



Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – July 21, 2020

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus takes action to support rural broadband

Southwestern, ON – At their meeting on July 2nd the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus approved a series of recommendations to support rural broadband in Southwestern Ontario. Increased funding from both the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada is urgently needed to address Southwestern Ontario's large connectivity gaps, so that we can close the digital divide and restart our economies.

In order to reduce the digital divide within Southwestern Ontario, and to achieve the Government of Canada's target, in which 95% of homes and businesses will have access to internet speeds of at least 50/10 Mbps by 2026, it will **cost an estimated \$1 billion**.

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus and the participating SWIFT municipalities of Caledon, Niagara and Waterloo are requesting **direct funding to SWIFT from the Government of Canada in the amount of \$254 million and from the Government of Ontario in the amount of \$221 million**. Combined with a \$174 million commitment from public-private partnerships, the WOWC intends to successfully address the \$1 billion Southwestern Ontario infrastructure deficit and achieve the interim goal of providing 50/10 broadband services to **95% of the population within the region by 2025**.

In addition, the WOWC is also requesting that the CRTC Broadband Fund and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) Universal Broadband Fund each allocate 10% of their funds directly to Southwestern Ontario (based on population share of total for Canada).

Quotes

"The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus supports the funding of existing shovel ready, municipally led projects that will connect our rural economies at an accelerated pace. We support SWIFT as Southwestern Ontario's funding mechanism to advance the expansion of critical broadband infrastructure across the region."

- Jim Ginn, Chair of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, Warden Huron County.

"Broadband is critical in moving the economy in Southwestern Ontario forward. We have heard from our business community loud and clear that in order to remain competitive, access to reliable internet is key."

- George Bridge, Chair of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus Economic Development Committee, Mayor Town of Minto.

“Families and businesses in our rural areas have been shut out of the economy and society as a result of the pandemic. COVID -19 has underscored the need for urgency to address gaps in broadband services across our region. The SWIFT model works, it delivers results and can be immediately leveraged to upgrade networks and coverage in our region’s underserved areas.”

- George Cornell, Vice-Chair of SWIFT, Warden of Simcoe County.

“At a time when people have become more dependent than ever on broadband, having access to high-speed internet is critical. SWIFT, together with our community leaders and local service providers, is committed to bringing Southwestern Ontario’s underserved communities online and high-speed internet access to thousands.”

- Allan Thompson, Mayor Town of Caledon, SWIFT Board Member and the Chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association.

Quick Facts

- Southwestern Ontario with a population of 3 million, represents 10% of the population of Canada.
- Southwestern Ontario represents 20% of the total number of businesses in Canada (*Source: Statistics Canada, Business Register, December 2015. Canadian Business Patterns 2015*). Now more than ever businesses need connectivity to ensure a livelihood for themselves and their employees.
- Without direct broadband funding the pre-existing Southwestern Ontario “homework gap” will be exacerbated and lead to an unparalleled inequality in education, as elementary, secondary and post secondary institutions, continue to shift to online learning.
- The Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus and SWIFT are committed to achieving the interim goal of providing 50/10 broadband services to 95% of the population within the region by 2025. This is one year earlier than the Government of Canada’s goal.

About

The **Western Ontario Warden’s Caucus (WOWC)** is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper and single tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, representing more than three million residents. The WOWC aims to enhance the prosperity and overall wellbeing of rural and small urban communities across the region. Caucus members work collectively to influence federal and provincial legislation and programs through advocacy, research and analysis and education. For more information, visit www.wowc.ca.

SWIFT, a regional broadband expansion project initiated by the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus is focused on enabling greater digital equality between rural and urban populations. SWIFT subsidizes the construction of open-access high-speed networks to encourage service providers to expand broadband infrastructure in underserved rural areas.

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