



“Brant Connects” – Broadband Strategy and Action Plan (Sept 23, 2021)

The purpose of this document is to summarize a proposal by the Chamber to develop a Broadband Strategy and Action Plan for the [County of Brant](#). Recognizing the integral role internet services now play in connecting the community and stimulating business growth, the [Paris & District Chamber of Commerce](#) believes that fast (at least 50/10 mbps), reliable and affordable local broadband service is essential. Fast and reliable broadband is needed for business retention/expansion and to attract new jobs and investment in today’s knowledge-based economy. With many more businesses now operating out of their homes in the County, the need has become even greater.

The County of Brant’s new Economic Development Strategy contains goals and references to the importance of connecting the community, including through broadband. The County is making progress on improving Broadband, through its participation in Southwestern Integrated Fiber Technology (SWIFT – Coun. Miller on Board). In July 2021, County of Brant Council adopted a motion (put forth by Coun. Coleman) calling for senior levels of government to provide more funding to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to improve high-speed internet, especially in rural areas. While the Federal Government is providing new funding, the Government of Ontario just announced nearly \$4 billion to connect every region in Ontario to reliable, high-speed internet by the end of 2025.

“Brant Connects” represents the next step for the County of Brant, to ensure with all the new funding we don’t miss out and have a coordinated action plan in place once funding is approved. The collaborative project between the Chamber and County Economic Development, is needed to verify broadband connectivity in the County, identify priorities for improvement in the short and long term. The Chamber of Commerce recently surveyed its members, and they ranked high speed internet services as “Highly Important” to their business, but “Poor” in terms of availability, speed, reliability and cost.

The Strategy would address the following:

1. Verify the current state of broadband infrastructure/services to businesses in Brant (verification of broadband availability, underserved/unserved areas, download/upload speeds, reliability and cost)?
2. How best should high speed be delivered today and tomorrow (e.g., fixed, wireless, satellite), i.e., how do we “future proof” the service?
3. What are the roles of the major players, including telecom providers (ISPs), senior levels of government and the County of Brant? For example, should the County of Brant modify its Engineering standards to include the installation of conduit and/or dark fiber in new subdivisions and/or for major road construction? What revenue generation potential exists for the County (e.g., leasing of fiber or conduit)?
4. What are the most important (e.g., 3-5) short term (2022-25) broadband infrastructure projects for the County of Brant? Will the ISPs choose projects in the County of Brant that match with our priorities for service? What are the options for funding sources and partnerships (e.g., with private sector, ISPs, educational and medical partners)?
5. What is the longer-term strategy for broadband improvements in County of Brant (2025+)? Remote work; home businesses; distance learning; virtual medical

A Task Force called “Brant Connects” should be established to act as a steering committee for the project. The Task Force would be Co-Chaired by the Chamber and County Economic Development (the lead for the County) and created as soon as possible. While the Chamber of Commerce has limited resources available for the project, they would be able to support through member volunteers on the Task Force, grant applications and assistance to promote the project to its members and the business community at large. The Paris & District Chamber of Commerce actively supports its membership and works to improve connections among local businesses. Its Advocacy Committee *“identifies issues that are important to the local business community and works to develop initiatives to present to political decision-makers, drawing on the support and advice of the highly-respected [Ontario](#) and [Canadian](#) Chambers of Commerce.”* The Chamber Board of Directors fully endorses this project.