



Hon Brad Duguid  
Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure  
8th Floor, Hearst Block  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

15 September 2015

**SUPPORT FOR WOWC SUBMISSION TO *MOVING ONTARIO FORWARD ON NETWORK SOUTHWEST*  
INTEGRATED PASSENGER RAIL AND BUS ACTION PLAN**

Dear Minister Duguid -

The Western Ontario Wardens Caucus (WOWC) has made a submission to the *Moving Ontario Forward* infrastructure consultations. Our organizations, the Southwestern Ontario Transportation Alliance (SWOTA) and Transport Action Ontario (TAO), participated in their submission and support it.

One of the components of the WOWC submission related to the *Network Southwest* integrated passenger rail and bus action plan commissioned by SWOTA. For easy reference, we are enclosing a copy of the full plan. Electronic versions are available at [www.swota.ca/network-southwest](http://www.swota.ca/network-southwest).

A brief summary is provided below.

**1. Proposal Summary**

There has been a precipitous decline in intercity passenger rail and bus service in Southwestern Ontario in the past 30 years, with the latest series of federal cuts and private bus service losses in the past 5 years leaving more than 100 communities isolated. Reliable and effective public transportation supports labour market flexibility, youth retention, investment attraction, tourism and recreation, access to regional healthcare centres, and vitality of smaller communities. It also reduces highway congestion and provides mobility options for all demographics.

We recommend that Ontario collaborate with local municipalities, and the next federal government, to develop an integrated passenger rail and bus network serving 100+ communities in Southwestern Ontario. This mirrors proven best practices in Michigan, North Carolina, California, and other US states where all levels of government are working together to improve regional public transportation.

*Network Southwest* consists of a higher frequency and higher speed passenger rail spine along the three corridors currently used by VIA Rail Canada, augmented by a rejuvenated bus network that offer coordinated schedules and integrated ticketing. Municipalities would be involved, as in the USA model, in upgrading, staffing, and maintaining local train stations to become mobility hubs, as well as providing improved urban transit connections. Although VIA Rail has recently made some announcements promising service improvements in 2016, these are contingent upon funding. Integration with feeder buses is vital to making these additional rail services financially sustainable and beneficial to more Ontario communities.

The *Network Southwest* plan is a good fit with Ontario’s ambitious long term plan for High Speed Rail between Toronto, London and Windsor. It will cultivate train and bus ridership growth in the region, and ultimately become a feeder network to the HSR corridor. Investments made for *Network Southwest* would be complementary to the High Speed Rail initiative.

Capital costs are projected at \$400M over a 5-year period, largely to purchase modern Ontario-built rail passenger cars and to alleviate track bottlenecks to avoid capacity conflicts with freight rail. Due to the lower rail operating and maintenance costs from new equipment, and ridership growth, annual operating subsidies for increased rail and bus services are expected to be similar to today’s subsidy for VIA Rail’s bare bones operation today – about \$60M/year.

We commissioned *Network Southwest* as plan to triage the immediate regional mobility crisis, with a focus on solutions that could be delivered in the current Ontario government’s term of office. Over a 5-10 year period, grade separation of major road and rail crossings throughout the region will yield road safety benefits, reduce passenger rail delays, and make the movement of hazardous goods by rail safer. We recommend that the current government should initiate the studies and environmental assessments needed to implement these longer-term projects.

## **2. Fit with Guiding Principles**

The *Moving Ontario Forward* discussion document outlined eight guiding principles for project ideas. The *Network Southwest* proposal is an excellent fit with these principles.

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Degree of Fit</b>
Collaboration	The network would involve collaboration between both senior levels of government and potentially over 100 municipalities. It also involves cooperation between VIA Rail, potentially GO Transit, private bus carriers and local urban transit.
Interconnectivity	This proposal will dramatically improve regional interconnectivity for personal mobility, and connectivity between communities in the region and the GTHA.
Openness to Bold Solutions	Pursuing an active partnership for integrated transport that reaches across traditional jurisdictions silos in Canadian passenger transportation is unusual for Canada although common in the USA and Europe. Coordinating services will maximize the public benefit of each dollar invested by each

	level of government. Incorporating an expectation of integration between rail and bus into the revised regulatory model for buses will allow increased private sector involvement at the same time as maximizing public benefit.
Shared Investments	The investments required to implement <i>Network Southwest</i> are intended be shared by two or potentially three levels of government, while allowing Ontario to move forward faster than the federal government if necessary. Feeder bus routes should involve local private sector operators.
Evidence Based	The strategic direction of <i>Network Southwest</i> is based on a study of successful integrated transportation projects elsewhere in North America. Each incremental investment recommended, whether in a new frequency for a rail route, or a new bus service, or a mobility hub, would also be justified by a business case analysis.
Outcome Oriented	This project offers a wide range of economic, social, and environmental benefits across the SW Ontario region.
Regionally Focussed	By definition, this proposal focusses on Southwestern Ontario. These concepts could subsequently be applied to enhance mobility and interconnectivity in Eastern Ontario.
Adaptive and Responsive	This project responds to public demand for a solution to the regional mobility crisis, demonstrated by the formation of advocacy groups in several communities and a series of public meetings. Taking an incremental approach to enhancing services allows the benefits of each investment to be realised quickly, and for services to be adjusted to meet new demands. All the equipment recommended is off-the-shelf and all business methods are proven in other jurisdictions, minimizing implementation risks. There is little financial risk with this project, as capital costs are low and the recommended measures maximise the utility of existing infrastructure.

We appreciate your review of the WOWC submission, and this letter. We would be happy to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Terence Johnson  
President, SWOTA

Peter Miasek  
President, TAO

Mailing address:  
9216 Fairview Line  
Chatham, ON N7M 5J4

Mailing Address:  
PO Box 6418  
Toronto, ON M5W 1X3

Email: [admin@swota.ca](mailto:admin@swota.ca)

Email: [ontario@transport-action.ca](mailto:ontario@transport-action.ca)

Cc: [infrastructureconsultations@ontario.ca](mailto:infrastructureconsultations@ontario.ca)