

ALTO is starting where rail already works. *Read this first.*

ALTO's first construction phase will begin in 2029–30 between Ottawa and Montréal. The CEO calls it the easiest segment in the corridor to build. The numbers show it's also where the case for HSR is weakest.

The Ottawa–Montréal segment is the project's test case — what ALTO has chosen to prove HSR works in Canada. But the existing 185-km service is the corridor's most reliable, the freight-conflict problem ALTO exists to solve doesn't exist on this track, and ALTO has publicly refused to put a cost on what it would replace. Four pieces of evidence, drawn from ALTO's own statements and VIA Rail's operating record.

1 ALTO picked Ottawa–Montréal because it's the easiest. They said so.

ALTO CEO Martin Imbleau describes the Ottawa–Montréal segment as "shorter and technically simpler." Transport Minister Steven MacKinnon called it "relatively short, flat and straight." ALTO's own consultation materials describe it as a "learning segment" — a test case to refine before scaling to the rest of the corridor.

This is the strongest case for HSR that ALTO can publicly make. The Toronto and Québec segments are technically harder, politically harder, and considerably more expensive. ALTO is leading with Ottawa–Montréal because it's the demonstration most likely to succeed.

ALTO is staking the credibility of the entire \$60-90 billion project on its weakest demonstration. If the case fails here, it fails everywhere.

3 The "freight conflict" problem ALTO exists to solve barely exists here.

ALTO's entire rationale — what justifies building a dedicated passenger-only \$60–90 billion HSR line — is that VIA passenger trains share CN-owned freight track and get pushed aside whenever freight passes. Across VIA's national network, **97% of the track it operates on is owned by other companies**, mostly CN.

Ottawa–Montréal is one of the very few exceptions. VIA owns the 110-km Alexandria Subdivision; passenger trains have priority on it because VIA controls the dispatch, and the 90% on-time performance reflects exactly that. The freight conflict on this route is confined to the ~65-km CN-owned approach into Montréal from Coteau Junction — and fixing that doesn't require demolishing what already works.

ALTO is starting by replacing a VIA-owned line that already runs at 90% on-time, rather than addressing the smaller CN-owned section where the reliability problem actually lives.

2 The existing service on this segment is the corridor's most reliable.

VIA Rail Ottawa–Montréal currently runs 34+ scheduled departures a week over 185 km, with an average travel time of 2 hours 4 minutes. Unlike most of the Québec City–Windsor corridor, **VIA Rail owns the bulk of this line** — the 110-km Alexandria Subdivision from Ottawa east to Coteau Junction, Québec.

VIA confirmed to CBC News that on-time performance on this VIA-owned segment runs at approximately **90%** — significantly better than any other corridor route. The poor reliability ALTO repeatedly cites to justify HSR investment is a problem of the freight-shared segments. It is not a problem here.

Ninety percent on-time performance is what most of VIA's corridor service aspires to. It is already delivered on the segment ALTO would replace first.

4 ALTO refuses to put a cost on it. But it has named the price in farmland.

Asked directly at the December 2025 announcement, CEO Martin Imbleau refused to estimate the Ottawa–Montréal segment cost: "difficult to have an estimate"; "kind of absurd to have an independent budget" for a portion. Eight months later, no number has appeared.

What ALTO **has** confirmed: the line will cross approximately **1,700 properties**, including around **500 farms**, in a 60-metre right-of-way through Eastern Ontario and western Québec farmland. Construction will take 8–10 years. No passenger service until the late 2030s. Time saved versus current VIA: approximately 25–30 minutes.

Twenty-five minutes saved on a route that already arrives on time 90% of the time. For an undisclosed cost. Crossing 500 farms.

The alternative that delivers nearly the same time savings, with almost none of the disruption.

High Performance Rail on the existing Ottawa–Montréal line. Upgrade the VIA-owned track to 200 km/h dedicated passenger speeds. Travel time approximately 1h 40min — within minutes of ALTO's projected 1h 35min, and roughly 25 minutes faster than today. Operational in 3–5 years rather than 12+. Real downtown stations preserved at Ottawa's rail station and Montréal's Gare Centrale. No greenfield expropriation. Compatible with VIA's already-purchased Siemens Venture fleet. A fraction of ALTO's undisclosed cost. The federal government has never produced a public comparison of this option against ALTO's HSR plan on this segment.

What you can do.

Write to Minister of Transport Steven MacKinnon, and to your MP — Ottawa and Eastern Ontario MPs in particular. Ask three specific questions — the kind that must be answered or visibly declined:

EMAIL MINISTER MACKINNON:

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1. Publish a cost estimate for the Ottawa–Montréal segment before construction begins in 2029–30. ALTO's refusal to do so is not justifiable on a project of this scale.
2. Publish a public comparative analysis of HSR versus HPR on the existing Ottawa–Montréal line, including time, cost, and disruption side-by-side.
3. Refer ALTO to the Parliamentary Budget Officer for independent review of fiscal, ridership, and station-location assumptions before construction.