

October 27, 2021

Honorable Kinga Surma
Ministry of Infrastructure
College Park, 5th Floor, Room 5E200
777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON
M7A 2J3

Dear Honorable Kinga Surma,

Re: Accelerated High Speed Internet Program (AHSIP)

On behalf of the County of Essex, I wish to express our commitment and support in regards to the Accelerated High Speed Internet Program (AHSIP), and am writing you today to seek that you review our recommendations and that Infrastructure Ontario halt the program's Request For Proposals (RFP) process until our concerns have been strongly considered and addressed.

Connectivity is key to the social and economic success of our communities. 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.

I recognize that universal access to high-speed broadband connectivity is fundamental to the continued relevance and future prosperity of small urban / rural communities in Southwestern Ontario.

The County of Essex would like to see the Province of Ontario's AHSIP maximize the amount of fibre deployed with the funds available, provide a level playing field that allows high participation of local and regional Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and ensure equitability of funding and outcomes between all municipalities in Southwestern Ontario (lower- and upper-tier).

We support the Province of Ontario's program and want it to be as effective as possible therefore the County of Essex is recommending that Infrastructure Ontario pause the procurement process until the following recommendations have been addressed:

- Lot sizes are reduced to an average reserve price of \$10 million with no single lot having a reserve price greater than \$20 million;
- "Wired" and "Wireless" designations are removed from the lots in line with Infrastructure Ontario's amendment to allow hybrid bids in all lots;
- Reserve prices are recalculated for all lots and are based on hybrid solutions rather than "Wired" or "Wireless" solutions;
- A clear / transparent formula for evaluating proposals that balances bid price with higher fibre content bids is created and communicated to participants;
- The RFP, when issued, be made visible to the public given that it contains no propriety ISP information;
- Immediately release the lot maps to all municipalities in Ontario so that they can review and comment;
- Ensure that small ISPs in Southwestern Ontario are consulted directly and their input is considered;
- The details of the procurement be re-evaluated and Infrastructure Ontario consider the following changes:
 - Allow for progress payments to the recipients rather than holding 100% of the funding until customers are in-service;
 - Eliminate the bid bond requirements;
 - Seriously reconsider the position that the Construction Act applies / eliminate the bonding requirements called for by the Act (especially if no progress payments are being made);
 - Eliminate the plan to hold back the final 10% and pay 100% of the project cost by the time the project is complete.

On behalf of the County of Essex, we are recommending that Infrastructure Ontario pause the procurement process until the above recommendations have been addressed.

Sincerely,



Gary McNamara
Warden



Mike Galloway, MBA, CMO
Chief Administrative Officer

Cc;

The Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario (doug.fordco@pc.ola.org)
Taras Natyshak, MPP (tnatyshak-qp@ndp.on.ca)
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