

ALTO HSR CITIZEN RESEARCH INITIATIVE

# From HFR to ALTO: A Procurement Accountability Record

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*How a structured federal procurement was redirected — the documentary record of what was committed, what Parliament was told, what was spent, and what remains undisclosed.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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This brief documents, in chronological order, the public record of how Canada's High Frequency Rail (HFR) procurement became the ALTO High-Speed Rail project. It draws exclusively on documents in the public record: government procurement instruments, parliamentary committee testimony, Access to Information releases, corporate plans filed with Treasury Board, and ministerial briefing notes. No document cited here is classified or commercially sensitive.

The brief does not argue against high-speed rail in principle. It documents a specific accountability question: a structured, legally binding procurement was conducted, three private consortia were shortlisted, up to \$60 million in public funds was committed for proposal development, Parliament was briefed on the project's parameters, and then — between the summer of 2024 and February 2025 — the project's fundamental specification changed. The decision-making record for that change has never been publicly disclosed.

The **four accountability questions** at the end of this brief follow directly from the documentary record. They are not rhetorical. They have not been answered.

## THE DOCUMENTARY TIMELINE

Each entry below is sourced from a publicly available document. Source codes refer to the reference list at the end of this brief.

2017–2021	<p><b>Phase 1: Review of VIA Rail's HFR proposal</b></p> <p>VIA Rail develops a High Frequency Rail proposal using predominantly dedicated tracks at speeds up to 160 km/h — not high speed. A Joint Project Office is established with the Canada Infrastructure Bank in 2019, with a \$71M budget to "de-risk" the project. Transport Action Canada's Terence Johnson testified to Parliament that VIA Rail's original proposal was decision-ready by summer 2018 and could have been in service by 2025. [Source: TRAN 18th Report]</p>
Oct 2020	<p><b>Ministerial Briefing filed: NPV –\$21.1 billion, no HSR cold-climate precedent</b></p> <p>A briefing prepared for Ministers McKenna and Garneau (Canada Infrastructure Bank ATI A-2024-004) finds the predecessor project has a Net Present Value of –\$21.1 billion, a benefit-cost ratio of approximately 0.4, and a 30-year subsidy requirement of \$37–42 billion. It also states explicitly: "QMOT was unable to identify an HSR system that operates at 300 km/h (186 mph) in –30 degrees Celsius conditions." Both findings remain on file at project announcement. Neither is disclosed publicly. [Source: CIB ATI A-2024-004]</p>
Feb 2023	<p><b>PSPC issues binding RFQ — Project Outcomes establish HFR baseline</b></p> <p>Public Services and Procurement Canada issues the official Request for Qualifications (RFQ No. T8128-210188/C). Binding Project Outcomes include: 17 million annual passengers by 2059; elimination of operating subsidies; adherence to an affordability range throughout the project lifecycle. The document uses "mostly dedicated tracks" throughout — not a fully fenced, fully grade-separated HSR corridor. Proposal development fees of up to \$20 million per proponent are committed, representing up to \$60 million for three shortlisted teams. The RFQ grants Canada intellectual property rights in all proposal deliverables. [Source: RFQ T8128-210188/C]</p>
Apr 2023	<p><b>RFQ closes — three consortia shortlisted</b></p> <p>Three consortia are selected: Cadence (CDPQ Infra, Atkins-Réalis/SNC-Lavalin, Systra Canada, Keolis Canada); Intercity Rail Developers (Intercity Development Partners, Meridiam, Kilmer Transportation, First Rail Holdings, Jacobs, Hatch, CIMA+, RATP Dev Canada, First Group, Renfe Operadora); QConnexiON Rail Partners (Fengate, John Laing, Bechtel, WSP Canada, Deutsche Bahn). [Sources: RFQ; TC Briefing Note Mar 2024; TRAN 18th Report]</p>
May 2023	<p><b>RFP Summary circulated to Indigenous communities</b></p> <p>VIA HFR circulates a summary of the RFP to Indigenous communities for consultation. The document explicitly states: "The HFR Project is subject to Impact Assessment requirements" and identifies Transport Canada, the Canadian Transportation Agency, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada as federal authorities whose regulatory approvals would be required. Section 35 duty to consult and UNDRIP principles are invoked as governing frameworks. [Source: VIA HFR RFP Summary, May 2023]</p>
Oct 2023	<p><b>RFP launched — two solutions required from each bidder</b></p> <p>The Request for Proposals is issued on October 13, 2023. Each of the three consortia is required to develop two solutions: one meeting HFR project outcomes at conventional rail speeds, and one more ambitious option including high-speed alignments or segments — explicitly for the purpose of allowing government to "assess the potential benefits and costs of integrating segments of high speed rail." The high-speed option is an assessment tool, not the project itself. [Sources: TC Briefing Note Mar 2024; TRAN 18th Report]</p>

