

Benefits for Stations, Costs for the Corridor

ALTO's own tourism study confirms the station/no-station divide — and counts none of the costs.

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NEW RELEASE

In June 2026, ALTO released “**Tourism in the Alto Corridor: Current Conditions and Potential Impacts**,” prepared for ALTO by the consultancy CPCS in association with HDR. It is the first tourism analysis the project has placed on the public record. It carries the standard commissioned-work disclaimer — the opinions “are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Alto” — and is dated after the April 24 consultation deadline had already closed.

CRITICAL FINDING

ALTO's own consultant has now confirmed, in writing, the distinction this initiative has argued from the start: **tourism benefits accrue to stations, not to the tracks between them.** The report studies only the six Census Metropolitan Areas containing the seven proposed stations — Toronto, Peterborough, Ottawa-Gatineau, Montreal, Trois-Rivières, and Québec City. The rural landscapes the corridor would traverse without stopping — Frontenac, Leeds & Grenville, the RTO 9 region — are outside the study's frame entirely.

The report is a benefits-only document. It contains **no construction-phase impacts, no tourism losses, and no accounting for visitors who shift away from non-station regions toward station hubs** — even though the report itself concedes that smaller places that fail to differentiate “will limit gains — or even risk losing activity to larger centres.” It answers one question: how much might the seven stops gain? It never asks what the corridor costs the regions it passes through.

The much-quoted “\$1 billion / 11,500 jobs” is the **medium** scenario, not a central case. The low scenario is +\$177 million and roughly 2,000 jobs. Even the medium figure is contingent on dedicated tourism policy, last-mile connections, and destination readiness ALTO neither controls nor funds. The report concedes the foundational caveat in its own words: “HSR alone is rarely sufficient to generate sustained tourism development.”

1. What the study is

“Tourism in the Alto Corridor” combines a baseline tourism profile of the six station CMAs, a review of international HSR-and-tourism case studies, and three illustrative scenarios that vary the level of tourism-policy coordination from low to high. Its baseline finding is that tourism in those CMAs already generates over **\$31 billion in visitor spending**, about **\$33.7 billion in GDP**, and more than **377,000 jobs**, with Toronto and Montreal taking the largest shares.

The forward-looking finding is that additional tourism spending under the project could add to GDP and jobs. The three scenarios produce very different numbers, and the report is explicit that they are “illustrative and should not be interpreted as forecasts.”

<p>+\$177M added GDP / ~2,000 jobs — LOW coordination</p>	<p>+\$1.0B added GDP / 11,500 jobs — MEDIUM (the headline)</p>	<p>+\$3.9B added GDP / 43,000 jobs — HIGH coordination</p>
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The single most important sentence in the document is on page 7: the destinations “most likely to be affected by a high-speed rail service are the urban areas where stations are located.” That premise defines the study’s entire scope. Everything that follows is built on the six station CMAs. The communities between them are neither modelled nor mentioned in the results.

2. What ALTO’s consultant concedes

This initiative has argued throughout the consultation that high-speed rail creates a station/no-station divide. ALTO’s commissioned study does not contradict that argument; in several places it states it.

WHAT THE REPORT SAYS	WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE CORRIDOR REGIONS
The destinations “most likely to be affected” are the urban areas where stations are located (p.7) — and the study is built only on the six station CMAs.	The regions the southern corridor would cross without a station are outside the analytical frame. The study cannot show a benefit for them because it never examines them.
Smaller municipalities that fail to differentiate and coordinate “will limit gains — or even risk losing activity to larger centres” (p.18).	The bypass / agglomeration effect, conceded. For a region with tracks and no station, this is the predictable default, not a managed exception.
“HSR alone is rarely sufficient to generate sustained tourism development; realized impacts depend on coordinated local strategies” (p.18).	Even the modelled gains require marketing, events, accommodation, and last-mile connections ALTO neither funds nor controls. Absent that, the report’s own logic points to the low scenario or below.
International tourist numbers see “limited to no change” (p.22 note); nearly all gains are in-corridor domestic visitors making shorter trips.	The projected uplift is largely Ontario and Quebec residents travelling more within their own provinces — possibly a reshuffling of existing spending, not net-new national tourism. The report never tests for displacement.

3. The cost side — everything the study does not count

A tourism impact assessment that names a benefit but no cost is a half-ledger. The report’s title promises “potential impacts”; what it delivers is potential gains at the seven stops. The costs documented in this initiative’s earlier research, and in submissions from affected regions, appear nowhere in it.

COST THE CORRIDOR IMPOSES	HOW THE STUDY TREATS IT
<p>Construction-phase disruption. 8–10 years of blasting, dust, night lighting, truck traffic, road closures, and trail severance through tourism-dependent rural areas.</p>	<p>NOT COUNTED The scenarios model an operating railway “if Alto were in service today.” The decade of construction preceding any benefit is not in the analysis.</p>
<p>Trail and active-tourism loss. The Cataraqui Trail (104 km of the Trans-Canada Trail) and the OFSC snowmobile network of Districts 1, 2 and 6 — an estimated \$220–270M direct and \$450–540M total annual activity.</p>	<p>NOT COUNTED The study’s tourism universe is the six metropolitan CMAs. Rural rail-trail and winter-tourism economies are out of scope.</p>
<p>The at-risk regional economy. RTO 9 recorded \$1.8B in tourism spending in Jan–Sep 2024; the Rideau Heritage Route sustains ~\$695M in GDP and 8,744 jobs.</p>	<p>NOT COUNTED Neither figure appears, and the regions that generate them are not among the six CMAs, so the modelled gains are not netted against this exposure.</p>
<p>VIA Rail displacement — regional and national. MP Scott Reid has confirmed in writing that either corridor option is likely to reduce VIA ridership and trigger cuts through Kingston, Brockville, and other southeastern Ontario towns. The risk is also national: then–NDP transport critic Taylor Bachrach (Skeena–Bulkley Valley) warned that VIA earns more than 80% of its revenue and carries more than 90% of its passengers on the Quebec City–Windsor corridor, and that handing that corridor to a private operator would leave VIA with “a fraction of the revenue” it uses to cross-subsidize long-distance rural routes across the Prairies, the West, and the Maritimes.</p>	<p>NOT COUNTED The report does not consider lost rail access to non-station communities, even as it counts new rail access as a benefit to station communities. Nor does it weigh the wider risk to the national VIA network that the corridor’s revenue currently helps sustain.</p>
<p>Visitors drawn away from non-station regions — the bypass effect the report concedes on p.18.</p>	<p>ACKNOWLEDGED, NOT MEASURED The report names the risk and then models only the upside at the stations that gain. The corresponding loss is excluded from the numbers.</p>

