



County of Essex ROMA Backgrounder: Roads to Prosperity ROMA Conference, Jan. 19, 2025 - 10:00 to 10:15 a.m. Infrastructure Request - Ministry of Transportation

Summary of the Issue

Transformational growth in Windsor and Essex County is being driven by generational investments in a new U.S. border crossing, an electric vehicle battery plant and a new state-of-the-art regional hospital. These landmark projects are attracting thousands of workers and fueling historic demand for new homes, which will place unsustainable pressures on transportation infrastructure.

The County of Essex has been a trusted and committed partner in ensuring that the region and the province are extracting the maximum benefit from these opportunities. The county is investing \$112.9 million to enhance its road network in 2026 after spending \$98.1 million in 2025 and \$88 million the year before. We are prepared to continue enhancing and expanding regional roads at this pace to meet growing demand and promote the construction of more homes.

However, additional provincial funding is required for a grade-separated interchange at the intersection of County Road 22, a regional road connecting Windsor and the new border crossing to the fast-growing communities of Tecumseh and Lakeshore, and County Road 19, a vital economic artery connecting directly to Highway 401 and markets beyond.

The intersection sees about 42,000 vehicles per day with more than 3,000 vehicles per hour clogging it during afternoon commutes. The overwhelming majority of collisions are rear-enders – the result of far too much traffic for a signalized intersection. About 15,000 westbound vehicles flow along County Road 22 every day – an average comparable to the same section of Highway 401.

The province committed \$50 million to improving the intersection of E.C. Row Expressway/CR 22 and Banwell Road. The positive impact of this investment can only be fully realized if the County Road 22/19 intersection just a few kms to the

east – which is already failing during peak traffic times – is also upgraded.

As necessary as these Banwell Road improvements are, it is important to note Banwell does not connect to Highway 401. County Road 19 connects directly to Highway 401 and we already have plans to widen that vital commercial thoroughfare before the end of the decade, from two to four lanes immediately south of the requested interchange.

We were buoyed by comments made during a recent trip to Windsor by Transportation Minister Prabmeet Sarkaria, who was quoted in the Windsor Star saying the provincial government was “committed to working” with the County to “find a solution” for this intersection and “support the growth that is happening.”

There are no red lights on the road to regional prosperity. The County of Essex stands ready and willing to partner with the province to modernize that dated, increasingly congested intersection, promoting economic growth, creating jobs, and paving the way for the construction of thousands of new homes.

Background

The Windsor-Essex region is on the cusp of historic economic growth, driven by transformative projects that promise to generate tens of thousands of jobs, inject hundreds of millions of dollars into government coffers, and ignite an unprecedented surge in residential, commercial, and industrial development. However, the full economic potential of these historic projects may not be realized without substantial provincial support for necessary infrastructure enhancements.

The construction of a \$5-billion electric vehicle battery plant, a new regional hospital and a new international border crossing have the potential to transform the regional and provincial economy, but significant infrastructure upgrades are urgently required to minimize traffic congestion and conflict with Essex County’s agricultural centre, and to ensure these projects promote rather than prevent continued residential, commercial and industrial growth.

The battery plant alone is projected to create 2,500 direct jobs, with estimates ranging from 14,000 to 21,000 indirect jobs, along with supply chain investments surpassing \$1 billion. Simultaneously, the construction of the new regional hospital, set to commence in 2026, is expected to generate over 11,000 jobs, contributing \$1.57 billion to the region's GDP and attracting top talent in health care.

Homes will be required for all of these workers and their families. The Town of Tecumseh and the Municipality of Lakeshore are preparing for the creation of 13,000 additional housing units along the County Road 22 corridor, a welcome development

that is in line with provincial housing priorities, but one that will add significantly to traffic congestion in the area.

The existing infrastructure, mainly rural roads and congested arteries like County Road 22/E.C. Row Expressway, requires major upgrades to accommodate this explosive growth and to maximize its economic potential. Without the requested interchange, gridlock will impede growth, hinder agricultural productivity, frustrate commuters, and compromise home construction and billions of dollars in economic opportunities.

Grade Separated Interchange at CR22/19

The County of Essex is seeking \$60 million in the next provincial Budget to build a grade separated interchange at the intersection of County Road 22 and 19, where traffic lights can no longer handle increased traffic and where gridlock is frustrating commuters, creating unsafe conditions, and threatening to impede economic development. This is the most congested and dangerous intersection along County Road 22, an economic artery providing a direct link to Highway 401 and the new bridge and battery plant. An environmental assessment completed in partnership with the Province in 2008 recommended a grade-separated interchange at this intersection.

