

2024 ONTARIO PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION



JANUARY
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About Conestoga Students Incorporated:

Conestoga Students Incorporated (CSI) was established in 1973 and is the official student association of Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, representing the voice of over 40,000 Conestoga students. CSI is governed by a student board of directors and provides Conestoga students with services, events, resources, and advocacy initiatives to improve and support the student experience.

Executive Summary

Conestoga Students Incorporated (CSI) represents over 40,000 post-secondary students at Conestoga College. As a non-profit organization committed to advancing the interests and well-being of post-secondary students, we recognize education's pivotal role in building a strong future together for our province. Our organization is one of many that advocate for the needs and interests of post-secondary students, striving to ensure affordable, equitable, and high-quality education and support in Ontario.

This pre-budget submission articulates our recommendations, rooted in the collective experiences of Conestoga's student population, to highlight the key areas where budgetary investments can make a transformative impact. The 2024 budget should implement the following targeted and strategic investments in education and associated supports to empower students across the province to excel in their educational journey, and contribute meaningfully to the prosperity of Ontario:

1. [Provide a one-time increase of 10% in per-student funding applied in 2024-2025 to the value of the Weighted Grant Unit \(WGU\)/Weighted Funding Unit \(WFU\), with subsequent increases each year equal to the increase in the consumer price index or 2%, whichever is greater;](#)
2. [Review the Ontario Student Assistance Program \(OSAP\) assessment processes and policies to increase grants for low-income students;](#)

3. [Create funding opportunities for non-profits, co-operatives, and post-secondary institutions to increase the supply of purpose-built student accommodations \(PBSAs\) to address the ongoing and increasing housing crisis;](#)
4. [Make targeted investments and policy changes that reduce financial barriers for students to address the root cause of food insecurity: financial insecurity. This includes but is not limited to, ensuring that social program disbursements \(OSAP, ODSP, Ontario Works, etc.\) reflect the current cost of living, that minimum wage is a livable wage, that institutions are not primarily reliant on tuition revenues, and that affordable housing is available for students; and,](#)
5. [Invest in public transportation projects that improve municipal and regional interconnectivity in the Grand River Watershed and beyond with an integrated payment method such as Presto.](#)

These investments will ensure the sector's financial sustainability, improve the accessibility of post-secondary education, and ensure students have the necessary support to be successful in their educational experience and beyond.

Sincerely,

Nelson Chukwuma

Nelson Chukwuma
CSI President



Introduction

Conestoga Students Incorporated (CSI) represents over 40,000 post-secondary students at Conestoga College and is pleased to submit our recommendations for consideration in the 2024 Ontario Budget. As a non-profit organization committed to advancing the interests and well-being of post-secondary students, we recognize the pivotal role that education plays in building a strong future together for our province. Our organization is one of many that advocate for the needs and interests of post-secondary students, striving to ensure affordable, equitable, and high-quality education and support in Ontario.

Ontario's post-secondary sector contributes significantly to developing skilled and innovative individuals equipped to make Ontario a destination for people to live, work, invest, and raise a family. In light of the ongoing challenges the post-secondary sector and its students face, targeted and strategic investments in education and associated sectors, such as housing and transportation, are paramount. This pre-budget submission articulates our recommendations, rooted in the collective experiences of Conestoga's student

population spread out across eight campuses and seven municipalities, to highlight the key areas where budgetary investments can make a transformative impact, empowering our students to excel in their educational journey and contribute meaningfully to the prosperity of Ontario.

To ensure Ontario continues to support the sector and post-secondary students, we ask the Government of Ontario to consider our recommendations to address the sector's financial sustainability, improve the accessibility of post-secondary education for all, and ensure students have the necessary supports to be successful.



