



GREATER KITCHENER WATERLOO
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
BUSINESS BUILDING COMMUNITY



February 10, 2021

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
90 Elgin Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G5

Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Ontario Minister of Finance
Frost Building South
7th Floor
7 Queen's Park Crescent
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Y7

Dear Minister Freeland and Minister Bethlenfalvy:

Re: Pre-Budget Priorities for 2021 Budgets

The Cambridge, Guelph and Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chambers of Commerce collectively represent 5,000 employers across one of Canada's most progressive and productive regional economies. We are writing to outline our member priorities for the 2021 Federal and Ontario Budgets.

Waterloo Region and Guelph-Wellington have maintained strong economic and population growth during the current pandemic. Recent data from Statistics Canada indicates the population of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo increased by 50,000 residents from 2016 to 2020. The population of Guelph also increased by 10,000 people over this five-year time frame. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Waterloo Region consistently achieves annual growth greater than 2 percent and frequently places within the top five metropolitan areas across Canada.

The current priority issue for our members is an effective and productive vaccination program. The faster the Ontario population is inoculated, the faster we can safely reopen and work together on a provincial and national economic recovery. Our local business community is prepared to assist with current and future efforts in the fight against COVID-19 through logistical support, communication with our members, best practices, storage and distribution. Continuation of our economic growth is dependent on federal and provincial investments into vital infrastructure and related services, primarily urban and regional transit. Fast and frequent two-way, all day GO train passenger service along the Waterloo-Toronto Innovation Corridor could deliver \$17.5



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billion in direct annual GDP and 170,000 high-quality jobs by 2025. Pre-pandemic demand across this region was evident with a 23 percent increase in ridership since 2015.

While we must remain vigilant in the fight against COVID-19, our economy is focused around moving people and goods. Post-pandemic, full time work from home is not feasible or accessible for all employers while intra-provincial travel will continue as a priority for major businesses who need to attract talent beyond their borders.

Public investments into local GO rail passenger services will be a vote of confidence in Advanced Manufacturing, Financial Services, Agrifood, Automotive, Research and Technology who are collectively sectors of the Ontario economy that will generate a national economic recovery and initiate major job creation efforts.

Workforce development issues remain for employers of all sizes in all sectors across Canada and Ontario. Small businesses can benefit from the contributions of student work placements in terms of technology applications and operations improvements. We highly recommend that all levels of government consider further investments into new and existing programs that assist employers with new processes and students with valuable work experience.

Furthermore, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have been particularly impacted by COVID-19 and require on-going support related to implementation of new technologies and virtual operations/sales. We also support increasing investments into rural broadband capacity where challenges were evident prior to the pandemic.

Thank you for the consideration of our proposals for your upcoming budgets and fiscal plans.

Sincerely,

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