



January 27, 2025

South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation (SCOR EDC) met with several ministers and members of opposition parties at the annual Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) conference.

SCOR EDC Chair, Ed Ketchabaw led a regional team in addressing issues facing the region.

Delegations included:

1. Delegate Attendees Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

- Ed Ketchabaw- Elgin County
- David Bailey- County of Brant
- Jennifer Kyle-County of Brant
- Deb Gilvesy-Oxford County
- Phil Schaefer-Oxford County
- Lukas Oakley-County of Brant
- Sharron McMillan-Middlesex County
- Tom Heeman- Thames Centre

Minister Rob Flack, Deputy Minister Dr. John Kelly, Staff

Discussion Points:

several key issues impacting local agricultural zoning, land use, and development were raised

a. Local Lens for Agricultural Zoning and Severances

One of the critical issues discussed was the importance of applying a local lens when considering agricultural zoned properties and severances. Advocating for a more nuanced approach to land use will allow for more flexible and sustainable development that aligns with the needs of our local communities.

- **Response and Action:** follow up with ministry staff to discuss critical issues around land use planning, growth and agriculture
- Connect with OFA to further discuss land use planning in agricultural zones including issues around Surplus Farm Dwelling, severances and agricultural land protection. Continued collaboration with the OFA is critical to ensure that agricultural land is being responsibly managed

b. Recognition of Land Classes 2, 3, and 4

Update on recognition of land classes 2, 3, and 4, which refer to soil types and their suitability for agricultural production. This is important for understanding agricultural productivity.

South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation (SCOR EDC)

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- Different soil classes have varying capacities for supporting crops and agricultural activities. Soil characteristics such as texture, fertility, pH, and drainage determine the types of crops that can thrive.
- Identifying prime agricultural land (often Class 1 soils) helps protect high-quality farmland from being converted to non-agricultural uses.
- Protecting high-quality soils supports long-term food security and the agricultural economy. Ensuring that we have the most up to date information on soil class will support environmental sustainability as poor soil management can lead to erosion, loss of biodiversity, and water quality issues.
- Soil classes affect natural drainage patterns and flood risks, critical factors in planning infrastructure and developments.
- Recognizing soil limitations can guide investment in drainage improvements for agricultural productivity or inform where development may face water challenges.
- Land valuation and investment strategies in rural and urban settings often depend on soil quality and its potential productivity.
- Protecting high-quality soils supports the competitiveness of Ontario's agricultural sector.
- By emphasizing the importance of properly classifying and assessing the land, we can ensure that local land use policies are better aligned with the realities of agricultural capacity and development potential.

Response and Action: Soil Mapping Updates (CLIS)

- Follow up with staff regarding the potential to update the soil mapping through the Canada Land Inventory Soil (CLIS) database. This update will help us better understand local soil conditions and better inform land-use decisions. Improved soil mapping is essential for identifying the most suitable land for agriculture and guiding long-term planning in a way that maximizes the region's potential for agricultural production and other uses.
- Connect with Ontario Federation of Agriculture Partners to discuss common messaging

c. Investment in Simcoe Research Station

- This facility plays a key role in agricultural innovation and research in the region, particularly as it relates to crop development, pest management, and sustainable farming practices. Ensuring continued investment in the Simcoe Research Station is vital to maintaining our agricultural sector's competitiveness and supporting local farmers.

Response and Action:

- The minister recognized the importance of the Simcoe Research Station
- Send advocacy information to OFA and University of Guelph
- Discuss common interests and strategies for encouraging investment in this agricultural asset to the region

d. Support for Ginseng Growers

The minister informed the delegation that his ministry continues to support ginseng growers. As a unique and important crop in Ontario, it is crucial to continue supporting the needs of ginseng producers, who face challenges related to land use, regulatory frameworks, and environmental conditions.



Response and Action:

Our ongoing advocacy efforts will help ensure the viability of this industry in the region.

