



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**EASTERN ONTARIO WARDENS RELEASE PROSPERITY PLAN,  
CALL ON PROVINCE TO CHANGE POLICIES  
AND INVEST IN REGION'S POTENTIAL**

MERRICKVILLE – The group representing rural communities in Eastern Ontario today released a Prosperity Plan that calls on the Province to realign its policies and increase its investments to better support the region's economic and social growth.

“With this plan, we are providing Queen's Park with a detailed roadmap to help Eastern Ontario achieve its full potential, which we believe is huge,” said Douglas Struthers, Chair of the Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus and Warden of the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville.

The plan, which is an element of the of the Eastern Ontario Rural Policy Project, was released at the conclusion of a one-day symposium in Merrickville featuring research findings and presentations on several of the themes in the plan.

The project was led by the Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus, working in partnership with the region's community futures development corporations and the Ontario East Economic Development Commission. Warden Struthers stressed, however, that “although much of our advice focuses on the needs of our communities, we believe that what helps them will also help the cities of Eastern Ontario.”

The plan lays out 51 policy-focused proposals on which the Province could act, thereby benefiting the region. “We offer these proposals to help tap the potential of our rural communities – especially those in Eastern Ontario – so they will be seen as solutions to a range of challenges facing urban Ontario,” Warden Struthers said. “Whether the issue is congestion, transportation gridlock, natural resource supply and management, or the ability to offer a full range of lifestyle choices, our region can help to shape solutions, while building a stronger economic base. But to do that, the Province needs to re-think many of its existing policies and develop new ones.”

Key themes of the plan include:

- Greater involvement of communities in the development of policies and programs, particularly around land planning and growth, in how funding is allocated to the region, and improved funding for key programs. “We would like the government to strengthen its commitment to consult with municipalities and extend it to all ministries, not just the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing,” Warden Struthers said.
- The need to deal with the continuing harm triggered by the downloading of major provincial programs in the 1990s and ongoing consolidation of services in larger urban centres, and must not download any further services until a review currently under way is completed. “Downloading and centralization have hit Eastern Ontario particularly hard, because of our relatively small population spread over a large geographical area,” the Warden said. “The Province needs to recognize and deal with this, especially where investments in critical infrastructure like roads and bridges are concerned.”
- Greater support for small and medium businesses. “More than in the cities, these smaller enterprises are major sources of economic activity in rural communities,” the Warden said. “Whether the sector is tourism, agriculture, bioenergy, high-tech, or manufacturing – the bottom line is that the Province needs to make it easier for businesses to get up and running and to operate in an environment that’s friendlier to them and to our communities.”
- More flexible and effective approaches to training workers and helping them adapt to economic change and a better focus on attracting needed skills. “Rural Ontario offers great lifestyle benefits, but we need a wider range of educational, training and re-training options to attract and keep workers,” Warden Struthers said. “Eastern Ontario also needs to be included in programs to draw skilled workers from outside Canada.”
- A regional transportation master plan for Eastern Ontario that better leverages its existing transportation systems, including highways, rail lines, air and deep-water ports. “Eastern Ontario offers the potential to be a national gateway, providing access to major markets in Canada and the eastern seaboard of the United States,” the Warden said. “We would be happy to collaborate with the Ministry of Transportation on developing a plan to take better advantage of its favourable location and linkages.”

The Warden said that the plan, if acted on, would provide a significant boost to a region “that is too often overlooked by Queen’s Park.”

He added that the caucus, through the prosperity plan and other means, would continue to press for action on two long-standing issues of special concern to the region: compensation for services provided to Crown lands, and a share of the gas-tax revenues that currently go only to communities with public transit systems. "We were extremely disappointed that the recent provincial budget was silent on these issues," Warden Struthers said.

### **The proposals:**

Following is a summary of the proposals in the prosperity plan. For a full copy of the plan, which includes full details of the proposals, please visit [www.uclg.ca](http://www.uclg.ca).

