

CONNECT TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING – MARCH 20, 2019

**Connect Transit Board Room #135
351 Wylie Drive - Normal, Illinois 61761**

The Connect Transit Advisory Committee meeting was held at the Connect Transit Board Room #135, 351 Wylie Drive, Normal, Illinois 61761 on March 20, 2019 at 4:15 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Noha Shawki
Shirley Craig
Linda Foster
Evelyn Johnson
John Corey
Wayne Layton

MEMBERS ABSENT: Emory Davis
Elaina Von Qualen

STAFF PRESENT: General Manager - Isaac Thorne
Marketing Manager - Jeff Holtke
Finance Director - Patrick Kuebrich
Community Outreach Coordinator - Brendan O'Neill
Interim Chief Operations Officer - Martin Glaze

General Manager Isaac Thorne opened the meeting at 4:15 p.m. with rollcall. Members approved the *Minutes* of the last meeting held on January 16, 2019, by Motion of Member Evelyn Johnson, seconded by Member Shirley Craig.

General Manager Thorne asked Staff member Brendan O'Neill, Connect's Community Outreach Coordinator, for an update on marketing efforts. Mr. O'Neil stated that Connect has been holding Community Engagement Sessions, but outside of the Engagement Sessions, in the upcoming month Connect will be partnering with various community organizations and reported on the following upcoming events:

- 1) April 2, 2019 – Election Day – Connect Transit giving free rides all day;
- 2) Miller Park Zoo will host a "*Party With the Planet*" event on Sunday, April 22 (*Earth Day*) and Connect's Community Bus will be present at the event;
- 3) The "*Sustainability Fair*" – Spring 2019; and
- 4) April 25, 2019 – "*National Get On-Board Day*" which was been re-branded from *National Transit Day*.

CTAC Appointments Discussion

General Manager Thorne stated that CTAC re-appointments will be presented by a *Recommendation* to the Board on April 26 to re-appoint the current Members of CTAC and that any Member who is unwilling or unable to serve for another two (2) years should let him know and noted that CTAC is still in need of two (2) additional Members and will continue to look for additional applicants.

Proposed Fare Adjustments Discussion

General Manager Thorne stated that after hearing public comments on Tuesday, he sat down with Staff and discussed what could be done in providing a discount to not only CM riders that are in the ADA service area (service area $\frac{3}{4}$ miles from a fixed route) when right now those riders can buy a CM 30-Pass for \$65 of unlimited rides. Those individuals living in "premium zone areas" cannot buy this Pass and have to pay the current \$3 and \$4 charge which leaves them with no discounted fare. Discussion resulted with creation of the "Value Card" so that any zone a rider is traveling to, the Value Card can be used, and the ride deducted from the Value Card. If a rider purchases a \$25 Value Card, actually spending \$23.75, but obtaining \$25 in true value on the Card for the rider's use. Likewise, for a \$50 Value Card – riders will spend \$45; and for a \$100 Value Card the rider will spend \$85. This is more of a universal discount for all users of CM, instead of just for para-transit individuals. The Value Cards do not expire but the 30-day pass expires within 30 days of purchase. There will be benefits to the plan but also some negatives and we are trying to find some middle ground. Continuing, General Manager Thorne stated that the over-break-even individuals that are buying a pass and are utilizing it, will be over the break-even point. Explaining further, he stated that for example for CM, if you buy a 30-day pass for CM, 32.5 trips is the break-even point which is, in short, the rider is getting all his or her money back when you buy a 30-day pass at \$65.

Member Shirley Craig asked the General Manager if he was saying that only one will be offered?

General Manager Thorne stated that now the 30-day CM pass can only be used in the ADA Para-transit areas, so you cannot utilize it going into zone 1 or zone 2, then you must use cash. The Value Pass eliminates that and you can utilize the Value Pass no matter where you are going – a universal pass through the premium areas or even in the ADA Para-transit areas.