- Send correspondence to the following stakeholders so they are aware of our support:
 - Ontario Ginseng Growers Association
 - Manager of Simcoe Research Station
 - University of Guelph
 - OFA
- Send Thank you Letters to Minister and ADM

2. Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs

The South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation (SCOR EDC) met with Minister of Rural Affairs, Lisa Thompson during the recent ROMA conference, where we discussed several important topics that directly affect our municipality and rural Ontario as a whole. Here you can find a summary of the meeting.

- Ed Ketchabaw- Elgin County
- Jennifer Kyle- County of Brant
- David Bailey- County of Brant
- Todd Noble-Elgin County
- Kezia Cowtan- Rural Ontario Institute

Minister Lisa Thompson, Parliamentary Assistant to Ministry of Rural Affairs Steve Pinsonneault

Discussion Points

- a. Key points of discussion was the Rural Ontario Development Program (RODP). The Chair and present members thanked the Minister for the additional funding allocated to this program, which is a vital resource for supporting economic development initiatives in rural Ontario. This funding can be used to enhance local infrastructure, support business growth, and promote economic diversification in rural communities. We are optimistic that this funding will help improve our community's economic prospects and ensure support for local and regional projects.
- b. Also discussed was the importance of community transit as a catalyst for rural economic development. As transportation is often a barrier to access for rural residents, improving transit options is key to enhancing mobility, facilitating access to job opportunities, and supporting local businesses. The Minister expressed support for rural transit initiatives and indicated that she would be engaging with the Minister of Transportation (MTO) to discuss transit through a rural lens. This advocacy at the provincial level could lead to increased support for rural transit funding and policy adjustments, which would benefit our municipality and surrounding areas.

Southwest Community Transit (SCT) Fast Facts

- Southwest Community Transit is composed of 9 member systems: Brant Transit (Brant), Grey Transit Route (Grey), Huron Shores Area Transit (Lambton Shores), Middlesex Connect (Middlesex), Ride Norfolk (Norfolk), PC Connect (Perth), Strathroy-Caradoc, T:Go (Tillsonburg), RIDE WELL (Wellington)



- Member systems represent a population of 1M+ and connect geographies to serve a greater population of 2M+ and a land area of 21,000 km²
- Of the 2M+ in the SCT's service area, 375,000+ are over the age of 65 and nearly 200,000 are low-income
- In 2021, the SCT had 33,494 riders. In 2023, the SCT had 110,145 riders – an increase of 229% between 2021 and 2023.
- Between 2021 and 2023, all SCT members have experienced significant growth in ridership, ranging from an increase of 41% (T:Go) to 1299% (Huron Shores)
- 2024, ridership 124,119
- Benefits of Rural Transit
 - SCT as a means for students to access post-secondary education
 - Economic impact of rural transit- calculated at approximately \$748,800,000 across the region
 - SCT also as a means to offset housing and household costs. Average cost of a car ownership is around \$15,000

Key points

- modification of Gas Tax Program to support rural transit systems
- Creation of a dedicated rural stream that would support reasonable cost sharing
- Investment in SCT as a provincial pilot for rural transit that could be replicated throughout the province

Response and Action:

- Send the minister updated ridership information
- Send minister and staff economic impact information calculations related to rural transit
- Send minister and staff business and job seeker information and testimonies that support need for rural transit

c. Rural Housing Information Systems (RHIS)

- Another critical topic raised during the meeting was the Rural Housing Information System (RHIS) developed by Rural Ontario Institute. We discussed the necessity of having housing development tools tailored specifically for rural Ontario, as the unique needs and challenges in these areas are not always adequately addressed by urban-focused systems. SCOR EDC delegates provided the Minister with background information on the number of municipalities already using the RHIS, as well as the benefits of the system in helping municipalities plan and track housing development more effectively. This system allows for better data collection, supports informed decision-making, and helps rural municipalities manage housing growth while considering local characteristics and infrastructure capacity. The Minister was receptive to the idea and acknowledged the importance of expanding access to such tools to further support rural housing development.
- Our “ask” was that the minister continue to invest in RHIS to support rural housing opportunities.