4. How robust are the numbers?

Even on its own terms, the headline is softer than it will sound in a press release.

- **The headline is the middle scenario, not a central estimate.** “\$1B / 11,500 jobs” is medium coordination, requiring dedicated tourism policy in every city and improved last-mile connections — conditions to be met, not outcomes of the railway.
- **The gains are scenario assumptions, not a Canadian model.** The arrival, stay, and spending percentages in Appendix B are judgmental selections from the international literature applied to Canadian baseline data; outputs are functions of the chosen inputs.
- **No reference-class or outturn discipline.** The uplift is bracketed by three policy scenarios chosen to span a positive range, with no comparison to what comparable HSR projects actually delivered.

- **Shorter stays can reduce spending even as arrivals rise.** The report concedes that average length of stay falls in some cities even in the medium scenario, and that accommodation spending can drop even when arrivals rise.
- **The report’s own “structural differences” section (p.19) undercuts transfer.** Dispersed attractions, lower base tourism, car-dominant travel (85–98% drive today; train ~6% to Toronto, ~2% elsewhere), and an immature rail network — “early impacts may take longer to be realized.”

5. The marketing contradiction

ALTO has been running a Facebook campaign inviting travellers to “embark on a culinary adventure from Toronto to Quebec City,” with the tagline that Canadian food tourism is getting “easier — and faster.” The implication is broad, corridor-wide benefit. ALTO’s own commissioned study says something narrower: benefits concentrate at stations, and non-station areas may lose activity. The food-tourism landscapes of Eastern Ontario sit in a corridor the train would pass through without stopping. The campaign and page 18 of the report cannot both be the whole story.

6. Summary ledger

STATUS	AGAINST AN HONEST TOURISM ASSESSMENT OF THE CORRIDOR
CONFIRMED	Benefits accrue to stations, not tracks. The study is built on the six station CMAs and states station cities are most likely to be affected (p.7).
CONFIRMED	Non-station places can lose activity. The bypass / agglomeration risk is conceded (p.18).
CONFIRMED	HSR alone is not sufficient. Benefits depend on coordination ALTO does not fund (p.18).
SOFT	The headline is the medium scenario, ~6× the low case; the numbers are assumptions, explicitly “not forecasts.”
SOFT	Gains are largely in-corridor domestic, international numbers little changed — an unanswered displacement question.
OMITTED	Construction-phase disruption (8–10 years): not in the analysis.
OMITTED	Trail and winter-tourism loss (Catarauqui Trail; OFSC Districts 1/2/6, \$450–540M total): not in scope.
OMITTED	At-risk regional economy (RTO 9 \$1.8B; Rideau Heritage Route \$695M GDP / 8,744 jobs): not netted.
OMITTED	VIA Rail displacement: loss of existing rail access to non-station communities not considered — nor the national risk to VIA, which earns 80%+ of revenue on this corridor.
OMITTED	Bypass losses: conceded in prose (p.18) but excluded from the numbers.

ALTO has now produced its own tourism study, and it confirms three things this initiative has argued throughout. Tourism benefits accrue to stations, not to tracks. The rural corridor regions are not in the study. And the report contains no cost side at all. ALTO's consultant has, in effect, validated the station/no-station distinction while declining to measure the half of the ledger that falls on Eastern Ontario. **A benefits-only study of the seven stops is not a tourism impact assessment of the corridor.**

Sources

1. CPCS, in association with HDR, for ALTO. *Tourism in the Alto Corridor: Current Conditions and Potential Impacts*. June 2026. (Scenario results pp.21–24; policy-coordination conclusions p.18; study scope p.7; structural differences p.19; baseline p.5.)
2. ALTO HSR Citizen Research Initiative. *The Tourism Economy at Risk*. citizenresearch.ca/tourism-economy
3. ALTO HSR Citizen Research Initiative. *Snowmobile Trails and High-Speed Rail*. citizenresearch.ca/snowmobile-trails
4. Submission to RTO 9 — ALTO High-Speed Rail Southern Corridor: Tourism & Economic Impacts for Southeastern Ontario. February 2026.
5. OFSC 2022–2023 Economic Impact Study (Harry Cummings & Associates, TREIM); district apportionment for Districts 1, 2 and 6.
6. MP Scott Reid, correspondence to constituents (2026), re: VIA Rail displacement risk.
7. CBC News, “NDP warns privatizing high-speed rail from Toronto to Quebec could kill passenger trains in rest of Canada,” February 19, 2025 — carries MP Taylor Bachrach’s warning and VIA’s corridor revenue/passenger shares.
8. ALTO, “Embark on a culinary adventure from Toronto to Quebec City” — Facebook advertisement, February 2026 (alto-hsr.ca).