

**Public Hearing of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees
May 2, 2016
4:30 to 6:00 P.M.
Uptown Station, 4th Floor, Council Chambers
Normal, IL 61761**

Comprehensive Operational Analysis – Route Restructure

Summary of Comments

Vice Chairman Mike McCurdy opened the public hearing at 4:33 p.m. He thanked those in attendance for their attendance. He stated Andrew Johnson, General Manager would have some opening comments regarding the Comprehensive Operational Analysis, the proposed route restructure and an update on the process that has taken place over the last few months.

Andrew Johnson, General Manager thanked everyone for their attendance. When the process began in January 2015, Connect Transit made a commitment to make its service simple to use. This means that the service would operate at regular intervals, operate along direct paths and use symmetrical routing. It would service well defined markets and transfer points. Connect Transit also made a commitment to ensure strong public participation in the process. Connect Transit believes that the public has stepped up to voice their opinions and concerns over the last eight (8) months. Those opinions and concerns have shaped this proposal. Those opinions have also prompted modifications to the proposal. Those opinions have also prompted Connect Transit to ensure first mile/last mile service to those within the community that will lose fixed route service. Connect Transit is committed to having a solution in place at the same time that the route restructure is implemented in August. Connect Transit is very excited for these improvements and look forward to hearing public comments at today's public hearing.

Vice Chairman Mike McCurdy thanked Mr. Johnson for his comments. He noted that the purpose of the public hearing was for Connect Transit Board and staff members to listen to public comments and not for debate. Staff would be taking notes. Connect Transit staff may address some inaccuracies at the end of the hearing. Vice Chairman McCurdy noted that the Town of Normal Town Council would be holding their regularly scheduled meeting following the Connect Transit public hearing and urged those in attendance to clear the Council chambers promptly following the conclusion of the public hearing.

Vice Chairman Mike McCurdy called the following speakers and a summary of their comments follows:

Warren Turner:

Mr. Turner stated he is glad for the Bloomington/Normal public transit system. He was concerned with the proposed changes to the current Lime I route. The Lime I route currently travels on Washington Street and passes many valuable resources and retail outlets. The proposed route restructure moves this route over to Market Street which is a three (3) block difference. This causes an extreme hardship on children, the elderly and the handicapped. He recommends that the Lime I route as it exists remain the same.

Richard Anderson:

Mr. Anderson stated he is a regular rider for ten (10) years. He is upset with the proposed route restructure layout. He would have to change buses three (3) times with the new routes versus only one (1) bus change with the existing routes. His home to the nearest bus stop is 1 minute. With the proposed routes he would need to walk one to two (1-2) blocks to reach the bus stop.

Shelli Welleniter:

Ms. Welleniter stated that she is concerned about the proposed route restructure. She is concerned about handicapped individuals that will have a more difficult time getting around.

Larry Radcliffe:

Mr. Radcliffe stated that he had concerns regarding the Blue E route. Twelve (12) years ago he was in an accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury. The loss of the Blue E route and the proposed new route moves the nearest bus stop to him to over a mile away. Due to his disability, it would take him too long to walk there, and he would have to take a taxi to the nearest stop. Taxi service is cost prohibitive. He is married however his wife often works long hours and is unable to take him to his doctor's appointments, etc. The loss of the Blue E means losing his independence. He asks that Connect Transit reconsider removing the Blue E from the system.

Dee Thompson:

Ms. Thompson stated she did not believe that Connect Transit did a fair job of allowing citizens to become informed about the proposal. There is a small sign posted on all of the buses announcing the public hearing. She did not believe that Connect Transit has been very forthcoming about the process. She was unable to download the information from Connect Transit's website. She was forced to contact Connect Transit's planner and have him send her the information. She does not understand why Connect Transit is proposing this route restructure immediately after switching to a fixed stop system and installing all new bus stop signs. The proposed routes will cause her to have to take two to three (2 – 3) transfers to go to the same place that it currently only takes her one (1) transfer.

Shirley Craig:

Ms. Craig stated she has attended many of the listening sessions starting back when the system switched from the flag stop to the fixed stop system. She had comments regarding the proposed Olive route. The Olive route does not go to a transfer center. She would like Connect Transit make sure that the Olive route coordinates with a route that goes to the OSF Prompt Care and physical therapy offices.