<p>Nov 2023</p>	<p><b>VIA Rail CEO testifies: no HSR precedent for 70°C temperature range</b>                  Mario Péroquin, President and CEO of VIA Rail Canada, testifies before the TRAN committee that he is "not aware of any examples of high-speed trains that operate in regions where the temperature can vary by up to 70°C from winter to summer, including drastic changes within a season, or even a single day." This testimony is given fifteen months before the ALTO announcement. It is never publicly reconciled with the subsequent 300 km/h specification. [Source: TRAN 18th Report, Nov 2023 testimony]</p>
<p>Feb 2024</p>	<p><b>Parliamentary committee passes Recommendation 4: budget and cost analysis required</b>                  The House of Commons TRAN committee passes Recommendation 4 of what will become the 18th Report, formally requiring the Minister of Transport to provide within six months "a budget and a timetable for completing this project, including an analysis of the incremental cost between HFR and HSR." Recommendation 6 requires full unredacted release of the Joint Project Office report. Neither is fulfilled. [Source: TRAN 18th Report, September 2024]</p>
<p>Mar 2024</p>	<p><b>Transport Canada ministerial briefing: co-development expected late 2024 – early 2025</b>                  A Transport Canada briefing note prepared for the TRAN committee states: "Following contract signature, VIA HFR and the Private Developer Partner will commence the Co-Development Phase, expected in late 2024 to early 2025." This is the government's official projected timeline for beginning co-development with the winning HFR bidder. The document's scripted response on high-speed rail frames HSR as an assessment option within HFR, not as the project itself. [Source: TC Briefing Note, binder item 37, March 2024]</p>
<p>Jun 2024</p>	<p><b>RFP proposals submitted by three consortia</b>                  All three consortia submit their RFP proposals. Under the terms of the Submission Agreement, Canada holds intellectual property rights in all deliverables. These proposals contain detailed engineering, financial, and operational analyses developed at a combined cost of up to \$60 million in government-committed development fees. The proposals have never been publicly disclosed. [Source: RFQ T8128-210188/C; TRAN 18th Report]</p>
<p>Late Summer 2024</p>	<p><b>Preferred proponent selection was scheduled – what happened is unknown</b>                  According to both the RFQ procurement schedule and the March 2024 TC briefing note, the preferred proponent was to be selected in late summer/fall 2024 and co-development was to begin in late 2024. Whether a selection was made, what the proposals showed, and what triggered the subsequent redesign are undisclosed. This is the central gap in the procurement record. [Sources: RFQ; TC Briefing Note Mar 2024]</p>
<p>Sep 2024</p>	<p><b>TRAN 18th Report tabled – Recommendations 4 and 6 both unfulfilled</b>                  The committee's 18th Report is tabled. Neither the budget/incremental cost analysis (Rec. 4) nor the full JPO report (Rec. 6) has been provided. The government is required to respond to the committee within 120 days under Standing Order 109. [Source: TRAN 18th Report]</p>
<p>Feb 2025</p>	<p><b>ALTO announced – 300 km/h, \$60–90B, construction 2029, no budget</b>                  Prime Minister Trudeau announces ALTO at a press conference in Montréal. The project is described as 300 km/h, fully dedicated track, fenced along its entire length, \$60–90 billion, construction beginning 2029. No budget methodology is disclosed. No incremental HFR/HSR cost analysis is published. No explanation is given for why the HFR procurement — whose preferred proponent was to be selected six months earlier — was superseded. The three HFR consortia's proposals, worth up to \$60M and containing government IP, are not released.</p>

<p>May 2025</p>	<p><b>ALTO Corporate Plan filed with Treasury Board: no validated budget until Stage 4</b></p> <p>ALTO's Amended Corporate Plan 2024-25 to 2028-29 confirms that Class 4 cost estimates (-30% to +50% accuracy) will not be available until the end of Stage 2 of co-development; Class 2 estimates (-15% to +20%) not until Stage 4, which falls outside the five-year plan period entirely. The plan also acknowledges ALTO "faced some challenges in recruiting very specific technical skills (e.g., rail sector)." [Source: ALTO Amended Corporate Plan, May 2025]</p>
<p>Jan 2026</p>	<p><b>ALTO CEO at Empire Club: "Our budget is not known"</b></p> <p>Martin Imbleau states at the Empire Club of Canada, the day before public consultation opens: "Our budget is not known. We have a working estimate today because I cannot have a budget if I don't know the alignment, haven't done the proper engineering." He also states: "What Canada does too often — we make political promises. We throw numbers, dates, without doing the proper work." This is not a retraction of the \$60–90B figure; no correction has been issued. [Source: Empire Club of Canada transcript, January 22, 2026]</p>
<p>Jan–Apr 2026</p>	<p><b>Public consultation opens and closes — no budget, no environmental baseline, no geotechnical studies</b></p> <p>ALTO's three-month public consultation period runs January 23 to April 24, 2026. Communities are asked to comment on corridor routes for a project with no validated budget, no completed environmental field studies, no geotechnical characterisation of either corridor, and a procurement record that has never been publicly accounted for. ALTO's CEO has confirmed on the record that consultation and route refinement are concurrent — not sequential — with the corridor selection decision.</p>

**THE CENTRAL ACCOUNTABILITY GAP**

Between June 2024 — when three HFR consortia submitted their proposals — and February 2025 — when ALTO was announced — the project's fundamental specification changed. The government went from: **"mostly dedicated tracks, faster and more frequent"** to **"fully dedicated, fenced, fully grade-separated, 300 km/h."**

What the HFR proposals showed, why they were set aside, who made the decision to change the specification, what analysis was conducted, and what happened to the \$60 million in proposal fees and the government-owned intellectual property in those submissions — none of this has been disclosed. The decision-making record for the most consequential change in the project's history is not in the public domain.

