



## Policy Development and Strategic Direction Committee Report

**To:** The Chair and Members of the Policy Development and Strategic Direction Committee

**From:** Alison Newton, General Manager Strategic Initiatives

**Date:** January 11, 2022

**Subject:** RPT-22-01 – Brant Connects – Joint Committee on Broadband Strategy

**Purpose:** For approval

*[Handwritten signature and date: Jan 25, 2022]*

### Recommendation

That RPT-22-01 dated January 11, 2022, be approved;

AND that staff be directed to coordinate an inaugural meeting of the Brant Connects committee in coordination with the Paris & District Chamber of Commerce.

### Strategic Priority

Strategic Priority 4 - Reliable Infrastructure.

Goal – Optimize existing assets and develop new assets to support the current and future needs of the community.

### Financial Considerations

None at this time.

### Background

In July 2021, Council adopted a resolution calling for senior levels of government to provide more funding to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to improve high-speed internet, particularly in rural areas. Also in July 2021, the Provincial Government announced nearly \$4 billion dollars in funding under its Improving Connectivity for Ontario (ICON) program, which is meant to provide high-speed internet to every community by the end of 2025. While all the details of the Provincial plan are not yet clear, we do know that service will be provided by a combination of fixed-wireless towers, satellite, and fibre. The fixed-wireless towers are generally the most cost-effective method in more sparsely populated and/or rural areas.

In October 2021, the Paris & District Chamber of Commerce (PDCOC) made a delegation to Council requesting approval to establish a collaborative task force called “Brant Connects” between PDCOC and the County of Brant Economic Development Division.

## Report

Access to fast and reliable internet service has become a critical need for households and businesses, particularly in rural areas of the County of Brant. The COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated the existing gaps as students have learned virtually, business is conducted from homes and many social connections are maintained online.

While it is acknowledged that internet service is a private utility, and it is cost prohibitive to execute implementation at a municipal level; it is important to also acknowledge that the County of Brant has been extremely proactive in this area. Some of the investments and actions already taken include:

1. \$2.6 M invested by the County of Brant in association with its subsidiaries Brant County Power Services and Brant Municipal Enterprises, installing 56 kilometers of fibre to underserved areas of the County.
2. Through the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus (WOWC), the County has been a member municipality of Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) since it's inception. SWIFT just recently approved a \$9.4 M project which will cover 120 kilometers of road and pass 2,465 premises in the communities of Harrisburg, Harley, Fairfield Plain, Burtch, Newport, Middleport, and Six Nations of the Grand River.
3. The New Official Plan will include strengthened language concerning the installation and provision of utilities and telecommunications infrastructure as development occurs.
4. The Operations department and the Business and Technology Solutions division have committed to a more cohesive communications process to ensure opportunities to add conduit during infrastructure projects are available when feasible and appropriate. This process provides greater efficiency and cost effectiveness of scarce municipal resources.
5. The County of Brant has leased portions of municipally owned property for the installation of fixed-wireless towers.

With unprecedented Provincial investment and solid groundwork as indicated above, the County of Brant is in an excellent position for greatly improved connectivity in the near future. There are, however, many unknowns regarding the logistics and timing of how the ICON program will unfold. Staff expect that additional details will be made available in the coming months including how municipalities can actively participate in the process and what our expectations should be.

In response to the request by the PDCOC, and in the context of the new provincial funding announcement, staff recommend that a committee be formed with the following parameters and structure:

1. The committee would consist of members chosen by the PDCOC, staff from the Economic Development and Tourism Division, and a staff member from Business and Technology Solutions Division. This will ensure that the appropriate expertise is available for meaningful discussion.



2. Membership would also be extended to the Mayor and Council Liaison to SWIFT for consistent and efficient communication between all groups.
3. The collective advocacy measures should be consistent with WOWC and SWIFT and should build upon their efforts whenever possible to increase overall efficacy.
4. The committee will be responsible for ongoing monitoring of the provincial program as details become available and will examine these details from the particular viewpoint of County of Brant stakeholders. Any perceived concerns or deficiencies will first be discussed with the regional groups (as subject matter experts) and then recommendations will be brought forward for consideration to County of Brant Council.
5. The committee will report back to Council on a quarterly basis detailing activities and recommendations.
6. Terms of reference will be drafted for approval at the inaugural meeting.

### **Interdepartmental Considerations**

James Rickert, Director Business and Technology Solutions has been consulted and assisted with this report.

