

CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MONTHLY BOARD MEETING MINUTES – JANUARY 26, 2021

**351 Wylie Drive – Training Room
Normal, Illinois 61761**

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on January 26, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. at Connect Transit in the Training Room with Board Members participating in the meeting virtually.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Trustee Judy Buchanan
Trustee Linda Foster
Vice-Chairman Julie Hile
Trustee Tim McCue
Trustee Deb Presley
Trustee Mandava Rao
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

CITY MANAGERS: Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece - Absent
Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus - Absent

STAFF PRESENT: Mark Peterson, Interim General Manager
Jill Baxter, Board Clerk
Patrick Kuebrich, Finance Director
Dave White, Safety/Training Director
Steve Stockton, IT Manager
Brady Lange, Maintenance Manager
Jeff Holtke, Marketing Manager

The January monthly meeting of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees was called to order by Chairman Ryan Whitehouse at 4:30 p.m. Roll call was taken and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Chairman Whitehouse welcomed new Trustee, Mandava Rao, to the Connect Transit Board of Trustees.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of Minutes of November 24, 2020 Board Meeting and Minutes of Special Board Meeting held on December 15, 2020
2. Disbursements for the months of November and December 2020
3. Monthly Statistical Report for November and December 2020

4. Cardinal Infrastructure Federal Report (*Addendum*)
5. Cornerstone – Illinois Weekly Update

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion to Approve the Consent Agenda*. Secretary Buchanan so moved, seconded by Trustee Foster.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Trustee Rao; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board approved the *Consent Agenda*.

NEW BUSINESS

Recommendation to Approve Bid for Engineering Services for Better Bus Stop Program

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion for Recommendation to Approve Bid for Engineering Services for Better Bus Stop Program*. Trustee McCue so moved, seconded by Secretary Buchanan.

Interim General Manager, Mark Peterson, called upon staff member Brady Lange to present an overview of the *Recommendation*. Mr. Lange stated that this *Recommendation* is a continuation of Connect's progress for the *Better Bus Stops Campaign*. The *Recommendation* will allow Connect to move forward with engineering and site design work for the next 100 stops that will be constructed in FY2022. Three (3) bids were received and all three were more than qualified to perform this type of work. Lewis, Yockey & Brown was chosen to be the winning and most competitive bid to the proposal. The work contained in the scope was \$1,970 per site. As noted in the *Recommendation*, we will be using 65% of IDOT DOAP monies and the remaining 35% will be funded by the *Illinois Capital Grant*. No local dollars will be spent for the engineering work.

DISCUSSION

Trustees Hile commented that she was pleased with the steady progress on bus stops. Trustee Foster agreed and stated that this is what our community deserves and thanked the Board and staff for making the *Better Bus Stops Campaign* a priority.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Trustee Rao; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation to Approve Bid for Engineering Services for Better Bus Stop Program*.

Recommendation to Approve Amendment to the Connect Transit Procurement Policy – (Micro Purchase Revision)

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion for Recommendation to Approve Amendment to the Connect Transit Procurement Policy*. Trustee Foster so moved, seconded by Secretary Buchanan.

Mr. Peterson stated that our current *Procurement Policy* requires any expense greater than \$3,500, we must go through a formal process to receive quotes or bids depending on the nature of the activity. There are times that this is an unnecessary process and causes significant delay in many instances. The FTA guidelines allows up to \$10,000. In conversations with Pat Kuebrich and Brady Lange, we discussed going to \$10,000 and we all felt that would be appropriate. That doesn't mean Connect will not seek quotes for the lower amounts. If we are uncertain where the best price is, we will go through the process. By increasing the limits to \$10,000 does not preclude the practice of obtaining quotes for lesser amounts and that would still be our practice. A lot of the items that we purchase, we know based on our past purchases and past activities where the low price is.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Buchanan inquired if this is consistent to what we believe other transit systems and municipal governments are doing?

Mr. Peterson responded that it is his understanding it is relatively standard to follow the FTA rule which is \$10,000. Mr. Peterson stated that he is certain some may have lower limits but \$10,000 is the standard according to FTA. Mr. Lange responded that it depends on the agency's local Board approval. He added that a few of Connect's peer agencies have the \$10,000 limit.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Trustee Rao; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation to Approve Amendment to the Connect Transit Procurement Policy – (Micro Purchase Revision)*.

Recommendation to Approve an Amendment to the Interim General Manager Agreement - Duration

Chairman Whitehouse called for a *Motion for Recommendation to Approve an Amendment to the Interim General Manager Agreement - Duration*. Trustee Presley so moved, seconded by Trustee McCue.

