

July 2023

PEOPLE. COMMUNITY. ECONOMY. ENVIRONMENT.

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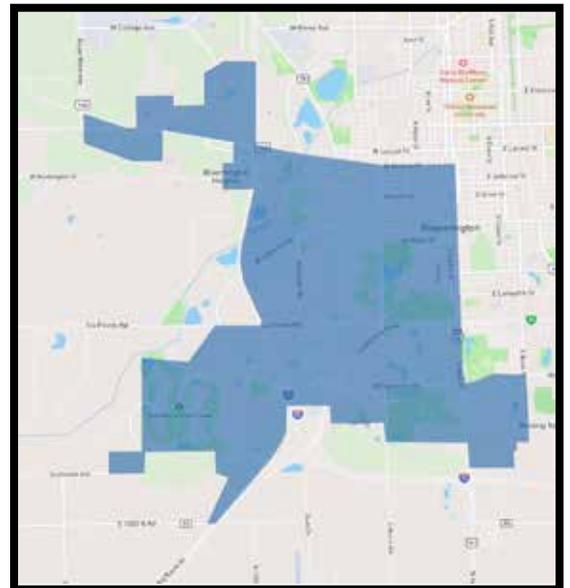
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To contact our Trustees, please email [trustees@connect-transit.com](mailto:trustees@connect-transit.com).

### GM Notes ~ David Braun

We are excited to introduce a new, modern service to enhance our traditional fixed route and Connect Mobility services called microtransit. Microtransit is an on-demand service hailed by using a smartphone app that provides flexible routing based on passenger demand within a defined zone. The new service will start on July 16 and will serve the southwest portion of Bloomington-Normal, as shown. Our new service is called Connect FLEX, and will not require a fare until at least September 1, to encourage people to try it.



This is only the first zone we plan on providing service to! We will continue to examine our current fixed route system to determine if we can realign routes to make the fixed route service easier and faster to use. As we make improvements to our fixed route system we will introduce additional Connect FLEX zones that will provide service to areas that are interested in transit, but can't be served effectively by our large buses. Connect FLEX will connect to our fixed route system, which will provide access to the entire Bloomington-Normal community.

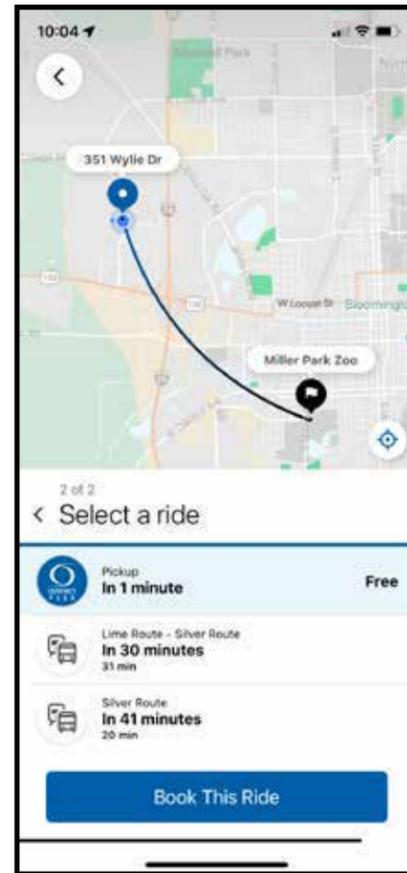
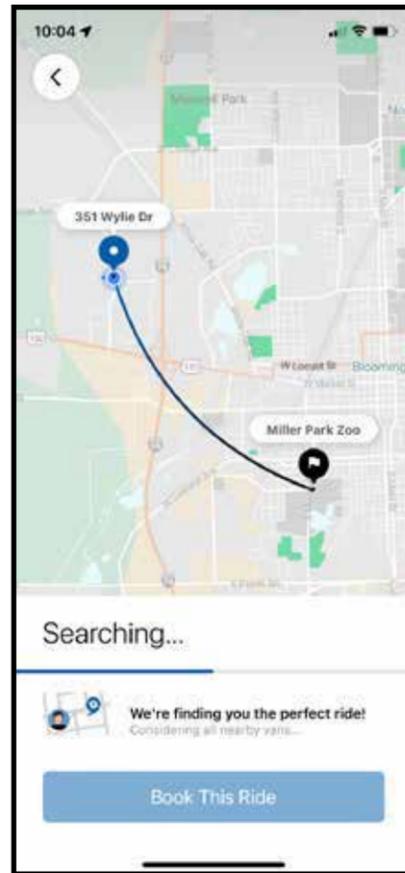
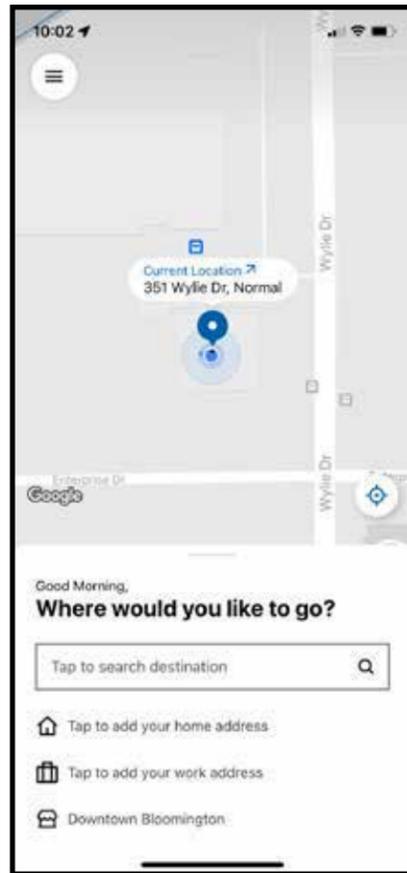
This zone can be described as a "food desert" or "healthcare desert" in that there aren't any grocery stores or healthcare centers nearby. Connect FLEX will provide better access to employment, groceries, entertainment, healthcare, and the whole fixed route network. Some key attractions in the zone include Ferrero, OSF Prompt Care, Bloomington Walmart, Aldi, Connect Transit offices, Marcus Theater, and our Downtown Bloomington transfer area.