### **Attachments**

1. Map – roads currently without fibre coverage
2. Map – Brant Fibre Network (BME or SWIFT)

### **Copy to**

1. Senior Management Team
2. James Rickert, Director Business and Technology Solutions

### **File**

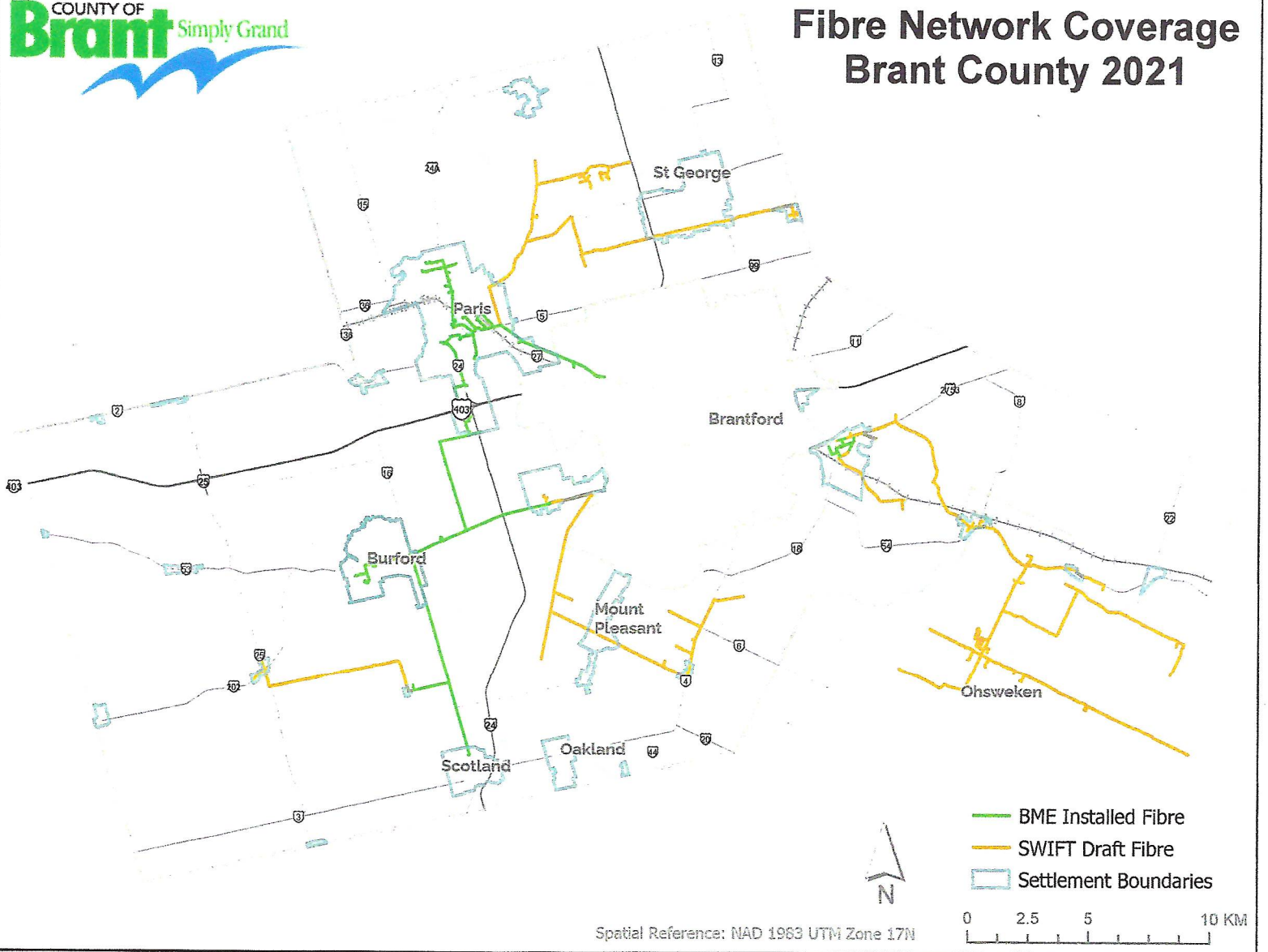
In adopting this report, is a bylaw or agreement required?

