



Bill 93, The *Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022*

AMO's Remarks to the Standing Committee on General
Government

March 30, 2022



Remarks by Brian Rosborough, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding Bill 93, the *Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022*. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and municipal governments place critical importance on internet and cellular connectivity for our residents and businesses.

To illustrate how important, I would like to give you a bit of background.

Fast and affordable internet and cellular connectivity have long been identified by local governments as a priority for economic and social development, and service delivery.

Municipalities, through AMO, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) and other municipal associations, have called for more investment to extend networks for over a decade.

Seeing slow expansion of these networks, coupled with growing demand of residents and local businesses, local governments and local leaders jumped in to fill the gaps. Organizations in Eastern Ontario, Western Ontario and the North were created by municipal governments to analyze connectivity challenges and provide organizational capacity and financial capacity to close those gaps.

Each of these organizations was developed to serve less populous communities which telecommunications industry players and markets found too difficult and costly to connect. They, and organizations like them, represent local ingenuity in Ontario's small communities to solve common problems.

While we applaud these initiatives, we also must acknowledge that they jumped into this space because the market could not provide adequate service. They did what municipal governments always do: saw a challenge, listened to their residents and businesses, and worked hard to fill the gap.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic made everyone aware that these coverage gaps could no longer be tolerated. As the world moved on-line by necessity, connectivity became a matter of access to work, school, medical services and to social connection, to name a few.

AMO and ROMA recognized the need to help members solve these challenges. At the onset of the pandemic, AMO identified significant investments in broadband coverage as necessary for Ontario to come out better than we started. ROMA developed materials and guides to help rural municipalities advocate for local solutions.

As a result, AMO has strongly supported the Province's broadband and cellular investments. Ontario's \$4 billion connectivity investment will have a game-changing effect on underserved and unserved communities.

This funding means guaranteed connectivity by the end of 2025 for our residents and businesses that have been left behind.

While this investment means municipalities no longer need to front-up funds, they still have important work to do advocating for communities and managing access to public property to make these projects happen. The Bill in front of you will require municipal approvals within ambitious standards.

AMO understands timely access approvals are necessary to meet program timelines. However, as these projects will be built mostly in small, rural, and Northern municipalities, it is important to recognize that these communities may find meeting timelines challenging due to more limited staff capacity.

For this reason, AMO is pleased that the Minister of Infrastructure has committed to strike a dedicated Technical Assistance Team. While the exact functions and services of the Team are still being developed, it should help our small, rural and Northern members to meet their responsibilities.

Underground infrastructure mapping is another challenge that will be important to manage. Many municipalities have inherited maps in various formats since the infrastructure was first built. Many of these were the responsibility of the municipality.

Some may have been inherited from the province. Others may have been assumed from private developers, if they were provided at all. Whatever the format, municipalities will provide whatever data they have to make projects happen, but it is important to recognize that not all communities will have information readily available.

Finally, this legislation helps enable one of the most significant infrastructure builds of the 21st Century. To ensure public support, Ontarians need transparent information on project investments, successful proponents, technology, anticipated speeds and exact areas served. We hope the Ministry will make this information available as soon as possible.

Let me close by saying that AMO fully supports better connectivity. Municipal governments have been calling for this investment and doing their part.

We believe this will be every bit as important to our future prosperity as railways, roadways, transit, water systems and other infrastructure continue to be.

Thank you again. I'm happy to take any questions.