Creating and Maintaining a Sustainable and Accessible Public Post-Secondary System

Operating grants for post-secondary institutions are foundational to developing, maintaining, and propelling an accessible public post-secondary system. Although operating grants are essential in a public post-secondary system, they have not kept pace with inflation, forcing a shift to increase and rely on tuition funds, specifically international tuition, that risk the future sustainability of the college sector as a whole.¹ Therefore, the Government of Ontario should implement the following recommendation from the Blue-Ribbon Panel on Post-Secondary Education Financial Sustainability:

1. a one-time increase of 10% in per-student funding applied in 2024-2025 to the value of the Weighted Grant Unit (WGU)/ Weighted Funding Unit (WFU), with subsequent increases each year equal to the increase in the consumer price index or 2%, whichever is greater;²

The funding shortfall comprises a lack of operating grant increases and recent tuition cuts and freezes. Compared to other provinces across the country, the Government of Ontario currently provides \$8,724 less funding per college student on average in 2021-2022.³ While the one-time increase of 10% in per-student funding will still leave Ontario behind the national average, it will greatly reduce the gap between Ontario and other provinces.

From 2008 to 2021, operating grants per college student have only increased by \$750, from \$6,615 to \$7,365.⁴ This is \$948 below the real value of the grants when adjusted for inflation.⁵ This funding reduction in real terms has been further compounded by the 10% cut to domestic student tuition in 2019 and the continued tuition freeze.⁶

While the lack of investment forced many Ontario colleges to pivot, innovate, and create new efficiencies, this can only be exercised to a point. A point that has come and past, with many colleges indicating that they are now operating at a loss for every domestic student they enrol.⁷ This further increases and explains their reliance on an unsustainable and unpredictable source of revenue: international students.

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Ontario colleges can reduce their reliance on tuition-funding models when they can operate on a predictable and sustainable financial model. To ensure Ontario’s colleges remain sustainable and accessible, while providing a high-quality education, direct investments in operating funds for colleges are required.

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¹ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight,” December 2021.

² Alan Harrison, “Ensuring Financial Sustainability for Ontario’s Postsecondary Sector,” November 14, 2023, <https://files.ontario.ca/mcu-ensuring-financial-sustainability-for-ontarios-postsecondary-sector-en-2023-11-14.pdf>.

³ Harrison

⁴ Harrison

⁵ Bank of Canada, “Inflation Calculator,” Inflation Calculator, accessed December 12, 2023, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>.

⁷ Colleges Ontario, “Statement - Public Colleges Are the Talent Pipeline for Ontario’s Economic Future,” Colleges Ontario, November 20, 2023, <https://www.collegesontario.org/en/news/statement-public-colleges-are-the-talent-pipeline-for-ontario-s-economic-future>.



Similarly, improving accessibility to post-secondary education can be accomplished through targeted investments and policy changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). As the Blue-Ribbon Panel on Post-Secondary Education Financial Sustainability stated, “The fundamental goal of OSAP should be to ensure that, in conjunction with institutional assistance, no qualified student in Ontario who wishes to pursue post-secondary credentials is denied access because of their economic circumstances.”⁸ As this government aims to improve affordability

for Ontarians, the Blue Ribbon Panel has suggested a variety of recommendations that would better support low-to-middle-income students. The Government of Ontario should implement the recommendation from the Blue-Ribbon Panel on Post-secondary Education Financial Sustainability:

2. Review the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) assessment processes and policies to increase grants for low-income students.⁹

From the year 2000 to 2015, an average of approximately 35% of Ontario college students owed debt through OSAP at the time of their graduation.¹⁰ While the average debt owed by college debtors in Ontario has remained relatively stable at approximately \$15,100, the ability of students to pay off this remaining debt has diminished over time, as college students in 2015 had, on average, an additional 12% more debt to pay off than students in the year 2000.¹¹

Additionally, in 2018, student debt contributed to more than 17% of all insolvencies in Ontario, with this problem only growing in the years since the changes to OSAP in 2019.¹² Previous changes to OSAP in 2017 sought to reduce the overreliance on loans and increase grant ratios, with only 11% of OSAP fund disbursement in the program’s final year being repayable loans before being reverted back to primarily loans.¹³

OSAP, in many instances, has become a primary means for students accessing a post-secondary education, but college tuition rates have risen more than 400% since 1993,¹⁴ forcing students to take out greater loan amounts to pursue their education. The current model places a heavy burden on students, many of whom live below the poverty line as is, including up to 87.4% of Conestoga students¹⁵. Absent a revision to grants over loans, OSAP’s loan program will only continue to create debtors, not graduates. Reviewing OSAP’s current assessment processes and policies to increase grants for low-income students will help increase access to post-secondary and further stimulate Ontario’s economy.¹⁶

⁸ Harrison, “Ensuring Financial Sustainability for Ontario’s Postsecondary Sector.”