Art Abrams:

Mr. Abrams stated he is a Connect Transit driver. He believes that the proposed route restructure is good; however, he is concerned about the Uber drivers being used for the first mile/last mile issue. He has been with Connect Transit for twenty (20) years. He believes that the cleanliness of the buses has deteriorated. There are two (2) servicemen. He believes that more servicemen should be hired to ensure cleanliness of the buses.

Hannah Melby:

Ms. Melby stated she is a Community Support Specialist with Chestnut Health Systems. She is speaking on behalf of a client. This client is in a motorized wheelchair, however when weather conditions are bad she has to use her manual wheel chair. The loss of the bus stop right outside of Chestnut would cause the client to have to go uphill in a manual wheelchair. She would like to see the bus stop stay at the Chestnut Health Systems Clinic.

Ryan Heerin:

Mr. Heerin is Director of the Tool Library. Last Monday he spoke at the Bloomington City Council meeting regarding the removal of the Lime I. Within a few days staff of Connect Transit contacted him and presented the proposed Gold route to service the west side of Bloomington. He thanked Connect Transit for listening to their concerns and working with them to find a solution.

Jim Riordan:

Mr. Riordan stated that he is the President of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 752 (ATU). He stated that the ATU, which is the Connect Transit Driver's union, has had a contentious relationship with Connect Transit management in the past. He has worked hard to change that. He had offered Connect Transit management the opportunity to establish a committee with experienced drivers to assist with the route restructure process. It was not accepted. He believes that is problematic. Computer software is being used to design the route restructure without the input from experienced drivers who interact with the ridership every day.

He stated that he had received a letter while he was away on vacation regarding the potential partnership with Uber to handle the first mile/last mile issue. Uber drivers are not regulated, they are not trained and they are not union. He asked Connect Transit to reconsider using Uber to fill the first mile/last mile gap.

Bonnie Johnson:

Ms. Johnson stated that it would have been simple for Connect Transit to accomplish its goals without such dramatic change to the system. She believes that the proposed restructure is causing a lot of harm. She believed that the Blue E that caters to seniors, mobile home parks and disabled communities is deliberately being eliminated. She stated that she does not believe that Connect Transit encourages strong public participation. This is the first and only public hearing. It is not enough. The listening sessions were not good enough.

Ron Poppe:

Mr. Poppe is a retired Illinois State University Political Science professor. He understands the concerns. He understands that it is not possible to solve every situation. He wants to focus on the stop at OSF on Fort Jesse. He has Parkinson's disease. He must exercise daily or he would become much less mobile. He believes that moving the stop at OSF on Fort Jesse immediately makes it inaccessible to handicapped individuals. He believes that there is a better solution.

Brian Enata

Mr. Enata stated that he is a 38 year driver for Connect Transit. He is against contracting with Uber for the first mile/last mile gap. He suggests that Connect Transit put the brakes on any contracts with Uber. He acknowledges that some transit systems across the nation have partnered with Uber. However the arrangements have had unintended consequences. Mr. Enata stated that the Uber industry is unregulated. There is no governing body regulating the maintenance of the vehicles. Mr. Enata questioned why bus riders should be subjected to an unregulated industry.

Andrew Johnson, General Manager noted that Connect Transit is committed to finding a solution to the first mile/last mile gap.

Jeremy Studebaker:

Mr. Studebaker stated he does community engagement for Mid Central Community Action, (MCCA). He had attended a listening session in March. He noted that the Lime I would be moving from Washington Street to Market Street. Connect Transit staff had held meetings with MCCA in regard to the situation. As a result of these conversations and collaboration the Gold route has been added to the new route structure. He looked forward to additional discussions and collaboration. He thanked Connect Transit for listening to their concerns and their willingness to work with them and other social service agencies. He realized that there would be additional tweaks along the way but again thanked Connect Transit, for voices are being heard.

Larry Stevig:

Mr. Stevig is representing Immanuel Health Center. He was present to advocate for the patients of the clinic. The clinic is at 502 South Morris Ave. Their location is currently two (2) blocks from the nearest bus stop. This proves challenging for many of their patients. The new proposed route moves the stop to four (4) blocks from the clinic. He implores Connect Transit to reconsider and create a stop one (1) block from the clinic.

