



BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The following reports reflect the substantial research done by *Connect To The Future* subgroups during the course of the project. It includes references to benchmarks against other transit systems; opinions of subgroup members, Subject Matter Experts, and community members; and various kinds of analysis.

While this information here informed our collective final work, it is superseded by our consensus recommendations.

Recommendations:**1. Increase efforts to promote, advocate for, and support transit supportive development (“TSD”).**Description

Connect Transit (and other community partners) should bolster efforts associated with the promotion of transit supportive development. This is imperative as the community continues to grow and evolve. The value of the transit system from an economic partnership perspective (and many other aspects) hinges upon appropriate and reasonable access anywhere in the community. This includes engaging in public and private partnerships to ensure new and existing developments are compelled to consider access to Connect Transit routes through planning, design, and implementation.

Goals and Objectives

This aligns with many of the strategies outlined in the Connect Transit strategic plan as well as many of the goals developed by the Connect to the Future working group. This specifically contributes to the goals identified surrounding access, growing ridership, and safety.

Measuring success

Success for this recommendation can be measured through increases (or decreases) in overall ridership, especially for geography where access to the system has historically been limited due to poor planning.

Responsibility

Responsibility for executing this recommendation falls on the Connect Transit operations personnel as well as The City of Bloomington, The Town of Normal, McLean County administration, and other pertinent stakeholders.

Priority

High

2. Continue and expedite efforts to develop Downtown Bloomington Transfer CenterDescription

Connect Transit should continue (and perhaps expedite) efforts associated with the development of the Downtown Bloomington Transfer Center. In accordance with the suggestions of the Short-Range Transit Plan, the City of Bloomington’s Comprehensive plan, and other pertinent studies, our recommendation is being provided as validation associated with this initiative. The lack of infrastructure is not only taxing on the operations but is also not conducive for economic growth in Downtown Bloomington and beyond. It is likely that the establishment of the transfer center

will be a spur for development in the area, create opportunities in the area, create opportunities to promote commerce, and impact the overall economic ecosystem positively.

Goals and Objectives

This recommendation closely aligns with goals of access, growing ridership, and safety established by the Connect to the Future working group.

Measuring success

Success related to this recommendation can be measured by the overall growth in ridership and the impact on surrounding businesses once the transfer center is established.

Responsibility

Responsibility for executing this recommendation falls upon the Connect Board/leadership municipal stakeholders, and pertinent parties associated with developing the transfer center, such as private partners.

Priority

High

3. Further advance efforts associated with economic partnership and influence in the community.

Description

While Connect Transit has engaged in community outreach, it appears there may be opportunities to further advance dialogue with partners in the community from an economic development perspective. This includes a cohesive, structured, and deliberate initiative to engage with employers and businesses to understand and address transit related desires/concerns. This is incredibly important as it pertains to businesses not presently located in existing transit corridors or areas without high transit propensity. The Short-Range Transit Plan calls for increased efforts to expand the universal access program in this regard. However, doing so for new businesses and those not presently taking advantage of the transit system will require such a mechanism to understand the need for transportation, existing barriers, and potential solutions.

Goals and Objectives

This recommendation aligns with the goals of access, growing ridership, and community engagement as established by the working group.

Measuring success

Success for this recommendation can be measured in the rate of choice ridership and the increase in employers utilizing the universal access system.

Responsibility

The responsibility for executing this recommendation falls upon the Connect Transit operational leadership, as well as the Board of Trustees.

Priority

High

4. Engage in a sustained Connect Transit ambassador campaign with local economic stakeholders to promote awareness and support for Connect Transit throughout the community.

Description

Development a program to partner with local business leaders to promote the services offered by Connect Transit. Those involved with the campaign should include leadership from Connect Transit, representatives from the business community, and/or those presently utilizing universal access. A concerted marketing effort would be beneficial in this regard with specific promotions offered (free ride sponsorships, advertising, etc.)

Goals and Objectives

This recommendation aligns with the goals of access, growing ridership, and community engagement as established by the working group.

Measuring success

Success for this recommendation can be measured in the rate of choice ridership and the increase in employers utilizing the universal access system.

Responsibility

Connect Transit, local employers, and business partners

Priority

High

Focus Group Topic: Sustainable Funding**Focus Group Participants:**

Judy Buchanan, CttF Committee Member Co-Chair and Connect Transit Board Member
Katy Killian, CttF Committee Member
Deb Presley, CttF Committee Member
De Urban, CttF Committee Member
Donna Boelen, City of Bloomington Ward 2 Councilperson
John Bowman, Connect Transit Board Member
Martin Glaze, Chief Operating Officer - Connect Transit
Terry Lindberg, Retired McLean County Administrator
Jeri Mintzer, Smart Growth America
Beth Osborne, Smart Growth America
Charles Scott, Associate Vice President, Facilities Management, Planning and Operations
Jennifer Sicks, McLean County Regional Planning Commission
Nick Stoff, ISU Director of Parking and Transportation

Current Context of Recommendations and Existing Conditions in Bloomington-Normal:

Public transportation in Bloomington-Normal is a needed service for many individuals in our community. The cost of that service and how to pay for it is a challenge that is expected to become more challenging as operating costs rise without a secure source of additional revenue.

To understand and assess sustainable funding, our subgroup compared Connect Transit with five other communities in Illinois: Champaign, Peoria, Springfield, Rockford, and Decatur. We also gathered information from many subject matter experts as seen through the participants in our group. Most data were obtained from Connect Transit (CT) sources unless otherwise noted.

