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SWIFT receives \$180 million in provincial and federal funding through Small Communities Fund

Ultra-high speed Internet connectivity is critical to rural economic development and Southwestern Ontario is another step closer to seeing the development of a project that will have a major impact on the region's current and future vitality.

Today, at the London Roundhouse in London, Ontario, the Governments of Canada and Ontario announced they are investing in the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project with contributions of \$90 million each towards the total project cost of approximately \$281 million. This investment will support the expansion of access to broadband by delivering fibre optic coverage to over 350 communities with a total population of 3.5 million across Western Ontario, as well as Caledon and Niagara.

"This is a major victory for all our residents and businesses currently underserved or with limited access to high speed internet," said SWIFT Board Chair Gerry Marshall. "I applaud the federal and provincial governments for truly stepping up and supporting small-town, rural Ontarians. The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) created the SWIFT project to connect the region to ultra-high-speed broadband and prepare for ever-growing demand for connectivity."

"SWIFT was created by the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, which represents 15 counties in southwestern Ontario, with more than three million residents. Today's announcement demonstrates what's possible when all orders of government work together and will connect our communities and support important regional economic development for all Ontarians," said Chair of the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus, Randy Hope (Mayor, Chatham-Kent).

In addition to leadership from the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus and investment from the federal and provincial governments, the Region of Niagara, Town of Caledon and City of Orillia are also supporting the project. SWIFT has received support from the

Southern First Nations Secretariat, school boards, colleges, universities and health care organizations.

The project will help southwestern Ontario communities and businesses better compete in global markets, attract new jobs and improve quality of life. It will also allow individuals to use online resources to gain skills and experience.

“This project will bring critical broadband infrastructure to southwestern Ontario. High-speed internet will connect people and businesses to the resources they need to compete in the global marketplace and strengthen our economy,” said Hon. Bob Chiarelli, Ontario Minister of Infrastructure

SWIFT Staff Lead Sonya Pritchard (CAO, Dufferin County) underscored the importance of connectivity for rural and regional economic development: “In today’s economy, all industries and sectors rely on broadband to succeed. Improved Internet connectivity will drive innovation, remove barriers to economic growth and create jobs.”

“By providing better access to a wider variety of online tools and resources, we are increasing the potential for economic growth and diversification in these areas, not to mention enhancing residents’ quality of life,” said Hon. Navdeep Singh Bains, Federal Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

“By investing in SWIFT, Ontario will bring high speed internet to residents in more than 300 southwestern communities, creating economic opportunities and ensuring families and businesses across the province have access to this technology,” said Hon. Jeff Leal, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

SWIFT aims to create an extensive fibre network that connects the entire region with service ranging from 1 Gbps up to 100 Gbps, using a combination of public and private funding to address gaps in broadband infrastructure that are leaving some communities behind. SWIFT will build on existing fibre to create a far-reaching regional fibre network, bringing fibre closer to customers and making it easier for ISPs to connect homes and businesses to ultra-high-speed internet. The new funding will trigger private investment from ISPs, who will continue to own and operate their networks and deliver services directly to customers. All ISPs will have equal access to the fibre network, leveling the playing field and creating a more competitive marketplace that will better serve both urban and rural communities.

“SWIFT is forward-looking and future-proof. It is focusing on ultra-high-speed services, rather than funding local internet access in the short-term, with lesser speeds and reliability,” said SWIFT Staff Technical Lead Geoff Hogan (Director of IT, Grey County).

The SWIFT Initiative is based on the principle that everyone in Western Ontario deserves access to high-speed Internet, regardless of the size of their community, their age, education, or where they work. SWIFT will build an affordable, open-access, ultra-high-speed fibre-optic regional broadband network for everyone in Western Ontario and Niagara Region.

To find out more information about the SWIFT initiative, please visit www.swiftnetwork.ca or contact:

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