⁹ Harrison, “Ensuring Financial Sustainability for Ontario’s Postsecondary Sector.”

¹⁰ Statistics Canada Government of Canada, “Student Debt from All Sources, by Province of Study and Level of Study,” December 1, 2014, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710003601>.

¹¹ Government of Canada.

¹² “Student Debt Insolvencies On The Rise,” Hoyes, Michalos & Associates Inc., accessed September 14, 2022, <https://www.hoyes.com/press/joe-debtor/the-student-debtor/>.

¹³ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Chapter 3 Section 3.10: Ontario Student Assistance Program,” in 2017 Annual Report, 2nd ed. (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2017), 456–94, https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en18/v1_310en18.pdf.

¹⁴ Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario, “The Impact of Government Underfunding on Students,” July 2015, <https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Factsheet-Underfunding.pdf>; Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight” (Office of The Auditor General of Ontario, December 2021), https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/AR_PublicColleges_en21.pdf.

¹⁵ Nathan Barnett, “2023 CSI Year-End Survey Results,” 2024.

¹⁶ Jason Jabbari et al., “Student Debt Forgiveness and Economic Stability, Social Mobility, and Quality-of-Life Decisions: Results from a Survey Experiment,” *Socius* 9 (January 1, 2023): 23780231231196778, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231231196778>.

Building Housing: Increasing the Housing Supply Through Purpose-Built Student Accommodations (PBSAs)

Ontario communities with post-secondary institutions are commonly finding their student populations competing for the local rental housing supply. As enrollment in Ontario post-secondary institutions increases with an influx of international students,¹⁷ and Ontario remains in a housing shortage,¹⁸ the availability of affordable, community, and on-campus student housing has quickly evaporated.¹⁹ As post-secondary institutions continue to be denied funding from higher levels of government, the housing crisis in these communities will only continue to get more desperate – particularly as they are implicitly encouraged and forced to increase international enrolment exponentially. On-campus PBSAs have been shown to bring a myriad of benefits to institutions and students, such as improving recruitment efforts, supporting and creating student belonging, improving utilization and access of campus facilities and support services, improving academic performance and success, creating new revenue streams, and increasing economic impact for local communities.²⁰ Therefore, the Government of Ontario should:

3. Create funding opportunities for non-profits, co-operatives, and post-secondary institutions to increase the supply of purpose-built student accommodations (PBSAs) to address the ongoing and increasing housing crisis.

In 2018, the Government of British Columbia introduced a program that shields themselves from long-term debt in financing housing supply while allowing educational institutions to take long-term loans on funds earmarked for housing supply, creating a buffer between the immediate costs of building housing and the institutions that build.²¹

This was a component of their Homes for B.C. initiative, called the B.C. Student Housing Loan Program. This program created a “\$450 million student-housing investment which will now allow public post-secondary institutions to borrow directly from the province to help finance an estimated 5,000 new on-campus student housing units, which previously was not permitted.”²² This program expanded the on-campus housing capacity of institutions like the University of Victoria by 25%, translating into an additional 620 student beds, and is part of the government’s long-term strategy to address affordable housing.²³ Through its success, the Government of British Columbia introduced an additional \$575 million over three years in its 2023 budget to continue increasing affordable student housing availability.²⁴

B.C.’s program demonstrates how post-secondary institutions can help address the competition for housing supply between their enrollment and the local community with provincial support, while also taking advantage of all the positive benefits for institutions and students PBSAs bring with them. CSI believes this funding model could be expanded to include non-profit and co-operatives organizations that have the capacity to participate to increase the available partners to develop affordable housing and could increase the speed at which housing supply is made available. Therefore, the Government of Ontario should create funding opportunities for non-profits, co-operatives, and post-secondary institutions to increase the supply of purpose-built student accommodations and assist in meeting the province’s goals of building 1.5 million homes by 2031.²⁵

¹⁷ Joe Friesen, “Ontario Colleges Are Fueling Unprecedented Growth in International Students,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 2, 2023, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-international-students-ontario-colleges-enrolment/>.