Fare Structure

Connect Transit relies more heavily on Fare Revenues to support its operating expenses than any other comparison community.¹ While the current fare structure for Connect Transit is similar to some of the other communities, the rate increases approved on 3/26/2019 would make CT fares higher than found elsewhere. It was noted that some communities are able to actually offer free rides to large segments of their riders. Connect Transit's new rates and rate structure would be significantly higher than other communities and unaffordable for many transit dependent riders; especially those dependent on Connect Mobility (CM) the paratransit service. **Our highest priority recommendation is for CT to establish a "One Rate for All" fare structure (suggested \$1.25) for both the fixed-route service and all paratransit service levels with a fare cap or monthly pass (suggested \$40) for low income riders.**

Although the cost to provide CM service is higher than fixed-route service, a "One Rate for All" fare structure recognizes the value of enabling individuals with disabilities equal access to our community at the same fare rate. Additionally, riders who cannot use the fixed route because of ADA non-compliant stops will be assured that paratransit service is available for the same cost as the fixed-route service.

Our suggested fare rate of \$1.25 is a fixed-route fare increase of \$0.25 and paratransit fare decrease of \$0.75 from the current rates. Because of the various passes and discounts currently available in the fare structure, calculating the exact impact of fare changes is a rough estimate, at best. Detailed ridership data by fare category is not readily available.

The methodology used to estimate the impact of changes to the fare structure results in widely different numbers. Using raw ridership data and full fare amounts, an estimate of the maximum amount of revenue possible can be calculated. This amount would then need to be reduced by the various fare reductions offered. So a \$1.25 per trip

¹ Federal Transit Administration, NTD Transit Agency Profiles

rate would reduce current maximum CM fare revenue roughly by \$73,513² annually and increase maximum fixed rate revenue by \$612,000³. The monetary impact of the various passes, universal access program, and mandated fare reduction for seniors and other groups would decrease the total amount realized just as it does under the current fare structure. However due to the lack of detailed data, this could not be calculated.

Using a different methodology of applying a 25% increase to FY2019 total fare revenue, Connect Transit roughly estimates a \$1.25 per trip rate would reduce current CM fare revenue by \$50,867⁴ annually and increase fixed rate revenue by \$297,492⁵. However this does not take into consideration that the total fare revenue is not all generated by the same fare rate. Different methodologies will produce varying results because of the complexity of the fare structure and lack of detailed data with which to calculate a more precise number.⁶

The fare cap for low-income riders we are suggesting is \$40, which is approximately 5% of the current Supplemental Security Income (SSI) of \$771. This amount ensures low-income transit-dependent riders will only be asked to pay a pre-determined amount of their monthly budget on transportation. A process similar to the BEAM / Circuit Breaker⁷ application process could be used to determine who is eligible for the fare cap. We do not support the discount card concept used in the rate structure approved (and postponed) in March 2019 because the lowest income riders do not have enough money to take advantage of the discounts. Instead we recommend use of a fare cap for eligible low-income riders.

The fare rate and fare cap should be reviewed as part of the budgetary process. Any future rate increases should be determined in light of cost of living changes to SSI and should not exceed approximately 5% of SSI on a monthly basis.

The “One Rate for All” fare structure eliminates the upcharge currently added for Premium A (add \$1) and Premium B (add \$2) paratransit service. The additional revenue brought in by the upcharge accounts for approximately \$6324⁸ annually in additional revenue, but makes mobility transportation unaffordable for some of the most transit-dependent citizens. Under the rate structure approved 3/2019 and then postponed, a paratransit rider living in the Premium B area would pay \$300 per month for one ride per day (\$10*30days). That is nearly 40% of monthly SSI income and therefore unaffordable. Additionally, drivers reported that the premium service fare structure is confusing to the riders and many times charges a higher rate for a trip that is actually shorter in distance.

Following the rate increase in March 2019, there was considerable community concern surrounding the differences between the CT fare structures and the CM base and premium fare structures as well as the unaffordable nature of the fare structure for those with disabilities and low incomes. One focus of this subgroup is how we as a community might address this concern. Furthermore, there has been an abundance of community support and commitment to improve transportation access and affordability for individuals with disabilities and transit dependent riders. This concern prompted the CT Board to postpone its implementation of the fare hike “in order for Staff to continue to look for other sources of revenue.” (CT Board Minutes 3/26/19).

Furthermore, two of the key findings from the McLean County Regional Planning Commission’s Short Range Transit Plan (MCRPC-SRTP) included: “Connect Transit should focus on serving those who are dependent on it.” and “Connect should prioritize fare capping or other mechanisms to ensure that riders with the most need are not unduly burdened.” Our recommendations try to address these concerns through creating a simplified “One Rate for

² 86,872 paratransit rides * \$0.75 + 3,815 paratransit Premium A rides * \$1.75 + 612 paratransit Premium B rides * \$2.75 = \$73,550

³ 2,446,527 rides * \$0.25

⁴ \$135,645 CM Revenue - \$84,6778 CM Revenue with same ridership @ \$1.25/ride = \$50,867 reduction in CM Revenue

⁵ \$1,189,968 Fixed Route Fares x .25 = \$297,492.

⁶ See MCRPC Short Range Transit Plan p. 58-59 Data Gathering, Management, and Analytics.

⁷ <https://www2.illinois.gov/aging/BenefitsAccess/Pages/Ride-Free-Transit-Benefit.aspx>

⁸ 4,692 rides * \$1 upcharge + 816 rides * \$2 upcharge = \$6,324

All” fare structure that is both affordable and equitable for those using fixed and paratransit services in Bloomington-Normal.

While we discussed the possibility of free fares, at this time we did not find a free fare system sustainable until substantially more revenue was achieved. The “One Rate for All” fare structure with a fare cap for low-income riders being recommended is attainable through current funding mechanisms.

