



Connect to The Future Working Group Focus Group Topics

During its July 20 meeting the Connect to the Future Working Group brainstormed key topics the group felt it appropriate for us to address through this effort. Smart Growth America (SGA) confirms the Work Group's assessment and extends project focus on the basis of our public transit experience. SGA recommends the below four (4) 3-4 person focus groups that will work between meetings to advance Connect to the Future goals. All topics mentioned on July 20th are accounted for within the proposed focus group topics and the recommended scope of their work.

Focus Group Topics

- Ridership and Access
- Integration of Public Transit into Land Use and Development
- Sustainable Funding
- Connecting to The Future: Connect Transit as Economic Partner

Process and schedule

Focus groups will be asked to provide draft written recommendations to the full group by **October 12th** for discussion during the Working Group meeting on October 19th. Each focus group is asked to **meet four (4)** times between August 17th and October 12th.

Focus Group leaders, members, plan of work, and schedule will be confirmed on August 17th. Chair Judy Buchanan will propose focus group assignments in advance of the meeting.

SGA facilitators will participate in the kick off meeting and final meetings for each group. The facilitators will be available to participate by phone in other meetings if requested by the groups.

Please see guidance below for Focus Groups' scopes of work. Each group will be given a charge and asked to learn from public transit agencies of similar size and complexity in peer communities, look at Connect Transit's current situation as shown in data, and make informed recommendations for the system we envision in our future.

Focus Groups' Scope of Work Guidance

All focus groups are asked to factor into their work our community values and the public transit system we have agreed Bloomington/Normal wants, deserves, and is prepared to fund by 2030 (evolving from upcoming August 17 discussion).

1. Ridership and Access

- **Charge:** Recommend ridership approaches for the future of Connect Transit with corresponding performance standards and success indicators/measures.
- Define who Bloomington/Normal public transit riders are today and who we want them to be in the future: riders who are differently abled, aging, fixed-income, commuters, choice riders; etc.
- Understand current Connect Transit ridership data, and trends. Compare to ridership trends and best practices from similar communities, including route planning and impact of fares on ridership.
- Examine current Connect Transit accessibility realities and issues, such as ADA compliance, bus stop positioning, curb cuts and ramps, the Better Bus Stops campaign, etc.
- Consider how we attract and retain ridership, including desired future riders, through a well-designed system.

2. **Integration of Public Transit into Land Use and Development**

- **Charge:** Recommend ways to support transit in Bloomington-Normal through land use and development practices with performance standards and success indicators/measures.
- Understand the impact of land use policy on US transit systems in similar communities.
- Learn about current City of Bloomington and Town of Normal land use policy in relation to Connect Transit: how is it enforced and what are the strengths and gaps?
- Examine the challenges and opportunities for transit posed by specific decision-making processes: location of new development in relation to existing routes; preservation of access to transit during private construction; establishment and maintenance of infrastructure (sidewalks, bus stations, etc.)
- Learn about the US “Complete Streets” movement and McLean County Regional Planning Commission recommendations for adapting Complete Streets locally.

3. **Sustainable Funding**

- **Charge:** Recommend funding approaches with performance standards and success indicators/measures.
- Learn about how public transit funding works in the US: current funding best practices, challenges, and innovative approaches.
- Understand Connect Transit’s current funding formula: strengths, gaps, opportunities.
- Study and discuss alternate funding approaches from similar communities: municipal investment, government and large-employer funding partners, transit as independent taxing body, etc.
- Consider how to capture and sustain community support for a transit system that is well-funded and accountable for the long term.

4. **Connecting to The Future: Connect Transit as Economic Partner**

- **Charge:** Recommend options for Connect Transit’s mid- to long-range role in the local business mix and economy with corresponding performance standards and success indicators/measures.
- Understand Connect Transit’s historic development, current function, strategic and mid-range plans, and longer term potential to evolve from a circulation system to an economic driver.
- Learn about how the transit systems have helped support economic development and revitalization in other communities and what factors contributed to their success.
- Learn about similar communities that have expanded their transit into a “mobility platform” and envision whether and how Connect Transit could expand into that role in Bloomington-Normal.
- Consider how to attract and sustain community support for a well-funded mobility platform.