DISCUSSION

Chairman Whitehouse stated that Mr. Peterson's original contract was to expire January 31, 2021. In conversations with him the Chairman has asked Mr. Peterson to stay on until we have a new General Manager. Continuing, the Chairman stated that Mr. Peterson's leadership is needed. The new "duration" will expire on April 15, 2021 or until Connect has chosen a new General Manager.

A number of the Trustees expressed agreement and publicly thanked Mr. Peterson for his leadership.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Trustee Rao; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board unanimously approved the *Recommendation to Approve an Amendment to the Interim General Manager Agreement - Duration*.

GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Safety Update

Interim General Manager Peterson stated he had asked Dave White, Connect's Safety/Training Director to report on safety in our system. Mr. White commented he will give a brief overview of reports and accidents over the calendar year 2020 in relation to calendar year 2019. With all that has happened in the last year with the pandemic situation, decrease in ridership and decrease in service frequency, we expected to see a decrease in the number of reports that were submitted. Overall, we saw about a 15% decrease in the number of reported events. One category increased over previous years was "passenger disturbance issues". These are incidents which a disturbance occurred involving a passenger and could be a passenger versus an employee or a passenger versus a passenger. Typically, it is a verbal altercation that may have escalated slightly and requires intervention by supervisory personnel or even law enforcement personnel. We did see an increase primarily in the summer months, June, July and August. That matches up with ridership started to increase again after the initial lockdown which is all tied to the facemask and face covering mandates. A lot of folks were just getting used to the fact that they were going to have to wear a face covering while riding the bus. Drivers were beginning to adjust to having approach people about the face coverings. As expected, we have seen a significant decrease in that kind of activity over the last couple of months. We have had one reported incident that required an intervention over the last two months as opposed to receiving 4-5 over the summer. We expect that to continue to trend downward. Additionally, vehicle collisions, which usually make up a good portion of the accident reports we receive, we are down about 32%. Nothing that Mr. White has seen in the reporting and the graphing he has done jumps out as any indication of any negative trends. Currently, everything seems to be trending in a very positive way and is consistent with trends we have seen in the past. One other thing that he stated he does on an annual basis is a very quick security assessment of the area, looking at police reporting from the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal. This information is available through their websites. In looking at what is happening around us and that doesn't seem to be trending any differently than it has in the past. Most

of the events we see occurring around the property on Wiley Drive tend to occur to the south where the City is more built-up with retail and residential areas there that we do not have to the north. Most of the incidents occur around the retail outlets and exhibit no significant threats to the property on Wiley Drive. As we continue to move forward and add resources in facilities in other parts of town, that is something we will continue to do by monitoring the activity that takes place around our properties to see what kind of security measures we need to implement or reinforce.

DISCUSSION

Trustee Hile commented by thanking Mr. White and staff for being on top of getting employees and operators COVID-19 vaccines. She stated that she understood that we are not there yet but are in the queue. She stated that she would appreciate his keeping the Board informed about when those vaccinations are available for employees of Connect.

Trustee Foster asked Mr. White if he is seeing a lot of physical damage or the possibility of lack of security may prompt increases in damages or if damages are being made by individuals?

Mr. White responded to Trustee Foster regarding the passenger disturbances on the vehicles. Most seem to be one-on-one encounters and is usually having to approach a customer and remind them of the face covering or facemask requirements. Occasionally, disturbances are reported have to do with the intoxication of passengers or under the influence. Property damage related to passengers is typically very low. We do not see too much of that. Once they escalate to a point where a passenger causes property damage, it is classified as a different type of report which falls under accidents and damage to vehicles.

Interim General Manager Peterson commented that Mr. White is one of our longest-serving employees and brings a unique perspective to this role because he has been a driver and a dispatcher. He understands what drivers deal with on a daily basis and he is also our Training Officer and he makes certain to emphasize the need for safe practices in terms of driving as well as ways the drivers interact with our customers. Mr. Peterson stated that he appreciates Mr. White's experience in the practical application of some of the safety practices that he has developed.

Trustee Buchanan thanked Mr. White for the comprehensive reporting. She asked that when the drivers have to intervene on occasion, is there a system or protocol in place if the incident becomes necessary for emergency personnel or fire or police involved, how does our driver initiate a request for assistance?

Mr. White stated that typically via the 2-way radio and by contact with Connect's dispatch office.