**THE COST OF THE GAP**

The RFQ committed up to \$20 million per proponent in proposal development fees — totalling up to \$60 million for three consortia. Canada also acquired intellectual property rights in all deliverables. These proposals contain detailed engineering, financial, and operational analyses for a High Frequency Rail project across the Toronto–Québec City corridor. They are government property. They have not been released. The communities now being consulted on ALTO have no access to the only independent financial analyses ever conducted for infrastructure of this scale and on this corridor.

## FOUR ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

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The following questions arise directly from the documentary record. They have not been answered by the government, ALTO, or in parliamentary proceedings.

Q1

What happened between June 2024 and February 2025? Was a preferred HFR proponent selected, and if so, what did their proposal show? If a selection was made, why was the project specification then changed? If no selection was made, why not, and at whose direction?

Q2

What are the contents of the three HFR RFP proposals? Canada holds intellectual property rights in all deliverables submitted. These proposals contain independent financial modelling, engineering analyses, and ridership projections for this corridor — produced at a combined cost of up to \$60 million. Why have they not been released? Under what authority are they being withheld from communities participating in the ALTO consultation?

Q3

Why were Parliamentary Recommendations 4 and 6 not fulfilled? The TRAN committee required the Minister of Transport to provide a budget and incremental HFR/HSR cost analysis within six months (September 2024). The Minister was also required to release the full JPO report. Neither has been provided. The government is required under Standing Order 109 to respond to committee reports. What is the government's response?

Q4

What is the legal basis for proceeding to route corridor selection before the Impact Assessment Act process the RFQ identified as mandatory? The binding HFR RFQ stated explicitly that the project is subject to IAA requirements and that regulatory approvals from Transport Canada, the Canadian Transportation Agency, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada are required before construction. Bill C-15 proposes to make these protections subject to ministerial exemption. What assurance exists that the statutory framework in place when the procurement was launched will govern the project through to construction?

## WHAT ACCESS TO INFORMATION CAN UNLOCK

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The ALTO HSR Citizen Research Initiative has filed formal ATIP requests to Infrastructure Canada covering the procurement records described in this brief. Parallel requests to **Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)** — the Procurement Authority confirmed in the RFQ — are warranted and have been recommended. The records in scope include:

- Draft and final RFP proposals submitted by all three consortia (government IP under Submission Agreement)
- Evaluation scoring matrices and assessors' notes from the RFP proposal evaluation
- Internal correspondence and decision memoranda relating to any change in project scope, technology specification, or speed standard between June 2024 and February 2025
- Records of any communication between PSPC, Transport Canada, VIA HFR, and the Privy Council Office regarding the transition from HFR to ALTO
- The JPO final report in unredacted form, as recommended by the TRAN committee
- The Canada Infrastructure Bank's financial modelling for the ALTO specification (if any exists distinct from the 2021 HFR business case released under ATI)

## PRIMARY SOURCES

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**CIB ATI A-2024-004** — Canada Infrastructure Bank Access to Information release, November 2025. Ministerial Briefing on HFR, October 2020. Contains NPV, BCR, and cold-climate findings.

**RFQ T8128-210188/C** — Request for Qualifications for the High Frequency Rail Project. Issued by PSPC, February 17, 2023. Submission deadline April 24, 2023. 126 pages.

**VIA HFR RFP Summary** — Summary of the Request for Proposals of the High Frequency Rail, circulated to Indigenous communities for consultation. VIA HFR, May 2023.

**TRAN 18th Report** — Issues and Opportunities: High Frequency Rail in the Toronto to Quebec City Corridor. Report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, September 2024, 44th Parliament, 1st Session.

**TC Briefing Note Mar 2024** — Transport Canada Ministerial Briefing Note, Item 37: High Frequency Rail. TRAN Briefing on Infrastructure in Canada, March 21, 2024. Published at [tc.canada.ca/en/binder/37-high-frequency-rail](https://tc.canada.ca/en/binder/37-high-frequency-rail).

**ALTO Corporate Plan** — ALTO Amended Corporate Plan 2024-25 to 2028-29. Filed with Treasury Board, May 2025.

**Empire Club Transcript** — Remarks of Martin Imbleau, CEO of ALTO, Empire Club of Canada, January 22, 2026.

**ALTO Consultation** — ALTO public consultation materials and ALTO Amended Corporate Plan statements on concurrent consultation and corridor refinement, January–April 2026.

*This brief is produced by the ALTO HSR Citizen Research Initiative for the public record and the ALTO public consultation process (deadline April 24, 2026). [altohsrcitizenresearch.ca](https://altohsrcitizenresearch.ca) · Independent and non-partisan.*