By-law required Yes

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and /or Clerk No

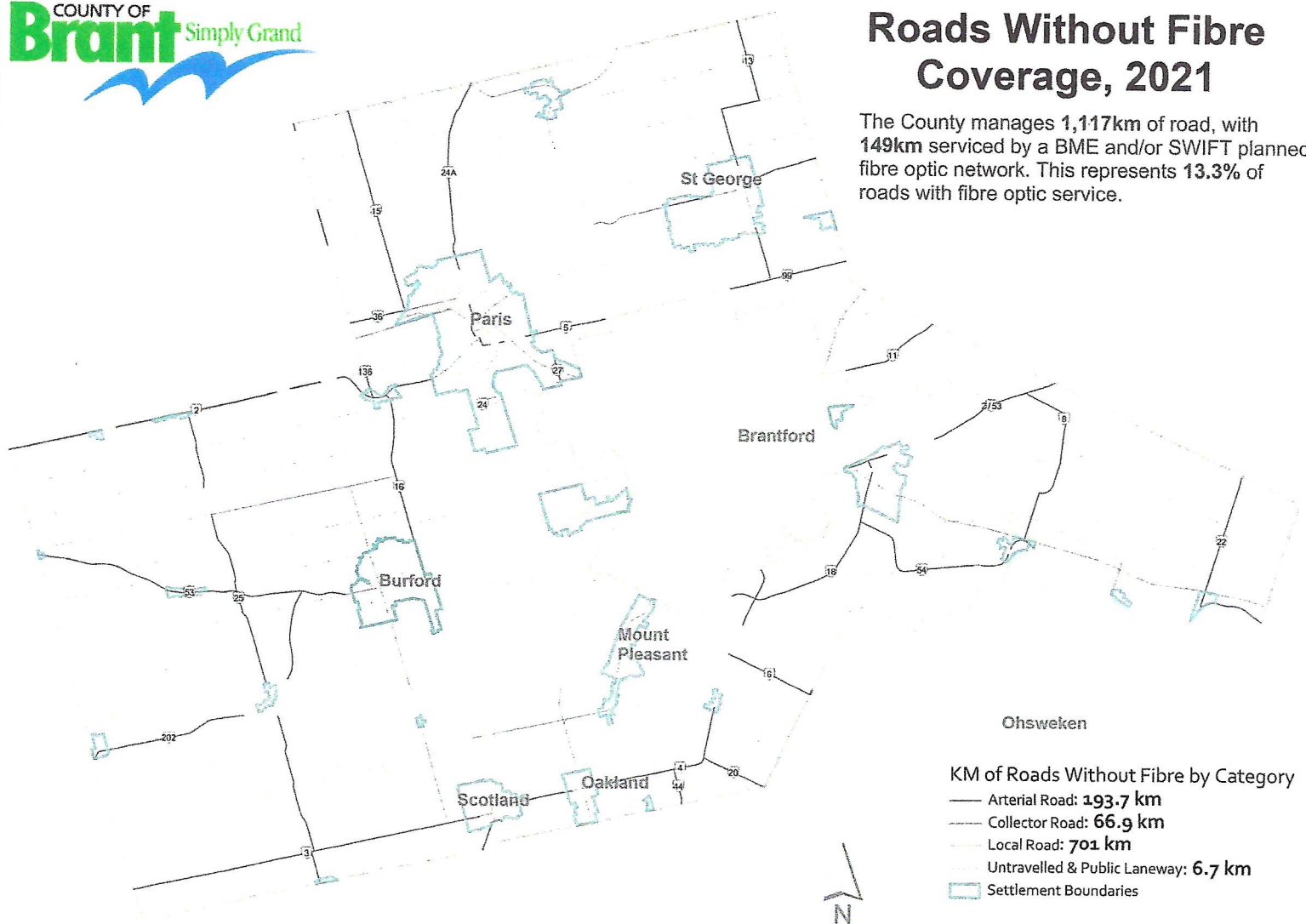
Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? Yes

## Fibre Network Coverage Brant County 2021



## Roads Without Fibre Coverage, 2021

The County manages 1,117km of road, with 149km serviced by a BME and/or SWIFT planned fibre optic network. This represents 13.3% of roads with fibre optic service.



Spatial Reference: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N

0 2.5 5 10 KM



Mr. Volterman asked if the County has limited the number of rental units and tenants per unit. He noted that the parking issues result in difficulties with snow removal. He also suggested enhanced community education about the proper use of roundabouts. Mr. Volterman expressed concern about the volume of truck traffic, which is further complicated by the roundabouts and suggested a Highway 403 interchange at Bishopsgate Road.

Discussion was held regarding the County's Brant Safe Streets Program, ongoing studies into an interchange at Bishopsgate Road, the roll-out of development and road construction along the Rest Acres Road corridor and the intensification of uses / support for more affordable and attainable residential unit types.

Discussion was also held regarding the previous petition regarding the development and it was clarified that a petition is not a requirement for concerns to be presented to Council.

Moved by Councillor Bell  
Seconded by Councillor Peirce

That staff be directed to prepare a report in response to the proposals submitted by Mr. Volterman.

**Carried**

4.3 Susan Morton, President and David Cash, Member - Paris District Chamber of Commerce - "Brant Connects" Broadband Strategy and Action Plan

Ms. Morton and Mr. Cash made the presentation entitled "Brant Connects Broadband Strategy and Action Plan", requesting that staff be directed to report back on partnership opportunities. In response to a question, Ms. Morton and Mr. Cash confirmed that this proposal is intended to consider service throughout the County of Brant, including both urban and rural areas. Discussion was held regarding a public consultation / engagement component for the strategy.

In response to a question, Ms. Morton and Mr. Cash suggested that all the parties working on this issue be brought together to develop strategies, priorities and plans going forward. Councillor Miller suggested that SWIFT may have more detailed information and mapping of service availability.

Moved by Councillor Coleman  
Seconded by Councillor Bell

That the presentation from the Paris District Chamber of Commerce Regarding the 'Brant Connects' Broadband Strategy and Action Plan be referred to staff for review.

**Carried**