



City of Hamilton

Report for Information

To: Chair and Members
Public Works Committee

Date: May 4, 2026

Report No: PW25068(a)

Subject/Title: Rural Broadband Expansion Plan Update (OBL)

Ward(s) Affected: (City Wide)

Recommendations

- a) That Report PW25068(a) respecting the Rural Broadband Expansion Plan **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide a status update on progress and actions related to the Rural Broadband Expansion Plan.
- At Public Works Committee on September 29, 2025, through Report PW25068, it was reported that several meetings with Rogers Communications and Infrastructure Ontario/Ministry of Energy and Mines had occurred; however, no formal plan for deployment had been received.
- Since September 2025, a subsequent meeting has been held with representatives from Rogers, and the results of that meeting are summarized in this report.
- Staff have proactively reached out to Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of Energy and Mines to inquire about the status of the Rural Broadband Program

and learned that there are ongoing discussions with Rogers Communications regarding the future of their provincially-funded projects and that updates will be provided in Spring 2026.

- Based on mapping of currently available internet service in Hamilton, rural areas are generally well served by Rogers 5G wireless technology, which meets or exceeds the minimum requirements under the rural Broadband Program.

Financial Considerations

There are no direct financial impacts to the City at this time, as Rogers Communications Canada Inc (Rogers) has not submitted a formal application or proposal. However, if non-standard installation methods (such as roadside ploughing) are approved in the future, staff anticipate potential additional long-term costs and liabilities related to maintenance, operations, and possible relocation of Rogers' infrastructure.

Background

At the Public Works Committee meeting on September 30, 2024, Council directed staff by way of motion to examine details of this program to facilitate the success of deployment, including;

- b) That the Council of the City of Hamilton supports the establishment of partnerships with local internet service providers and regional stakeholders to plan, fund, and implement high-speed broadband expansion along rural roads and underserved areas;
- c) That Council commits to working with relevant provincial and federal authorities to ensure that rural broadband expansion remains a priority for the long-term growth and prosperity of the City of Hamilton and advocate for continued and increased federal and provincial funding to support broadband infrastructure development in rural communities;
- d) That Council directs staff to work with Internet Service Provider(s) to seek a rural broadband expansion plan, including identification of candidate rural roads in

Hamilton where alternative installation techniques, such as plough-in (considering both Roadside and Property line), may be implemented for faster broadband deployment, taking into consideration costs vs risks vs benefits;

- e) That the identification and investigation work to be led by Engineering Services and includes Transportation Services, Hamilton Water, and Internet Service Provider(s) and includes consultation with any other relevant City departments;
- f) That Council directs Engineering Services staff to report back within 4 months on the progress of the rural broadband expansion plan, risks and mitigation plan, possible partnerships, costs and any potential funding sources if available and timelines for implementation; and
- g) That Council directs Engineering Services staff to continue actioning upon the rural broadband expansion plan in consultation with other departments and Internet Service Provider on a regular basis and report back to Council every 6 months until the completion of the program in 2025.

On September 29, 2025, Report PW25068 provided an initial update on the program, and the report was received for information.

Analysis

Broadband Access Context

Reliable, high-speed internet access is critical to economic development, educational opportunities, healthcare delivery, and the overall well-being of residents. As defined by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, broadband service encompasses several high-speed transmission technologies, including fibre to the home, 5G wireless internet, satellite internet, digital subscriber line, and cable internet. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's universal service objective is to provide users access to a minimum download speed of at least 50 megabits per second and actual upload speeds of at least 10 megabits per second.

The City of Hamilton's Urban Area is currently served by several high-speed internet providers that use a range of technologies, including fibre to the home, 5G wireless internet, satellite internet, digital subscriber line, and cable internet connections. In contrast, many rural areas currently lack access to fibre to the home infrastructure, limiting the availability of high-speed broadband delivered through this transmission technology; however, alternative connectivity solutions are available.

Provincial and Federal Broadband Programs

In order to address this challenge a partnership between the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada was established in 2021 to help accelerate the deployment of high-speed internet in rural areas such as rural Hamilton. The two programs are the Accelerated High-Speed Internet Program and the Universal Broadband Fund. Rogers Communications Canada Inc. as an Internet Service Provider was the successful bidder to provide fibre service to the rural areas of Hamilton.

Existing Rural Connectivity

According to information provided by Rogers, rural areas within the City of Hamilton are currently well served by 5G wireless technology, which typically provides broadband upload and download speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second (see Appendix "A" to Report PW25068a). For comparison, 1 gigabit per second is approximately equivalent to 1,000 megabits per second. As a result, rural areas meet and exceed the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's 50/10 megabits per second service standard through 5G technology; however, this service is not delivered via a fibre network.

Based on Rogers' analysis, the installation of an additional fibre to the home network in rural areas under the *Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021* has the potential to result in a duplication of services where alternative high-speed connectivity options, such as 5G wireless internet, are already available.

Municipal Infrastructure and Cost Implications

As previously noted in Report PW25068, the introduction of additional underground fibre infrastructure within the City right of way, in close proximity to the surface, would significantly impact the City's ability to maintain cost neutrality, as it would constrain future municipal works within the road allowance and increase maintenance and construction costs associated with activities such as ditching, sediment and debris removals and outlet and inlet maintenance.

Municipal Right-of-Way Oversight and Experience

The City of Hamilton has been an industry leader in the development and deployment of Municipal Access Agreements and municipal right of way management. For an in-depth review please refer to Appendix "B" to Report PW25068(a).

