

Governments spend \$180M on high-speed internet in Ontario

'Transformational' investment into broadband internet, Ontario's infrastructure minister says

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A \$180 million investment from the the governments of Canada and Ontario is expected to bring high-speed internet to more than 300 rural communities in Southwestern Ontario.

Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, on behalf of the Amarjeet Sohi, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and Bob Chiarelli, Ontario Minister of Infrastructure made the announcement in London on Tuesday morning.

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Once complete, the SouthWestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project will ensure more people, especially those in rural areas, have access to the new fibre optic network.

Areas without service prioritized

"This is going to make a huge difference in how we live — our quality of life, the level of healthcare we receive, the services we get from business, the level of education our children get," Chiarelli said. "It's very transformational."

The project is expected to cost \$281 million. By 2023, every household in Southwest Ontario should have 1 GB high speed internet access, according to Gerry Marshall, the communications director for the SWIFT corporation.

Areas without access to "downtown internet service" will be prioritized, Marshall explained.

"We'll look at the areas that don't have service today as our top priority," he said. "We want to make sure we get that to them quickly and then over the long haul we want to get one gigabyte service everywhere."

Matt Marchand, the president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce applauds the investment. His organization represents businesses in Essex County where there are pockets of internet "dead spots."

"In the county, it's important we have this broadband infrastructure to drive our economy and drive jobs," he said. "We have a lot of dead spots. It's a positive announcement that's going to help drive our economy in Windsor-Essex."

The governments of Canada and Ontario will each contribute up to \$90 million through the New Building Canada Fund's Provincial-Territorial Infrastructure Component-Small Communities Fund. The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus will be responsible for the remaining project costs.

The \$1-billion Small Communities Fund supports priority infrastructure projects in communities across the country that have less than 100,000 residents.

In addition, Budget 2016 committed to deliver on the Government of Canada's priority of increasing high-speed broadband coverage by investing up to \$500 million over five years, starting in 2016-2017, for a new program to extend and enhance broadband service in rural and remote communities.

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