

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) represents the 15 upper and single tier municipalities in Western Ontario and over 3 million Ontario residents, 20% of Ontario's population. The Economic Development strategy sets out a plan to strengthen economic opportunity across the region. We believe working in collaboration with the province is critical to realizing the plan's goals and objectives.

High Speed fibre

More than 488,000 residents across Southwestern Ontario lack access to reliable broadband services.

SWIFT, regional broadband expansion project, is currently overseeing a \$209 million broadband expansion plan that aims to bring high-speed connectivity to 50,000, approximately 22%, of the underserved homes and businesses across Southwestern Ontario. To-date SWIFT has:

- Issued more than \$197 million in Request for Proposals (RFP) to expand and improve broadband services across Southwestern Ontario.
- 90% of procurement is now complete and the project has already successfully exceeded both its 50,000 premises passed and 3,095 fibre kms KPIs.
- ISPs have demonstrated a strong interest in the SWIFT program. To-date the project has received 97% higher than anticipated in ISP contributions, totalling an additional \$58M in broadband upgrades above and beyond expectations.
- Overall, the total project funding outlook has increased from \$209M to \$270M as a result of private sector contributions and additional municipal contribution and is likely to achieve \$275M by the end of the project.
- SWIFT is also currently overseeing fibre-optic projects within the following First Nation communities: Delaware Nation Moravian of the Thames, Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River and anticipate that this list will continue to grow as future projects are announced.

Made in Ontario Supply Chains



WOWC is pleased to be partnered with the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance to be mapping the agriculture and manufacturing assets in Western Ontario. This mapping project will enable businesses and local government to determine and address gaps in the regional supply chain.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the gaps within the supply chain in Ontario. There needs to be a strong focus and financial commitment on securing our supply chains, and committing to Ontario Made solutions.

Planning for our Recovery

With the support of the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development, WOWC has partnered with Workforce Planning West on a regional scenario planning project. Scenario Planning is a favoured method by economists, economic developers and business professionals for strategic planning under uncertain times, when significant socio-economic disruptions make the past data irrelevant for future forecasting.

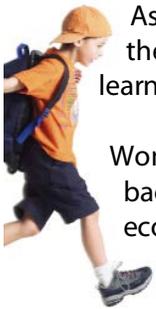
The scenario-based planning was adopted for laying out a local and regional economic recovery plan. The issues that have been identified through this work are;

Mental Health Supports for Business

Canadians report levels of poor mental health four times higher than pre-pandemic levels across all age groups as well as increases in substance use. Business owners' shoulder additional burdens from ensuring their business is complying with public health restrictions to concern about their employees and their families.

Mental health supports for Ontario's business owners are a necessary component of our recovery.

Women and Work: The She-cession



As schools, childcare centres, hotels, restaurants and shops shut down, women accounted for 62 per cent of the jobs lost between late February and March 2020. With each lockdown the responsibility of online learning, parenting and maintaining work from home employment has fallen predominantly on women.

Women need someone to watch the kids to be able to return to work — and Ontario needs female workers back on the job in order to stage a full recovery. Access to reliable and affordable childcare is critical to our economic recovery.

Participation Rate

The overall participation rate for Ontario in July to September 2020 was 64.9%. In stark contrast is Southwestern Ontario's participation rate at 59.8% the second lowest region in the province.

All levels of government need to work together to develop viable solutions to our continued workforce challenges, including a shortage of workers.

Labour Mobility

COVID-19 has highlighted the benefits of our rural communities and accelerated the urban-to-suburban trend as more employers shift to a work-from-home model and young, first-time buyers look beyond the city for more affordable properties.

This urbanization of rural will require the support of the Provincial government to ensure that policy, services, and infrastructure in our rural communities are able to support an influx of new residents.



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