

FY 2020 Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities

Applicant and Proposal Profile

Is this a resubmission due to an invalid/error message from FTA? Yes No

Section I. Applicant Information

Organization Legal Name:

FTA Recipient ID:

Organization Chief Executive Officer:
(Name and Direct Phone Number)

- Applicant Eligibility:
- Designated recipient
 - State
 - Local governmental entity that operates fixed route bus service
 - Tribe (Federally recognized Native American Tribe)

- Project Location:
- Small Urbanized Area
 - Large Urbanized Area
 - Rural

Description of services provided and areas served:

Connect Transit's mission is to provide safe, reliable transportation and access to opportunities to strengthen and enrich individual lives, our community, the economy and the environment. We service over 46 square miles in the twin cities of Bloomington and Normal, Illinois, with an operating system featuring 42 buses on 16 routes.

Bloomington-Normal has a population of nearly 135,000 residents, which balloons to over 150,000 during the academic year as students from Illinois State University, Illinois Wesleyan University, Heartland Community College, and Lincoln College-Normal flow into the metropolitan area. Embedded in the center of this bustle, Connect Transit provides a crucial service to the thousands of students, faculty, and residents who rely on our buses to get to class, work, and health services: our most recent on-board survey in May 2019 revealed that nearly 27% of Connect Transit riders use transit every day, 14% of our rides are education-related, 36% of our riders make less than \$15,000 annually, and over 55% of our riders do not own a personal vehicle. That positions Connect Transit as an irreplaceable structure in the community, and we pride ourselves on outreach efforts designed to optimize the experience for our riders. We have partnerships with local universities – as well as the corporate headquarters for State Farm Insurance and Country Financial – that enable riders to travel using their student or worker ID cards. We are also particularly proud of our Connect Mobility service: 15 para-transit buses geared towards providing the most accessible service possible for handicapped individuals. As a function of our mission, we believe in going the extra mile to empower everyone in our community.

Further, to ensure that Connect Transit continues to respond and adapt to community needs, in 2016 we conducted a year-long effort to solicit feedback on improving our bus routes. We revamped our routes and increased bus frequency in key areas to improve efficiency. By focusing our services where they are most crucial, we increased ridership by about 12% over 24 months. The upshot is a transit system very much woven into the fabric of the Bloomington-Normal community. In FY2019, Connect provided 2.5 million rides – a 23% increase from FY2013 – in the most accessible, responsible, and responsive way we possibly could. We provide mobility to educational, financial,

health, manufacturing, and telecommunications services, including our local universities, Advocate BroMenn Medical Center, OSF St. Joseph Medical Center, Bridgestone-Firestone, and Afni, Inc. Connect Transit is excited at the opportunity to apply for 5339(b) Bus and Bus Facilities grant, as it sets us up to continue serving Bloomington-Normal for years to come.

Section II. Project Information

About the Project

Project Title:

Project Executive Summary:

Connect Transit is requesting Section 5339 funds to build a transit center in Downtown Bloomington.

Project Statement of Work: (Description of Project)

Connect Transit services is an essential asset of Downtown Bloomington and it enables its day-to-day function and its continued sustainable growth. Like no other part of Bloomington-Normal, downtown is central to the life of the city and region. Changes to the downtown affect all Bloomington residents and the region. There are those who work downtown daily, others who travel through it on their way somewhere, increasing more who live and work around downtown.

If applicable, describe how this application addresses one or more departmental objectives addressed in the NOFO:

Downtown Bloomington is central to the life of the city and region. Downtown transit center will affect all Bloomington residents and the region. This project will bring more economic and transit oriented development in Downtown and also the region.

If applicable, describe how the proposed project is located in or will impact an Opportunity Zone. Please identify the Opportunity Zones impacted:

This project will greatly impact and support public transportation service for those individuals in the qualified opportunity zone. The Illinois State University campus is located in a Opportunity Zone and a majority of students utilize bus service. Students traveling to Downtown Bloomington will be bettered served by the transit center.

- Project Type:
- Bus Replacement
 - Bus Rehabilitation
 - Bus Expansion
 - Bus Facility Replacement
 - Bus Facility Rehabilitation
 - Bus Facility Expansion
 - Bus Equipment
 - Other

If Other, specify:

Project Budget

Description	QTY	5339(b) Amount	5339(b) Match Amount	Other Federal Funds	Other	Total Cost
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Total:		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Matching Funds Information

Matching Funds Amount : (Must match Project Budget Amount)

6,000,000

Source of Matching Funds:

Connect Transit will use local share of \$3 million dollars and \$3 million dollars of State of Illinois funding to cover the local match. The local funding is provided by the municipalities and is to be used for the local share of federal funding and capital purchases. State of Illinois has awarded Connect Transit a \$3 million dollar capital grant to build a transfer center.

