for a larger match.
- Property tax for businesses located in close proximity to transit
- Gas tax
- Greater university contribution

*What would not work here?*

- Should not pursue an overly regressive tax. However, spending revenue from a regressive tax in progressive ways (such as on affordable transit service) would still be an improvement over the inequities in the current transportation system.
- Funding without a clear vision and outcomes tied to it

- Not having broad community support

### **Focus Groups kick-off**

Four focus groups will meet between Working Group meetings and develop written recommendations for discussion during the CttF meeting on October 19. The facilitators briefly outlined the process for these groups. The focus groups then held their first meetings immediately following the adjournment of the Working Group. Please see documents provided separately for a summary of the focus group topics, process, assignments, and template for written recommendations.

### **Major Next Steps**

The following major actions will be taken before the next meeting:

- Connect to the Future Focus Groups will meet four times and develop written recommendations for discussion during the October 19<sup>th</sup> Working Group meeting. Connect Transit will circulate contact information to support these meetings.
- The facilitators will provide materials at least one week in advance of the next meeting.
- The following additional information will be circulated to Work Group members before the next meeting: share of Bloomington and Normal sales tax revenues currently going to transit.

**The next Connect to the Future Working Group Meeting will be Sept. 21, 2019**