Fixed Route Cost vs Paratransit Service Cost

Since paratransit is a demand service, the amount of usage and operating cost are directly related. The more usage, the more cost. This is different than the relationship found on the fixed route service where operating costs are fixed no matter how many people ride the bus.

A noted concern is that paratransit services are more expensive per trip to provide than fixed-route service, and therefore it is thought that the fare to utilize that system should be higher. However fare recovery is a very small portion of overall operating revenue on either system and will not generate enough money to offset operational costs in a meaningful amount. Additionally, it seems incongruent with community values to charge more for providing a service that is an accommodation for being disabled and unable to ride a fixed-route bus. Charging higher fares for mobility service is analogous to charging library patrons for using large-print books or shoppers for using ADA accessible doors or students for special education services. The cost for such accommodations is borne by the public as a whole, not just the population that the accommodation serves.

While the cost to provide paratransit service is higher than the cost to provide fixed service, those using the paratransit service in our community many times do not have another option for transportation. Our community does not offer taxi service for those in a wheelchair. Services such as Uber are not navigable (or safe to use) by many with developmental disabilities. It is apparent that the provision of paratransit service is helping those individuals with the most need for public transportation in our community.

Additionally, those individuals using paratransit are also typically those who are least able to afford the service (current monthly SSI is \$771). The additional cost to provide paratransit service cannot be borne by the majority of those who need the service. A monthly fare cap or pass that does not exceed roughly 5% of SSI for paratransit service is part of our highest priority recommendation.

We also recommend that paratransit service be expanded to include all areas in Bloomington-Normal. This would eliminate the corridor concept around fixed route services. Currently paratransit service is only offered in a corridor around fixed routes: up to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (base service), $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 mile (Premium A service), and 1-1.25 miles (Premium B service). While this will increase operating costs because more people will be served, this expansion is in line with the underlying value of providing service to those most in need in our community: seniors, the disabled, and the low-income rider. Where you live in our community should not determine if you have access to paratransit service. Changes in fixed routes would no longer impact whether paratransit service was available to individuals with disabilities. Additionally, riders who cannot use the fixed route because of ADA non-compliant stops would be assured that CM service is available. Older residents who become disabled would not be forced to move from their home in order to secure paratransit service. It is difficult to assess the potential cost of this expansion due to the unknown number of users and the various rate structures in place. We recommend that an effort be made to identify the potential number of riders and cost to expand paratransit service to all of Bloomington-Normal. Once determined, a plan to expand service should be developed and implemented.

CT can alleviate some of the cost of providing paratransit service by assuring that as many individuals who can use the fixed route system do. This includes making sure that the fixed routes are ADA compliant and that only individuals who are eligible for paratransit are using it. We also would like CT to explore the potential cost saving of purchasing and utilizing a shared minivan service for a portion of the paratransit service offered.

Revenue Sources

CT operating revenue comes from a combination of passenger fares, universal access contracts, advertising revenue, City of Bloomington and Town of Normal support, State of Illinois DOAP funding, and Section 5307 Federal

funding. As operating expenses continue to climb, it will be important to secure a combination of funding sources that increase with inflation as well as review both capital expenditures and operating expenses to make sure they align with community values and needs.

Connect Transit relies less on local funding for operational expenses than any of the comparison communities. Increasing local funding from the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal will help to bring CT in line with other communities studied. Since CT riders are also residents of McLean County, and of either Normal Township or City of Bloomington Township, these entities could also be a source of additional revenue; especially for low-income riders. Additional local dollars will allow CT to develop a universally affordable rate structure with a fare cap, reduce its reliance on Federal 5307 funds for operating expenses, fully maximize DOAP funding, and have a sustainable funding source into the future.

CT's Universal Access program is inconsistent in how each universal access partner is charged. In FY2019 the two largest partners, ISU (\$.88 fare) and HCC (\$.75 fare), paid only a portion of the fare charged to the general public (\$1.00 fare). Except for one program, all other universal access programs paid a reduced fare between \$0.75 and \$0.90.

By far the largest Universal Access partner is ISU who accounted for 617,716 trips (25% of all passenger trips) in FY2019. By charging the proposed standard fare of \$1.25, revenue of \$279,850 (universal access) and \$492,295 (Redbird Express) would be generated (using FY2019 ridership numbers). Similarly, Heartland Community College would generate \$154,993 in revenue. We recommend that the Universal Access fares be made equitable with the "One Rate for All" fare structure where all riders of the participating programs would be charged at least 90% of the fare charged to the general public. Additionally, the Redbird Express is primarily a circulator route used by ISU students during the academic year. Connect Transit projects the 2020 operating cost for this route is approximately \$613,000. We recommend that CT consider negotiating a separate contract for the Redbird Express as was done prior to 2014.

Other potential Universal Access partners include the MARC Center, Homes for Hope and the McLean County Nursing Home. These organizations are heavy users of CT services and are potential sources of additional revenue to support transit for their residents.

We would also like CT to explore encouraging Universal Access partners and other employers to offer Qualified Transportation Benefits to their employees. This benefit basically allows employees to pay for public transportation costs with pre-tax dollars.

CT has increased its advertising revenue, which now accounts for 7% of its operating revenue. We recommend that CT continue to pursue all avenues of increasing revenue in this manner. A potential new source of advertising is the Rivian plant being located in Normal (which ties nicely into the new electric bus purchases).

Operating Funds Challenge

Through a one-cent local sales tax voted in 2015, the City of Bloomington provides \$610,000 per year and the Town of Normal provides \$390,000 per year for a total of \$1,000,000 for CT operating expenses. We recommend that a formalized agreement be reached that provides a set percentage of the sales tax revenue be used as a dedicated funding stream for public transportation rather than it being a fixed amount. This would provide for increasing revenues as the tax base increases and thereby help to keep up with rising operating expenses.