Here's what's inside!

- How to Ride Connect FLEX Wrap
- Design & Explanation
- Use Cases
- Tech Corner

## How to Ride - Booking Process & Hours of Operation

Booking rides with Connect FLEX will be relatively simple. The best way to schedule is to use the smartphone app. The app will let the user select their pickup and drop off locations and pick the most convenient proposal provided. This will allow the user to arrive to or depart from their location at their desired time. The app will show explicit directions to the closest pickup location (typically at a safe street corner) and an estimated pickup time. Once the user is picked up, the app will provide an estimated time of arrival. If the user is transferring to a fixed route, the next available route will be displayed.



People who don't have a smartphone can also book their trip online or by calling 309-828-9833. The advantage of the app or online booking is that a user can see the location of the vehicle as it approaches the pickup, which won't be available to people who call for their ride.

The hours of operation will complement our current fixed route schedules by starting slightly before and running slightly longer to allow connections to be made. These hours will help people utilizing the fixed route to make it back to their destination before our service finishes for the night. Connect FLEX's hours of operations are:

Monday – Friday: 5:00 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Saturday: 5:30 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Sunday: 5:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.

If you're interested in receiving more information on Connect FLEX or would like us to attend a promotional event, please email [astaton@connect-transit.com](mailto:astaton@connect-transit.com).

## Vehicle Design

The zone will be served by unique Connect FLEX branded, low-floor vehicles that are fully accessible for people with mobility needs. These 2022 Dodge RAM ProMaster vehicles have eight passenger seats and room for two passengers using mobility devices. Since they are commercially available vehicles, warranty work and parts will be readily available. The vehicles will use gasoline now but will be updated with the same type of vehicle in an electric model in the next 18-24 months, when they become available.



You'll notice that these vehicles are wrapped in a new design, specific for Connect FLEX. Since these vehicles will be traveling within neighborhoods, we wanted them to be clearly marked with our branding. On the sides of each vehicle, we have also included small nods to the Bloomington-Normal community. On the curb side, you will see the "buckle" of Downtown Bloomington and on the street side, you will see Uptown Circle of Normal. Each part of the design was carefully considered and intentional!

## Tech Corner

The success of Connect FLEX will depend largely on the smartphone app, and back end software that will help us manage the system. We realized how important our technology partner is to this service so we teamed up with Via Transportation to provide the algorithm and back end of both the driver and rider applications. Via is a world leading provider of advanced public mobility solutions with over 600 partnerships in 40 countries and over 200 microtransit deployments carrying 115M+ trips.

Once someone books their ride, Via's software begins to look at multiple factors to make that process as smooth as possible for the rider, dispatchers, and the vehicle operator. Their software will monitor the location of vehicles to identify the most suitable vehicle for that trip, and then will ask itself a few questions to optimize efficiency. All trips are optimized in real time, so active trips might still pickup another requested trip while enroute to the destination. Following are some questions that the algorithm might ask itself on the back end while it processes the trip in the blink of an eye.

Is there another trip going to the same destination, or is there another trip in progress that passes where this person is being picked up? Let's see if we can comingle those trips.

Does the vehicle operator have time before their next trip? Let's find a safe location near the next pickup location so that they are ready to go.

Will this trip require that the operator work too far into a scheduled break or shift end? Let's see if we can find another operator nearby to keep everything moving smoothly.

The algorithm and software we are using for Connect FLEX is impressive and equips our staff with the tools to serve Bloomington-Normal efficiently and effectively.



