Adversaries Become Allies: Using Community Outreach to Drive Necessary Service Change

Andrew Johnson

Connect Transit

Bloomington-Normal, IL
Bloomington - Normal is where exactly?
About Connect Transit

• Started in 1972
• Nearly 2.1 million boardings in FY13
• 14 Fixed Routes
• 35 Fixed Route Buses
• 13 Paratransit Buses
• Over 100 Employees
About Connect Transit

- The transit system had not undergone any substantial change in decades
- Routes remained unchanged despite development and growth around them
- No clear mechanism for public involvement aside from that mandated by the FTA
Change Comes to Transit in B-N

- Overhauled the organizational structure
- Rebranded the system
- Proposed a restructuring of the all of the bus routes
The Route Restructure

• Numerous obvious adjustments that needed to be made to existing routes
  • Improve safety
  • Improve on-time performance
  • Increase overall convenience for customers

• Everything seemed very straightforward...
Public Reaction
Public Reaction

- Some people in the community were definitely not happy with the proposal.
Public Reaction

- Public hearings took a negative turn, but provided important insight into community wants and needs.

- It was immediately apparent that the proposal would have to be reworked.

"Changes to bus system delayed. Review planned after resistance."
The Aftermath

• Public backlash did not mean the route restructuring idea would be dropped

• But everyone was watching now

Our Views
City bus route changes worthy of second look

Carefully consider transit system changes

Let me start this letter with thanks to the Connect Transit board and management for their efforts to make a fine bus system even better. The proposed new routes are an attempt to make service more frequent, which is certainly a laudable goal.
The Aftermath

- Lack of an inclusive process was the problem
- Quickly devised a new plan
The Reboot

- The new plan focused on outreach...
  - Individual citizens
    - Listening sessions
  - Open houses
  - Public hearings
The Reboot

- The new plan focused on outreach...
  - Media
  - Editorial Review Board
  - Individual interviews

Cheers
... to the Twin City transit system, for continuing to discuss proposed changes to several bus routes rather than forcing a decision. A number of Connect Transit (the new name for Bloomington-Normal Public Transit System) customers are upset about the proposals that would lead to fewer stops and longer walks. We’re always in favor of efficiency for tax-supported bodies, but changes also need to be weighed against the needs of the users.

Panel drives toward transit changes

3 open houses scheduled for public to comment on route alterations

By Mary Ann Ford and Roger Miller

June 12 at the Connect Transit offices, 351 Wylie Drive, Normal; June 13 at the Normal City Council chamber at Uptown Station; and June 14 at the council

On the Web

More to know – Log on to view a PowerPoint presentation on Connect Transit’s proposed route changes at www.pantagraph.com

NORMAL – The public will have a chance to comment at the three open houses.

The Lime-1 will be streamlined to maintain safe, reliable service on the far west side. It will skip the Market Square stop, which will continue to be served by the Brown-F.

A second leg will be added to Teal-F to serve...
The Reboot

- The new plan focused on outreach...

- Special interest groups

**Committee to Ensure Fair Transit (CEFT)**

The Committee to Ensure Fair Transit (CEFT) is a grassroots organization whose purpose is to ensure equal and fair access to Public Transportation for all people in Bloomington-Normal.

Several individuals gathered to form CEFT in response to serious concerns about bus route changes. We are not alone: currently there is a nationwide movement that focuses on the need to guarantee fair transit for everyone. This is largely because use of public transit tends to increase during times of economic stress, rising gas prices, environmental concerns, and the gap between the poor and the wealthy which has steadily increased since the 1980s. Additionally, aging baby boomers create more need for services.

We are grateful that Connect-Transit leaders have postponed most route changes for now and look forward to working with CT in improving the system for everyone. We hope that CT leaders will welcome our interest, suggestions and desire to work with them. Care users are always the "experts" when it comes to what works and what doesn’t. We want to share our expertise.

**PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT MEETING:**

Life Center for Independent Living
2201 Eastland Dr., Suite 1, Bloomington
4:00-5:00 P.M. (take the Orange H or Trail 1)
Results

• The new plan focused on outreach...
  • The process took months
  • The public participated in greater numbers
Results

• Comments and concerns influenced the final proposal
• The press focused on the positive
Results

- New relationships and lines of communication were opened with citizens and government entities
Results

- The modified proposal was widely praised, was passed and was implemented
Final Thoughts

• When things go sideways, all is not lost

• There is an opportunity in every situation – take advantage of it!