We also recommend that the total amount provided by the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal be increased through the funding mechanism provided for in the Intergovernmental Agreement. An increase in local funding will bring us in line with other communities in Illinois. An increase would also serve to maximize our Illinois Downstate Operating Program (DOAP) funding. By increasing funding at the local level, CT would be able to receive an additional 65 cents in DOAP funding for every 35 cents of additional local funding. This additional revenue would allow CT to: a) implement the recommended changes to the fare structure to make it more affordable and equitable; b) have a sustainable source of operating revenue; and c) ultimately reduce the need to use federal funds for operating expenses rather than capital expenditures.

The largest portion of operating expenses is funded through DOAP subsidies. In 2020 CT was allocated \$13,890,500 in potential DOAP funding by the State. (DOAP funding began in 1984 and increases by about 10% each year.) CT's FY2020 operating budget is expected to use \$8,830,000 of the allocated DOAP funding. For the first time, an additional \$1,153,100 in DOAP funding is being accessed through debt service to pay for the capital purchase of the solar array and electric buses. (While this increases the amount of DOAP funding used, it also blurs the line between capital expenditures and operating expenses. Utilizing local funding to secure loans, which are then paid back through DOAP debt service funds, ultimately reduces the amount of DOAP available for operating expenses.) Since CT is not fully utilizing DOAP funding, this currently makes sense. However, as operating expenses rise, we recommend that DOAP monies be prioritized for operating expenses not capital expenditures.

In FY2020 CT is unable to access \$3.9 million in DOAP subsidies due to the lack of local funding. With an additional \$2.1 million in operating revenue from the local governments (split between the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington), CT would meet the funding threshold needed to access the full amount of DOAP funding available. Since DOAP pays for \$65 of operating expenses for every \$35 in local revenue spent, it is important for CT to receive additional local funding in order to maximize its use of DOAP funding.

Further, CT is currently using approximately \$2 million in Federal funds (49 USC 5307, Urbanized Area Formula Funding) to cover operating expenses. These funds are allocated on a population-based formula and there is no cap on the amount of these funds that can be used for operating assistance. If operating expenses are not covered by other means, more and more Federal 5307 funds will be used for operating expenses thereby reducing the ability to use them for capital expenditures. We recommend that additional local revenue be secured in order to reduce the dependence on Federal 5307 funds currently being used for operating expenses.

We did not pursue a review of CT's detailed line item operational budget. However the operational budget is the driving force behind the type and quality of service offered and should be developed collaboratively⁹ to reflect community values. We recommend that both the operating budget and capital budget be developed collaboratively with transit users, community stakeholders, and local municipal governments thus assuring that they are reflective of the needs of the community and of the riders. Community input should be garnered from multiple approaches including online and through social media. Special attention should be made to reach the disability community as well as areas of our community and riders not currently served by the system. Once the values, priorities and needs of the community are determined, the transit budget and project priorities would be formally presented to the local municipal Councils for approval and funding.

Capital Funds Challenge

Funding large-scale capital projects while maintaining the necessary funds available for operating expenses is a challenge. Community concern pertaining to current and future capital projects is largely due to the belief that priority should be given to address operational concerns before proceeding with large capital expenditures. Unaffordable fares, ADA accessibility issues, and route reductions are some of the operational concerns that have prompted scrutiny of upcoming capital projects. Since much of the operational and capital revenue (municipal support, state DOAP, and federal 5307) are intertwined and are used for both operational and capital expenses, there will naturally be trade-offs as monies are prioritized for either operational or capital expenses. We recommend an annual review of operational and capital expenditure priorities (as provided for within the Intergovernmental Agreement) by both City of Bloomington and Town of Normal Councils. To improve community input, understanding, and ultimately garner community support, the operational and capital expenditure priorities developed and presented should be based on collaborative community input.

Additionally, we recommend that the identified priorities be presented in tandem with the annual budget request made to the municipalities as also laid out in the intergovernmental agreement.

CT has been very successful in pursuing and being awarded state and local grants to support many of its capital expenditures. CT has been awarded the following Federal 5339 Capital Grants: \$2 million to purchase diesel buses (2015); \$1.45 million to purchase electric buses and solar infrastructure (2017); \$6 million to purchase electric buses and solar infrastructure (2018); \$553,000 for the Better Bus Stops campaign (pending). CT has also been awarded

⁹ iap² Spectrum of Public Participation

the following State 5305 Capital Grants: \$250,000 to conduct feasibility and alternative site analysis for Downtown Transfer Station (2017); and \$3 million for construction of Downtown Transfer Center (2019). Finally, CT has been awarded Block Grants in 2016 from the Town of Normal for bus shelters and from the City of Bloomington for benches and bus stops. We recommend that CT continue to vigorously pursue federal, state and local grants to support its capital needs.

Our recommendation to increase local municipal funding to support the operational budget will also serve to free up Federal 5307 funds currently being used for operating expenses. This increases available capital funding for both capital maintenance expenditures and new capital projects. The current local general revenue funds from the Town of Normal (\$511,900) and City of Bloomington (\$626,375) are necessary to help secure federal funding which requires a 80/20 split (80 federal / 20 local).

Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA)

We recommend that the IGA be fully utilized to secure sustainable funding from the municipalities through its funding section. Section 5 specifies the funding relationship between CT and the municipalities. The amount contributed by each municipality is based proportionately on each municipality's population from the most recent federal census. By December 1st CT is to provide each municipality with an estimate of the funding needed. "If either City Council disagrees with such estimated funding request, it shall notify the Board of such disagreement no later than February 1st of the subsequent year." This is substantially different than what has happened and offers a clear solution that ties the municipality's funding amount to CT's budget needs rather than a historically pre-determined amount.

