

10.0 Recommendations

There is nothing technologically or legislatively untested in the SouthwestLynx plan. The three successful U.S. examples cited in this report demonstrate its various elements are all service proven.

What is required to make SouthwestLynx is the most difficult commodity to prescribe and obtain: political will. Whether it exists at the federal and provincial levels and can be leveraged to implement this plan remains the overriding question.

Resolving Southwestern Ontario's mobility challenges is a growing concern to many in the region and time is of the essence. There are already documented cases

of major firms rejecting the region in favour of those that are, among other things, much better served by public transportation. Long-range and risky projects requiring billions of scarce public dollars and a decade or more to deliver any appreciable improvement, such as the provincial high-speed rail (HSR) proposal, are inadequate and not likely to fully address the multiple challenges.

Should Oxford County endorse the SouthwestLynx alternative to HSR or the unsustainable status quo and provide the leadership to advance its creation, the following recommendations are offered.

10.1 Local and Regional Endorsements

As was done on the New Directions and Empowering Ontario's Short Line Railways projects, Oxford County should consider taking the SouthwestLynx plan to the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus and the Mayors of Southwest Ontario for their consideration and endorsement. Wide distribution to local councils, the business community and the media should also be part of any communications plan.

While there is political and public interest in an alternative to the HSR proposal and the continuing hollowing out of Southwestern Ontario's remaining intercity public transportation services, there is no plan that has emerged as a rallying point. SouthwestLynx should be made that point of reference and advocacy. In such a campaign, there is always strength in numbers.

10.2 Oxford County SouthwestLynx Vision Workshop

The SouthwestLynx plan can and should be used to knock down the many silos that separate governments, operators and users. The best way to start that process is for Oxford County to play a leadership role by bringing some of these parties together for a closed-door discussion of SouthwestLynx. Only in this way can the plan be refined and a mutually-agreeable course for its advancement be reached.

The first step in such a process should be a vision workshop involving the counties within the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus. This should not be a public session because that would lead to the participants not speaking their minds and resolving any differences of opinion. Public sessions may be contemplated as part of this first session, but it should be structured so that all the participants may speak freely at a high level.

10.3 Multi-County Intercommunity Transportation Development

A natural outgrowth of a preliminary vision workshop should be the formation of a smaller working or steering group to craft a plan for the advancement of the multi-county intercommunity transportation system outlined in Chapter 9.2. This is the one element of SouthwestLynx that can be developed without interference or obstruction by the federal and provincial governments, which have so far demonstrated no inclination to address the regional transportation crisis that is becoming endemic to Canada.

Even without the rail passenger component of the proposed demonstration project, the intercommunity transportation system can be developed as a stand-alone service. It can also serve as a spur to get the upper levels of government moving on that rail demonstration project. A concrete plan placed before the elected officials and civil servants at Queen's Park and on Parliament Hill will be a tough argue to counter.

10.4 Federal and Provincial Government Engagement

Oxford County has played a leadership role in challenging the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) and the marching orders it has received from unknown sources to reject any examination of true high-performance rail and intercommunity transportation alternative to the HSR proposal.

To date, MTO and various senior politicians have refused to include the options favoured by Oxford County in what is supposed to be a comprehensive and thorough environmental assessment of the HSR proposal.

Continuing to factually challenge the stance taken by the province on its HSR proposal is recommended. Furthermore, a similar position should be taken by Oxford County on the federal government's failure to deliver on the rail service promises made in 2015 by its Crown agency, VIA Rail Canada.

It should be noted that there has been no response from Ottawa or VIA to official communications on the latter subject that have been sent by Oxford County. This includes a formal request to the Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications for a critical review of VIA, especially its convoluted and uncertain corridor fleet renewal and Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal high-frequency rail proposals.

The squeaky wheel gets greased. Therefore, Oxford County should continue to lead the calls for comprehensive reviews of the HSR proposal and VIA.

10.4 Hamilton and Niagara Municipal and Regional Outreach

Previous experience by this consultant for another client indicates the regional and municipal governments from Hamilton to the Niagara River are equally frustrated by the slow pace of federally- and provincially-promised projects to improve public transportation in that region. There is also a growing realization that the proposed HSR system would not only deliver no benefits to the Greater Hamilton Area, but it could destroy the current VIA Toronto-London South Main Line service that now includes station stops at Aldershot and Oakville, where it connects with GO's 30-minute, all-day rail service and connecting bus services.

There are many benefits to be gained by Southwestern Ontario and the Hamilton and Niagara Region through a joint approach to this situation. There are also natural travel patterns that could, under a plan such as SouthwestLynx, lead to the provision of direct and connecting services linking the two regions.

Outreach by Oxford County to the various governments throughout the Niagara Region to discuss and potentially include them in the SouthwestLynx plan is, therefore, recommended.