Response and Action:

- Send the updated ridership information/farebox information



- Send regarding RHIS
- Send Thank you letters to Minister, and ROI

3. Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities

- Ed Ketchabaw
- Sharron McMillan
- Todd Noble
- Tom Heeman

Minister Nolan Quinn

Discussion points:

- Importance of regional campuses that support economic development. Investors doing site selection consider positive criteria like workforce but also nearby post-secondary institutions as a means for continued workforce training.
- Support for Regional Industry Needs: Satellite campuses align academic programming with the needs of regional industries, providing targeted training and workforce development to fill local labor gaps in key sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, tourism and agriculture.
- Workforce Retention: By offering accessible post-secondary education and specialized training close to home, regional campuses help retain local talent and reduce outmigration to urban centers, ensuring a stable workforce for the community.
- Economic Catalyst: Satellite campuses drive local economic growth by attracting students, creating jobs, and fostering partnerships with businesses. These institutions support entrepreneurship and innovation hubs, contributing to regional economic diversification.
- Accessibility and Equity in Education: Regional campuses provide opportunities for rural and residents to access high-quality education without the financial and logistical barriers of relocating to larger urban centers.
 - Minister Quinn commented that he also was a grad of a regional campus
 - Ontario Learn and Stay Program
 - Ontario Student Opportunity Grant ([OSLG](#))
- Southwest Community Transit (SCT)
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Response and Action:

- Send the minister updated ridership information
- Connect with regional satellite campuses to compile information on programs and impact

4. Ontario NDP delegation:

- Ed Ketchabaw
- Jennifer Kyle
- David Bailey
- Lukas Oakley

Marit Stiles, Jennifer French, Teresa Armstrong, Catherine Fife, Lise Vaugeois, John Vanthof
Erika email: elougheed@ontariondp.ca

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- **Regional Satellite Campuses for Colleges and Universities**
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Response and Action:

- Send the updated ridership information
- Send thank you letters

5. Ontario Liberal Delegation

- Ed Ketchabaw
- Bernia Martin
- David Bailey

Bonnie Crombie, Mary-Margaret McMahon, Ted Hsu, Stephen Blais, Lucille Collard

Discussion Points

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Response and Action:

- Send the updated ridership information/farebox information
- Send information regarding satellite campus impact
- Send thank you letters

6. Ontario Green Party

- Ed Ketchabaw
- Jennifer Kyle
- Lukas Oakley
- Sharron McMillan
- Tom Heeman
- Todd Noble

Mike Schreiner, Staff

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Response and Action:

- Mr. Schreiner Offered to Send a Letter of Support regarding the importance of transit in rural communities- follow up with staff
- Send the updated ridership information
- Send information on accessing Gas Tax Funding
- Send information regarding satellite campus impact
- Send thank you letters

Why continued advocacy and government relations building is important.

SCOR EDC member municipalities are responsible for delivering essential services such as transit, infrastructure maintenance, housing, and social services. Regular engagement with provincial decision-makers allows municipalities to advocate for funding, legislative changes, and policy support. This advocacy ensures local priorities that align with broader provincial goals can be leveraged for best outcomes.



Through advocacy efforts and relationship building we ensure that we are top of mind for funding opportunities. The provincial government regularly consults with municipalities on legislative changes, regulations, and strategic policy directions. Engaging with ministers and staff allows SCOR EDC to provide input, share best practices, and influence decisions that impact local governance. The relationship building also helps us navigate complex issues that are inter-governmental in nature

Advocacy also supports trust and mutual understanding between the province, federal government and our municipal partners. This is invaluable when emergencies arise, or we are seeking support on strategic initiatives. It also provides a seat at the table when the provincial government priorities shift based on political and economic conditions. Regular interactions with ministers and their staff help our region stay informed and adapt local strategies to align with evolving provincial mandates.

Establishing strong government relations ensures that our region is well-positioned to secure the support and resources necessary for our communities.