Section 8 specifies that each municipality be presented a budget prior to the start of the fiscal year (July 1). The Councils then have the opportunity to reject the budget prior to July 1st. If they reject the budget, then the Councils and CT must work together to formulate a new budget. We recommend that CT prepare a budget that clearly delineates operating expenses, maintenance capital expenses, and large-scale capital projects with anticipated revenue sources. We also recommend that CT work collaboratively with stakeholders and the municipal governments to seek and document community input pertaining to the prioritization of expenditures and the resulting budgets.

Section 9 specifies that CT is to provide each City Council with ongoing monthly, annual, and special reports (prior to any anticipated major change). We recommend that all of these reporting mechanisms be diligently fulfilled in order to better keep the municipalities engaged in the working needs /priorities of CT.

Section 3 of the IGA defines the "area of service" as "the combined corporate limits of the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington." We recommend that funds be saved for future operational expenditures so that CT can be responsive to changing community needs (e.g. bus service in various areas of the community) and be prepared for unexpected changes in funding. Reserves will allow CT more flexibility to be responsive to ever changing commercial and residential development; including medical facilities, retirement communities and places of employment. Additionally, it was reserves that kept CT running when DOAP funds were help up by the budget stalemate in 2016.

Pursuit of a Referendum to become a Transit Taxing Body

In reference to pursuing a referendum for CT to become its own taxing body, our subject matter experts shared that they did not perceive there was sufficient community support to pursue this in the near future. Additionally, creating a taxing body would be a long-term project and wouldn't solve the sustainable funding dilemma currently being considered. Furthermore, even if a taxing authority was approved, there is no guarantee that the tax rate approved would be at an amount that would provide any more funding than can be currently gained through our municipalities. If such an authority was created, and both municipalities lowered their levies by an amount equal to their current contribution, and the newly formed authority set a levy equal to the municipalities, there would be no net revenue gain. If the taxing authority would set levies at an amount exceeding the current amount, we felt it unlikely it would garner enough support for its creation. Finally, we found that for a taxing body to potentially be successful it would likely need to include a broad range of issues (walking trails, bike lanes, etc.) thereby diluting that Board's priority focus on providing public transportation to Bloomington-Normal.

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>1. Develop a “One-Rate for All” fare structure with a fare cap for low-income riders that is the same for fixed route and paratransit riders.</p>	<p>1.A. Rescind the rate hike approved on March 26, 2019 and create a simplified “One Rate for All” fare structure so that all riders of paratransit and fixed-route buses are charged the same amount.</p> <p>1.B. Establish a suggested fare of \$1.25 for both fixed and paratransit trips.</p> <p>1.C. Establish a fare cap (suggested \$40) which is approximately 5% of monthly SSI for all paratransit riders (regular and premium) and fixed-route riders who meet standard poverty levels (i.e. eligible for SSI or Medicaid).</p> <p>1.D. Establish an annual review of fare rates to assure they are affordable (caps not to exceed roughly 5% of SSI) and equitable (same fare for fixed routes and paratransit regular and premium service). Potential future rate increases should be consistent with cost of living adjustments.</p> <p>1.E. Eliminate the upcharge for premium service trips so that <u>all</u> CM riders have the same fare. (Note that this recommendation is not needed if the “one-rate for all” fare structure is adopted.)</p>	<p>Affordability, Grow ridership, Access</p>	<p>“One-Rate for All” is implemented within 6 months</p>	<p>CT Board</p>	<p>1 highest</p>

¹ See full report “Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations 11/08/19” for narrative explanations and data.

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>2. Explore ways to reduce the operating cost of paratransit service without reducing service.</p>	<p>2.A. Explore the purchase of and use of shared ride “mini” vans in place of the small buses to reduce the cost of providing paratransit service.</p> <p>2.B. Reduce the potential overuse of paratransit service by assuring that all riders meet paratransit service qualifications and that riders who can use the fixed route service do.</p> <p>2.C. Prioritize and expedite the creation of ADA compliant bus stops and the infrastructure to make them accessible thereby allowing more individuals with disabilities to use the fixed routes rather than the more expensive paratransit service.</p>	<p>Access, Affordability, Grow ridership</p>	<p>Paratransit service is expanded within one year</p> <p>A pilot project is developed for minivan service</p> <p>Paratransit service qualifications are assessed bi-annually</p> <p>Bus stop campaign is expedited</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>3. Expand paratransit service throughout Bloomington-Normal.</p>	<p>3.A. Identify the potential number of riders and associated cost to expand paratransit service to all of Bloomington-Normal. Once determined, a plan to expand service should be developed and implemented.</p>	<p>Access, Affordability, Grow ridership</p>	<p>Paratransit service is expanded within a year</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board</p>	<p>1</p>

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>4. Standardize and expand the Universal Access program.</p>	<p>4.A. Make the universal access fares equitable with the “one-rate” fare structure. (All riders of participating programs should be charged at least 90% of the fare charged to the general public.)</p> <p>4.B. Separate the Redbird Express from the Universal Access program and negotiate a separate contract for the Redbird Express route.</p> <p>4.C. Explore agencies as additional Universal Access partners; specifically Marcfirst, Homes for Hope and the McLean County Nursing Home. (These organizations are heavy users of CT services and are potential sources of additional revenue to support transit for their residents through agency fares.)</p> <p>4.D. Encourage Universal Access partners and other employers to offer Qualified Transportation Benefits to their employees.</p>	<p>Access, Affordability, Grow ridership</p>	<p>Negotiated contracts generate additional local revenue</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board</p>	<p>2</p>

