



IDEAS IN MOTION: 2019 POLICY BRIEFING

SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO RAIL & BUS

Since 1990, passenger rail frequencies across southwestern Ontario have been reduced, journey times extended, and regional bus connections eliminated. This severely limits economic opportunities and social inclusivity in many communities.

A number of local transportation advocacy groups have formed since 2011, with municipalities and mayors also becoming actively engaged with the issue. The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) has adopted policy supporting a strategy of incremental rail service improvements and connecting bus services.

The Southwestern Ontario Transportation Alliance and Transport Action Ontario organised a series of public meetings and published *Network Southwest* in spring 2014, setting out a vision for High Performance Rail, with incremental upgrades to existing rail corridors, a new VIA Rail fleet, and connecting regional bus services. This approach is designed to address the economic imperatives and public pressure on the subject, delivering results for more communities on a shorter timeline and at dramatically lower cost than High Speed Rail as set out in the 2011 EcoTrain report, or in the Ontario government's 2016 feasibility study.

In 2015, VIA Rail made a public presentation to the London Chamber of Commerce setting out their vision of London as a hub with two additional frequencies to Toronto, Windsor and Sarnia plus one through Stratford. This was contingent upon a capacity study by CN, and the use of Budd railcars to relieve VIA Rail's shortage of LRC and heritage equipment, which proved technically infeasible.

The County of Oxford published an expanded regional transportation policy report, *SouthwestLynx* (<http://tiny.cc/southwestlynx>) in 2018. This report has been endorsed by WOWC, Transport Action Ontario, and regional advocacy groups.

	London, Ontario (population: 366,000)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5 trains to Toronto• 4 trains to Windsor• 2 trains to Kitchener• 1 train to Sarnia
	Criarlarich, Scotland (population: 185)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 trains to Glasgow• 6 trains to Oban• 4 trains to Fort William• 1 sleeper train to London, England

RELIEVING THE RAIL BOTTLENECK

The new VIA Rail fleet to be delivered in 2022-24 will eliminate time-consuming wye moves to turn trains at Sarnia and Windsor, reducing operating costs and offering the possibility of running additional revenue services with the same amount of equipment, as envisioned in *SouthwestLynx*, *Network Southwest* and by VIA Rail management, provided the train paths are made available.

The most pressing need in Southwestern Ontario is therefore for CN to be able to provide additional train paths to VIA Rail on the main line between Burlington, London and Sarnia. **Reinstating the second CN main track between London and Sarnia** would be the most cost-effective way to increase capacity, relieving a critical bottleneck and improving pathing flexibility for westbound and eastbound freight movements between Toronto and the Sarnia tunnel, in turn also releasing capacity east of London. Funding or tax relief though accelerated capital cost allowance for this project should be contractually tied to additional passenger train paths.

COORDINATED RESTORATION OF INTERCOMMUNITY BUS SERVICES

The Community Transportation Grants announced by Ontario in 2018 in response to public consultations that had identified the restoration of intercommunity bus services as an urgent need. Some communities are combining these operating grants with the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program's transit stream for capital funding to restore routes envisioned in *Network Southwest* and *SouthwestLynx*. However, not all communities have applied for the available funding or are using it to maximum regional impact, and the elimination of the increase to the Ontario gas tax transfer further hampers their ability to deliver additional services.

Regional coordination of strategy and planning is essential to ensure that the available public funding fulfils the mandate of providing a regional network that is connected and integrated, rather than competing or fragmented services, and to ensure that the public can find schedules and purchase interline and rail-bus tickets with ease. This would also pool administrative talent, which is a challenge for rural municipalities, and reduce duplication of administrative overhead, while also leveraging Metrolinx for analytical and procurement capabilities to avoid adding new costs.