



# Media Release

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## Progress Made Towards Regional Broadband Network

Development of a Regional Broadband Network for southwestern Ontario is one step closer to reality. The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) has approved a \$350,000 budget for the next stage of the project, which includes public education, formal business case development, and application to the Building Canada Fund. The decision was made at this week's Rural Ontario Municipal Association / Ontario Good Roads Association combined conference in Toronto.

The South West Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project seeks to bring high capacity, fibre optic infrastructure to the entire southwestern Ontario region, regardless of population density, and promises to level the playing field for service providers. The project also aims to foster competition and drive down the cost to both providers and users.

"The WOWC is sending a strong message that it is dedicated to bringing broadband service to all of southwestern Ontario," said WOWC Chair and Lambton County Warden Todd Case. "The Caucus strongly encourages the Federal and Provincial governments to partner in the funding of this infrastructure to improve the economic competitiveness of the communities in its region".

A WOWC-commissioned feasibility study has demonstrated the critical need for a regional broadband network in southwestern Ontario and has been endorsed by the Caucus.

"Today broadband across southwestern Ontario tends to be high cost, low-functioning and unreliable, with limited availability outside large urban centres," said SWIFT project lead Lance Thurston, Chief Administrative Officer for Grey County. "The next step in the process is to explore suitable operating and governance options and seek financial support from senior levels of government."

The SWIFT project is working towards a low cost, readily available, largely fibre-based integrated system that can be upgraded to meet increasing demands without triggering additional large capital investments or provisioning delays.

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## What would *SWIFT* look like?

The proposed *SWIFT* network consists of the following elements:

1. **Network Design:** Once fully established, the network would serve over 300 communities, encompassing 3 million residents – including rural areas with population densities as low as four persons per square km. Users across the region would be encouraged to connect to partner providers' systems and user fees would sustain the system.
2. **Governance:** A not-for-profit corporation governed by both service providers and WOWC members, and possibly other major public and private sector users (e.g. school boards) would be created to operate the SWIFT network. A management team, reporting to a board of directors, would be responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of the system.
3. **Capital Structure:** Funding for SWIFT would come from equity, debt, and grants from county and senior levels of governments. The operating model is premised on securing large commercial users, municipalities, universities/colleges, school boards and health care organizations as early adopters to provide the necessary cash flow and critical mass of activity to sustain the system. Introducing home, small business and farm users with access provider partners will provide the blanket coverage required to achieve the region's economic and social aspirations.
4. **Cost:** The capital cost of building the proposed network is estimated at \$243 million, which could be reduced by 20-30% if existing infrastructure in the region can be used as part of the network.

More information about the SWIFT network can be found in a [brief](#) at [WOWC.ca](http://WOWC.ca), including the [WOWC Broadband Feasibility Study](#) and details about [next steps for the SWIFT project](#).

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