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>5. Pursue increased local funding from the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal and solicit new funding streams from other governmental entities (McLean County, Normal Township and City of Bloomington Township). (An additional \$2.1 million in local revenue/funding would access the untapped \$3.9 million in DOAP funding currently available.)</p>	<p>5.A. Increase local funding sources (City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, Advertising, Universal Access) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) reduce the use of Federal 5307 funds being used for operating expenses b) support the proposed fare structure, establish fare-caps, and expand CM service c) meet increasing operating budget needs d) maximize retrieval of DOAP funding <p>5.B. Develop a formalized agreement with the municipalities that provides a set percentage of the sales tax revenue be used as a dedicated funding stream for public transportation rather than the fixed amount that is currently allocated. (This will create an annual increase to the local funding mechanism to help it keep up with inflation and increasing operational expenses.)</p>	<p>Access, Affordability, Grow ridership</p>	<p>Formalized agreement on percentage of sales tax revenue</p> <p>Additional funding secured from municipal governments</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board, Municipal governments</p>	<p>1 highest</p>

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>6. Prioritize the use of available funding for operational needs, followed by capital maintenance and new capital projects.</p>	<p>6.A. Operating expenses, capital maintenance expenses (e.g. replacing aging buses), and new capital projects (e.g. buying additional buses), should be clearly delineated with anticipated revenue sources identified.</p> <p>6.B. In the future DOAP funds should be prioritized for use on operating expenses over capital expenditures.</p> <p>6.C. Priority should be given to make sure that maintenance capital expenses are covered prior to other new capital projects</p> <p>6.D. Funding priorities should be developed collaboratively with stakeholders and be reflective of and responsive to changing community needs. (new residential area, retirement communities, medical centers, employers, etc.)</p>	<p>Affordability, Grow ridership, Community Engagement</p>	<p>Budgetary items are delineated by type of revenue</p> <p>Budgets reflect collaboratively developed priorities</p> <p>Route restructuring increases ridership in areas not served</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board, Community input</p>	<p>3</p>

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>7. Large scale capital projects should have dedicated funding campaigns to generate additional revenue beyond the baseline needed for capital maintenance and operational expenses.</p>	<p>7.A. Creating dedicated funding campaigns for large-scale capital projects generates public understanding/input and local government oversight of major capital funding initiatives</p> <p>7.B. Explore the use of tax-increment financing for major capital projects.</p> <p>7.C. Encourage the municipalities to support specific capital projects through the pledge of additional funding beyond the annual amount used for routine maintenance capital expenses and operational expenses.</p> <p>7.D. Federal grants should be pursued for specific new capital projects.</p>	<p>Affordability, Community Engagement</p>	<p>Funding campaigns, tax-increment financing and grants are utilized for capital projects</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board, Municipal governments</p>	<p>4</p>

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>8. Pursue a variety of additional sources to increase revenue and diversify revenue streams.</p>	<p>8.A Pursue the expanded use of Community Development Block Grant funding for specific Capital projects prioritizing those pertaining to ADA compliance.</p> <p>8.B. Additional sources of advertising revenue should be pursued. Rivian is one potential example.</p> <p>8.C. Explore the use of the state sales tax and the local motor fuel tax for CT.</p> <p>8.D. Pursue 377 Board funding as an additional revenue source to support/expand paratransit services for individuals with developmental disabilities.</p>	<p>Access, Affordability, Community Engagement</p>	<p>Various funding sources are explored to generate additional revenue</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board, Municipal governments</p>	<p>4</p>

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
<p>9. Utilize the funding mechanism provided for in the Intergovernmental Agreement (Section 5) and the reporting mechanisms in Section 9 to secure the funding needed to support the operational needs of the transit system and keep the municipalities actively engaged in the working needs / priorities of CT.</p>	<p>9.A. As required by Section 8 of the IGA, the CT Annual Budget prepared by CT staff and approved by the CT Board should clearly delineate operating and capital expenditures (including the priorities developed collaboratively with stakeholders), and should be provided to each City.</p> <p>9.B. CT representatives should appear before each City to further explain and support their budget. This presentation should include a statement of CT's priorities and long-term goals.</p> <p>9.C. CT should provide a monthly report of its fiscal and operational activities to each City Manager, as provided by Section 9 of the IGA. The City Managers should make these CT reports available to their Councils.</p> <p>9.D. CT should work collaboratively with transit riders and community stakeholders to establish operational and capital expenditure priorities.</p>	<p>Affordability, Access, Community Engagement</p>	<p>Priorities are reflective of community values & input</p> <p>CT works collaboratively with transit stakeholders</p> <p>Needs of ridership groups (senior, disabled, low-income) are reflected in budgetary priorities</p>	<p>CT Staff & Board, Municipal governments</p>	<p>2</p>

Connect to the Future Sustainable Funding Group Final Recommendations – Template Form

Recommendation ¹	Description	Goals and objectives	Measuring success	Responsibility	Priority (1-5)
10. Both the operating budget and capital budget need to be developed from and reflective of the priorities established collaboratively with community stakeholders.	10.A. Prior to developing a budget, CT should work collaboratively with transit riders and community stakeholders to prioritize potential operational and capital expenditures.	Affordability, Access, Community Engagement	Budgets are reflective of community priorities Needs of ridership groups (senior, disabled, low-income) are reflected in budgetary priorities	CT Staff & Board	2

Recommendations:

- 1. Re-examine and update subdivision plans as they come up for re-approval or as they expire, as well as update the City's and Town's Manuals of Practice.**

Description

Subdivision plans establish the location of lots, roads, and sidewalks, among other things. They expire either after three (3) years of no activity, or they expire as part of an annexation agreement, which can last up to twenty (20) years. There are many acres of approved but not built subdivisions in Normal and Bloomington, encompassing hundreds of houses yet to be built. In some cases, these subdivisions were approved without sidewalks or with minimal street connections, which make transit access difficult. These subdivisions also may have residential densities below that which the communities Comprehensive Plans now encourage. When these plans expire, there is an opportunity to require changes that would enhance transit access.