¹⁸ Allison Jones, “Ontario Housing Starts up, but Still Far off Needed Levels for 1.5 Million Homes,” *Toronto Star*, November 2, 2023, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/ontario-housing-starts-up-but-still-far-off-needed-levels-for-1-5-million-homes/article_c1cc2c51-f8e8-552a-8d56-76bb7f307a02.html.

¹⁹ “HOUSE,” *HOUSE*, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.houseontario.org>.

²⁰ Franklyn Taylor, Kaley Buck, and Tracey Kane, “Campus Housing in the Community College Setting: Benefits and Challenges for Residential Living,” *Community College Enterprise* 25, no. 2 (September 22, 2019): 77–94.

²¹ “Homes for British Columbia,” accessed October 26, 2021, <https://www.bchousing.org/projects-partners/Building-BC/homes-for-BC>.

²² “Homes for British Columbia,” accessed October 26, 2021, <https://www.bchousing.org/projects-partners/Building-BC/homes-for-BC>.

²³ “Premier Announces New Student Housing Project - University of Victoria,” *UVic.ca*, accessed January 2, 2022, <https://www.uvic.ca/news/topics/2018+new-student-housing-premier-announcement+news>.

²⁴ Ministry of Finance, “Budget and Fiscal Plan 2023/24 - 2025/26” (Government of British Columbia, February 28, 2023), https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2023/pdf/2023_Budget_and_Fiscal_Plan.pdf.

²⁵ Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, “More Homes, Built Faster: Ontario’s Housing Supply Action Plan 2022-2023,” *More Homes Built Faster*, October 25, 2022, <http://www.ontario.ca/page/more-homes-built-faster>.

Ensuring Sustenance: Improving Student Success through Food Security

Food insecurity has been on the rise in Canada: in 2014, over 1 in 10 households were experiencing some level of food insecurity,²⁶ and by May 2020, this rose to 1 in 7 households.²⁷ However, food insecurity is not felt equally. In Fall 2021, almost 60% of post-secondary students in Canada reported facing food insecurity,²⁸ and as of the Winter 2023 semester, 90% of Conestoga students reported they were experiencing some level of food insecurity, significantly higher than national and post-secondary averages.²⁹ CSI's Student Nutritional Access Program (SNAP) has been combatting food security on-campus for over 25 years however, CSI has seen the number of applications to the program increase dramatically: 1,068 in 2019-2020,³⁰ 1,477 in 2020-21, and 2,570 in 2021-22, representing approximately a 3% increase each year after controlling for enrollment.³¹ This has further increased the SNAP program's usage, serving approximately 1,200 students per month and climbing.³² Therefore, the Government of Ontario should:

4. Make targeted investments and policy changes that reduce financial barriers for students to address the root cause of food insecurity: financial insecurity. This includes but is not limited to, ensuring that social program disbursements (OSAP, ODSP, Ontario Works, etc.) reflect the current cost of living, that minimum wage is a livable wage, that institutions are not primarily reliant on tuition revenues, and that affordable housing is available for students.

Food insecurity is closely linked to financial resources, meaning that those with higher incomes and more financial assets are less likely to be food insecure.³³ Various studies have examined the connection between homeownership

and food security, meaning that the rising cost of rent and homes is likely to contribute to the increasing rates of food insecurity.³⁴ In addition to housing costs, financial resources, such as wages, play a key role in mitigating food insecurity.³⁵ In Waterloo Region, the liveable wage for a full-time worker is almost \$20/hour,³⁶ however, the minimum wage in Ontario is \$16.55.³⁷ While the minimum wage is now controlled for CPI, it lags behind a livable wage. For many students, working part-time on a below-livable wage means prioritizing some essentials over others. Additionally, food inflation has been on the rise.³⁸ This means that students' financial resources are being stretched while the income students make remains below what is livable. Local food banks have seen a drastic increase in the number of people accessing them, including Waterloo Region where a collective of food banks saw an 89% increase in households and a 46% increase in individuals accessing food banks in 2023, compared to 2022.³⁹



²⁶ Jasmin Bhawra, Sharon I. Kirkpatrick, and David Hammond, "Food Insecurity among Canadian Youth and Young Adults: Insights from the Canada Food Study," *Canadian Journal of Public Health - Revue Canadienne de Santé Publique* 112, no. 4 (February 23, 2021): 664, <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-020-00469-1>.

