

STRATEGIC PLAN

2026-2031

FROM EXPANSION TO COMPLETION, ADVANCING REGIONAL
CONNECTIVITY IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reliable broadband and cellular connectivity are essential to the economic competitiveness, public safety, and quality of life of communities across Southwestern Ontario. Significant federal and provincial investments have expanded access to high-speed internet across the region, with SWIFT playing a central role in advancing this progress.

Despite these advances, connectivity gaps remain, particularly in rural and low-density areas. At the same time, challenges with cellular coverage are increasingly evident. Reported coverage does not consistently reflect real-world experience, with many communities facing unreliable or inconsistent service.

This strategy outlines SWIFT's role in supporting the completion of current broadband programs, identifying remaining connectivity gaps, advancing solutions to cellular coverage challenges, and managing the close-out of SWIFT 1.0 obligations.

The strategy is organized around four priorities:

- Managing the close-out of SWIFT 1.0 and associated obligations.
- Supporting the completion of federal and provincial broadband programs.
- Identifying remaining fibre-based connectivity gaps and informing future investment.
- Improving understanding of cellular coverage gaps and advancing funding solutions.

Together, these priorities position SWIFT to provide regional leadership, evidence-based analysis, and coordinated engagement to support connectivity across Southwestern Ontario.

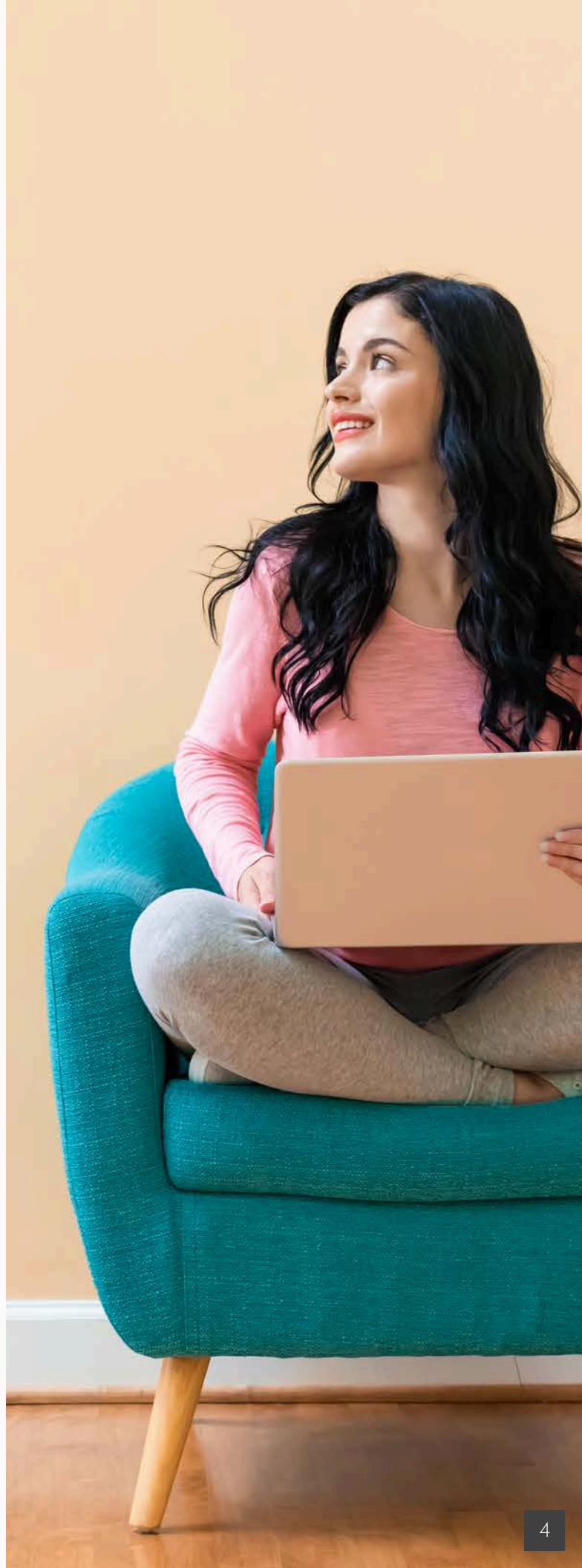
VISION & MISSION

VISION

A Southwestern Ontario where reliable telecommunications connectivity is available to everyone, everywhere, ensuring communities remain competitive, connected, and prepared for future technological needs at competitive rates.

MISSION

To accelerate and enhance telecommunications coverage through partnerships, closing connectivity gaps and preparing Southwestern Ontario for future technological needs.



