



Infrastructure & Planning Services

Service Delivery Promise

The County of Essex continues to prioritize the well-being of its residents by fostering communities that offer quality jobs, education, recreation, and sustainable development. The Infrastructure & Planning Services (IPS) Department plays a vital role in shaping these communities through reliable infrastructure, responsible planning, and effective service delivery.

IPS is committed to maintaining and enhancing the County's infrastructure and built environment through policy, planning, construction, maintenance, traffic operations, permits, and facility management. With a focus on mobility, asset management, and service excellence, IPS aims to harmonize procedures and deliver high-quality transportation and facilities services.

Level of Service Statement

IPS strives to maintain infrastructure in a state of good repair, integrate sound planning and design, support multi-modal transportation, and deliver timely services aligned with the County's strategic goals. The department oversees:

- County-wide land use and Planning services
- 1,500 km of roads
- 84 bridges, 125 culverts, and 42 traffic control systems
- 400+ km of bike lanes/trails/routes
- Custodial and maintenance services for County-owned facilities



Opportunities, Challenges and Risks for 2026

Infrastructure & Planning Services continues to face a complex set of challenges that impact its ability to deliver services efficiently and sustainably across Essex County. These challenges include:

- **Rising Service Level Expectations:** Increasing demands for timely maintenance and rehabilitation of roads, bridges, culverts, and facilities are straining existing resources and operational capacity.
- **Accelerating Development Pressures:** Population growth and economic expansion are driving up traffic volumes and infrastructure usage, leading to faster asset deterioration and heightened demand for corridor management and expansion.
- **Labour Force Constraints:** Skilled labour shortages persist across engineering, construction, and maintenance sectors, affecting project delivery timelines and operational flexibility.
- **Escalating Construction Costs:** Inflationary pressures continue to impact material, labour, and equipment costs. For example, the unit cost of hot mix asphalt has risen from \$93/tonne in 2012 to \$165/tonne in 2025, a 77% increase.
- **Persistent Funding Gaps:** Limited levy increases have widened the gap between infrastructure needs, available resources and rising costs. This has led to deferred projects and reduced paving output year-over-year.

- **Corridor Management Complexity:** Balancing the competing demands of mobility, safety, development access, and active transportation within constrained rights-of-way requires increasingly sophisticated planning and coordination.
- **Risk of Declining Asset Condition:** Without increased annual investment, the County's ability to maintain infrastructure in a state of good repair will continue to erode, impacting long-term service levels and network reliability.

These challenges underscore the importance of strategic planning, inter-governmental collaboration, and continued advocacy for Essex County's fair share of infrastructure funding.

IPS will continue to advance studies, designs, and construction projects that align with the County's strategic goals for asset management, active transportation, and roadway capacity improvements. In 2026, the Department will focus on:

- **Sustaining the State of Good Repair Program** for roads, bridges, and culverts, with increased investment in drainage related infrastructure and bridge/culvert rehabilitation
- **Expanding the CWATS (County-Wide Active Transportation System)** with a budget of \$5.7 million for paved shoulders, multi-use paths, and active transportation facilities
- **Advancing construction on County Road 42 and County Road 43**, including Phase 4 works between roundabouts at key intersections
- **Continuing detailed design and property acquisition for County Road 22**, with \$17.5 million allocated in 2026 for pre-construction, utility relocation, and expropriations
- **Supporting corridor management and intersection improvements**, including County Road 8 and South Talbot Road, and County Roads 19 & 22, to address congestion and safety concerns
- **Collaborating with local municipalities** to integrate water and sewer infrastructure during County Road reconstruction projects
- **Accessibility** remains a priority. The division continues to design and implement infrastructure that meets or exceeds accessibility standards, promoting inclusive mobility options for all residents

These objectives reflect a commitment to sustainable infrastructure growth, regional collaboration, and enhanced mobility across Essex County.

In 2026, the Construction & Engineering division will continue its commitment to maintaining and improving the County's transportation network through strategic rehabilitation and expansion projects. The State of Good Repair (SOGR) Program includes a mix of road, bridge, and culvert preservation efforts aimed at extending asset lifecycles and improving safety and reliability.

The program will deliver approximately 32 km of roadway rehabilitation, a slight reduction from previous years due to rising construction costs and reduced external funding. Rehabilitation techniques include Cold In-Place Recycling with Expanded Asphalt Mix (CIREAM), overlays, and full-depth milling and paving. These methods support cost-effective renewal while extending the lifecycle of aging infrastructure.

Key bridge and culvert projects include:

- Big Creek Bridge (County Road 42) – \$2.93M rehabilitation requiring early tendering due to seasonal constraints.
- Lonsberry Drain Culvert (County Road 50) – \$1.83M replacement with potential spring scheduling to minimize tourism impacts.
- River Canard Bridge (County Road 12) – \$2.19M replacement.
- Multiple culvert replacements and engineering assessments across County Roads 9, 14, 20, 27, 31, and 34.

