

Three hours, downtown to downtown? *Read this first.*

It sounds wonderful — a fast train at French or Japanese speeds, the airport hassle gone. The plan being sold isn't that plan, and four pieces of evidence say so plainly.

ALTO, the federal high-speed rail project for the Toronto–Québec City corridor, has obvious urban appeal: civilised, fast, no airport, no security line. The case against it isn't ideological and isn't rural nostalgia. It's structural — built from ALTO's own statements, the European Court of Auditors, and Ontario's own 2016 high-speed rail business case.

1 The “three hours” is the train, not your trip.

ALTO's published times are train-in-motion only. They exclude getting to the station, through it, and from the terminus to your actual destination. The marketed times assume true downtown stations at every end. None is contractually committed.

In April 2026, ALTO CEO Martin Imbleau publicly conceded Toronto's first station will be a suburb — opened first, with the downtown leg completed later. Even the eventual “downtown” candidate, **East Harbour**, sits 3 km east of Union. Montréal's downtown station depends on a 10+ km tunnel under Mount Royal at \$1B+/km (McGill); the P3 partner has every incentive to shorten it. Québec City favours suburban **Sainte-Foy**.

With realistic stations — including a suburban Toronto first stop — and the unavoidable Montréal reversal, door-to-door times grow 60–90 minutes. Toronto–Montréal becomes essentially identical to flying. Toronto–Québec City becomes 45 minutes *slower* than flying.

3 ALTO won't tell you what a ticket will cost. Here's why.

Four years into procurement, ALTO has not published a single projected fare. Its FAQ says prices “cannot be set” until the route is finalised. Meanwhile, ALTO's CEO has publicly committed the service will operate **without any government subsidy**.

Those two positions are mathematically incompatible with low fares. A \$60–90+ billion P3 project — private profit, debt service, and operating costs all recovered from the farebox — must price like one. International benchmarks (CAD): Acela \$200–400+, Eurostar London–Paris \$275+. CRI analysis indicates ALTO fares are likely to run higher still — most international HSR is state-subsidised, while ALTO has committed not to be.

ALTO's own published FAQ concedes the answer: “VIA Rail may remain the more economical option for travellers with time but tighter budgets.” The civilised, affordable train urban Canadians imagine is a French- or Japanese-style public service. ALTO is not.

2 We're not France or Japan. The geography isn't comparable.

The TGV connects Paris and Lyon — two of Europe's largest cities — in 465 km. The Tokaido Shinkansen connects four metropolitan areas of 5+ million each in 515 km. These corridors work because they are short, dense, and serve multiple major hubs.

The ALTO corridor is 1,000+ km between only three meaningful destinations. Ontario's own 2016 HSR business case — for the more densely populated Toronto–Windsor corridor — found explicitly that **“speeds of up to 300 km/h do not deliver a significant increase in benefits”** over 250 km/h.

ALTO's own internal Benefit-Cost Ratio is approximately 0.4. The viability threshold is 1.0. The federal government has not disputed the figure.

4 The farmland we lose doesn't come back. Your grocery bill does.

The proposed greenfield corridor crosses some of Canada's most productive agricultural land — Class 1 and 2 soils in Eastern Ontario and the St. Lawrence Lowlands that took millennia to form. Canada has only about 5% of its land base in this top category.

Once expropriated and graded for a 300 km/h right-of-way — fenced, unscalable, no level crossings, severed fields, viaducts — it isn't farmland again. The loss is permanent and irreversible.

This isn't a sentimental rural concern. The food on grocery shelves and farmers' market stalls along this corridor comes from this land. Less of it nearby means higher prices and a longer, more fragile import chain — at the exact moment trade with the United States has become unreliable.

There's a better option — and the federal government has never evaluated it.

High Performance Rail along existing corridors. New dedicated passenger track at 200 km/h, alongside the 401 highway or the existing CN Kingston Subdivision. Under \$10 billion. Operational in 5–7 years. Uses VIA's already-purchased Siemens Venture fleet. Serves all eleven existing corridor communities rather than bypassing them. Premier Ford prefers the 401 alignment; the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (103 communities) supports it. Twenty-eight studies into ALTO's 300 km/h vision. None into this.

What you can do.

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

EMAIL MINISTER MACKINNON:
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1. Release the comparative analysis between 200, 250, and 300 km/h options that preceded the rebrand from VIA HFR to ALTO.
2. Publish a public evaluation of dedicated passenger track along the 401 and the Kingston Subdivision *before* the 2029–30 Final Investment Decision.
3. Refer ALTO to the Parliamentary Budget Officer for independent review of fiscal, ridership, and station-location assumptions before construction.