ALTO HSR CITIZEN RESEARCH INITIATIVE

An independent, non-partisan citizen research project

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

ALTO Consultation: What Residents Actually Experienced

Analysis of survey responses collected during the ALTO public consultation period, with full data-integrity documentation

SURVEY SUMMARY

Responses collected (raw): 386

Analytical sample (after data-integrity filter): 354

Data collection period: March 24 – April 17, 2026

ALTO consultation deadline: April 24, 2026

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Executive Summary

This report presents the complete quantitative and qualitative analysis of the ALTO HSR Citizen Research Initiative Participant Experience Survey, conducted concurrently with the ALTO public consultation period. 386 total responses were collected; 354 are included in the analytical sample after application of the data-integrity filter documented in the companion Data Integrity Appendix. 85.7% of respondents in the analytical sample hold property within or immediately adjacent to an Eastern Ontario study corridor.

The results present a coherent and internally consistent pattern of consultation failure across every dimension assessed.

Key findings

ALTO's direct notification reached 2.0% of respondents. Awareness spread almost entirely through citizen networks — neighbours, community Facebook groups, and advocacy organizations.

87.8% rated ALTO's information as Inadequate or Very Inadequate — a near-consensus result that directly negates any ALTO claim that the consultation was information-sufficient.

85.7% do not believe the process was designed to genuinely register community input; 45.4% take the stronger position that it was actively designed to suppress opposition.

Only 7.7% of those who submitted questions received a specific, direct answer.

78.9% of in-person attendees rated sessions as Not Very Useful or Not Useful at All; virtual sessions produced a comparable result at 73.5%.

72.8% of ALTO map users rated it not useful; 99.4% of respondents attempted to use a map.

36.0% of ALTO survey completers (n=289) experienced the cut-off "Strongly Disagree" fifth response option.

DATA INTEGRITY

This report was subjected to a coordinated submission attempt in its final days. The pattern was detected, documented, and — for the figures in this report — analytically excluded. 32 of 386 responses (8.3%) were flagged under an objective three-criterion rule (post-April 11 arrival, ≤120s completion, pro-ALTO rating profile). Zero critical respondents meet this rule. The underlying raw dataset has been preserved intact. See the companion Data Integrity Appendix for full forensic documentation.

Methodology

The Participant Experience Survey was designed by the ALTO HSR Citizen Research Initiative to document the lived experience of residents engaging with the ALTO public consultation. It was distributed independently of ALTO through community networks, local Facebook groups, and the CRI's own communications channels.

The survey comprised 17 questions: 13 structured (multiple choice or single select) and 4 open-ended text fields (Q7, Q15, Q16, with Q1 and Q17 also including open "Other" fields). Respondents self-selected from the affected community.

Thematic coding of open-ended responses was performed inductively, with themes derived from the content of responses rather than imposed a priori. Where a single response addressed multiple themes, it was coded to each applicable theme. Percentage figures in thematic analysis are calculated against the number of respondents who answered the relevant open-ended question.

Data-integrity protocol

Of 386 total responses collected, 32 were excluded from the analytical sample under an objective three-criterion rule: (a) submission on or after April 11, 2026; (b) total completion time of 120 seconds or less; (c) a pro-ALTO rating profile on Q4/Q6/Q13. Zero critical respondents and zero pre-April 11 respondents of any sentiment meet this rule. The analytical sample is therefore n=354. All raw data remains intact; filtering is performed analytically and is fully reversible. Full forensic documentation is provided in the companion Data Integrity Appendix.

Note on corrected denominators

For Q3, percentages are calculated against respondents who completed the ALTO online survey (n=289), excluding those who did not complete it. For Q6, percentages are restricted to respondents who used the ALTO map (n=334). For Q10 and Q12, percentages are restricted to respondents who actually attended each session format (in-person n=161; virtual n=132).