CWATS is integrated into the SOGR through the Paved Shoulder Program, which adds approximately 16 km of active transportation facilities. Projects include:

- County Road 3 (County Road 8 to Canard Drive) – \$510K
- County Road 8 (County Road 23 to Cameron Sideroad and County Road 31 to Hwy 77) – \$1.9M
- County Road 9 (South Talbot Road to County Road 7) – \$542K
- County Road 31 (County Road 8 to County Road 14) – \$730K

These CWATS investments are funded separately from the SOGR envelope and reflect a strategic effort to maximize construction value while supporting regional mobility goals.

Despite the program's scope, the County continues to face a significant funding gap in its Asset Management Plan. Without increased annual investment, the overall condition of the County's infrastructure will decline under the pressures of inflation, reduced grant support, and growing asset demands.

The Transportation Planning and Development division continues to lead long-range planning initiatives that shape the future of mobility across Essex County. In 2026, the division will complete several strategic projects, including:

- **CWATS Asset Management** – refining the County-Wide Active Transportation System to address maintenance, ownership and rehabilitation
- **Transportation Master Plan** – aligning infrastructure investment with growth, sustainability, and multimodal transportation goals
- **Road Rationalization Strategy** – optimizing jurisdictional responsibilities and improving network efficiency
- **County Road 46 Environmental Assessment** – evaluating corridor improvements to support future development and safety

As traffic volumes rise and development intensifies, the demand for safer, more efficient roadways has grown. The division is responding to an increasing number of requests for safety enhancements, particularly for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, schoolchildren, older adults, and cyclists.

Through regular assessments of the County road network, several opportunities for improvement have been identified, including:

- Intersection operations and visibility
- Excessive vehicle speeds
- Gaps in pedestrian infrastructure

To address these challenges, the proposed 2026 Budget includes targeted investments in traffic signal upgrades, intersection improvements, and active transportation facilities. These enhancements are prioritized based on legislative compliance, engineering recommendations, Council direction, and community need.

The division remains committed to delivering data-driven, collaborative solutions that improve safety, accessibility, and mobility for all users of the County's transportation network.

The new County of Essex Official Plan, titled *One Land, One Climate, One Future, Together*, was approved by the Province with modifications and came into effect on August 16, 2025. This comprehensive plan sets the course for growth and development through to 2051, emphasizing fiscal and environmental responsibility, land stewardship, natural heritage protection, and the integration of active transportation and reconciliation principles.

In 2026, the Planning division will focus on implementing the policies outlined in the Official Plan, including:

- Advancing the **Regional Employment Land Strategy**, which identifies and promotes Regionally Significant Employment Lands to attract investment and support economic development across the County
- Finalizing and implementing the **Large Scale Industrial Grant Matching Program (“LSI-GMP”)**, which will enable the County to participate in local municipal Industrial CIP grant and incentive programs aimed at attracting large scale industrial development
- Continuing work on implementation of recommendations included in the Regional **Energy Plan**, aligning land use planning with sustainability and climate resilience goals
- Providing one-window coordination for planning applications, including Official Plan amendments, plans of subdivision and condominium, and Part Lot Control exemptions, as the County’s Planning Services division serves as the Provincially delegated approval authority for these matters
- Facilitating intergovernmental collaboration and ensuring consistency with the Provincial Planning Statement, while guiding local municipalities in the preparation and implementation of their own Official Plans and zoning by-laws

The Planning Services division will also continue to engage with stakeholders, Ministries, and Local Municipal Partners (LMPs) to ensure that development across Essex County is strategic, sustainable, and responsive to community needs.

Proposed 2026 Budget Plan

The Maintenance Operations program supports the day-to-day upkeep of the County’s transportation network, ensuring safe, reliable, and efficient movement for all users. The 2026 program is distributed across four key areas:

- Summer (roadside, pavement, drainage, culvert)
- Winter (patrol, plowing, salting)
- Traffic/Safety Devices
- Equipment Maintenance



Regular roadside maintenance activities include:

- Mowing, brushing, and tree trimming to maintain roadside visibility and safety
- Ditching and surface sweeping to manage drainage and debris
- Grading of shoulders to preserve road edge integrity
- Pothole and spray patching to extend pavement life
- Guidepost installation and maintenance
- Centreline marking and painting
- Catch basin flushing to prevent flooding
- Invasive species control, including phragmites management

The County applies the Minimum Maintenance Standards for Municipal Highways to guide snow and ice control across various road classes. These standards ensure timely and appropriate responses based on traffic volumes, road classifications, and risk management needs. The program prioritizes safe and efficient travel during winter conditions, balancing service levels with available resources and is essential to preserving infrastructure, supporting public safety, and maintaining the County's commitment to service excellence.



