

Connecting Southwestern Ontario

January 2018



Amtrak Capitol Corridor

Southwestern Ontario deserves a High-Speed Rail EA that considers all options

The Province of Ontario is about to initiate an Environmental Assessment (EA) for its High-Speed Rail (HSR) proposal for the Toronto-Windsor corridor, including the development of a new rail corridor west of Kitchener. The implied preference is to ignore viable alternatives as required by the Environmental Assessment Act by developing a Terms of Reference that eliminates the need to consider alternatives. Oxford County believes such an approach is contrary to the intent of the Environmental process and that there is a viable alternative worthy of consideration.

Fast, frequent and affordable intercity rail passenger service— High-Performance Rail (HPR)— is at the core of many integrated public transportation systems now operating in thriving regions around the world. Coupled with inter-community transportation connections, this regional transportation option offers:

- Higher-than-conventional speeds that shorten travel time and allow for greater frequency in service;
- Emphasis on existing infrastructure that lowers costs and shortens implementation timelines;
- Less adverse impacts on the environment and on communities.

Examples around the world suggest HPR is the best option to quickly, efficiently and effectively connect large and medium-sized urban centres to small urban-rural Ontario. With HPR often described as an affordable near-term option that can be implemented incrementally and used to build market demand for an ultimate high-speed rail (HSR) service, the Province should consider the advantages offered by high-performance rail in the Toronto-London-Windsor corridor.



All Aboard Florida's Brightline high-performance rail system

What is HPR?

High-performance rail is a middle ground between VIA Rail's current service and high-speed rail that optimizes existing rail corridors rather than requiring new rail corridor development. It does not require corridor "overhead" electrification, but rather allows for the evolution from diesel-electric to alternate energy solutions without costly infrastructure. HPR incrementally improves all aspects of existing conventional rail operations, offering higher speed and improved performance at lower costs. For over 50 years, the Province of Ontario has demonstrated this approach in serving transportation needs in and out of Toronto through the constantly evolving GO Transit Rail-Bus network.

What is inter-community transportation?

In similar fashion to the GO Transit Bus network feeding the GO Transit Rail system, inter-community transportation encompasses small urban-rural community transportation connections—such as bus, van or other—that connect smaller communities to each other, to larger urban centres, and to an improved core rail system. These connections are vital to quality of life, removing barriers that make it difficult for some populations to fully access:

- Work
- Health care and specialized medical services
- Public service agencies and programs
- Education
- Entertainment
- Community events and supports
- Urban transit systems
- Other intercity rail, air and bus services

An inter-community transportation system in Southwestern Ontario could be developed leveraging and complementing existing motor coach services in a similar manner as the Ontario Northland bus network.

Why HPR and not HSR?

HPR optimizes existing rail corridors rather than creating new ones. This allows for a transportation solution at a lower cost, in less time, with greater preservation of agricultural lands, rail freight improvements and less detrimental community impacts. The incremental build approach allows HPR to offer immediate mobility benefits to a region while still allowing flexibility for incremental improvement to the system.

Oxford County strongly believes that improved public transportation services across Southwestern Ontario are vital to our economic vitality, our community wellbeing and, fundamentally, a healthy environment. To demonstrate the feasibility of this position, Oxford County is developing a more definitive outline of the HPR alternative and the Southwestern Ontario inter-community transportation concept.