



**WOWC**  
Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus

# BRIEFING

## PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES AND CURRENT INITIATIVES

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) represents 15 upper- and single-tier municipalities which make up Southwestern Ontario, collectively representing 300 communities and approximately three million residents.

The purpose of the WOWC is to advocate and engage with other levels of government as one united voice on opportunities, common needs and issues of critical importance to Southwestern Ontario.

Ontario municipalities need help from other levels of government to maintain and provide infrastructure and services. But together we can guide success.

As a rapidly growing area, the WOWC priorities advocate for key investments in Southwestern Ontario, while planning for future needs, promoting economic vitality, and supporting community wellbeing.

While we certainly support many other issues pertinent to our municipalities, some of which are outlined by groups such as AMO, OMSSA, and Advantage Ontario; WOWC has identified its three key areas of focus in Southwestern Ontario, where the WOWC desires to work with the provincial government and our local MPPs to achieve very needed results:

- WOWC as the trusted perspective and partner for municipal priorities, plans and concerns
- Economic Development
- High Speed broadband networks

We call the next provincial government to work with municipalities in Southwestern Ontario to achieve these opportunities and help us create greater communities, together.



**The WOWC offers supported views and reasoned actions toward initiatives to promote progress for Ontario.**

## SOUTHWESTERN PRIORITIES AND CONCERNS

The WOWC provides a respected and informed view and voice on the important topics of concern for the people and municipalities of Southwest Ontario. Advocacy, on behalf of this significant portion of the province of Ontario we represent, is a key pillar of the work of the Caucus. Key areas of interest currently include and are not limited to:

- Transportation Connectivity and Performance
- Long Term Care and Seniors
- Infrastructure

The Caucus seeks to inform and influence in these areas, and welcomes cooperation and perspectives of all concerned. The WOWC seeks to partner with the Provincial Government and provide valuable insights and perspectives on how the opportunities and concerns of our communities are addressed. The WOWC offers supported views and reasoned actions toward initiatives to promote progress for Ontario.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Municipalities in Ontario need meaningful, sustainable and consistent federal and provincial infrastructure funding to maintain our critical public infrastructure.

In South-Western Ontario, an abundance of watercourses feeding into the Great Lakes systems result in an extraordinarily high number of municipal bridges and culverts on our municipal roads – these assets cost significant money to maintain prudently. Downloading of aged roadways and structures from the Province to the municipalities over the years has also added to our expanding asset management inventory, and many of these have come with little or no asset maintenance funding and now require costly improvements.

Water and waste-water infrastructure also remains a

challenge in terms of provision of new capacity and maintenance of existing systems for municipalities. It is essential that future federal and provincial infrastructure programs consider, and meaningfully fund, municipal priorities and respect our existing municipal asset management and financial plans. When infrastructure-funding programs are application or lottery driven, and geared primarily toward short-term economic considerations or politically strategic investments rather than overall longer term prioritized infrastructure maintenance, unintended distortions can result on municipal capital plans and ultimately result in overall lower value for money for our taxpayers. This is an inefficient deployment of scarce resources, eventually costing more for governments at all levels.

**Municipalities are committed to working with the Federal and Provincial Governments to reach a common understanding on the elements of prudent and sustainable infrastructure funding programs, designed to meaningfully meet the needs of every level of government, and deliver good infrastructure value-for-money to Canadians.**





# TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

The WOWC believes a fully integrated inter-community transportation system in Southwestern Ontario is essential to broader small urban-rural community mobility across the region. The development of a public transportation system that addresses mobility and connectivity is vital to our economic vitality and community wellbeing.

Properly developed, enhanced passenger rail transportation across Southwestern Ontario can be the vital backbone of a fully integrated public transportation system. Through the 2019/20 Budget the Province announced its intent to investigate a full range of transportation options for Southwestern Ontario. Specifically, the 2019/20 Budget included the following:

*“The Province will examine options for improved connections between London, Kitchener and Toronto to spur economic activity in the region by improving*

*mobility and increasing travel reliability. This will include practical options for improvements to existing rail corridors in collaboration with private-sector partners to optimize passenger and freight rail. As well, it will include improvements to the highway network and inter-community bus services. As part of this work, the Province will consult with affected municipalities and Indigenous communities.”*

The WOWC supports the development of enhanced passenger rail from Toronto to Windsor. WOWC has endorsed the SouthwestLynx Plan and supports the concept that both freight and passenger rail capacities and services can be enhanced within existing rail corridors and further complemented by an integrated inter-community bus system.

