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CITY & REGION

Report: London's future in knowledge industries

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By [RANDY RICHMOND](#), [SUN MEDIA](#)

A new provincial report has boosted London and backed what its leaders have insisted for years: London can lead Ontario into a new economy.

“The fact that London is specifically mentioned in the report gives us a boost,” Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco-Best said today.

“I think we are already moving to a new economy. The province is seeing London on the radar much more than ever before.”

The \$2.2-million report, commissioned by Premier Dalton McGuinty, examines the change in the province from reliance on manufacturing to a new economy of service, health care and research jobs that require high levels of knowledge and creativity.

By focusing on the new economy — and letting the old die naturally — Ontario is set to compete against other North American economic mega-regions when the recession eases, the report says.

“A handful of cities — from London through Kitchener-Waterloo through Toronto and Ottawa — together comprises one of the world’s largest economic mega-regions that helps make Ontario one of the most advanced and productive jurisdictions on earth,” Richard Florida, one of the report authors, said today.

But to realize its full potential, the mega-region needs improvement in key areas, including education and transportation, the report says.

“We propose the province orient its infrastructure strategy around a simple goal — to speed the movement of goods, people and ideas . . . ” the report states.

“We will need to build more substantial connections and further unify the Toronto/Greater Golden Horseshoe/Ottawa/London mega-region.”

London's political and economic leaders have been pushing to make the city a transportation hub through air, rail and highway improvements.

"(Transportation) is one of the areas in the report that stands out as where London can contribute," DeCicco-Best said.

"We believe we should be the transportation hub for the Southwestern Ontario region, which will make the province more competitive."

The report's recommendation Ontario develop and increase its "creative class" is nothing new to London, which has been trying to attract and hang onto young, well-educated workers, DeCicco-Best added.

"We are already doing it," she said.

In a speech before the report was released, co-author Florida clearly identified London as a creative-class city, said Peter White, chief executive officer of the London Economic Development Corp.

"That makes total sense, give our capabilities in education and that we are the health service centre for the region," he said.

But the authors' rejection of a manufacturing-based economy angered Jayson Myers, president and chief executive of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

"The problem with this analysis is it assumes manufacturers are not innovative. If they think manufacturing is a brawn industry, they have to catch up with the times."

The suggestion the new creative economy will leave workers in manufacturing behind is little more than elitism, Myers said.

"Those working in manufacturing help pay for those who sit around universities drinking coffee," said Myers.

Florida and the report's co-author Roger Martin, are leaders at the University of Toronto's Rotman school of management.

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