²⁷ Meal Exchange. (2021). 2021 National Student Food Insecurity Report. 5. Retrieved from: www.mealexchange.com/resources

²⁸ Hannah Baillie, "Accessibility and Affordability: The Status of Student Food Insecurity in Canada," The Sandbox Project, June 8, 2022, <https://sandboxproject.ca/the-ycrh-blog/2022/5/31/accessibility-and-affordability-the-status-of-student-food-insecurity-in-canada>.

²⁹ CSI Food Insecurity Report, forthcoming..

³⁰ This represents hampers distributed Sept 2019 to March 16, 2020 as the food bank closed from March to August 2020 due to COVID-19.

³¹ Samwelyn Rubi, email to author, May 4, 2023.

³² SNAP Program Brief Overview, 2023.

³³ Fei Men, Marcelo L. Urquía, and Valerie Tarasuk, "The Role of Provincial Social Policies and Economic Environments in Shaping Food Insecurity among Canadian Families with Children," *Preventive Medicine* 148 (July 1, 2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106558>.

³⁴ Men et al., "The role of provincial social policies in shaping food insecurity" 2.

³⁵ Men et al., "The role of provincial social policies in shaping food insecurity" 7.

³⁶ CBC News. "Living Wage in Waterloo Region, Guelph a Positive Increase but Still Tough to Get by, Says Financial Adviser | CBC News," November 20, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/living-wage-kitchener-1.6656328>.

³⁷ Ontario. "Minimum Wage | Your Guide to the Employment Standards Act | Ontario.ca." Minimum Wage, March 31, 2023. <http://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/minimum-wage>.

³⁸ Sean Boynton, and Craig Lord. "Grocery CEOs Defend 'Reasonable Profitability' in Grilling over Soaring Food Costs - National | Globalnews.ca," April 18, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9534180/food-prices-canada-grocery-ceos-inflation/>.

³⁹ Kim Wilhelm. "People Are Accessing Waterloo Region Emergency Food Support at Record-Breaking Numbers." *Waterloo Chronicle*, April 27, 2023. https://www.waterloochronicle.ca/opinion/people-are-accessing-waterloo-region-emergency-food-support-at-record-breaking-numbers/article_7041d7bd-a09e-59ce-9c96-4623ce329571.html.



Food insecurity's impact on a student's quality of life and academic success can be both vast and detrimental. Food insecurity and poor nutrition can increase the risk of numerous diet-focused chronic illnesses⁴⁰ and increase the severity of said illnesses.⁴¹ Food insecurity has also been documented to increase the risk and severity of numerous mental health problems,⁴² higher life stress and lower life satisfaction in general, and a lower sense of belonging in their communities.⁴³ Regarding academic consequences, those experiencing food insecurity are more likely to be unable to concentrate during class or an exam, are more likely to fail or withdraw from a course,⁴⁴ and more likely to have a lower GPA (which can often limit them from accessing merit-based funding), leading to lower retention and completion rates.⁴⁵

Often, students try to address their food insecurity by deferring other payments, usually related to their education, such as not buying textbooks, necessary technology, etc., or by compromising on the quality and/or quantity of food; and buying food on credit.⁴⁶ Many of these strategies focus on not necessarily reducing food insecurity, but on delaying it.

The majority of current efforts to address food insecurity across Canada use a charity-based model, as seen through food banks, soup kitchens, etc. These models require individuals to seek out help themselves, and can often be stigmatizing. Additionally, research has shown that not all those who are food insecure seek out food banks for assistance, due to a variety of reasons, such as stigma or believing others need it more.⁴⁷

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To truly address the root of food insecurity, short-term, symptom-focused approaches will not work. When someone with a broken leg goes to the hospital, doctors don't just give them pain meds and send them on their way – they focus on the root cause, and efforts to address food insecurity need to do just that as well through targeted investments and policy changes that reduce financial barriers for students.

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⁴⁰ Adèle Corkum, “Household Food Insecurity in Canada Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Findings from the International Food Policy Study 2018-2020” (University of Waterloo, 2020), 1 https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/bitstream/handle/10012/18272/Corkum_Adele.pdf?sequence=5.