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) Universal Service Objective sets a national target for broadband service of 50 Mbps download/10 Mbps upload (50/10). Significant public investments have advanced connectivity across Southwestern Ontario towards this benchmark.

SWIFT-led projects have delivered much of the progress achieved to date, while broader federal and provincial initiatives, including ICON, UBF and AHSIP programs continue to move forward in efforts to expand service.

As implementation progresses, a clearer picture of remaining needs has emerged, particularly in rural, low-density, and hard-to-serve areas.

The Western Ontario Wardens Caucus (WOWC) has recently defined broadband as the availability of fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) or hybrid fibre-coaxial (HFC) infrastructure. This definition reflects the long-term connectivity needs of communities rather than minimum speed thresholds such as the CRTC's 50/10 benchmark.

This approach recognizes that future-ready-infrastructure is essential to supporting economic development, public services, and quality of life across Southwestern Ontario.

Experience across the region indicates that achieving universal, reliable connectivity will require continued coordination, accurate data, and continued regional leadership.





In parallel, communities across Southwestern Ontario are increasingly identifying gaps in cellular coverage. Reliable cellular service is essential for public safety, business operations, transportation, and day-to-day communications. Addressing these challenges requires a clearer understanding of actual coverage conditions across the region and highlights the importance of coordinated regional data and advocacy to support future investment.

The following issues are shaping SWIFT's strategic priorities:

Need for clear program close-out and organizational transition. As SWIFT 1.0 concludes, final reporting and program obligations must be completed and the organization's wind-down managed in an orderly and accountable manner.

Completion of current broadband programs remains critical. As implementation progresses, additional unserved premises continue to be identified across the region, underscoring the need to complete existing programs and resolve remaining connectivity gaps.

Cellular coverage challenges are increasingly evident. Reported coverage does not consistently reflect lived experience and many communities experience unreliable or nonexistent service, affecting public safety, economic activity, and quality of life.

Need for credible regional data and coordination. Reported broadband and cellular coverage often overstates real-world service availability, highlighting persistent data gaps. A standing regional body is needed to provide evidence-based analysis, support to governments and partners, and to ensure regional realities are reflected in planning and implementation across Southwestern Ontario.

These realities underscore the importance of SWIFT's continued role in coordinating efforts, informing decision-making, and supporting the region through the next phase of connectivity, and provide the foundation for the strategic priorities outlined in the following sections.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: **SWIFT 1.0 CLOSE-OUT AND ORGANIZATIONAL WIND-DOWN PLANNING**

(2027-2031)

Objective:

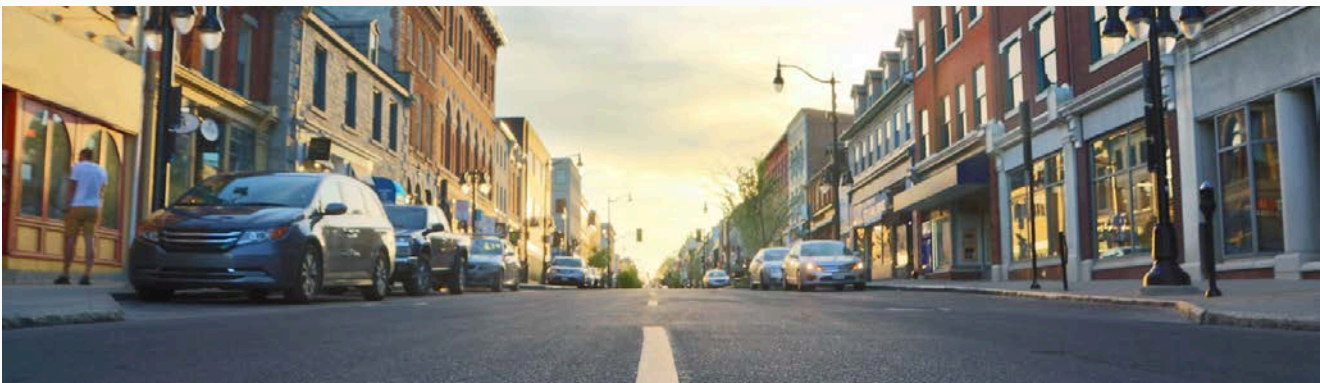
Ensure the orderly and accountable close-out of SWIFT 1.0 program obligations and transition of co-ownership arrangements.