The combination of local capital and State capital dollars of \$3 million dollars is approximately 43% of the estimated \$14 million dollars this project will cost to build.

Supporting Documentation of Local Match:

The local match is provided by the municipalities and is to be used for the local share of federal funding and capital purchases. The municipalities have provided this funding since 1972 and is included in the By-Laws that created Connect Transit. The City and Town collect sales and property taxes that are directed to the general revenue fund and a monthly amount is sent to Connect for local capital purchases.

The Connect Transit Board of Trustees has provided a letter of support for this project (Attachment D). Patrick Kuebrich, Connect Transit Finance Director, has provided a signed letter affirming the amount and source of Connect's matching funds. A copy of the letter is included in Attachment C.

Project Scalability

Is project scope scalable? Yes No

If Yes, specify minimum 5339(b) Funds necessary:

Provide explanation of scalability with specific references to the budget line items above:

The project is scalable by reducing the federal share of the Downtown Transfer Center. This scalable option will still allow Connect Transit to build the transfer center. Connect can accommodate this lower cost share by using a larger portion of local share and applying an additional \$2 million dollars of local share to the project.

Connect Transit could still complete the Downtown Transfer Center with \$6 million dollars of 5339 funding. This would require Connect to use additional local funding of \$2 million dollars, bringing Connects local funding share to \$8,000,000 or 57% of the total project cost.

Project Timeline (Please be as specific as possible)

Timeline Item Description

Timeline Item Date

Congressional Districts (Place of Performance)

Congressional District

IL-013

IL-018

Section III . Evaluation Criteria

Demonstration of Need

Downtown Bloomington is a major mobility hub for the Bloomington-Normal area. The Downtown Bloomington transfer point handles over 1,800 trips per day, with eight different routes serving the current transfer point.. There are only two bus stop shelters and four benches currently installed, and the transfer point uses both sides of one street. This raises safety, accessibility, ADA, and quality of rider concerns, particularly during peak hours and during bad weather. This transfer point location has been used for the last 30 years and is completely inadequate for Connect and customer needs.

In the summer and winter Connect uses a bus as a cooling or warming station for passengers due to the lack of adequate waiting area for customers. There is also a need for public restrooms for customers using Connect services. There is also a need to provide real-time bus information to customers that will provide information to those waiting on a bus route and make it easier for new customers.

Connect's ridership has increased 11% over the last two years and on pace to have the second highest ridership in our history. With increased ridership, a greater focus has been placed on improving transit infrastructure such as bus stops and transfer points. Despite increased awareness of need, Connect Transit does not have a transfer center in the City of Bloomington because of the lack of capital funding.

Safety is Connect Transit's biggest concern for the current conditions at the transfer location. The area has no direct crosswalks to buses and it is very difficult to cross the street. Currently, navigating from one side of the street to another provides a great connection for our riders, but can be confusing and unsafe for those unfamiliar to the area and new riders. The transfer point can be complicated with the heavy vehicular movements and steady stream of buses exiting during two peak periods. Given the significant ridership associated with this area, Connect Transit is committed to providing a safe and high-functioning transfer center.

Demonstration of Benefits

The overarching benefit in construction of a new transfer facility is the revitalization of what has become an unwieldy central city street. The new bus transfer facility in Downtown Bloomington will be anchored by the transportation center and be designed to encourage transit accessibility and encourage reduced automobile usage. The vision of the Downtown Transfer Center is to provide a resource that residents, City leaders, and business owners can utilize to create a revitalized neighborhood. The transfer center will enhance economic development and the quality of life through affordable and accessible transportation services. For bus riders, the development enables Connect Transit to provide more efficient service to the elderly, economically disadvantaged, and disabled residents. The Transfer Center provides a safe, navigable, and comfortable space for riders to alight and transfer between buses, in contrast to the current system that can be confusing, stressful, and often not up to acceptable ADA standards. Further, the transfer center will expedite surface transit movement for riders and independent automobile users: the Transfer Center will reduce the rate of accidents, decrease headways, and contribute to lowering overall operating costs.