Member Craig stated that her concern is for the people who are on the regular bus who only get 40 rides and will get hit with a fair amount of increased costs.

General Manager Thorne agreed and stated that basically, a \$100 Value Card – someone is going to pay \$85 to receive 40 trips. Those affected are those that are going to use it for 41+ rides.

Member Wayne Layton stated that a lot of times riders get caught unknowingly when they go into a zone area and had to come up with cash, adding that he thought this was a really good idea.

General Manager Thorne stated that he was sympathetic to those individuals and understood that it is being used for 50-60 or more rides. Continuing, he stated that he believed these were in the minority in terms of how often it is being used and fortunately there are not very many people that are in that category as opposed to those who are under or breaking even.

Member Craig inquired whether the 30-day passes will remain for regular riders?

General Manager Thorne stated, no, it won't. We are proposing to eliminate the 30-day pass for CM and replace it with the Value Card.

Member Craig asked if the people on the fixed route regular bus will still be able to obtain a 30-day pass.

General Manager Thorne replied, yes, and stated that this new proposal only deals with CM and Premium Service. In terms of the fare proposal, this is what has been changed after feedback primarily from those individuals who are living in the Premium Zone areas.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that based on the feedback, Connect could not revise the proposal for all of the requests, but letting riders know it was possible to do some things that they wanted.

General Manager Thorne stated that this is how the system was designed – that only those individuals living in the ADA Para-transit areas are getting a discounted fare. The new proposal will now allow anyone living in any of the Premium Zones or in the CM ADA Para-transit Zones to receive a discount of 5%-10% or 15%.

Member Craig stated that she believes the Value Card will be received as a wonderful item for some of our folks over the winter who don't work but they are wanting to get out and Member Johnson inquired whether this will be reduced by how often a rider uses it?

General Manager Thorne stated the reduction and/or discount is applied at purchase. The discount comes up-front when purchasing the Value Card with the discount amount dependent upon the amount of the Value Card. A rider dips it into the farebox and the card will come back and tell you the remaining balance on the card. Stating that another comment heard from the community was for those with cognitive disabilities as parents do not want to be giving their children a \$100 Value Card, so we broke the card values down by \$25.

Member Layton asked if that will be more paper for him to deal with?

Staff Member Martin Glaze stated that right now transfers are not issued on CM, but it may be possible to load the machines with \$25 cards where you can purchase it on the bus. He continued by stating that a \$100 Value Card runs into problems depending on whether it was preloaded when printed. For accommodating those with vision disabilities, we may be able to put the card amount on the individual account so that the carrying of the card wouldn't be necessary, which would be decided on an individual basis.

General Manager Thorne stated that his concern is making certain the person using the card knows how much value is remaining on the Value Card. Staff Member Martin Glaze added there may be the possibility that we may be able to have audio features where the farebox would tell you how much is remaining on the Card.

Member Shirley Craig wanted to confirm that the new value of the card would be printed on the card?

Staff Member Glaze stated that it would be similar to a 30-day pass when you activate it. The cards are all pre-coded to be activated for 30 days. It would be similar with the \$25 card, it is pre-coded and once it is activated, the \$30 would be loaded on the card. Until the card is activated, the card remains empty. If you put in a \$20 bill and the fare is \$2, it will print you off a card with \$18 on it.

Member Shirley Craig questioned if it keeps deducting so that someone – who has three cards at home – will be able to see the balance on the card?

Staff Member Glaze stated that the logistics of these will have to be decided by which will work best.

Member Linda Foster asked if the visually impaired or those who cannot hear, is there a screen that says – when you put the card in – you have \$18? Does the screen show that, does it talk to you or print the amount out?

Staff Member Glaze stated that he believed it would be printed on the card and will state on the screen, but he would check on that. The “audio” may just be a feature that would need to be added and switched on.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that if the audio was turned on, the other passengers would hear that she has \$75 left on her card.