The Construction program supports the County's strategic infrastructure goals through the following diverse areas:

- Roadway Expansion
- State of Good Repair (current and deferred projects)
- Traffic Operations
- Municipal Drainage
- Planning/Engineering
- CWATS
- Equipment and Software

The 2026 program includes a broad range of infrastructure initiatives designed to support the County's strategic priorities in transportation, safety, and sustainability. The program encompasses:

- **Environmental Assessments and Engineering Studies:** These foundational activities support future capital projects and ensure compliance with environmental regulations and design standards.
- **Preliminary and Detailed Design Assignments:** Design work continues for key corridors such as County Road 22 and County Road 19, enabling future construction phases and integration with municipal servicing needs.
- **Capital Budget Prioritization:** The 2026 Annual Capital Budget includes both new and previously approved projects, selected based on readiness, funding availability, and the County's capacity to deliver. The Multi-Year Capital Budget reflects all approved multi-year projects.
- **Road Network Data Collection and Analysis:** Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of pavement condition, traffic volumes, and safety metrics inform project selection and long-term planning.

- **Highway Capacity Expansion and Rehabilitation:** Projects include corridor improvements, bridge and culvert replacements, and pavement rehabilitation across multiple County roads.
- **Municipal Drainage and Connecting Links:** Investments in drainage infrastructure and inter-municipal road connections support regional development and resilience.
- **CWATS Program Delivery:** The County-Wide Active Transportation System (CWATS) continues to be a significant subprogram, with \$3.6M allocated for paved shoulder construction in 2026. CWATS also includes educational initiatives and performance monitoring.
- **Traffic Signal Operations:** The County maintains and upgrades traffic control systems to ensure safe and efficient movement. Responsibilities include:
 - Operation and coordination of traffic signals
 - Maintenance and repair of streetlights
 - Implementation of signal timing changes
 - Adjustments for construction schedules and special events.
- **Transit Feasibility Study:** The Regional Transit Working Group will continue discussions in 2026. Council approved \$100,000 in 2026 to begin a Transit Feasibility Study. The Study will gather data, and weigh benefits against cost and risk to allow Council to make an informed decision.

This comprehensive program reflects the County's commitment to maintaining infrastructure in a state of good repair while advancing strategic expansion, safety, and mobility goals.



The Fleet & Facilities program supports the renewal and modernization of County assets that enable service delivery across the department, as well as supporting General Government Services. The total program is allocated between two key areas:

- Fleet & Equipment
- Facility Renewal

Facilities Management provides custodial, security, building maintenance, energy management, and construction services for County-owned buildings. In 2026, the division will continue investing in tools and technologies to manage a growing volume of work orders and improve operational efficiency.

Key initiatives include:

- **Security Upgrades:** Enhancement of security system at Roads depots
- **Ground-Floor Renovations:** Reconstruction of aging ground floor spaces to improve functionality, safety, accessibility, in Library and Facilities spaces, and storage areas of Records Management, IPS and Essex Region Conservation Authority.

The program also oversees the lifecycle management of the County's road maintenance and equipment fleet, including acquisition, maintenance, and disposal. The 2026 program aligns with the County's Asset Management Plan and includes:

- Scheduled replacement of various pickup trucks
- Replacement of key heavy equipment such as a loader, grader, bushhog mowers, bucket truck, crash truck, water truck, sweeper truck, and forklift
- Replacement of four tandem cab & chassis units (2 from 2024 and 2 from 2025)

IPS will continue to explore cost-saving opportunities through enhanced preventative maintenance programs, ensuring compliance with provincial regulations while optimizing asset performance and longevity.



The proposed 2026 Budget includes funding for the Planning Services division to advance the work on a Specialty Crop Study, which will formally identify and map these areas so that they can be protected in accordance with policies in the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS). These areas are recognized by the PPS as the highest category of prime agricultural land as they are suitable for high-value crops like tender fruits, grapes and specific vegetables. Specialty crop areas are finite based on a specific combination of soil and climate and once these areas are identified, they will be recognized in both the County and Local Official Plans.

The purpose of the Pelee Coastal Resilience project is to create a coastal climate resilience and adaptation action plan for the south shore of Essex County along Lake Erie from Amherstburg through Leamington. This project received funding from Natural Resources Canada's Climate Resilience Coastal Communities Program in the amount of \$1,000,000 and through the leadership of a multi-stakeholder working group consisting of membership of all levels of government, the Indigenous Community and NGOs, this project will conduct a vulnerability assessment to address forthcoming climate change impacts and co-develop integrated regional resilience plans and adaptation actions that are equitable, sustainable and transformative.