Eastern Ontario asks the Province to:

- extend the principles enshrined in the Memorandum of Understanding [on consultation] beyond the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to permeate all Ontario government ministries;
- acknowledge and implement the findings of the Joint Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review (due in the spring of 2008);
- reinvest in ministries with mandates which are of particular importance to rural communities, particularly Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and Ministry of Tourism and provide adequate resources to Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) to fulfill their mandate without sacrificing access to quality health care in rural Eastern Ontario;
- consider, as provincial real property is reviewed and assessed for future needs, a first-right-of-refusal for local stakeholders for the transfer of surplus land and buildings, at low or no cost and free and clear of liabilities, as a tool for stimulating local economic development;
- encourage co-ordination of the wide range of services and information resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses at the federal and provincial levels and take a leadership role in introducing a "one-stop" approach for entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in rural Ontario;
- consult with local entrepreneurs, small businesses and leaders of innovative local organizations, and invite ideas and suggestions instead of simply presenting preferred solutions that have been developed outside Eastern Ontario, *before* introducing new policies which affect the business and economic climate;
- base policy development and program design for entrepreneurs and SMEs on incentives and rewards for communities and regions that build networks of common interest to coordinate service delivery, introduce best practices, share infrastructure, and build capacity for community economic development;

- Remove the minimum investment threshold from the eligibility conditions for the Advanced Manufacturing Investment Strategy and instead emphasize the impact of the investment on job retention and growth, and the contribution of the proposed investment to introducing innovative or leading edge technologies into Ontario's manufacturing sector;
- intensify its efforts to resolve aboriginal land claims affecting this region, and encourage similar attention from the federal government;
- redesign its tourism policies and programs by redefining "icon" to include existing *and* emerging icons, and to include both site-specific and distributed icons;
- revamp its tourism promotional strategy to increase emphasis on "new media", the use of which is in the ascendance and where participation by tourism operators other than the major urban attractions would be more accessible;
- develop and introduce a program to precede the Premier-ranked Destinations Program, which would help small and medium-sized tourism operators and developers 1) build or enhance the quality of their existing tourism product, 2) build linkages with other operators to create tourism icons that are, in fact, clusters of tourism operations, and 3) market these tourism clusters to target markets within and outside the Province;
- review tourism program funding criteria to ensure that assets which are geographically distributed across a region (for example, trail systems, small theatres) are considered for support along with single-site tourism icons typically found in larger centres;
- ensure that tourism and economic development aspects of recreational trails are reflected in policies and programs associated with the Ontario Trails Strategy, and the Ministries which affect implementation success;
- review of policies of other Ministries which affect negatively the prospects for tourism in Eastern Ontario, with the objective of identifying changes which would safeguard the public interest without placing undue burden on tourism operators for monitoring and compliance purposes;
- initiate an inter-ministerial initiative through the Minister of Research and Innovation to improve the regulatory climate for energy from biomass to improve provincial knowledge of new energy-related technologies and remove/reduce barriers to energy from biomass;
- to have the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs review its support programs to ensure that eligibility conditions do not limit pursuit of agriculture-based economic opportunity to organizations made up entirely of or led by agricultural producers;

- review its support programs for research, innovation and commercialization to ensure that eligibility conditions include stakeholders from rural areas, including agricultural producers, processors, and other small businesses;
- undertake an inter-ministerial initiative to 1) remove/reduce regulatory barriers or 2) provide financial or other incentives to enable producers to meet new regulatory requirements, with environmental regulations, health unit regulations, and predatory grazing regulations as priority areas.
- develop an approach to supporting municipal infrastructure investments that incorporates clear provincial investment priorities, allocation-based systems rather than competitive processes, sustainable revenue streams, multi-year commitments and a requirement for solid evidence of need;
- reduce the number and types of any competitive infrastructure funding processes to keep municipalities' costs of application development down;
- launch any competitive infrastructure funding processes as early in the annual budget cycle as possible so that municipalities can apply, learn the results, and act on any funding secured as early in the construction season as possible;
- build, with AMO, two key concepts into the expectations of the Fiscal and Service Delivery Review process: sustainability over time, presumably at least as long as the life expectancy of the infrastructure asset itself, and flexibility to enable both levels of government (provincial and municipal) to reflect local circumstances;
- continue its efforts to encourage community use of facilities such as schools to make better use of existing infrastructure;
- make a short-term investment in broadband designed to overcome initial capital cost barriers, thereby bringing the initial capital cost and risk down to a point where private sector Internet Service Providers (ISPs) can make a business case for operating and maintaining the service;
- designate one of its ministries as the lead to ensure that provincial funding is expended in an accountable fashion;
- let the region designate a regional stakeholder group to oversee implementation and take responsibility for accountability for public funds;
- initiate, through the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, development of a new program that will expand the range of educational options available to residents of rural Eastern Ontario;
- pursue policy changes, through the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, through the Labour Market Partnership Agreement that will
  - Ensure local/regional priority setting for labour market programs
  - Enable staff to package supports to meet individual needs