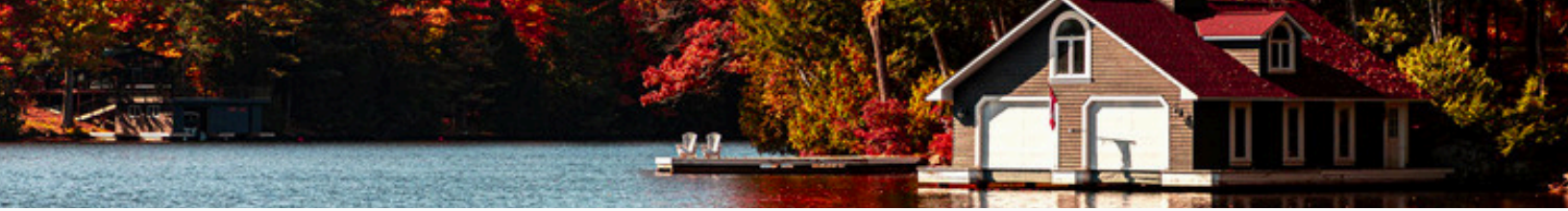
Strategic Positioning:

SWIFT will act as a responsible program steward, ensuring all financial, contractual, and ownership obligations are fulfilled while maintaining transparency.

Key Actions:

- Oversee completion of all financial, contractual, and reporting obligations.
- Manage transition and conclusion of co-ownership arrangements.
- Maintain clear communication with municipal members and partners.
- Ensure appropriate documentation and knowledge retention.
- Provide regular progress reporting to the Board.





Outcomes:

- Completion of all SWIFT 1.0 obligations.
- Orderly transition of ownership arrangements.
- Transparent and well-documented program close-out.

Success Indicators:

- Collection of \$8.2 Million in Broadband Development Fund (BDF) payments from ISPs.
- Completion of all SWIFT 1.0 program obligations.
- Conclusion of co-ownership arrangements as ownership terms expire.
- Legal transfer of SWIFT 51% ownership to ISPs.
- Proper documentation and records retention for SWIFT 1.0 program delivery.

Key Assumptions:

- ISPs will fulfill contractual obligations.
- Co-ownership agreements will conclude as scheduled.
- Required reporting and administrative activities can be completed within timelines.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

SUPPORT COMPLETION OF FEDERAL & PROVINCIAL BROADBAND PROGRAMS

(2026-2028)

Objective:

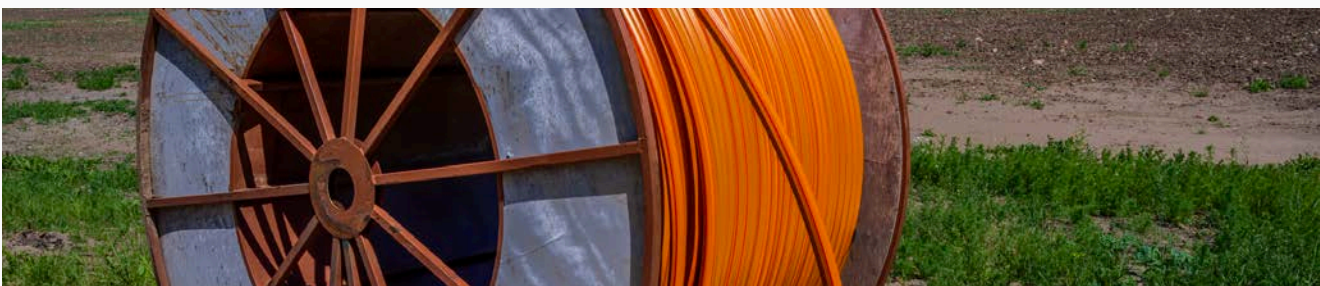
Support, where appropriate, the completion of federal and provincial broadband programs across Southwestern Ontario by maintaining engagement with governments and partners, providing regional insight, supporting the advancement of projects requiring additional coordination or solutions at the request of federal and provincial partners, and serving as a resource for municipalities and residents.

Strategic Positioning:

SWIFT will serve as a regional partner, providing coordination, insight, and targeted support to help advance broadband program completion and address outstanding service areas across Southwestern Ontario.

Key Actions:

- Maintain structured engagement with federal and provincial partners to support program delivery.
- Provide regional intelligence and coordination to address implementation challenges and remaining service gaps.
- Serve as a central point of contact for municipalities and partners.
- Support escalation and resolution of issues requiring regional coordination.
- Advocate for regional delivery approaches for residual gap programs, including the Last Mile Challenge.





Outcomes:

Completion of federally and provincially funded broadband programs across Southwestern Ontario with coordinated regional support.