Staff Member Glaze stated that is the reason why the audio feature is not used on fixed routes. There are audio features, but we will just have to discover the capabilities. The nice thing is that it is very personalized service, the driver is right there and can help out with a lot of the issues and they can tell what is on and what is not.

Member John Corey stated that he knows that Connect has looked at taking credit/debit cards in the past and thought that it was time to revisit as you are asking people to carry a lot of money.

General Manager Thorne stated that we have looked getting it here at our offices when people come in to buy passes, we will accept those credit/debit cards and we are really close to being able to do that and added that Staff has looked at 3-4 different vendors to be able to do that.

Member John Corey asked if this would be able to be done on the bus?

Staff Member Glaze stated that right now at the fareboxes, we would have to provide the fareboxes with wireless capabilities which would demand cellular in addition to data costs. Currently, the fareboxes are not running data, plus you are charged a fee – which means charges upon charges when placed on the buses. Even big transit stations do not run data. The better way to go and is more cost-effective is through a mobile app – mobile payments. Connect recently acquired the Econlane mobile app. You can send us an email and then log-in to it and once we set up the options for creating rides for yourself, we can allow credit card payments, but we just haven't vetted that out yet as far as what the costs would be and added that it is an option that is available to us and is a better option than putting it on the fareboxes.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that a problem would be if the card does not work, a lot of time could be wasted with people trying to use a debit/credit card.

General Manager Thorne stated that Connect would not allow the credit/debit cards on the actual farebox. We allow for the mobile ticketing app and that is probably how it would be done and the option to pay by cash would not be eliminated. Continuing, General Manager Thorne stated that we are also looking at the fixed route side by looking at acquiring a smart mobile ticketing app as well for a smartphone. That could be available and would be the way we would attempt to achieve the fare-capping. He stated many people are saying to him that "they would take the bus – or at least try it – but who carries cash – if you had a mobile ticketing app, I might try transit." We plan to implement that, too.

Staff Member Glaze stated that would also be available to CM as well. It has all of the capabilities. Unfortunately, sometimes we have to piece-meal our available options together because different vendors offer different capabilities which are not compatible with one another.

Staff Member Glaze then spoke about the idea of turning off texts. Basically, the notifications will be moved over to the mobile app. The mobile app also gives notifications and a similar notification as the text does. It runs through the phone's accessibility features and it will tell you when the buses are arriving, how many stops before you are the next pick-up and will give you a lot more information. The mobile app is called Ecolane and again, we can help you set it up.

Member John Corey stated that he has been other places where he has seen people pay for their regular fixed route fare through an app.

Staff Member Glaze stated that is what Connect is looking at now. We have been calling vendors, trying to find out the specs/options for each vendor and obtain an expected price for it. Once we know that, we can go out for bid and/or a trial period and install and perform a test run. We are hoping to have that capability by July 1 when the new fare structure goes into place.

General Manager Thorne stated that Connect has been talking to four (4) different vendors and has wanted to be able to utilize mobile ticketing for quite some time and this is the best opportunity for us to move forward.

Proposed Route Adjustments Discussion

Member Evelyn Johnson asked the General Manager for an update on the Olive route elimination.

The proposal is to eliminate the Olive route – a majority of the ridership on the Olive route is Orlando/Northbrook and in the middle of the route there is very little ridership – at Wal-Mart and OSF is where we are seeing the ridership. Essentially, Orlando/Northbrook, Wal-Mart, and OSF is where the ridership is on the Olive route. We proposed eliminating the Olive route because the Yellow route serves Orlando/Northbrook on Main Street with 15 and 30-minute service. The proposal additionally requested that we perform 15-minute service on the Lime route Express and the Red route Express. Individuals travelling from Orlando/Northbrook right now you can take the Olive and get to Wal-Mart

in 15 minutes. With the proposed changes, there would be increased service on the Red Express and passengers will be able to take the Yellow to the Red and get to Wal-Mart in 22 minutes which is only a 7 minute increase in ride and will be more efficient for Connect to operate the system instead of continuing to run the Olive route when we know that the majority of the ridership is really coming from Orlando/Northbrook, they can use the Yellow.