Section 1 — Quantitative Results

Q1 — How did you first learn about the consultation? (n=351)

Source	n	%
Direct notification from ALTO (email, mail, phone)	7	2.0%
Notification from municipality or township	9	2.6%
Local news or radio	27	7.7%
Other (word of mouth, neighbours, community groups)	61	17.4%
Social media	247	70.4%

Key finding: ALTO's direct notification reached 7 of 351 respondents (2.0%). Social media was the dominant discovery mechanism, but open-ended responses confirm this was almost entirely citizen-driven — neighbours, community Facebook groups, and local advocacy organizations rather than any ALTO-authored content.

Q2 — When did you first become aware the consultation was open? (n=351)

Timing	n	%
Before January 23 (before it opened)	39	11.1%
January 23 – February 6 (first two weeks)	96	27.4%
February 7 – March 1	116	33.0%
March 2 – March 23	68	19.4%
March 23 or after (≤4 weeks before close)	32	9.1%

Key finding: 28.5% of respondents became aware within the final six weeks or less of the consultation period. Given the late addition of the southern corridor and the limited direct notification, late discovery was structurally predictable.

Q3 — "Strongly Disagree" visibility in the ALTO online survey (completers n=289)

Result	n	% of completers
All five options clearly visible	88	30.4%
"Strongly Disagree" cut off or not visible	104	36.0%
Not sure / don't recall	97	33.6%

Key finding: Among ALTO survey completers (n=289), 36.0% experienced the suppressed "Strongly Disagree" option. This finding has direct implications for the reliability of the ALTO survey's quantitative results.

Q4 — Quality of ALTO information provided (n=352)

Rating	n	%
Very adequate	26	7.4%
Somewhat adequate	8	2.3%
Inadequate	134	38.1%
Very inadequate	175	49.7%
Did not look for additional information	9	2.6%

Key finding: 87.8% rated ALTO's information as Inadequate or Very Inadequate. This near-consensus result directly negates any ALTO claim that the consultation was information-sufficient.

Q5 — Map usage (n=353)

Usage	n	%
Used ALTO map only	166	47.0%
Used third-party map only	16	4.5%
Used both	109	30.9%
Tried but could not determine corridor location	60	17.0%
Did not use a map	2	0.6%

Key finding: 99.4% of respondents attempted to use a map. Those who used both maps did so because the ALTO map was inadequate, turning to third-party sources to fill information gaps.

Q6 — Usefulness of the official ALTO map (ALTO map users, n=334)

Rating	n	%
Very useful	23	6.9%
Somewhat useful	56	16.8%
Not very useful	116	34.7%
Not useful at all	127	38.0%

Key finding: 72.8% of ALTO map users rated the map not very useful or not useful at all. The map lacked wetlands, conservation boundaries, local roads, property lines, and environmental features — rendering the primary feedback mechanism of the consultation non-functional for most users.

Q8 — Questions submitted and answered (n=350; submitters n=183)

Outcome	n	%
Yes — answered specifically and directly	14	4.0%
Yes — general or indirect response only	83	23.7%
Yes — not answered at all	86	24.6%
Did not submit questions	127	36.3%
Tried but could not find a way to submit	40	11.4%

Key finding: Of 183 respondents who submitted questions, only 14 (7.7%) received a specific, direct answer.

Q9–Q10 — In-person session attendance and usefulness (attendees n=161)

Attendance outcome	n	%
Yes, attended	162	46.0%
No — no session in my community	46	13.1%
No — not aware of sessions	41	11.6%
No — aware but could not attend	80	22.7%
No — chose not to attend	23	6.5%

Usefulness rating (attendees only)	n	%
Very useful	18	11.2%
Somewhat useful	16	9.9%
Not very useful	49	30.4%
Not useful at all	78	48.4%

Key finding: 78.9% of in-person attendees (n=161) rated the sessions not very useful or not useful at all.

Q11–Q12 — Virtual session attendance and usefulness (attendees/viewers n=132)

Attendance outcome	n	%
Yes, attended live	90	25.5%
Yes, watched recording	43	12.2%
No — not aware	101	28.6%
No — aware but couldn't attend	66	18.7%
No — chose not to attend	53	15.0%

Usefulness rating (attendees/viewers only)	n	%
Very useful	17	12.9%
Somewhat useful	18	13.6%
Not very useful	39	29.5%
Not useful at all	58	43.9%

Key finding: 73.5% of virtual attendees/viewers (n=132) rated sessions not very useful or not useful at all. Combined with the in-person result of 78.9%, both formats rated strongly negative — confirming the failure was structural, not format-specific.