Success Indicators:

- Completion of AHSIP, ICON, UBF, and SWIFT 2.X programs.
- Formal engagement with the province on delivery approaches for residual gap programs.

Key Assumptions:

- Continued advancement of provincial and federal broadband programs.
- Ongoing recognition of SWIFT's regional coordination role.
- Sustained collaboration among governments, municipalities, and partners.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

SWIFT'S POST FEDERAL & PROVINCIAL BROADBAND PROGRAM STRATEGY

(2028-2031)

Objective:

Identify remaining FTTH and HFC gaps, develop cost and funding analysis, and support adoption of fibre-based infrastructure as the standard for future broadband investment.

Strategic Positioning:

SWIFT will provide regional evidence and strategic guidance to support universal access to future-ready broadband infrastructure.

Key Actions:

- Conduct a regional broadband gap assessment following completion of current programs.
- Issue a comprehensive Request for Information to Internet Service Providers.
- Analyze connectivity based on infrastructure technology rather than advertised speeds.
- Develop cost estimates to achieve universal FTTH/HFC access.
- Prepare funding analysis to support future investment.
- Advance fibre-based standards through engagement with governments and partners.





Outcomes:

- Evidence-based understanding of remaining connectivity gaps.
- Cost estimates and funding analysis to support future investment.
- Alignment of policy discussions with long-term infrastructure needs.

Success Indicators:

- Completion of regional gap analysis.
- Development of cost and funding models.
- Integration of fibre-based standards into policy discussions.

Key Assumptions:

- Broadband policy and funding frameworks will continue to evolve.
- ISPs will participate in data collection and planning.
- Evidence-based analysis will inform future investment decisions.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

CELLULAR COVERAGE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

(2026-2031)

Objective:

Develop a comprehensive understanding of cellular service gaps and position Southwestern Ontario to secure funding and investment to address priority areas.

Strategic Positioning:

SWIFT will act as a regional evidence provider and coordinator, addressing gaps between reported and experienced cellular coverage and supporting data-driven investment decisions.

Key Actions:

- Commission and oversee a region-wide cellular coverage assessment using credible methodologies.
- Validate findings through engagement with wireless carriers and partners.
- Develop a clear understanding of priority coverage gaps.
- Translate findings into evidence-based funding proposals.
- Coordinate regional advocacy in alignment with municipal and regional partners.





Outcomes:

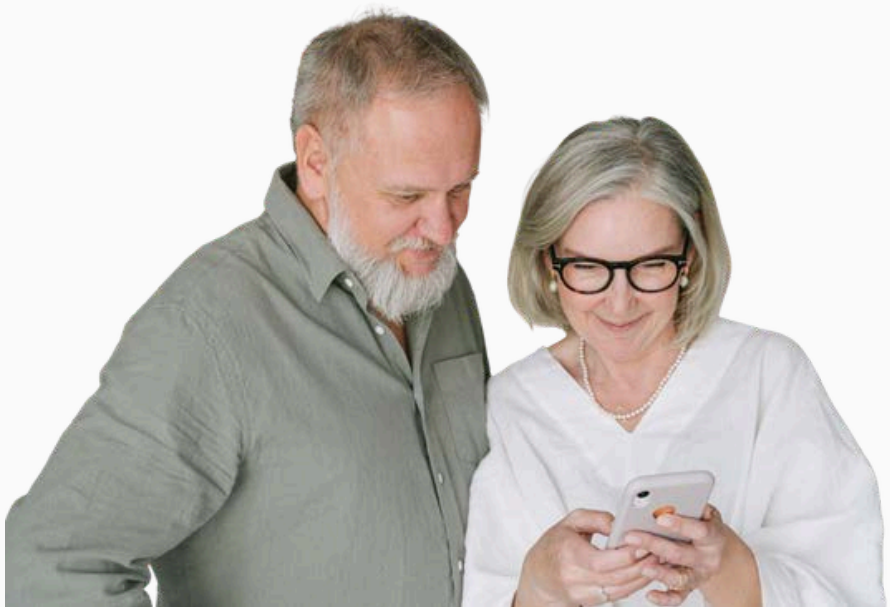
- Comprehensive understanding of cellular coverage gaps.
- Development of funding proposals to address identified needs.
- Improved positioning to secure investment in cellular infrastructure.

Success Indicators:

- Completion of a region-wide cellular coverage assessment.
- Identification of priority coverage gaps supported by validated data.
- Submission and/or advancement of funding proposals to provincial and federal governments.
- Securing funding commitments or formal government engagement to address identified gaps.

