

Media Release

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WOWC supports Good Roads’ plan to build safer rural roads and address municipal liability

Southwestern Ontario – The Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (WOWC) joined Good Roads (originally known as the Ontario Good Roads Association) in calling on the Province of Ontario to work collaboratively with municipalities across rural Ontario to make roads safer, as well as improve risk management, community connectivity, and economic development.

Given that the 15 members of the WOWC represent approximately 300 communities across rural Southwestern Ontario, the Caucus recently supported Good Roads’ *Plan to Build Safer Rural Roads and Address Municipal Liability*, specifically the request to work in conjunction with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to design and administer a program to provide municipalities with access to a pool of funding to enhance road safety and to repair and upgrade targeted sections of rural roads deemed unsafe.

Good Roads has also indicated its preparedness to fund pilot projects to demonstrate the benefits of this initiative, noting that Ontario’s rural roads are disproportionately dangerous and a source of significant liability for rural municipalities – and that there are cost-effective, cutting-edge roadway safety tools that can be used to prevent injuries and save lives.

“Simply put, rural roads are more dangerous than other roads. In 2019, there were 428 traffic fatalities on municipal roads, of which 205 occurred in rural municipalities. The unfortunate reality is that with only 13.3% of the provincial population, rural Ontario accounted for 48% of traffic fatalities on municipal roads,” explains Scott Butler, Executive Director of Good Roads. “Many rural, remote, and northern municipalities are responsible for maintaining extensive road networks on a smaller population/tax base. As a result, these roads tend to be older, in poorer condition, and incorporate basic road safety infrastructure.”

With provincial partnership, problematic sections of Ontario’s rural, northern, and remote roads can be made less dangerous. Potential interventions include replacing legacy assets (wooden posts with guardrails), installing absent road fixtures (guiderail, signs, lighting, and

road paint), or upgrading to more modern assets with innovative safety functions (guardrails, guiderails, and crash cushions).

“The WOWC understands that there are multiple benefits to a program such as this, notably, that preventing crashes results in a reduction of serious injuries and deaths, which keeps people out of hospitals at a time when the system is straining,” explained WOWC Chair Glen McNeil. “Lawsuits resulting from these accidents are also significant factors in increasing municipal insurance premiums, meaning that efforts to make roads safer are also one of the most meaningful ways that municipalities can improve their risk profile – all while creating employment for labourers working right here in rural Western Ontario.”

Good Roads also highlights funding precedents in other parts of the world, including in the United States, where the High Risk Rural Roads (HRRR) program as part of the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) aims to “correct or improve a hazardous road location or feature or address a highway safety problem; or be identified on the basis of crash experience, crash potential, crash rate, or other data supported means.”

In Australia and New Zealand, the Remote Roads Upgrade Pilot Program targets “road improvements for regional communities, and addresses significant deficiencies on key regional and rural roads that limit community access, pose safety risks, and impact the economic development of the surrounding area.” No similar program exists in Canada or Ontario.

Good Roads is a municipal association concerned with the quality and design of roads in Ontario, devoted to the cause of better roads since 1894. Its members include most of Ontario’s municipalities and a growing number of First Nations as well as dozens of affiliated corporate members in the transportation and infrastructure sectors.

About

The ***Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (WOWC)*** is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper and single-tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, representing more than 1.5 million residents. The WOWC aims to enhance the prosperity and overall wellbeing of rural and small urban communities across the region. Caucus members work collectively to influence federal and provincial legislation and programs through advocacy, research, analysis, and education. For more information, visit www.wowc.ca.

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