



Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Ontario AgriCentre

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January 26, 2018

Elizabeth Elder
Senior Policy Advisor
Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure
Infrastructure Policy Division
Policy and Planning Branch
900 Bay Street, Floor 5
Mowat Block
Toronto ON
M7A 1C2

Dear Ms. Elder,

RE: EBR # 013-1907 – Building Better Lives: Ontario's Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2017

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) wishes to provide comments on Ontario's Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2017 (LTIP) released by the Ministry of Infrastructure.

OFA is Canada's largest voluntary general farm organization, representing more than 37,000 family farm businesses across Ontario. These farm businesses form the backbone of our robust food system, and rural communities, with the potential to drive the Ontario economy forward.

OFA is pleased the Ontario government plans to invest about \$190 billion over 13 years, starting in 2014–15, in infrastructure. However, OFA does not support the current spending allocations. Adjustments are required to ensure Ontario remains competitive and that growth is inclusive and benefits Ontarians and communities across the province.

As outlined in Figure 2 of the LTIP document, the Province's 13-year Infrastructure Plan by Sector indicates:

Transit	35%
Highways & Other Transportation	19%
Health	15%
Education	12%
Postsecondary	3%
Social	1%
Justice	3%
Other	12%
Total Infrastructure Planned Investments	100%

It is clear the current allocated planned investments are significantly urban focused, with spending on transit representing 35% of total spending.

OFA advocates that the government adopt a more inclusive approach of “Distributed Economic Development”. Rural economies are different than urban economies. Funding formulas have tended to favour urban areas being density-based as well as transit and commuter focused.

A family living in rural Ontario would have difficulty relating to Figure 8: A day in the life of a family in Ontario contained in the LTIP document. The figure assumes access to public transit, natural gas, and broadband. And where is the Ontario food system in this diagram? How could food be left out of Ontarians’ daily lives? The only mention of food is the ‘Garden for food bank’.

Different people living in different places need different things from their government. Yet the LTIP document mentions “Toronto” 54 times and mentions “rural” only 14 times. The Australian example cited on page 20, is most telling. It notes the Australian focus on four “hot spots” out of 73 regions and their efforts to focus on the kind of development will help drive the greatest economic impact in these four regions. These “hot spots” are in Australia’s four largest cities, where three-fourths of the population growth is expected to occur between 2011 and 2031.

This is a case of self-fulfilling prophesy. Australian cities will grow because Australia is focussing investment there. The Australian path of ignoring rural economies is not the path Ontario should consider.

As noted in the LTIP document, the “Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is the fourth-largest region in North America. It is projected to be the fastest-growing region of the province, with its population increasing by almost 2.9 million, or 42.3 per cent, to reach 9.6 million by 2041. The GTA’s share of provincial population is projected to rise from 48.3 per cent in 2016 to 52.7 per cent in 2041. At the same time, rural Ontario is seeing different trends. While some smaller rural communities are experiencing population decline, others are experiencing population growth. Both trends put differing pressures on Ontario’s public infrastructure assets.”

We know that if rural Ontario prospers, led by a strong agri-food sector, all Ontario will benefit. An increase in government support towards rural infrastructure will stimulate economic growth to produce prosperity in Ontario for the benefit of all Ontarians. Both rural and urban challenges can be addressed by distributing economic development across the province.

OFA appreciates that Ontario is working with federal and municipal partners to focus on the needs of small, rural, and Northern communities to develop and renew “their infrastructure”, including roads and other transportation, bridge, water, and wastewater projects and expanded broadband Internet service to better connect communities. However, we encourage the Ontario government to view infrastructure located in rural Ontario as “Ontario infrastructure” similar to how the government views infrastructure located in the GTA.

Rural municipalities in Ontario are eager to repair roads and bridges; reliable access to broadband is needed; and installing natural gas pipelines is a long-standing request of OFA. Infrastructure investment will help grow our businesses and attract new businesses to our rural communities. We strongly recommend that the government work with municipalities across rural Ontario to develop and adopt a cost-effective infrastructure program—roads, bridges, broadband, drainage—and provide funding to municipalities to help implement these programs.

Municipalities and regions are not only major infrastructure operators, but also drivers of economic development. Growth in rural Ontario must be paired with thoughtful stewardship, including land-use policies, to ensure farmland remains protected.

OFA was pleased to see the LTIP call for a more-integrated approach to land-use planning and infrastructure investment. Both the Growth Plan and the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) emphasize the protection of agricultural lands, therefore OFA recommends that the LTIP document should have emphasized protecting agricultural lands as well. Consistent with the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review recommendation, OFA recommends that Agriculture Impact Assessments (AIAs) be required for future infrastructure projects in Ontario. AIAs would assess needs and issues not necessarily covered by Environmental Assessments. In addition, the LTIP's "Managing Natural Resources and the Environment Sustainably" section should have acknowledged that agricultural lands are also a valuable resource.

OFA agrees that aligning infrastructure investments with land-use plans can help support the development of compact and complete communities. As noted in the LTIP document: "Strategically planned and located infrastructure plays a central role in building compact, transit-supportive communities that contribute to economic competitiveness, curb sprawl, build resilience to climate change and protect vulnerable agricultural land."

The Growth Plan's concept of "complete communities" is a community where people can live, work, shop and play all within close proximity. Although the LTIP document references "complete communities", the LTIP continues to place great emphasis on commuting infrastructure, such as highspeed rail. Facilitating longer-distance commuting, from home to work, is counter to the "complete communities" concept. What we need is distributed economic development to have people living and working in their own communities.

As noted in the LTIP document: "Well-planned infrastructure is essential to the viability of Ontario's communities and critical to economic competitiveness, quality of life and the delivery of public services"

Strategic investments in infrastructure will create jobs in rural Ontario, provide new opportunities for families and youth, and spark private investment. Ontarians can then find work in smaller and mid-size communities, realize home ownership, and enjoy other quality of life opportunities.

A thriving rural economy, driven by the agri-food sector, will ensure farmland preservation and sustainable stewardship practices, thus protecting local ecosystems. A growing domestic agri-food sector will also give consumers choice and secure access to high quality, safe, local food.

Infrastructure investments, like widespread broadband, access to affordable energy, especially natural gas, and increased social infrastructure including local schools and medical care centres will attract new businesses, will create new jobs, and will attract new residents.

OFA and our partners are looking for these investments to address fundamental rural and urban concerns, rather than just applying more band-aid solutions or stopgap measures to all the GTHA problems. With the proper investments, our rural communities could relieve the strain on the GTA housing market and offer less painful long-term economic growth.

We believe it's time to adopt a new approach, an approach that is a concerted effort to boost our rural economy through a planned program of distributed economic development. It has been a

long time since there has been long-term strategic investment in rural Ontario, and we feel that time is now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Currie', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Keith Currie
President

cc: OFA Board of Directors