The Town and City have for many years relied on a relatively similar Manual of Practice to establish the engineering design requirements for public infrastructure, including streets, sidewalks, and any appurtenances in the public rights-of-way.

The current Manuals could be updated in ways that would impact transit access, including sidewalk design and street connectivity.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth, Safety

Measuring success

If designed to physically accommodate buses (turning radii, etc.), buses will be able to navigate a new subdivision. If designed with high enough residential density and adequate street and sidewalk connectivity, it is possible that the bus system would find it worthwhile to extend a bus line.

Success could be measured by whether a bus line is extended to the development, and if yes, what the ridership numbers look like. The safety of routes could be confirmed with accident data and user surveys.

Responsibility

Municipalities; McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Priority

1a. Update requirements for bus stops, including assessable sidewalk connections, in public right-of-way and on private property.Description

Ensure that enough land is available for and that infrastructure such as public lighting is in place for the addition of bus stops, especially high use stops. Ensure that any infrastructure is complains with the *Americians With Disabilities Act*.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth, Safety

Measuring success

Better-placed bus stops would improve access, and higher-quality bus stops (i.e. those with shelters) would attract choice riders. Safety would also be enhanced by getting users off the street and onto a sidewalk to the bus stop.

Measuring success could be achieved through user surveys, accident reports, ridership numbers and ADA compliance.

Responsibility

Connect Transit; Municipalities

Priority**1b. Advocate for changes to current parking requirements**Description

In order to promote denser and more diverse development (higher density residential areas in closer proximity to jobs, institutions, civic buildings, parks, and the like), consider reducing the amount of parking required by the Zoning Code, adding parking incentives for locating businesses and institutions near/along transit lines, and establishing parking maximums in the Zoning Code, all of which would create a density of development more conducive to public transit.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth, Safety

Measuring success

As the community's residential and commercial density increases, we should see better access to multiple bus routes, increase ridership, and enhanced safety overall.

Measuring could be through revised ordinance, user surveys, accident reports, and ridership numbers.

Responsibility

Connect Transit; Municipalities

Priority

1c. Require new higher density housing developments, high schools/educational institutions, assisted and supportive living facilities to be built along a public transit route – or consider providing a mechanism for public transit to be part of the conversation if development occurs outside of current routes.

Description

Locating higher density development along an existing transit corridor or providing a mechanism for transit to participate in early development review can grow ridership of under-represented riders.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth

Measuring success

Success could be measured by ridership on the pertinent routes.

Responsibility

Connect Transit, Municipalities; McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Priority

1d. Implement sidewalk improvements with development or re-development for public transit – and consider requiring bus platforms if needed.

Description

An amendment to municipal codes and/or the Manual of Practice could better ensure that development (or significant re-development/rehabilitation) includes any needed sidewalk installations or upgrades to existing sidewalks, all with the goal of connecting to transit.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth, Safety

Measuring success

Measuring success could be achieved through confirmation of ADA compliance at bus stops, and measurement of new or improved sidewalks.

Responsibility

Municipalities

Priority**1e. Review current standards for lighting bus stops on public and private property.**Description

Attempt to install bus shelters near existing lighting. Zoning code provisions could be more specific to lighting near a transit stop, although in the vast majority of cases the lighting would be on public right-of-way.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth; Safety

Measuring success

Measuring success could be achieved through user surveys, improved lighting, and crime statistics.

Responsibility

Connect Transit, Municipalities

Priority**2. Rethink residential density and redevelopment, particularly along existing transit corridors.**Description

Increasing areas of higher density housing would create more opportunities to expand transit. Increasing residential density should be prioritized in areas adjacent to high-use transit corridors.

Municipalities can be intentional about incentivizing and encouraging redevelopment of underutilized or vacant parcels located along transit routes. This could be achieved in part through amendments to the zoning code and to the zoning map.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth; Safety

Measuring success

Measuring success could be achieved through an analysis of residential access to bus routes, ridership figures, number of new development projects, and safety statistics.

Responsibility

Municipalities; McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Priority

3. Consider incentives for affordable housing in existing transit areas.

Description

Those in affordable housing units tend to have greater reliance on transit. Creating more affordable housing in existing transit areas would facilitate usage by this population.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth

Measuring success

Proximity to transit enhances access. Measuring could be through ridership numbers, and incentives.

Responsibility

Municipalities

Priority

4. Incorporate Connect Transit into the development process

Description

Without disclosing confidential information of potential developers, be intentional about including Connect Transit as a partner when new development or redevelopment takes place.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth; Safety

Measuring success

Measuring success could be achieved through measuring the number of reviews.

Responsibility

Connect Transit, Municipalities; McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Priority

5. Consider development of a Downtown Bloomington transfer center

Description

Connect Transit's second busiest transfer/gathering spot is the sidewalk in front of the Law & Justice Center on Front Street. There are no restrooms or Connect staff near the Front Street shelters.

Goals and Objectives

Access, Ridership Growth; Safety

Measuring success

Measuring success could be achieved through completion of phase 1 site feasibility/preliminary design.

Responsibility

City of Bloomington; Connect Transit

Priority

Recommendations:

- 1. We must make ridership more affordable for those who are dependent on it, with focus on persons with disabilities, those who live in poverty and Seniors.**

Description

The Short-Range Transit Plan noted that 67% of riders who are cash customers are in the extremely low household income range. This vulnerable population is paying more in transit charges by comparison to those whose income allows them to purchase passes. The Short-Range Transit Plan also noted that over 55% of all riders do not have a driver's license. Nearly half of all riders have been using transit for more than three (3) years.