Q13 — Genuine opportunity to influence the route decision (n=350)

Response	n	%
Yes — input will meaningfully influence decision	25	7.1%
Uncertain — hope so but not confident	25	7.1%
No — decision already made; consultation is a formality	141	40.3%
No — process not designed to register opposition	159	45.4%

Key finding: 85.7% do not believe the consultation was designed to genuinely register community input. The majority take the stronger position: 45.4% of all respondents believe the process was actively structured to suppress opposition rather than simply being premature or inadequate.

Q14 — Most important missing information (n=353; multiple response)

Information type	n	%
Detailed cost comparison of the northern and southern corridor options	58	16.4%
Environmental impact assessment results (species at risk, watersheds, farmland)	232	65.7%
Geotechnical studies	68	19.3%

(bedrock, karst geology, groundwater)		
Route maps showing precise corridor location relative to properties	161	45.6%
Grade crossing information (which roads would be closed or grade-separated)	140	39.7%
Financial case for the project (NPV, subsidy, ridership assumptions)	125	35.4%
Emergency services and healthcare access impact analysis	111	31.4%
None — the information provided was sufficient	30	8.5%

Key finding: Environmental impact assessment was the dominant unmet information need, followed by precise route mapping and grade crossing information. Respondents consistently identified multiple categories as missing; several noted in Q16 write-ins that their true answer would have been "all of the above."

Q17 — Where do you live? (n=350)

Location	n	%
Within or immediately adjacent to Eastern Ontario corridor	254	72.6%
Within 5 km of an Eastern Ontario study corridor	46	13.1%
Within the broader Eastern Ontario region (>5 km)	30	8.6%
Outside Eastern Ontario but in Ontario	6	1.7%
Outside Ontario	7	2.0%
Other	7	2.0%

Key finding: 85.7% of respondents are in or adjacent to the study corridor (or within 5 km). The survey cohort is overwhelmingly composed of directly affected residents, substantially strengthening the weight of findings throughout this report.

Section 2 — Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

Three questions invited open-ended responses: Q7 (map information gaps), Q15 (most significant positive feature), and Q16 (most significant gap or failure). Responses were coded inductively in an initial coding pass covering the April 13 cohort, and confirmed against the subsequent authentic responses in a second pass. Each response could contribute to multiple themes. Percentages represent the share of respondents addressing each theme.

Q7 — Information missing from the ALTO map

The 103 substantive responses to Q7 constituted a detailed inventory of mapping failures. The most commonly cited themes:

Theme	% of coded
Wetlands and conservation areas absent	27.2%
Road names disappear or missing on zoom	25.2%
Property and building features absent	23.3%
Waterways incomplete or absent	21.4%
Map became unusable when zoomed	19.4%
Grade crossing / road closure information absent	17.5%
Map format / usability problems	17.5%
Pin placement unreliable	13.6%
Frontenac Arch / UNESCO boundaries absent	11.7%

Representative responses

“Frontenac Arch Biosphere boundary; proposed over/underpass roads; roads slated to be closed; areas to be designated 'water access only'; the Rideau Canal UNESCO World Heritage Site boundary; wetlands and geological formations inadequately identified.”

— Survey respondent, Q7

“The map was just a blue smear across the landscape, but with zero context as ALTO has said they have not done any studies on the proposed routes so we have no idea of their plan and neither do they.”

— Survey respondent, Q7

Q15 — Most significant positive feature of the consultation

The distribution of Q15 responses was unusual: the majority identified no positive feature, and many used the question to express further criticism of the process.

Theme	% of coded
No positive feature identified	48.0%
Process galvanized community opposition	11.8%
Staff were polite	9.2%
Awareness of the project	7.2%
Illustrated ALTO's lack of preparedness	5.9%
Map / pin functionality in principle	5.3%
Sessions were offered at all	4.6%

Community networking	3.9%
Genuinely positive assessment of process	2.0%

Representative responses

“The Alto consultation process was so bad, so useless, so inept, that it has radicalized and ignited a serious opposition to the HSR.”