The County is prepared to complement that provincial investment with a \$45 million investment of its own, accelerating the completion of this vital project without delaying other key projects that form part of the County's road capacity expansion program, in particular, projects near the airport and new hospital on County Road 42. This funding split is similar to the one between the Province and City of Windsor for the upgrades to the intersection of EC Row Expressway and Banwell Road.

The County could leverage this provincial funding to begin design work and identify property acquisition requirements in 2026-2027 as well as continue working on a detailed design and construction plans for a stormwater management solution at the intersection. Property acquisitions and planning would continue in 2027-2028 and a staging plan would be developed for construction in 2028.

This timeline would ensure the completion of other key projects, particularly improvements to the County Road 42 corridor, which also runs east-west and could handle detour traffic without imperiling commerce and the flow of motorists and goods.

The County's Commitment to Regional and Provincial Prosperity

Essex County strives to be a partner with the Province of Ontario in providing a safe and reliable road system "that connects smaller communities to larger centres; improves

access to jobs and critical services; and supports an open and competitive business environment,” as set out in Connecting the Southwest: A Draft Transportation Plan for Southwestern Ontario (2020).

The county has steadily and consistently been making major investments in its road network to accommodate growth, particularly in the area around the City of Windsor. It is currently expanding and enhancing County Road 42, a critical regional road that will carry increased traffic being generated by historic investments and home construction.

The County constructed a two-lane roundabout last year at the intersection of County Road 42 and County Road 19. The year before, the County constructed another two-lane roundabout at the intersection of County Road 42 and County Road 43/Banwell Road. Other enhancements in the fast-growing area east of Windsor are nearing the construction stage and expected to be completed in the next few years. The County’s average annual spend on roads over the last two budget cycles is \$105.5 million.

While the County is prepared to continue enhancing and expanding regional roads at this pace to meet growing demand, it also faces a significant infrastructure gap. The County’s updated Asset Management plan pegs the annual capital requirement for road segments at \$22,956,400 while the actual reinvestment is only \$10,521,600, generating an annual funding shortfall of \$12,434,800. The annual funding gap for all County of Essex assets has been calculated at \$27.3 million.

When it comes to expanding the County’s road network to accommodate historic growth, the figures are even more staggering. The total cost of the roadway expansion program for the next 20 years is estimated at \$704,800,000. The 2025 Budget included a base levy contribution of \$16 million with annual increases of \$1.5 million proposed to be built into future budgets. The funding model relies on a mix of tools including annual levy contributions, strategic use of long-term debt to finance major projects and early use of reserves, with plans to replenish them.

Adding provincial funding to this model would enable the County to construct a grade separated interchange at the intersection of County Road 22 and County Road 19 on an accelerated timeline, accommodating increased residential and commercial traffic fueled by historic investments without jeopardizing the timelines and financial viability of other key projects identified in the County’s roadway expansion plan.

Roads to Prosperity: Working Together to Meet Historic Demand

The Provincial government has made substantial investments in Windsor and Essex County, including the expansion of Highway 3, the new battery plant and regional

hospital. Together with a new international border crossing, these generational investments present opportunities for unprecedented economic growth. The accelerated pace with which they are coming on stream, however, presents significant infrastructure challenges, particularly on the County's border with east Windsor.

The need to construct the grade-separated interchange recommended in that 2008 environmental assessment has become urgent given the increase in traffic volume that will accompany the opening of the bridge, battery plant and hospital. Gridlock at the intersection is already frustrating commuters and creating unsafe conditions that will only deteriorate and prevent the region and province from maximizing the economic potential of historic investments.

The County of Essex is prepared to forge ahead with this priority project without provincial assistance but doing so would extend the horizon for completion and jeopardize other vital projects. Partnering with the province represents an optimal approach that would serve the interests of regional and provincial residents while unlocking the economic potential of Windsor and Essex County and promoting the construction of thousands of more homes.

The provincial government has consistently shown its support for Windsor-Essex and expressed its belief that the region can leverage its skilled workforce, history of manufacturing excellence and proximity to the border to become a powerhouse that drives the provincial economy. The County of Essex is seeking continued support to maximize the positive impact of the generational opportunities before it.

We had excellent discussions with government officials at last year's AMO conference and look forward to more positive dialogue.

Contact:

Sandra Zwiers

CAO, County of Essex

szwiers@countyofessex.ca

519-776-6441, ext. 1350

Allan Botham

Director of Infrastructure and Planning Services

abotham@countyofessex.ca

519-776-6441, ext. 1397

519-776-6441
TTY 1-877-624-4832

360 Fairview Ave. W.
Essex, ON N8M 1Y6

countyofessex.ca