⁴¹ Jung Sun Lee et al., “Food Insecurity and Health across the Lifespan,” *Advances in Nutrition* 3, no. 5 (September 1, 2012): 745, <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.112.002543>.

⁴² Fei Men, Frank J. Elgar, and Valerie Tarasuk, “Food Insecurity Is Associated with Mental Health Problems among Canadian Youth,” Google Docs, February 12, 2021: 742 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2021-216938>.

⁴³ Jasmine Farahbakhsh et al., “Food Insecure Student Clients of a University-based Food Bank Have Compromised Health, Dietary Intake and Academic Quality” *Nutrition & Dietetics* 74, no. 1 (August 2, 2016): 70-71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12307>.

⁴⁴ Farahbakhsh et al., “Food Insecure Student Have Compromised Health, Dietary Intake and Academic Quality.” 71.

⁴⁵ Amanda Hege et al., “College Food Insecurity: Implications on Student Success and Applications for Future Practice,” *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 58, no. 1 (March 9, 2020): 52-56.

⁴⁶ Farahbakhsh, Jasmine, Geoff D.C. Ball, Anna P. Farmer, Katerina Maximova, Mahitab Hanbazaza, and Noreen D. Willows. 2015. “How Do Student Clients of a University-Based Food Bank Cope with Food Insecurity?” *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research* 76 (4): 200–203. <https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdp-2015-020>.

⁴⁷ Tung, Audrey, Reuban Rose-Redwood, and Denise Cloutier. 2022. “Breadlines, Victory Gardens, or Human Rights?: Examining Food Insecurity Discourses in Canada.” *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Etudes Sur L'alimentation* 9 (2): 255. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.530>.

Enhancing Interregional Transportation for Seamless Regional Connectivity

For many people living in Ontario, including students, there are limited transit options for underserved communities and an absence of convenient or affordable means of transportation between municipalities beyond the Greater Golden Horseshoe.⁴⁸ There is currently no transit service that operates routes along the Grand River corridor, leaving Conestoga College students who wish to travel between campus locations in Guelph, Brantford, and Waterloo Region without a means of mass transit.⁴⁹ This is problematic for the 67.7% of students who do not have access to a personal vehicle and rely on public transit as their primary mode of transportation as they are ultimately rendered immobile without this access.⁵⁰ Therefore, CSI recommends the Government of Ontario:

5. Invest in public transportation projects that improve municipal and regional interconnectivity in the Grand River Watershed and beyond with an integrated payment method such as Presto.

Currently, for a student to commute between Brantford and Waterloo using the available public transportation options, it takes anywhere from 3.5 – 4.5 hours each way,⁵¹ while driving a personal vehicle only takes one hour.⁵² This is the shared experience by all in these communities trying to travel throughout the Grand River Watershed. The value of a public system of interregional transit between the municipalities that make up Conestoga College's major campus goes beyond the impacts for just students. The benefits to public welfare would permit the movement of those without employment

or sustainable income sources to seek out employment beyond their own municipality; inversely, employers could expand their pool of potential hires, a move that benefits both labour and business. More comprehensive public transit is also key to addressing the housing crisis, as new and more efficient routes allow people to expand their housing search while knowing that they can still access work, school, and other necessities. Additionally, the movement of people into public transit, and away from single-vehicle use has enormous benefits for the environment, reducing smog, congestion and more.⁵³

The call for improving interregional transportation is shared across a variety of stakeholders, from local governments such as the City of Brantford and the Region of Waterloo that are seeking the introduction or improvement of GO Train services,^{54, 55} to Unions representing transit workers and students in these communities,⁵⁶ to Chambers of Commerce across Ontario seeing the need to seamlessly connect all Ontarians.^{57, 58} There is clear local cross-sector support for improvements to interregional transportation. Connecting the Grand River Watershed communities to each other and beyond is essential to support education, employers, employees, and the environment making it necessary for the Government of Ontario to invest in public transportation projects that improve municipal and regional interconnectivity in the Grand River Watershed and Greater Golden Horseshoe, while expanding integrations of PRESTO with other transit agencies in Ontario.