We are still holding community engagement sessions with another public hearing coming up. The Board will vote on the proposed fare increases and the elimination of the Olive route at Tuesday's public hearing.

Member Shirley Craig stated that one of the issues that is being raised in the community is that with the elimination of the Olive route, there is no access to ARC. Member Craig added that when she looked at the Olive originally, she said this route is doomed for failure because it doesn't hit Downtown or Uptown. When you have a bus that doesn't go to either Uptown or Downtown, it is not going to receive the ridership. She stated she would still like to see a bus service ARC because there will be more people aging out of driving.

General Manager Thorne stated that there is no doubt that if you take the Olive route to Uptown Station you are going to have more ridership. You would have more people that travel from Orlando/Northbrook to Uptown Station and would probably transfer over to the Red route or Green route. However, when discussing this internally, what Connect would be doing is duplicating service because Connect already has the Yellow and the Pink going into Uptown Station. The Olive would basically come right into Uptown Station after the Yellow and Pink.

Staff Member Martin Glaze stated that depending on what path you take, if you were to take it on Main Street or on School Street, these buses would literally be on top of each other because of the timing. Another point is that half of your ridership at Orlando/Northbrook is already walking out to the Yellow. So one-half is at Orlando/Northbrook and the other half is at the Yellow. If you take the Olive to Uptown Station, all of that ridership that is on the Yellow is just going to move to the Olive. You are cannibalizing one route to serve another route. That is the tough part and that is the reason it doesn't go Uptown because there is no path that makes transit sense.

Member Shirley Craig stated that to add a jog to one of the Reds to get up to ARC, I realize would cross the tracks twice which would slow everything down. She stated that she still dislikes seeing Connect eliminate the ARC stop.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that she had conversations with two (2) City Council members. The concern was the Orlando where the pickup was is further away than what they have been used to. That was one of the concerns, especially if you have to get groceries.

General Manager Thorne stated what was frustrating is that the bus stop we had was pretty far west on Orlando and the property owners told us to move it so we moved it a little bit further down east. Then the property owners then told us to move it, so we moved it even further east and the property owners still didn't like that. Staff Member Glaze added that at Summertree and Mayberry Village, the stop was in front of Summertree and homeowners complained so we then moved it down to Mayberry and they complained. Staff Member Jeff Holtke added that people would call and ask why was the bus sitting

outside their apartment and running and were complaining about the noise and the smell. General Manager Thorne continued to state that Connect has moved it so far east now on Olive Street that if you are standing at the Yellow stop in front of the Alumni Center, you can see the Olive bus stop from the parking lot.

Member Evelyn Johnson asked if these people who are complaining have the right to ask Connect to move something if it doesn't make sense to move it? If it is a bus stop on the street in front of an apartment complex and it is not doing any damage, can they just say move it and you have to move it?

General Manager Thorne stated that we have had many homeowners complain about where we put a bus stop and, yes, we will move it.

Member Evelyn Johnson asked if the City has some ordinance? She stated that you can't just come and say I don't want it in front of my apartment housing and move it, defeating the whole purpose.

Member John Corey stated that he had lunch recently with someone who lives on that street. They are going to stop riding because they have to walk so far and that the General Manager should be giving some pushback on this issue.

Member Noha Shawki asked if the buses were really that noisy?

Staff Member Martin Glaze stated that it depends on a lot of variables and depends on how detrimental the issue is and what our options are. Can we move it one block over – is that a safe block, etc.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated is there no written City or Town ordinance specifying that bus stops cannot be moved for that reason?

General Manager Thorne also stated that elected City officials have called Connect to say that they have heard from constituents and then ask us to move that stop.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that is not right and shouldn't operate that way.