Mr. Peterson circled back to the vaccination conversation and stated that Connect's employees do fall in the 1b category but unfortunately, due largely to supply limits, there have been very few appointments available for 1b vaccinations. We are hoping that in February things will open up a little bit to where our employees can get appointments for vaccinations. We are encouraging our employees to aggressively pursue the vaccination to get it as soon as possible but at this point we have no idea when all of our employees will have the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Trustee Buchanan stated that the real reason for the slowdown is the fact that we do not have a supply. Unfortunately, the Health Department does not know from week to week what that supply will look like in terms of numbers of vaccine vials as well as when more vials might arrive. She urged employees to be patient and continue to do what you need to do in order to keep safe.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Fare Suspension Policy Discussion

Chairman Whitehouse stated that Connect's fares have been suspended since March of last year and are continuing to be suspended until March 8, 2021. However, the Chairman also stated that he wanted to have a conversation with the Board and added that the reason we receive *Cares* money is to cover the cost of the COVID-19 situation. He believed that this system has made it a priority for the safety of our riders and employees. Our system is financially strong and he believed that in February the Board should revisit the suspension of fares further, possibly suspending until we have wide vaccinations in our community. He asked for comments or questions from the Board on the further suspension of fares past March 8.

Trustee Hile stated that she is in alignment with the Chairman's proposed recommendation. She believed that the vaccine has the potential to be a game-changer. One thing she stated that she would add was that we need to keep an eye on the variance and thought that there was also some good work to be done just tracking with the efficacy of our masks given a potentially greater exposure to the COVID variants.

Trustee Rao commented that once businesses begin to reopen people may be better able to afford to pay transit fares and that is a consideration that we need to bring to the table.

Chairman Whitehouse commented that we can look at ramping up service when businesses reopen but thought that we should look at the science with this before we start up fares again.

Trustee Foster commented that we want to address every avenue before going back to charging fares. We want to make certain we are looking at and responding in a more informed and educated decision.

Trustee Presley concurred that Connect needs to wait until vaccinations are widely available for all of our transit staff and available to those who are transit-reliant. What she tends to think about from comments, we need to also be cognizant of those individuals who have been without jobs for a long period of time and have been unable to afford transit. We need to bring back our fares only at the point when we really feel that our local economy is back up and running due to an increase in vaccinations and when people are able to get out and therefore, those essential workers who have not been employed, now have an income with which to be able to pay fares.

Chairman Whitehouse summarized the comments by stating that staff will bring forward a *Recommendation* at our February meeting that we will suspend fares until further notice.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that at tomorrow's live press conference at Connect Transit, Connect will be announcing three (3) potential sites for the Downtown Transfer Station. The link to join the press conference virtually is posted at the top of Connect's website.

Chairman Whitehouse thanked the City and the Town for the opportunity to share a report on the Downtown Transfer Station to each respective Councils in the last two weeks.

Chairman Whitehouse asked the Board to place on their calendars the date of Wednesday, February 10, 2021 at 4:40 p.m. for a Special Board Meeting to discuss in detail the three sites. This meeting will not be the deciding point for the sites but will mostly be an informative and educational meeting on each site. The Farnsworth Group and staff will be in attendance to lay out the pros and cons of each site and will be available to take questions.

TRUSTEE'S COMMENTS

Trustee Buchanan stated we are beginning a new year and we have a country with economic issues, she congratulated Board Members and the dedicated staff for continuing to rise above all obstacles and do what needs to be done and do it well. She commented on the way we must move forward and now we are on the "eve of the eve" of announcing the three sites for the new transfer center in Bloomington. She believes we are on the way to things that are even better for local transit here in Bloomington-Normal.

Trustee Foster thanked the staff and administrators for weathering the "storm". She stated that we will get through this together. It is the Board's responsibility to make this a priority so that Connect gets through all of this safely. She commented on the City and Town Council meetings and thanked all of the Board members who participated.

Trustee Hile echoed Trustee Foster's sentiments regarding recently held City and Town Council meetings. The need that we have as a community of transit advocates to get the message out. As a Board, she asked the members to look for every opportunity to carry our message to the various places we go in this community. She also encouraged the Board members to reach out to candidates for elected office who are running in the April election, to make the visit to Connect Transit to get the education that we have for them about the system.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – ILCS 120/2(c)(1) – PERSONNEL MATTERS

Chairman Whitehouse asked for a *Motion to Move into Executive Session*, moved by Trustee Hile, seconded by Trustee Foster.

Rollcall vote:

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Trustee Rao; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

The Board of Trustees entered into Executive Session at 5:25 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion to Adjourn*, moved by Trustee Foster, seconded by Vice-Chairman Hile.

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;
Trustee Rao; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the regular monthly Board meeting of January 26, 2021 adjourned at 6:05 p.m.


Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary


Jill Baxter, Board Clerk

[SEAL]