⁴⁸ "How Greyhound Canada's Permanent End of Bus Services in Ontario Could Impact Communities | GlobalNews.ca." Global News, accessed January 25, 2022, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7859388/greyhound-canada-ontario-bus-service-shutdown/>.

⁴⁹ "Greyhound's Gone and We're Way Past Time for a Regional Transit Re-Think," GuelphToday.com, accessed January 25, 2022, <https://www.guelphtoday.com/columns/market-squared-by-adam-donadson/greyhounds-gone-and-were-way-past-time-for-a-regional-transit-re-think-3800955>.

⁵⁰ Barnett, "2023 CSI Year-End Survey Results."

⁵¹ Google Maps, Conestoga College Brantford to Conestoga College Waterloo by Public Transit, accessed December 14, 2023, <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Conestoga+College+-+Brantford+Campus,+274+Colborne+St,+Brantford,+ON+N3T+2L6/Conestoga+College+Waterloo+Campus,+108+University+Ave,+Waterloo,+ON+N2J+2W2/@43.2619873,-80.5182461,10.25z/data=!3m1!5s0x882bf38c63ed2699:0x86c1820d5770c7ba14m1414m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x882c660f27fe5c45:0x1204754e03622e9a12m2!1d-80.259402712d43.1391629!1m5!1m1!1s0x882bf31d0cec9491:0x8bf5f60c306d22072m2!1d-80.518508312d43.4793463!3e3?entry=ttu>.

⁵² Google Maps, Conestoga College Brantford to Conestoga College Waterloo by Personal Vehicle, accessed December 14, 2023, <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Conestoga+College+-+Brantford+Campus,+274+Colborne+St,+Brantford,+ON+N3T+2L6/Conestoga+College+Waterloo+Campus,+108+University+Ave,+Waterloo,+ON+N2J+2W2/@43.3126797,-80.5629674,11z/data=!3m1!5s0x882bf38c63ed2699:0x86c1820d5770c7ba14m1414m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x882c660f27fe5c45:0x1204754e03622e9a12m2!1d-80.259402712d43.1391629!1m5!1m1!1s0x882bf31d0cec9491:0x8bf5f60c306d22072m2!1d-80.518508312d43.4793463!3e0?entry=ttu>.

⁵³ Stefan Gössling, "Why Cities Need to Take Road Space from Cars - and How This Could Be Done," Journal of Urban Design 25, no. 4 (July 3, 2020): 443–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2020.1727318>.

⁵⁴ City of Brantford, "Brantford on Track: Paving the Way for GO Rail Extension," November 6, 2023, <https://www.brantford.ca/en/your-government/resources/City-of-Brantford-GO-transit-report--Nov-6-2023.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Ricardo Veneza, "'This Is about Moving People': Regions Top Politician Calls for More Transit Services," Kitchener, June 23, 2023, <https://kitchener.ctvnews.ca/this-is-about-moving-people-regions-top-politician-calls-for-more-transit-services-1.6454113>.

⁵⁶ Graeme McNaughton, "Unions, Transit Advocates Call for Bus Links between Guelph, Waterloo, Brantford," Guelph Mercury, October 28, 2021, https://www.guelphmercury.com/news/unions-transit-advocates-call-for-bus-links-between-guelph-waterloo-brantford/article_9a628882-32a0-588c-8cac-08ab97e101eb.html.

⁵⁷ Catrina Kronfli, "Moving Forward: A Strategic Approach to Ontario's Transportation Needs" (Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 2018), <https://www.guelphchamber.com/media/155eeazx/transportationreport.pdf>.


⁵⁸ Brantford-Brant Chamber of Commerce, "Transportation Policy," accessed December 14, 2023, https://brantfordbrantchamber.com/wp-content/uploads/Transportation_final.pdf.


IN CONCLUSION

Through this submission, we have outlined key recommendations aimed at fostering a robust and sustainable post-secondary sector that empowers students and contributes to the overall prosperity of Ontario. These recommendations are a holistic approach to solidifying the foundations of Ontario's post-secondary education system, ensuring financial sustainability, accessibility, and overall well-being for students. CSI stands committed to collaborating with the Government of Ontario to implement these measures and collectively shape a brighter future to make Ontario a destination for people to live, work, invest, and raise a family.

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