General Manager Thorne stated that it becomes very frustrating because you have tenants in those apartments that are using transit. Also, the same property owners will plow their parking lots but will not shovel the sidewalks.

Staff Member Martin Glaze stated that Connect's long-term goal is to help land use and where things are built and why they are built there. The fact that they are built at the end of a dead-end was not very good planning. The residents want good bus service but why would you go to a dead-end street in a private neighborhood? Connect must turn the bus around on a dead-end street in Northbrook Estates which is private property. Connect does not go onto private property anywhere else in the City or Town. Continuing, Staff Member Glaze stated plainly that it is a dead-end street but is only one of the reasons that went into the proposal of why Connect is leaving that area as we are on private property and shouldn't be.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that the issue here is that Connect knows why you are doing what you are doing but everybody else doesn't know. It looks like to others you are not doing it because it doesn't fit in with what your plan is and what people do not understand is what has been brought to your attention. When you are talking about the Olive, it is a placement of where you get picked up but the placement where you get picked up is not because of Connect Transit – but because of the concerns and complaints from property owners.

General Manager Thorne stated that Connect would like to be able to place the bus stop closer to that intersection but cannot because of the two turn lanes and continued by stating that Connect would like to place one on the corner and place a shelter there but we cannot because of the turn lanes.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that 40 years ago there were no bus stops at all anywhere in town and you would have to flag the bus down to stop to pick you up. A lot of people have gotten use to the fact that there were no bus stops and now you put them out there for the community and the community fusses because they say they don't want a bus stop here.

General Manager Thorne stated Connect Transit was formed for these very reasons. We all know in living here that this City and Town was built for cars. The lack of infrastructure; lack of education and knowledge of our elected officials on how transit works; where bus stops need to go, etc., is an on-going effort that never stops. Every year or every few years newly elected officials come in and so it continues.

Member Evelyn Johnson stated that the elected officials do not ride the bus, so people need to talk to them from those of us who do so that they know that we vote too.

Member Shirley Craig stated they do not get really concerned until a family member who has had to give up their license or have a disabled child or grandchild. Then suddenly, they need service now.

Member Noha Shawki stated that she believes there is a great need for not only educating the public but also educating our public officials.

General Manager Thorne stated that there have been some really good conversations with the City of Bloomington about infrastructure needs, especially sidewalks. There have been good conversations with Tim Gleason regarding that and his willingness to partner with us on the *Better Bus Stops Campaign* where having sidewalks is so very important.

Member Evelyn Johnson inquired about Connect Transit's planning for 2020 baseball season and asked what was being done about connecting different groups in the community. Staff Member Brendan O'Neill responded that plans are in the works for the 2019 season.

Member Shirley Craig stated that she noticed a new 2-seat bench at one of the bus shelters. She inquired if those had been placed in other areas of the community.

General Manager Thorne stated that six (6) of the new 2-seat benches had been placed in the community and clarified that they are called "semme-seat" benches which are attached to the pole where riders can sit to wait for the bus. In locations where there is not enough room, these semme-

seats have been installed, together with the installation of solar lighting for stops needing additional lighting at night.

General Manager Thorne moved to the last item on the Agenda and asked the Members for any additional comments.

CTAC Member Comments/Suggestions

Member Evelyn Johnson asked if Connect had ever thought about promoting local transit on television.

General Manager Thorne stated that in 2012, Connect had a one-year contract which was extremely expensive so our advertising is mostly focused on the website, on the buses and through social media. However, we are planning to introduce more advertising on the buses when more advertising slots become available. The issue with that is Connect spending money on advertising on the bus and a paying customer buys the slot and Connect has to move its own advertising to allow for outside advertising.

Member Noha Shawki brought up the idea of contacting the Pantagraph and asking if they would do a story on public transit.

Adjournment

Member John Corey moved to adjourn, seconded by Member Evelyn Johnson.

The Members voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 5:10 p.m.



Jill Bower, Connect Transit Board Clerk