

# Executive Summary

Updated August 2017

On May 19, 2017, the Government of Ontario announced it is moving forward with preliminary design work and a comprehensive environmental assessment on a high-speed rail (HSR) along the Toronto-Windsor corridor, becoming the first province in Canada to undertake a rail project of this magnitude.

## *THE OXFORD COUNTY POSITION*

*Oxford County supports the Province of Ontario's proposed initiation of an Environmental Assessment process to consider the possible development of HSR in Ontario only if:*

- The Province of Ontario concurrently leads a multi-stakeholder process to develop an Integrated Public Transportation Master Plan for Southwestern Ontario;*
- The Integrated Public Transportation Master Plan includes a strategy to cultivate public transportation ridership and establish a feeder system in advance of any HSR implementation, while addressing the need for effective, efficient and viable Inter-community transportation across Southwestern Ontario;*
- The HSR Environmental Assessment specifically addresses the significant rural community and agricultural industry impacts that Oxford County, and others across Southwestern Ontario, will be subjected to as a result of the development of a major community barrier such as the proposed HSR corridor.*

Mobility is one of the keys to economic, social and environmental prosperity, affecting where people choose to live and work and thus influencing where businesses locate. In an increasingly competitive world, highly mobile regions are the ones that succeed in attracting residents, investment and a skilled workforce.

In 2016, Oxford County released the "New Directions, Advancing Public Transportation in Southwestern Ontario" toolkit to assist Southwestern Ontario in seizing several opportunities presented by upcoming public policy and funding decisions concerning the future of our national and provincial transportation systems. The toolkit was intended as a guide to building the type of public transportation system

that will contribute significantly to this region's competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

With the toolkit developed, Oxford County began advocating for the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) to lead a multi-stakeholder initiative to develop an Integrated Public Transportation Master Plan for Southwestern Ontario. Subsequently, the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus (WOWC) and the Mayors of Southwest Ontario (MOSO) endorsed Oxford County's vision of an Integrated Public Transportation Master Plan for Southwestern Ontario. The City of London subsequently used Oxford County's work as the basis for a similar position with MTO.

## **High-Speed Rail in the Context of an Integrated Transportation Master Plan for Southwestern Ontario**

On May 19, 2017, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the Province of Ontario's intent to move ahead with preliminary design work on an HSR corridor and to invest \$15 million in a comprehensive environmental assessment. The HSR corridor is proposed to connect Toronto to Windsor with planned stops at Pearson/Malton, Guelph, Kitchener, London, Chatham-Kent and Windsor. The provincial announcement also included the release of "High-Speed Rail in Ontario," the final report from the Honourable David Collenette, Special Advisor for HSR.

Prior to this announcement, there had been no apparent action from the Province of Ontario to address the need for a broader Integrated Public Transportation Master Plan for Southwestern Ontario or to address the effectiveness of the current regulatory regime of inter-community busing in Ontario. As a result, Oxford County is concerned and remains steadfast in its position that such a comprehensive plan and action to address inter-community transportation opportunities is vital.

In the long term, a viable HSR system connecting Toronto to Windsor will benefit much of Southwestern Ontario. Notwithstanding, the proposed system will only be viable if public transportation ridership throughout the corridor is developed and cultivated well in advance of HSR start-up. Recognizing the time and expense to develop an HSR system that cannot operate until each phase is fully functional, Oxford County has promoted the potential incremental and strategic value of developing public transportation ridership through the development and implementation of an integrated public transportation system in Southwestern Ontario.

Such a plan is envisioned to be one that recognizes the broad spectrum of public transportation components that will comprise an integrated system. Such a system would include not only HSR, but a viable and enhanced VIA high-performance rail service, multi-modal terminals, urban transit, a strong and viable inter-community bus system, and the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) GO Transit commuter service. All would be operated in a seamless and integrated manner that allows passengers to move across Southwestern Ontario and to/from the GTHA.

In supporting the initiation of an HSR environmental assessment process, Oxford County believes this must be undertaken concurrently with the development and strategic implementation of a provincially-led Integrated Public Transportation Master Plan for Southwestern Ontario.

In addition, Oxford County is deeply concerned with the rural community and agriculture industry implications of a physical barrier such as an HSR corridor to our community. Oxford County expects the environmental assessment process will address and mitigate the significant access implications an HSR corridor could impose on our community and our vital agricultural industry.

What might a fully Integrated Public Transportation System look like? Picture a vibrant Southwestern Ontario, its larger urban centres and its small urban and rural communities connected by vast areas of prime, highly-productive agricultural lands to the west and north of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.



*As demonstrated by Germany's Intercity Express system and others like it in Europe and Asia, high-speed rail only succeeds when it is the core of a seamless, integrated network of high-performance regional and commuter rail, inter-community bus and urban transit services. Photo courtesy of Deutsche Bahn.*

Now, picture a public transportation system comprising:

- a strong and viable inter-community bus network, connecting small urban and rural communities to each other and providing vital feeder service to...
- a network of multi-modal terminals offering access to further travel opportunities, such as:
  - the urban transit system in a larger community; or,
  - GO Transit service to destinations within the GTHA; or,
  - a revitalized, high-performance VIA Rail service connecting points within our region and beyond Windsor or the GTHA; or,
  - HSR to a very select few destinations en route to Windsor or Toronto.

Imagine the potential in such a vision, which can only be realized through partnership and coordination.