Goals and Objectives

Providing service that is significant reduced in cost to those in most need and who are most vulnerable will assist those individuals while increasing ridership and will increase the visibility of ridership to the general public. This addresses the Price/Availability factor.

Measuring success

Ridership numbers and comparisons over time will be the most significant measure.

Responsibility

Connect Transit Trustees

Priority

- 2. The process of qualification for persons with disabilities needs to be greatly simplified, while also improving the working relationship with agencies and groups that serve this population.**

Description

Sangamon and others accept as "Proof": a Letter from doctor; Social Security benefits approval letter; Driver's License with "disabled" designation; or Medicare Card. This practice is for Fixed Routes and the use of these for Persons with Disabilities will become possible when the infrastructure is improved (existence and improvement of sidewalks and ADA compliant stops will facilitate this shift).

Goals and Objectives

Service Quality factors: Public image of agency and Accessibility.

Measuring success

Specific outreach to the individuals for feedback and direction communication with those agencies that serve this population.

Responsibility

Connect Transit Trustees and Connect Transit Management

Priority

3. Discover the best practice in other jurisdictions related to these matters (Fares and Disability certification) and replicate those that best fit our system.

Description

The Sangamon, Rock Island, Peoria, Decatur and Champaign systems all have Fare structures that are more affordable.

Fort Collins Transfort structure is a commendable model to strive for with Annual Passes for seniors and persons with disabilities at \$25; Adult Annual Passes for \$154.

Transfort fares are \$1.25 for a single ride, reduced to \$.60 for Seniors and those persons with disabilities and/or Medicare

Goals and Objectives

Price/Availability Factors: Fare levels; types of Service available

Service Quality Factors: Public image of agency

Measuring success

Comparison of ridership over time in these categories:

Public Surveys

Outreach to Media and resulting coverage

Creation and reinforcement of "Service with Respect and a Smile" as the culture of the system from top to bottom.

Establish a regular feedback loop to ensure this is the perceived reality.

Responsibility

Connect Transit Trustees and Connect Transit Management

Priority

4. ADA compliant and accessible stops (including infrastructure to the stop; access to the stops). This will facilitate the ability for persons with disabilities to use Fixed Routes.

Description

The Better Bus Stops campaign must be expanded and a timeline established with regular updates on progress including the number of stops that are ADA compliant as well as the access to those stops (existence of sidewalks, condition of sidewalks, and crossing of streets along the way to the stop). These improvements beyond the stops themselves will require coordination and support from the responsible jurisdictions.

Goals and Objectives

Quality Customer Experience: Provide reliable, easy-to-use transportation services and quality, user-friendly amenities.

Measuring success

CT must make a priority of coordinating with local jurisdictions on these improvements beyond just the stops to access to the stops.

Regular updates to the Trustees, City and Town Officials documenting progress and giving feedback on their documented commitment to make these necessary improvements.

Responsibility

Connect Transit Trustees and Connect Transit Management

Priority

5. Establish a disadvantaged/poverty level beneath which there is no fare to ride either CT or CM.

Description

Survey programs and providers of services that have established these lower income levels and establish qualification for free fares compatible/comparable to them.

Goals and Objectives

Equity in Fare levels; Nature of subsidy programs and types of service available.

Measuring success

Outreach to and feedback from agencies and programs that service those who live in poverty.

Responsibility

Connect Transit Trustees and Connect Transit Management

Priority

6. We recommend Connect Transit become a Fair Fare system.

Description

We see upcharge for the Premium Service on Mobility buses ending.
The fares of Mobility rides will have equity with those on fixed routes.

Goals and Objectives

Provide riders with special needs a fair choice between fixed route or mobility
NOTE: Many disputes with drivers are about fares.

Measuring success

Price/Availability Factors

Responsibility

Connect Transit Trustees and Connect Transit Management

Priority

7. Improve/accommodate the needs of individuals who do not speak English

Description

Rider's Guides available in Spanish.
Investigate Translation Apps/programs to facilitate communication with non-English speakers
NOTE: Perhaps a trial on routes where concentrations of non-English speaking persons are present.

Goals and Objectives

Equity Strategies
Availability, and usefulness of information and customer assistance

Measuring success

Outreach to agencies and organizations that serve non-English speakers to provide Guides and seek recommendations

Responsibility

Connect Transit Management

Priority

8. Improve route information on Fixed routes

Description

Posted map of the route that a bus is running that passengers may use as a reference.
Automated graphic of upcoming stops to better inform passengers.

Goals and Objectives

Service Quality Factors

Measuring success

Regular measures of rollout

Responsibility

Connect Transit Trustees and Connect Transit Management

Priority

9. Add fixed route services to medical clinics, recreational facilities, social service providers, and places of worship that are currently not served. This would be a principle for planning. Restore services to those who lost it.

NOTE: The COA cited South East and South West Bloomington and North Normal as having residential areas no longer served due to route changes.

Description

Include medical facilities serving people with Medicaid and Medicare coverage.
Determine where individuals with disabilities and low-income individuals receive vital services, such as:

- Food Pantries
- Homeless Shelters
- Social Security Office
- Rehabilitative Services
- ARC

Goals and Objectives

Route Design to enhance Service Quality and provide service to areas that present difficulties to reach.

Restructure decisions in light of economic development potential and improving connections to compatible land uses.

Address Gaps and Opportunities.

Establish criteria for agencies, organizations and individuals to request modifications.

Measuring success

Prioritize reasons and basis for providing service to specific destinations.

Data-driven routing decisions derived from detailed analysis will support improved access and higher ridership throughout the transit system.

On-going measurement of Ridership by categories

Responsibility

Connect Transit Management

Priority