

Executive Summary

SouthwestLynx is a practical, affordable plan that can be rapidly deployed to address the public transportation access and mobility deficiencies that are threatening Southwestern Ontario's economic, social and environmental destiny.

By creating a high-performance rail (HPR) core system to significantly improve the current Southwestern Ontario rail passenger services, establishing a coordinated network of connecting intercommunity transportation services and linking them with intermodal mobility hubs, SouthwestLynx can begin improving the region's public transportation system within one year. It is scalable and incremental, and it can be completed at a lower and more readily verifiable cost than the still-unsubstantiated estimate of \$21 billion and 14 years required for the proposed Toronto-London-Windsor high-speed rail (HSR) project. It requires only minor land acquisition, severs no agricultural properties, includes rail freight benefits and provides a broader range of transportation improvements offering better value, compared with HSR.

SouthwestLynx is based on several successful HPR-based services now being offered or emerging in the U.S., which are in turn based on similar examples

from around the world, some of which have laid the groundwork for the later adoption of HSR service to augment the original HPR services. All of these successful global precedents have included major intercommunity transportation components, which have not only acted as feeders to the HPR core routes, but also to provide stand-alone service between the points they serve.

There are three prerequisites for the implementation of SouthwestLynx:

- Complete replacement of the Southwestern Ontario rail passenger fleet with new, proven high-performance diesel-electric locomotives and rolling stock, and rail infrastructure improvements;
- Coordination and cooperation among the Government of Canada, federally-owned VIA Rail, the Government of Ontario and provincially-owned Metrolinx/GO Transit; and
- A new governance and service delivery strategy based on the successful concepts employed on three integrated California high-performance rail corridors and Southwestern Ontario's SWIFT ultra-high-speed broadband project.

Multiple infrastructure upgrading projects must be undertaken on the two VIA Rail routes linking Southwestern Ontario with the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, which may be spaced over a number of years, dependent on available public funding. These include the easing of several speed-restricting curves, grade separating numerous road crossings, station improvements and track additions to minimize or eliminate conflicts between passenger and freight trains.

Each project will incrementally and progressively contribute to reducing current rail journey times, increasing rail frequency, reducing operating costs, reducing government operating subsidies and reducing passenger fares. All would work hand-in-glove with new, high-performance locomotives and rolling stock to offer benefits equal to or greater than those promised under the controversial Ontario HSR proposal.

A two-part demonstration project is recommended to bring early improvements and establish a template for the roll out of the full SouthwestLynx program:

- A joint VIA-GO “pool agreement” to blend their operations on the Toronto-Kitchener-London North Main Line route to provide faster, more frequent service at lower passenger cost; and

- Development of a multi-county network of intercommunity transportation connections between major points on the two VIA Rail routes and numerous off-line Oxford County points, which can act as a template for other county, regional and municipal governments.

At a time when Southwestern Ontario’s public transportation access and mobility are at low ebb, and the provincial government is contemplating the construction of a high-cost HSR that will not be fully operational for at least a decade – and one which does not substantially address intercommunity transportation requirements – the need for an alternative that will deliver more effective, more affordable mobility quicker is urgent. SouthwestLynx is that alternative.