- Integrate transportation into program design and supports offered to service recipients
  - Reduce or eliminate internal segmentation of programs
  - Expand the sources of funding for skills development and training of existing employees by private sector businesses, and
  - Help single industry towns diversify by nurturing ideas from within the community;
- adjust funding formula for both operating and capital purposes for post-secondary education institutions with multiple campuses;
  - provide specific incentives to community economic development (CED) agencies in rural Eastern Ontario to support the development and implementation of educational services that meet identified CED needs;
  - encourage, through the Ministry of Research and Innovation, the direct involvement of stakeholders beyond publicly-funded research institutions in any networks formed to create a culture of innovation in Ontario.
  - join the region in an analysis of demographic trends across the region and assessment of provincial policy implications, once the relevant data from the 2006 census is released;
  - include this region in any immigration-related initiatives undertaken by Ontario ministries;
  - designate or create a single organization to serve as a one-stop access point for rural Ontario (and recommends OMAFRA's Rural Development Division for this role);
  - either increase the resources to the OMAFRA RED program or use the program design as a model for other rural development programs;
  - create internal funding envelopes for communities of different sizes to ensure that smaller communities are not overlooked in funding decisions when "universal" programs are created/announced;
  - enter into a collaborative initiative to review provincial financing tools with the objective of determining ways to adjust these tools to meet the needs of rural municipalities;
  - recognize the financing challenges of rural municipalities by creating specific mechanisms through which these municipalities can access financing. In particular, Eastern Ontario requests that the Province assist in setting up:
    - A \$20 million a year Eastern Ontario Prosperity Fund for infrastructure and community development programs, to be administered by a regional organization designated by the Province to make allocation decisions in the best interests of the residents of Eastern Ontario, and

- An Eastern Ontario Grow Bond Program to help small and medium sized businesses to retain or create new jobs through the expansion or establishment of new businesses and to provide residents of Eastern Ontario with a safe, competitive savings instrument while actively contributing to the economic future of the region;
- address the inequities in commercial and industrial education taxes applied to businesses in this region.
- ensure that the \$3 billion gap for provincial health, social services and income redistribution costs is addressed as part of the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review;
- cease and desist from any further downloading of service delivery responsibility until the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review has completed its work, expected in the spring of 2008;
- enter into negotiations with Eastern Ontario municipalities to develop and implement a new payment-in-lieu program for Crown land;
- increase significantly the payments-in-lieu provided to municipalities for the service requirements of provincial facilities such as hospitals, colleges and universities;
- incorporate incentives to private landowners for environmental stewardship in provincial policies and programs designed to achieve provincial environmental objectives;
- repeal Section One of the Negligence Act to remove municipalities from the Act for the purposes of joint and several responsibility;
- undertake, through the Ministry of Transportation, a collaborative initiative with the region to develop a regional transportation master plan for Eastern Ontario;
- initiate the next phase of Places to Grow planning, focussing on Eastern Ontario and taking a collaborative approach with communities in the region;
- begin the process of interpreting good planning principles to Eastern Ontario's growth aspirations, in particular, by assigning an individual with land-use and service planning expertise to assist local governments;
- develop a comprehensive waste management strategy which includes diversion from landfill and use of new environmentally safe technologies to render hazardous materials harmless and convert them to usable form or to a source of energy, and offer financial incentives to encourage the introduction/adoption of measures contained in the strategy.
- encourage and provide incentives to organizations with commercialization expertise to expand their service areas to include both the public and private sector, particularly SMEs.

**For more information:**

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**To view the plan**

On the web, go to [www.uclg.ca](http://www.uclg.ca) and look for the link to the plan

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