The SouthwestLynx Plan provides a transportation solution at a lower cost,

in less time, with greater preservation of agricultural lands, enhanced rail freight improvements, less detrimental community impacts, almost immediate mobility benefits, and the flexibility for incremental improvement to the system. To enhance mobility and cultivate rail passenger ridership a fully integrated inter-community transportation system in Southwestern Ontario could be developed leveraging and complementing existing motor coach and other private sector transportation services in a similar manner as the Ontario Northland bus network.

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**“Support development of a fully integrated, inter-community transportation system in Southwestern Ontario as outlined in the SouthwestLynx Plan”**



## LONG TERM CARE AND SENIORS FUNDING

As our municipalities prepare for a shift toward a rapidly aging population, the WOWC has a strong concern surrounding the capacity to deliver Long Term Care and Seniors' Services given the current funding gap created, in part, by the Age-In-Place Provincial strategy.

In 2017, the WOWC confirmed that our region alone has a provincial funding shortfall of \$74.3 million annually for 3,428 beds. Since introducing the Age-In-Place Strategy, the WOWC region has experienced a significant increase in the acuity of new admissions. WOWC has not witnessed an increase in the funding envelope to address the strain to the system particularly in the areas of staffing surrounding registered and non-registered nursing staff.

In 2013, the WOWC advocated the Province to address the unintended consequences of the Age-In-Place Strategy and the 79/10 regulation. Arbitrary staffing requirements, coupled with design standard restrictions, create a highly inflexible arrangement for the public sector licensees. The continued fiscal grandfathering policies for Preferred Revenues is unrealistic and inequitable for each home. Further, the imposed funding restrictions on Basic Room Rates equalling the sum of Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) + Old Age Security (OAS) + Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) + Guaranteed Annual Income Supplement (GAINS) creates a local fiscal burden that is not sustainable.

WOWC seeks creation of a continuous and stable capital reinvestment model for the entire sector:

- Increase public sector resident monthly accommodation rates – create a special envelope for those residents in a publicly funded home to receive an additional supplement
- Increase the Long Term Care funding envelope and the RAI/CMI process to properly address the increased acuity of residents
- Provide additional funding avenues to municipalities seeking redevelopment and expansion of Long Term Care and Seniors' Services facilities
- Adopt the proposal from the City of Toronto, which sought a different agreement for the public sector whose funding goes directly back into care versus the for-profit sector
- Request transparency in funding allocations, including outlining how the 32 bed increment in design standards impacts funding allocations for each home
- Enhance private-public partnerships in our operating models
- Adjustments to the system that require market and pay equity comparisons to be with our private sector neighbours
- Flexibility to the staffing ratios dictated within the Act
- The elimination of current grandfathering requirements surrounding preferred rates to be addressed for resolution before 2025
- Revisit the legislative requirements to allow all facilities to realize economies of scale and address funding options for Nurse Practitioners in addition to Medical Director
- Redefine staffing requirements and work towards innovative solutions to sector wide human resource shortages
- Provide additional funding to boost food per diem rates that are currently sitting at \$9 per resident.

The WOWC maintains that the funding gap for the delivery of care, and the operational restrictiveness of the Long Term Care Homes Act for all public sector licensees must be addressed and seeks a real solution to the unintended consequences of the Age-In-Place Strategy and flexibility to the staffing requirements outlined in 79/10 regulation





## ACCESS TO HIGH SPEED BROADBAND NETWORKS (SWIFT)

SouthWestern Integrated Fibre Technology Inc. (SWIFT) was initiated in 2011 by the combined connectivity interests of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC). The WOWC continues to support SWIFT and highlights access to high-speed broadband networks as a catalyst for innovation, economic prosperity, and global competitiveness.

Broadband has become an essential service that is necessary to encourage economic growth and stability, modernize and streamline the delivery of health and social services, provide greater educational opportunities, increase capacity to administer and govern institutions, improve the environment, and create fairness and opportunity for everyone. Access will ensure that all Ontarians, whether they be in rural or urban areas, have access to the services they need to participate in the digital economy. The WOWC remains supportive of the SWIFT model and is actively involved in SWIFT governance through our 15 WOWC appointments to the SWIFT Board and through SWIFT's regular and ongoing dialogue with the WOWC Caucus and its CAOs.