Key Assumptions:

- Governments will continue to prioritize cellular connectivity.
- Wireless carriers will engage in validation and planning.
- Funding mechanisms will be available to support future investment.



GOVERNANCE, RISK & ACCOUNTABILITY

Strong governance, risk management, and clear accountability will support the implementation of this strategy and ensure that SWIFT meets its commitments to municipal members, partners, and funding governments.

As SWIFT advances program completion, policy engagement, and regional coordination activities, governance and reporting practices will ensure that decisions remain transparent and aligned with the organization's mandate.

SWIFT will maintain governance and accountability throughout the strategy period through the following measures:

- Annual Board oversight aligned with strategic priorities.
- Regular review of the enterprise risk register, including delivery, funding, reputational, and political risks.
- Transparent reporting to municipal members and government partners.
- Public release of major studies and findings, where appropriate.



GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Advancing connectivity across Southwestern Ontario requires coordinated engagement with several provincial and federal partners whose roles span policy, funding, and program delivery. The framework below outlines the primary points of engagement for key issue areas and clarifies how SWIFT will work with governments to support progress and accountability.

ISSUE AREA	PROVINCIAL ENGAGEMENT	FEDERAL ENGAGEMENT	SWIFT's ROLE
Broadband (FTTH/HFC)	Ministry of Energy & Mines (MEM)	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) & Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)	Evidence provider, standards advocate, regional coordinator
Last Mile/ Residual Broadband Gaps	Ministry of Energy & Mines (MEM)	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) & Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)	Program design input, regional delivery agent
Cellular Coverage	Ministry of Energy & Mines (MEM), Ministry of Infrastructure (MOI) & Ministry of Rural Affairs (MRA)	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) & Infrastructure Canada (IC)	Evidence provider, data analyzer, funding advocate



IMPLEMENTATION & REVIEW

Effective delivery of this strategy will require ongoing planning, regular performance review, and flexibility to respond to changing program conditions and policy environments. The following mechanisms will guide implementation and ensure the strategy remains responsive over time:

- Annual operational plans aligned to this strategy.
- Biennial Board review and adjustment based on program progress and policy changes.



STRATEGIC PHASES & TIME HORIZONS

Implementation of this strategy will occur across several overlapping phases aligned with SWIFT's four strategic priorities. While each priority has a defined focus period, work across these areas will progress concurrently as programs conclude, new evidence is developed, and long-term connectivity solutions are advanced.

Strategic Priority 1:

Support Completion of Federal & Provincial Broadband Programs
(2026–2028)

During this phase, SWIFT will focus on supporting, where appropriate, the completion of federally and provincially funded broadband programs across Southwestern Ontario. This includes maintaining engagement with provincial partners, supporting program delivery, and advocating for the LMC to address remaining service gaps.

Strategic Priority 2:

Post Federal & Provincial Broadband Program Strategy
(2028–2031)

Following the completion of current broadband programs, SWIFT will lead a regional analysis to identify remaining FTTH and HFC gaps. This phase will focus on developing cost estimates, funding analysis, and policy recommendations to advance universal fibre-based connectivity across Southwestern Ontario.

Strategic Priority 3:

Cellular Coverage Improvement Program
(2026–2031)

SWIFT will work to identify and validate cellular coverage gaps across Southwestern Ontario through a comprehensive regional study. The results will inform funding proposals and advocacy efforts aimed at securing provincial and federal investment to improve cellular connectivity.

Strategic Priority 4:

SWIFT 1.0 Close-Out & Organizational Wind-Down Planning
(2027–2031)

As SWIFT 1.0 projects conclude, the organization will manage the orderly close-out of program obligations and oversee the conclusion of co-ownership arrangements as their respective terms expire. This work will ensure all reporting, financial reconciliation, and administrative requirements are completed in alignment with the timelines of the co-ownership agreements.



CONCLUSION

Southwestern Ontario has made significant progress in expanding broadband access through recent public investments and coordinated regional efforts. As current programs move toward completion, attention must turn to resolving remaining connectivity gaps, improving cellular coverage, and ensuring that the benefits of these investments are fully realized.

This strategy outlines how SWIFT will support the completion of existing broadband programs, provide credible regional data to inform future investment decisions, advance solutions to cellular coverage challenges, and manage the orderly close-out of SWIFT 1.0 obligations. These efforts will require continued collaboration among municipalities, provincial and federal governments, ISPs, and other partners.

By focusing on these priorities, SWIFT will continue to play an important regional role in supporting connectivity across Southwestern Ontario and helping ensure that communities remain competitive, connected, and prepared for future technological needs.



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