



Administrative Report

Office of the Director, Infrastructure & Planning Services

To: Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

From: Allan Botham, P.Eng.
Director, Infrastructure & Planning Services

Date: Wednesday, June 05, 2024

Subject: Ontario Good Roads Association – County Delegation to the Ministry of Transportation

Report #: 2024-0605-IPS-R09-AB

Purpose

To provide County Council with a summary of the advocacy efforts undertaken by the Corporation as part of the 2024 Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA) Annual Conference held in Toronto, Ontario on April 22nd, 2024.

Background

The OGRA holds an annual conference to bring together members and municipalities to a three-day conference. The conference also offers opportunity to connect with other levels of government through a delegation process.

The 2024 conference was attended by the County Solicitor and the Project Manager of the County's Infrastructure & Planning Services department.

In keeping with the process established by the County, and given the opportunity to meet with key provincial Ministries related to infrastructure investment opportunities, Administration identified, and requested delegations related to, the need for upper level government investment in four (4) essential grade separations identified in past Environmental Assessments, namely:

- 1) Grade separate interchange at County Road 22 and 19;
- 2) Grade separated crossing of County Road 19 at the Canadian Pacific Railway;

- 3) Grade separated crossing of County Road 43 at the Canadian Pacific Railway; and
- 4) Grade separated interchange at County Road 22 and Lesperance Road.

Discussion

Through the application process, a delegation was granted with the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Minister Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria.

Similar to the recent delegation at the 2024 ROMA Conference, the County representatives highlighted the infrastructure pressures stemming from the Essex-Windsor Region's transformational economic growth opportunities: namely the battery plant currently under construction, the Gordie Howe International Bridge, which is nearing completion, and the planned new Regional Hospital.

As part of the presentation, the County's long-standing history of prudent growth planning and financial management were highlighted as keys to the County's success to date. However, the County representatives highlighted that with the extraordinary pace of change to the Essex-Windsor Region, there are considerable costs that the County will find difficult, if not impossible, to bear on its own to advance capital projects in the County Road 19, 42, and 43 corridors and complete the projects highlighted above.

Applying what the County learned at its delegation at the ROMA Conference, the County representatives focused on the four specific large Projects outlined above, of grade separations and overpasses. Investments in grade separations are very costly, and moving the projects identified above ahead on an expedited basis will only add to that cost. Further, it was identified that the need for the expedited upgrades was directly related to provincial and/or federal investments that had not taken into consideration impact that the investments would have on local roads and infrastructure.

The Minister recognized the importance of assisting with the effects of the growth in the County, and the effects that will have on the County road network, and he directed Ministry of Transportation Staff located in the Southwest Regional Office in London, Ontario, to hold further meetings with the County to explore whether or not the Ministry can support funding the four (4) projects identified above.

Administration will provide further updates to Council related to any meetings with the Ministry on these projects as and when updates are available and can be shared.

Financial Implications

Preparing for and sending representatives of the County to attend delegations at conferences requires the resources of a number of departments, with the operational department most impacted in preparing for the advocacy being the Manager of Communications and the CAO's office. The cost of this work is absorbed in the daily running of the business, and the cost of attending conferences is covered in the County's annual budget.

There is a potential for the County to receive the large benefit of the Province funding all or a portion of the costs of the projects identified above. However, the specific financial benefit will not be known unless and until the Province of Ontario confirms whether it will support the projects identified in this Administrative Report, and to what extent.

Consultations

In drafting this Administrative Report, the County representatives attending OGRA were consulted.

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive the 2024 OGRA Conference – Delegation Update report for information.

Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

Allan Botham

Allan Botham, P.Eng., Director, Infrastructure and Planning Services

Concurred With,

Sandra Zwiers

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix	Title
Appendix I	OGRA Critical Roadway Expansion Needs Support Materials