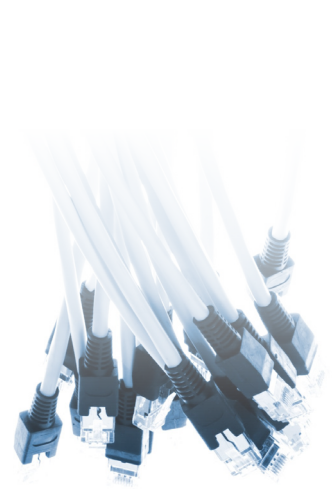
The WOWC appreciates the support of the Government of Ontario and financial participation in announcing three SWIFT Phase 2 initial projects (Norfolk, Lambton and Wellington Counties) valued at \$34.6 million.

The WOWC looks forward to the successful implementation of the Phase 2 projects leading to the Government of Ontario's support and participation in Phase 3 funding for the remainder of the initial SWIFT projects across Southwestern Ontario.

Looking forward beyond the current SWIFT projects and plans, the WOWC supports the implementation of a provincial broadband plan that is aligned with federal, regional, municipal and Indigenous partners. Such a plan would leverage the collective voice of the 3.5 million residents in the SWIFT geography to maximize broadband infrastructure investments in order to create equitable, evidence-based provision of services.

The WOWC is seeking support from the Government of Ontario to:

- Support and participate in long-term, predictable funding to models like SWIFT which are overcoming Ontario's connectivity barriers and meeting the unique needs of each community
- Unlock the tremendous potential of our province and create a safety net for individuals who cannot currently access Internet services due to remoteness of location or financial hardships by declaring broadband internet an essential utility



To continue supporting and investing in SWIFT's vision to empower communities to access global opportunities through local, ultra-high-speed connections.





Infrastructure is critical and municipal governments own almost two-thirds of all public infrastructure in Ontario, yet they collect less than 10% of each overall household tax dollar.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACROSS SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

Support greater economic prosperity across Southwestern Ontario by investing in local and regional economic development strategies, providing infrastructure needed for business expansion and attraction, addressing labour market shortages, and supporting land use planning policies that encourage responsible growth.

The WOWC has long appreciated the contributions that economic development makes to the sustainability of the region and its constituent municipalities and is now championing a regional Economic Development Strategic Plan for Southwestern Ontario. This approach provides a regional view of the need and priorities related to our sectors, markets, infrastructure, labour force and supply chains.

It also provides effective stakeholder engagement and a unique opportunity for discussion of local issues and opportunities with larger economic implications. As a growing region, we face collective issues in labour market shortages, transportation infrastructure and land use planning constraints that impact investment and growth.

Through its regional Economic Development Strategic Plan the WOWC seeks:

- Greater support for regional workforce planning, including strengthening access and quality of labour market intelligence and improving the region's access to a skilled and talented labour pool
- Investment in regional infrastructure to connect communities to major transportation hubs and ensure the flow of goods and services is equitable and efficient across the region
- Funding of regional sector strategies in the areas of manufacturing, agri-food processing and packaging, energy and digital industries and to support the growth of export and trade activities; and
- Provincial inclusion and support of Southwestern Ontario within national and international marketing and promotional objectives and investment attraction initiatives

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## SUMMARY

By working together, the next Provincial Government, the WOWC and the municipalities of Southwestern Ontario can provide our residents and businesses with the services, supports and infrastructure they need to thrive today and into the future, while planning for growth and a rapidly aging population. Many of our priorities are about connecting small and mid-sized communities to Ontario's broader infrastructure system, which will enable vitality, equity and prosperity for all.

We look forward to working with the next Government of Ontario to achieve these and many other priorities critical to the success of our communities and quality-of-life of our residents. Working together, we can achieve great things in Southwestern Ontario.





## **Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus Member Municipalities**

**County of Brant**

**Bruce County**

**Municipality of Chatham-Kent**

**Dufferin County**

**Elgin County**

**Essex County**

**Grey County**

**Huron County**

**Lambton County**

**Middlesex County**

**Norfolk County**

**Oxford County**

**Perth County**

**Simcoe County**

**Wellington County**

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