The pedestrian, auto, and bicycle community will benefit greatly from the Downtown Transfer Center. It will provide safe, efficient connections and safe crossing opportunities. Also, it will enhance safety and comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists to encourage non-auto access. Hundreds of people begin and end their trip as pedestrians. A transfer center in the public realm will accommodate people on foot by giving them enjoyable paths to travel, linger, and shop around the center. The center will seek to connect the riders and citizens to the bike network. Connect Transit understands the need to maintain appropriate traffic flow in the area and allow multi-modal transportation, which includes vehicles. In development of the Downtown Transfer Center, Connect Transit plans to accommodate vehicles by constructing a parking lot and implementing safer roadways for all citizens and visitors.

Planning and Local/Regional Prioritization

The proposed Downtown Transfer Center is consistent with the fiscal year FY2019 – 2023 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), included as (Attachment E). As indicated in the TIP, Connect plans to construct a transfer center by 2023. The proposed project is also consistent with Connect Transit's Strategic Plan for 2018-2021 (Attachment F), which includes the construction of a transfer center as a foundational component of the holistic transit network.

Connect has included a letter of support from the City of Bloomington and McLean County Regional Planning Commission that demonstrates their commitment to the transfer center construction.

Local Financial Commitment

Connect Transit is using \$6 million of local share and State capital funding. Connect has \$3 million of local share secured for the local financial commitment and \$3 million secured through a State capital grant. The City of Bloomington and Town of Normal provide \$1.1 million each year to Connect Transit for capital purchases through the By-laws that were used to establish Connect Transit. The \$1.1 million received from the City and Town is included in the FY2019 financial audit (Attachment G). These funds are provided by the City and Town through the general revenue fund that is collected through sales and property tax. Connect Transit has received capital funding since creation of the transit agency in 1972.

Project Implementation Strategy

Can this project be obligated within 12 months? Yes No

Connect Transit recognizes private and local partnerships as a pivotal piece of the Downtown Transfer Center project. Partnerships are always vital in ensuring plans from idea to reality. Connect Transit and the City of Bloomington have already taken proper steps to develop a partnership at the early stages of this project. The strategy is to achieve a planned vision and creating a transfer center for the customers and residents.

To demonstrate our commitment to the project, Connect Transit has already taken first steps by commissioning a preliminary plan and a study for the new Transfer Center. The study provides us with firm measurements of the space requirements necessary for the facility and its site. Also, a conceptual design was created to begin to explore how partner facilities might coordinate with Connect Transit on this project. In addition to the planning, several comprehensive work sessions were held with senior staff. With that, a consulting firm was able to develop two prototypical site and building layouts. These prototypes offer different options regarding how to enter and exit the site; as well as giving careful consideration to the urban design, streetscape elements, parking lots, and other site amenities. In addition, Connect Transit is currently conducting a feasibility study and architectural engineering to start step two in this process to build a downtown transfer center.

The next steps include conducting a comprehensive public outreach campaign. We plan to host multiple meetings at different locations and conduct interviews with key stakeholders, including community leaders. To increase project awareness of the need for a transfer center, Connect Transit will hold public meetings. We anticipate eager participation and representation from a diversity of opinions in the Bloomington-Normal community and we plan to collaborate with interested parties throughout the duration of the project implementation process. The interviews will provide perspectives on the specific accessibility needs related to the downtown transfer center.

We have based our strategy on an conducted study of the Downtown Transit Center Program of Spaces and Conceptual designs (Attachment I) of successful project implementation procedures, understanding implementation will be a multi-year process involving a variety of stakeholders. We believe our outreach to the City of Bloomington, initial design models, and consideration of project financing solidify a strong project backbone. The immediate next steps – community outreach, further design studies, and further exploration of potential partnerships set us up for a responsible and strategic implementation process.

Technical, Legal, and Financial Capacity

Technical Capacity

Connect Transit staff have also implemented and overseen the projects of several large procurements over the last three years such as: ADA software, fixed route ITS equipment and software, heavy-duty buses, and electronic fare boxes. In 2015 Connect Transit led a 326 bus procurement for 26 agencies in eight different states. There are no outstanding technical capacity issues that would make this a high-risk project. Connect Transit just received a perfect FTA Triennial Review in June with no findings.

Legal Capacity

Connect uses the City of Bloomington and Town of Normal legal counsel to review contract language and to form contracts. There are no outstanding legal capacity issues that would make this a high-risk project.

Financial Capacity

Connect Transit has excellent financial systems and practices in place to implement the project. Connect had \$24.2 million in assets and \$1.4 million of liabilities, as reported in the FY2017 financial audit (Attachment G). As of July, Connect has a \$5.3 million cash balance. There have been zero findings in the last five years of Connect Transit's financial audits. Connect receives approximately 1.1 million dollars of tax revenue per year from City of Bloomington and Town of Normal general revenue to fund for capital purchases.