## Use Cases

There are several reasons people may use Connect FLEX. We are hopeful that by providing a new kind of public transportation to this area, we can bring new opportunities to those who live there! Connect FLEX will allow people living within the FLEX zone to access the entire Bloomington-Normal community and all that it has to offer. Some examples could include healthcare, groceries, education, entertainment, and even employment!

The following examples do not depict real people, but potential use scenarios.



**Sandy**  
Age: 67  
Occupation: Retired

Sandy is a grandmother to three adorable, little girls. Since she is on a fixed income and has a hard time driving due to her eyesight, so has decided to give up her car. Sandy has never used public transportation before since there is no route to take her to her granddaughters. This has been frustrating since she can't always get to them when she'd like to visit. Sandy is easily frustrated when learning new technology – so much so that she doesn't even own a cell phone! Sandy calls our office every Wednesday to get a ride to see her granddaughters and doesn't miss any more special moments.



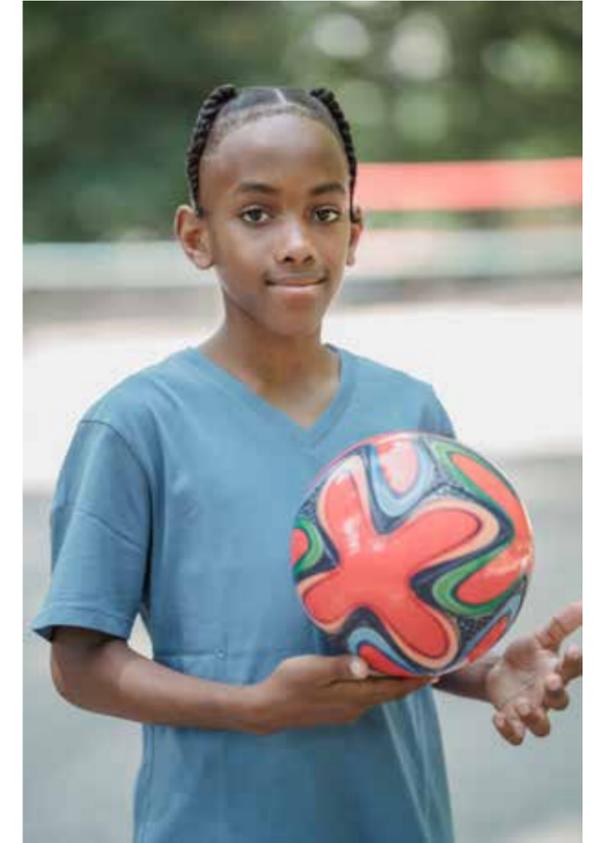
**Derek**  
Age: 42  
Occupation: Quality  
Product Specialist at Ferrero

Derek is committed to living a lifestyle that prioritizes lessening his environmental impact and practicing personal sustainability when possible. As part of his sustainability plan, Derek avoids driving by himself and takes public transportation to the nearest stop and walks an additional 30 minutes to work. Since Connect FLEX launched, Derek is picked up in a full vehicle and enjoys his commute with his coworkers, allowing him to work towards a low environmental impact.

## Use Cases

**Jax**  
Age: 14  
Occupation: Student

Jax is getting ready to head to high school next school year. He is so excited to join the soccer team and get to meet a ton of new friends! Jax doesn't live close to his school and his parents aren't always able to take him to his summer practices. He feels like some of his teammates may be becoming better friends because they get to spend more time together. Jax wished there was a way for him to be able to attend more of his team's get togethers. Now that Connect FLEX is open, he schedules his rides and hasn't missed a practice since!



**Liz**  
Age: 29  
Occupation: Remote  
Customer Service

Liz is a single mother who struggles to make ends meet. She has a car but has difficulty keeping up on maintenance and fuel costs. Before Connect FLEX, instead of driving 20 minutes to her closest store, Liz had her groceries delivered – an added expense she wanted to eliminate. With two young kids, Liz mostly used her car on what seemed like never ending medical trips. Because of Connect FLEX, Liz and her children can pick out their own groceries and get to their appointments with minimal financial impact.



351 Wylie Drive  
Normal, IL 61761

www.connect-transit.com

309.828.9833



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Scan to apply for  
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Dear Connect Abby,

Why are you still running the large  
fixed route buses if you have the ability to  
use these small ones instead?

Sincerely,  
BringBackTaxis

Dear BringBackTaxis,

While we are excited to offer this new  
service using our smaller vehicles, we would  
not be able to replace our entire system. It is  
more efficient and cost effective to continue  
running our fixed route system along the high  
ridership areas of Bloomington-Normal. One  
benefit of Connect FLEX is that our fixed route  
system will be more efficient after we have  
completed our entire study and introduced  
more FLEX zones.

See you on the bus!

*Connect Abby*