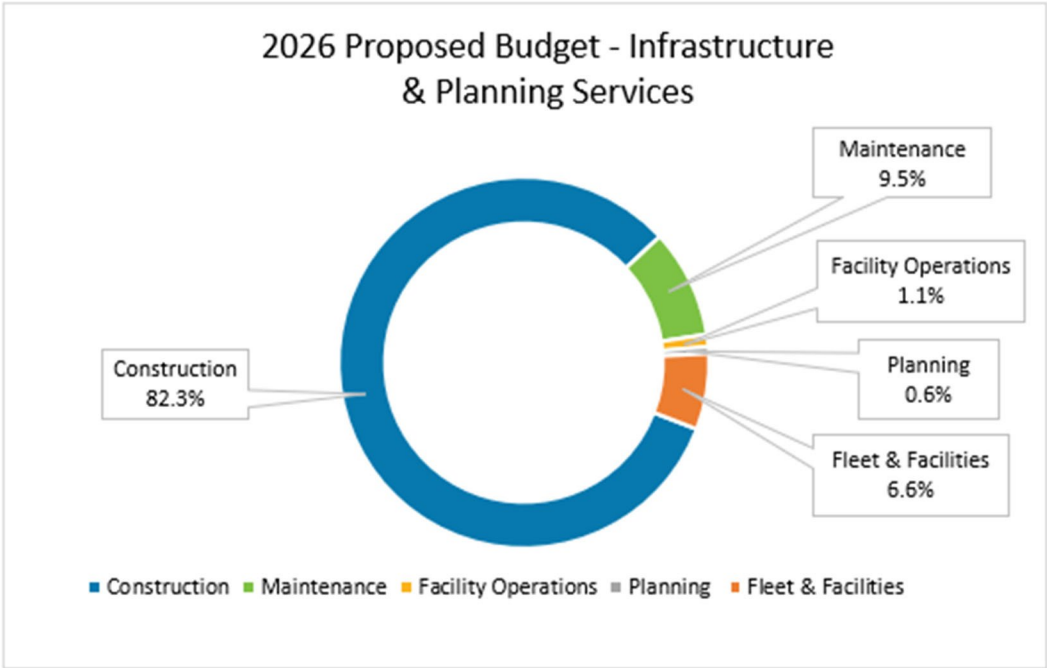
The Regional Employment Land Strategy will assess the merits and potential location for a significant area of land to be targeted as regional employment lands. Regional employment lands would be recognized and protected for business and economic activities in highly strategic areas of the County. The

development of the regional employment lands will be undertaken in partnership with local municipalities relating to the acquisition, servicing and development aimed at promoting this parcel on the larger North American and World trading market platform. To support the forecasted growth and number of jobs, a variety of local employment lands, along with the potential for a regional employment centre has been targeted through the new County Official Plan.

In 2026 Administration will continue to implement recommendations of the Regional Energy Plan, which focuses on energy efficiency, reducing emissions, and supporting sustainable growth. Key efforts include aligning municipal planning with climate goals—all part of a coordinated strategy to meet long-term environmental and economic targets.

Also included in the proposed 2026 Budget are funds to complete a Service Delivery Review for IPS. The last review, completed nearly five years ago, had a limited scope and no longer reflects the department’s current structure or service demands. Significant growth in the department and other operational changes warrant a comprehensive update. This initiative will be reserve funded.

The graph below illustrates the key areas of proposed 2026 Budget spending in Infrastructure & Planning Services:



Overall, the proposed 2026 Budget for Infrastructure & Planning Services, net of recoveries, totals \$54,345,940 (an increase of \$1,789,620 (3.4%) over the restated 2025 Budget of \$52,556,320).

Alignment with Strategic Plan Initiatives

Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners

IPS fosters collaboration with LMPs through joint pavement rehabilitation and full reconstruction projects. Municipalities are encouraged to participate in larger County-led contracts to benefit from economies of scale. The County also coordinates with LMPs to install water and sewer infrastructure during road reconstruction, reducing restoration costs and improving service integration.

Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County

The County hosts regional functional groups in Engineering and Planning, facilitating quarterly meetings with LMP administrations. These forums promote shared learning, policy alignment, and coordinated development across jurisdictions.

Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share

IPS continues to advocate for increased provincial and federal infrastructure funding. Staff actively engage with upper levels of government to ensure Essex County receives equitable support for its growing infrastructure needs.

Following the approval of the County's Official Plan in 2025, the Planning Services division is leading several strategic initiatives:

- Advancing the Regional Employment Land Strategy to support economic development
- Developing Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) for heavy industrial, commercial, and residential areas
- Harmonizing planning and development policies across the region to streamline approvals and promote consistency

IPS looks forward to continuing its leadership role in delivering infrastructure and planning solutions that support vibrant communities and sustainable growth across Essex County.