Marilyn Evans:

Ms. Evans is a retired senior who is concerned about a number of things. She was concerned with Connect Transit's ability to notify the public of its meetings. She stated that she was made aware of the public hearing via a notice that was on a Mobility bus. She did hear some news on the radio regarding the route restructure, and there is a person in her retirement community that keeps a bulletin board updated. She would like to see Connect Transit increase awareness of Board meetings and other transit related business.

Wallace Tudor:

Mr. Tudor is concerned about not having access to Bromenn Hospital. There will be no access to the Community Health Care Center. He was surprised that the Gold route has been added to the proposed route restructure. He believed that info letting to the public has been less than stellar. He has been unable to find any information regarding the timing of the routes. He has concerns regarding the 30 minute frequency between the Normal Walmart and the Bloomington Walmart.

Sue Yeatman:

Ms. Yeatman stated initially she was excited about the proposed route restructure. Then she noticed that her bus stop has been removed. She will now have to walk 15 minutes to catch the nearest bus. She stated the communications regarding transit related business on buses is hard to distinguish between the advertisements. She hopes that Connect Transit will explain the new route structure in plain, easy to understand terms. She states that she needs and uses the Lime I and the Pink D as they are. She believes that changes could have been handled differently in smaller ways as opposed to an entire overhaul.

Nitia Carey:

Ms. Carey heard the after-hours service would be cancelled. She uses this service to go out and Karaoke. She would no longer be able to enjoy this activity if the after-hours service was discontinued. There are many people who also use this service for their jobs.

She stated Connect Transit should have better communication with its drivers. The Connect Transit drivers say that they do not know much of anything. The drivers do a good job but they deserve better cooperation.

Mike O'Donnell:

Mr. O'Donnell is representing the West Bloomington Revitalization Project. He echoed previous comments. He thanked Connect Transit for the introduction of the Gold route in the proposal. The Gold route offers riders options for affordable grocery shopping, etc. The West Bloomington Revitalization Project pledges its support to the City of Bloomington to ensure that riders have adequate and safe crossing on Market Street and is also partnering with Connect Transit and other agencies to build bus stop benches.

Mr. O'Donnell stated in addition, once the proposed route structure is passed, Connect Transit will be conducting comprehensive educational sessions. The West Bloomington Revitalization Project pledges its support of those sessions to ensure that citizens can learn about the new routes and receive guides to get them where they want to go.

Debra Edwards:

Ms. Edwards had been riding the buses a lot. It is bothersome that there are people cut off. The people in Danbury Court, Pepper Ridge, the mobile home courts and Evergreen Village are being cut off. These people should not be cut off from the transit service. There should be preservation to some routes. The system should branch out to all of these places instead of cut off.

Jerica Watkins:

Ms. Watkins was present on behalf of Project Oz and a Project Oz client, Cheris Larson. Many involved with Project Oz also use other social service agencies. On behalf of young mothers with strollers, diaper bags, etc. she hopes that Connect Transit will reconsider the proposed changes. She noted that the addition of Sunday service and increased frequencies are good for the social service agencies on the west side of Bloomington. She thanked Connect Transit for listening to their feedback.

Logan Frederick:

Mr. Frederick was present representing Advocate Bromenn Medical Center. He had worked with Connect Transit staff to find solutions to access to the Bromenn facility. The Gold route reduces the walking distance for patients. It has been a decent compromise. Bromenn will continue to work with everyone to ensure patients have safe access to their facility.

Regina M.

Regina M. has concerns for the disabled and elderly community. They have to walk further and further. Connect Mobility is an option, however all Connect Mobility users are required to go through an eligibility process. She is concerned with the additional time it will take her to go to the grocery store and back, which has increased by one to two (1-2) hours.

Vice Chairman Mike McCurdy stated the last speaker has spoken and the public hearing would close. He invited Andrew Johnson, General Manager to address any inaccuracies or other items.

Andrew Johnson, General Manager thanked everyone for their comments. There were a few clarifications he wanted to address. The Gold route will cover the concerns with Washington Street and the Olive route will be American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible.

The concern regarding the first mile/last mile gap, a potential contract with Uber would not be voted on at the Board's upcoming Board meeting on Tuesday, May 3, 2016. Connect Transit is intent to find a solution to the first mile/last mile gap and subsidize same.

Regarding the discontinuation of the Late Night service. Studies have shown that this service is typically used as a demand response service. The late night service will not be discontinued, it will just operate as a demand response service much as it has been used in the past.

The meeting closed at 5:42 p.m.