Engineering Services is an industry leader in fibre to the home deployment with extensive experience through the work with the Urban Fibre to the home Special Utility Group. This project was a partnership with internet service providers to deliver high-speed internet to urban communities while consistently upholding engineering standards.

Implementation Status and Engagement with Rogers

A meeting was held with the Rogers management team on October 21, 2025, to discuss the path forward for applications. City staff and Rogers' representatives participated in a productive discussion focused on methodologies and processes for advancing future work.

Rogers provided an overview of their roadside ploughing approach (see report PW25068 for explanation of this method), confirming that a minimum depth of cover of 1.2 metres would be maintained and that all above-ground utility boxes would be located on the backside of City ditches. One of the challenges with this approach is that

at that depth of cover, hand digging may be required to avoid damage to the infrastructure. Hand digging is much more costly for the municipality.

City staff inquired about the possibility of entering into an agreement that would permit mechanical excavation through the City's ditching program, reducing the requirement for hand digging within one metre of structures to 0.3 metres. Such an agreement would allow maintenance staff greater flexibility and help reduce the financial burden associated with hand excavation in certain situations. Rogers advised that indemnification agreements may exist that could allow for this type of excavation outside of standard industry practices.

Rogers subsequently provided the City with an example "System Filter Agreement" as a possible means for addressing the City's concerns about excavation. However, an internal City review determined that the agreement does not indemnify the City for the work required (ditching) and would increase liability and costs. Under the agreement, Ontario One Call would issue office clearances only, with no field markups identifying Rogers' underground infrastructure. As a result, the City's maintenance program would be entirely dependent on hydro-vac methods for all ditching and culvert work.

As-Built Information

As part of the municipal access permit process, detailed "as-built" drawings identifying the location of installed infrastructure are required. Given the expected kilometres of infrastructure to be installed, the City inquired whether Global Navigation Satellite System, commonly referred to as GPS, data could be collected during installation and provided to the City of Hamilton. This data would enable the creation of an accurate digital representation of underground infrastructure, improving the City's ability to safely and efficiently manage its ditching program. Rogers, however, expressed reluctance to provide as-built deliverables beyond the standard paper format.

Permit Application

To advance the project, Rogers agreed to provide sample permit drawings for City permit staff to review. This would allow staff to confirm that the drawings include sufficient information to support installation-related decisions and issue permits.

The provincial guidelines under the Broadband Faster Act set requirements for drawing detail for permit applications; however, Rogers expressed concerns that provincial guidelines were overly detailed for rural applications. City staff offered to review Rogers' sample drawings to determine whether a simpler level of detail would be adequate for permit issuance.

Drawing quality is a critical component of all municipal consent permit applications. Confirming the adequacy of submitted drawings assists the City in determining the applicable fee category required to issue the permit and to complete the necessary pre- and post-construction field inspections.

As of the drafting of this report, the City has not yet received the sample drawings from Rogers.

Risk Management and Alternative Deployment Options

Under the Building Broadband Faster Act, several utility partnership frameworks exist, including notice provisions to distributors and transmitters regulated by the Ontario Energy Board. Provincial rules allow broadband providers to use existing utility infrastructure, such as hydro poles, to expand service in rural areas. Using overhead lines could help deliver fibre internet to rural homes without the need for underground installation.

Within the Engineering Services Division, the Corridor Management Municipal Consent group has been working closely with the Transportation Division, as the asset owner, to identify rural cross-sections that could accommodate roadside ploughing with minimal short-term risk to ditching and culvert infrastructure. These locations have been considered as potential candidates for non-standard roadside ploughing installations, particularly where recent maintenance has occurred or where works fall within an

established long-term ditching program cycle. This approach helps mitigate the likelihood of short-term maintenance costs.

However, formalizing a fixed list of isolated cross-sections could create unintended consequences, as adjacent corridors may introduce significant future maintenance costs for the Transportation Division. To fully understand the financial implications of permitting non-standard installations, the City relies heavily on proponents applying through an on-demand application process. It would be premature to make broad departmental decisions without a clear understanding of Rogers' overall master plan for the Rural Broadband Expansion Program.

In the absence of a comprehensive plan from the Internet Service Provider, specifically Rogers, the Transportation Division is limited in its ability to assess the risks associated with approving non-standard roadside ploughing within the rural road network. Until such a plan is provided, it would be inadvisable to issue a generalized list of candidate locations. The City remains willing to collaborate with Rogers once a complete master plan has been submitted.

Next Steps

In Fall 2025, Engineering Services contacted the Ministry of Energy and Mines and Infrastructure Ontario to confirm the status of funding for the broadband program. At the time, staff understood that the program funding is available to the end of 2026.

Engineering Services subsequently received confirmation from Ministry of Energy and Mines staff that they are engaged in active discussions with Rogers regarding the future of provincially funded broadband projects, including those affecting Hamilton.

These discussions are critical in determining next steps, and there is a commitment to provide public updates once further clarity is available. It is anticipated that the Ministry of Energy and Mines and Infrastructure Ontario will provide a public update in the spring of 2026.

Alternatives

Not Applicable. As this is an Information Report, no alternatives are provided.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The enhancement of broadband internet service and this report directly aligns to the 2022-2026 Council Priorities and specifically to:

Priority 1: Sustainable Economic & Ecological Development;

Outcome 2: Facilitate the growth of key sectors

Previous Reports Submitted

[PW25068 Rural Broadband Expansion Plan Update](#)

Consultation

The following City departments and divisions were consulted:

- Transportation Division, Public Works Department

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix A: Coverage map of the Rogers 5G+ network

Appendix B: Evolution of Municipal Right-of-Way Oversight

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