— Survey respondent, Q15

“That it brought the community, rural and urban, together on a common cause.”

— Survey respondent, Q15

Q16 — Most significant gap or failure in the consultation

This question produced the richest qualitative dataset in the survey.

Theme	% of coded
Absence of substantive project information	58.7%
Representatives unable to answer questions	53.1%
Process was a PR exercise / foregone conclusion	46.7%
Structural session format failures	20.4%
Failure to notify affected communities	17.6%
Geographic and local knowledge deficit	13.2%
Bill C-15 / Expropriation not addressed	10.8%
Ridership assumptions / business model not credible	8.4%

Representative responses

“Consulting implies a two-way conversation. Alto did not meaningfully participate.”

— Survey respondent, Q16

“Alto did not send any decision makers to the consultations. They sent young enthusiastic staff equipped with prepared marketing answers. They could not answer real questions. The executives were cowards.”

— Survey respondent, Q16

“Alto downplayed or ignored the effects of Bill C-15, the changes to the Federal Expropriation Act. Calling expropriation 'acquisition' doesn't fool us.”

— Survey respondent, Q16

Section 3 — Five Systemic Findings

The quantitative and qualitative results of this survey present a coherent and internally consistent picture across all seventeen questions and three open-ended themes. Five systemic failures are identifiable.

Finding 1 — Notification Failure

ALTO's direct notification reached 2.0% of respondents in the analytical sample. Awareness spread through citizen networks, community advocacy groups, neighbours, and social media — not through any official ALTO channel. A significant share of respondents became aware only in the final four weeks of the consultation. Multiple respondents reported that farmers, elderly residents, and those without social media access were never notified. The consultation's reach was self-selecting toward those with pre-existing community connections and digital access, systematically excluding those most likely to be affected but least networked.

Finding 2 — Information Withholding

87.8% of respondents rated the information provided as Inadequate or Very Inadequate. No business case, NPV analysis, environmental assessment, geotechnical studies, ridership methodology, or meaningful cost comparison was made available. Environmental impact assessment was identified as the most critical missing information category. The absence of project-defining technical information made meaningful participation structurally impossible: respondents could not evaluate corridor options, assess impacts on their properties, or engage substantively with the project's merits.

Finding 3 — Map Design and Usability Failure

72.8% of ALTO map users rated the map not very useful or not useful at all. Despite 99.4% of respondents attempting to use a map, the platform failed to display wetlands, conservation boundaries, local roads, property lines, waterways, agricultural land designations, heritage sites, or environmental features — the very information needed for the pin-placement feedback mechanism to function. Corridor shading disappeared on zoom, labels vanished, and geolocation was disabled. The map's design effectively rendered the primary feedback mechanism of the consultation non-functional for most users.

Finding 4 — Representative Unpreparedness and Structural Session Failures

Only 7.7% of those who submitted questions received a specific, direct answer. Frontline ALTO staff lacked subject matter knowledge and demonstrated no familiarity with local geography, ecology, or community infrastructure. Contradictory answers were given by different representatives at the same events. The information fair format precluded shared Q&A; no notes were taken at most sessions; executives were absent; and no follow-through on

commitments was observed. Both in-person and virtual sessions rated strongly negative (78.9% and 73.5% not useful), confirming that failure was structural rather than format-specific.

Finding 5 — Process Legitimacy Deficit

85.7% do not believe the consultation was designed to genuinely register community input. Of these, 45.4% of all respondents take the stronger position that the process was actively structured to suppress opposition. The phrase 'tick a box' appeared verbatim across multiple independent responses. The "Strongly Disagree" suppression finding — where 36.0% of ALTO survey completers (n=289) experienced a truncated five-point scale — provides specific technical evidence consistent with the broader legitimacy concerns documented qualitatively. The consultation design, information provision, notification strategy, and session format together constitute a process that did not meet the standard of meaningful public participation.

FOR FURTHER READING

The companion Data Integrity Appendix documents in full the detection and analytical handling of the coordinated submission attempt against this survey in its final days.

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