

Not Off the Hook

In Alto’s own words: why a Kingston station makes the southern corridor more uncertain for the communities around it, not less.

THE SHORT VERSION

The June 22 announcement can feel like a finish line for the communities between Ottawa, Kingston and Peterborough. It is closer to a starting gun. Alto’s CEO has said the company is now “concentrating on the southern corridor,” that the corridor there is still wide, and that the alignment will be drawn “in the next few months.” A station in Kingston does not spare the townships the line must cross to reach it, instead, it commits the line to crossing them.

Three reasons people think the fight is over and why each is wrong

After a feel-good announcement, it is natural to assume the danger has passed. Here are the three readings going around the corridor, and why each one misreads what was actually said.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE	WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE
<i>“The route moved to Kingston, so my area is safe.”</i>	A station is a destination, not a route. The tracks still have to travel the whole Ottawa–Kingston–Peterborough band to get there. A Kingston stop does not lift the line off the surrounding townships; it commits the line to passing through them.
<i>“A decision was made.”</i>	It was not. The Minister directed Alto to study a southern option, hedged “subject to technical feasibility and project requirements.” The alignment for this segment is not chosen until the 2027 consultation, with the impact assessment to follow.
<i>“If I’m not right on the 401, I’m fine.”</i>	Alto’s CEO said the line will not follow the 401 the whole way, and that the Ottawa-to-near-Kingston stretch is “probably too curvy.” That means the inland, off-highway countryside is exactly where the route is still open.

What the CEO actually said

In an interview the day of the announcement, Alto’s president and CEO described a search area that is widening, not closing. He said the northern route along the Highway 7 corridor has not been scrapped, it is “not off the table”. However, the likelihood of going back north is “less and less obvious,” because the company is now “concentrating on the southern corridor.”

He described the corridor between Ottawa, Kingston and Peterborough as still “fairly wide,” and said the job over the next few months is to determine how to get from Ottawa to Kingston with the “alignment of least impact” by following existing infrastructure where possible and trying to limit impact on the agricultural sector. He added that the line likely would not follow Highway 401 entirely, and that the Ottawa-to-near-Kingston stretch is too curvy to use the highway as a corridor there.

Read together, those statements describe the southern band as the primary search area, still wide, and actively being drawn right now. That is the opposite of a settled outcome according to Alto's CEO.

A wider search area, not a narrower one

“Wide corridor” is Alto’s own phrase, and a wide corridor means nothing inside it is fixed. The band still runs from Ottawa to Peterborough by way of Kingston, and the communities inside it — among them Stone Mills, Greater Napanee, Tyendinaga, Rideau Lakes, Tay Valley and South Frontenac — are not on the edge of this decision. They are inside the active study area. Adding Kingston as a destination does not shrink that band; it gives the line a reason to run through the middle of it.

“Least impact” is a promise, not a plan

The reassuring language — “least impact,” “follow existing infrastructure,” “limit impact on agriculture” — is worth reading carefully. None of it is defined, none of it is published, and none of it is a commitment any community can hold Alto to yet. “Least impact” still means an impact, on someone, somewhere; and the decision to avoid the 401 where it is too curvy means the alternative runs through open farmland and rural settlement. A goal stated in an interview is not a protection written into a route.

It is also the moment to keep the alternative on the table. Many residents told the consultation they would rather see existing rail service improved first (we call it High Performance Rail) before a new line is carved through the countryside. That option does not disappear because a station was named; it is exactly the question a wide-open corridor should still be asking.

The clock, and why now is the moment

The decision that affects you has not happened. Here is when it does.

- **This fall (2026):** Alto narrows the Central segment (Ottawa–Montréal) corridor and runs another round of public consultation.
- **2027:** Consultation on the western segment (Toronto–Ottawa) — which contains the Peterborough–Ottawa southern option and the Kingston question — the segment that decides the route through these communities.
- **~January 2027:** The federal impact assessment is expected to begin and run about two years, with its own input opportunities.

The alignment is on the drawing board over the next few months. The relief that follows a feel-good announcement is exactly what empties the room while the line is being drawn. The communities that stay organized and on the record are the ones whose concerns will define what “least impact” ends up meaning.

*A station for Kingston is not a reprieve for the corridor. The line still has to get there. Alto has said it has **not decided how**.*

What keeps your community on the map

- **Stay organized across township lines.** The corridor crosses many municipalities; the case is strongest when those communities speak together rather than each assuming the line will land on someone else.
- **Document your property now.** Photographs, surveys, drainage, wells and septic, farm operations and field connectivity. A clear record is your strongest tool the moment a route is proposed nearby.
- **Put your council and your MP on record.** Municipal resolutions and parliamentary questions can demand the alignment criteria and the evidence. Keep your community's position documented before the route is drawn.
- **Ask to see the rules.** "Least impact" should come with published criteria and weightings. Ask for them. A standard you cannot read is a standard no one can be held to.
- **Mark the dates.** Fall 2026 (Central), 2027 (your segment), and the impact assessment. Those are the rooms where the route is decided: be in them.

Sources

1. Elliot Ferguson, "Alto CEO says there are options to add Kingston to rail project," Kingston Whig-Standard, June 22, 2026.
2. Transport Canada, news release on the What We Heard report and Kingston as a potential stop, June 22, 2026. [canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca)
3. Alto, Public Consultation — What We Heard Report, Corridor Study Area (134 pp), June 2026. [altotrain.ca](https://www.altotrain.ca)

Quoted phrases are the words of Alto's president and CEO as reported in the Kingston Whig-Standard interview of June 22, 2026. The Alto HSR Citizen Research Initiative is an independent, non-partisan research project examining the proposed corridor through Eastern Ontario.