

Sign First, See Later

A confidentiality precondition runs through ALTO's field studies and corridor maps, for municipalities and for Indigenous rightsholders alike. A question of public trust, not of whether the trains are a good idea.

Two of ALTO's own June 2026 reports, read together, reveal a pattern. To let ALTO's crews onto its land for field studies, the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry would first have had to sign a **non-disclosure agreement**; they declined. And to see the early corridor maps for their own territories, Indigenous communities were asked to sign a collaboration or confidentiality agreement first.

In both cases the information came with the same condition attached: **silence**.

"The most basic question — where might the line go? — was answered only after a confidentiality agreement was signed."

— the pattern across ALTO's own June 2026 reports

What the documents show

The pattern is set out not in commentary but in ALTO's own records and a municipal council package. The same condition appearing in two separate processes, applied to two different kinds of party.

The municipal case is set out in the United Counties of SDG's June 15, 2026 council package. ALTO sought a Permission to Enter agreement for environmental field study and geotechnical work (boreholes, test pits, and tree clearing) on county-owned parcels, with the Counties required to sign a non-disclosure agreement as a condition of access. Council declined the request.

The rightsholder case is set out in ALTO's Indigenous Consultation What We Heard Report. Initial corridor maps, prepared in November 2025, were shared only with communities that had signed a collaboration agreement or a non-disclosure agreement; for the others, ALTO worked to secure non-disclosure agreements to share maps as early as possible (p. 14). A community could not see the corridor maps for its own territory until it accepted a confidentiality undertaking.

What was actually requested

ALTO sought a "Permission to Enter" (PTE) agreement covering two kinds of work. The first is environmental field study (wetland and habitat assessment, wildlife and bird surveys, and the collection of noise, vibration, hydrology, soil and archaeological data) described as largely non-invasive. The second is

geotechnical investigation: boreholes, test pits and other ground disturbance to characterise what lies beneath the surface. The County's own report notes that this second category **would require clearing trees** to bring in heavy equipment, with the land to be "restored" afterward.

The agreement also runs in favour of the private developer consortium, **Cadence**, not only the Crown corporation, so a landowner's signature binds them to both. And it requires the landowner to keep the arrangement confidential.

The request and its supporting materials are on the public record in the United Counties' June 15, 2026 council package: the [CAO Key Information Report](#), the [ALTO presentation](#) of May 5, 2026, and the [Map of Impacted SDG Properties](#).

"It tells you nothing about the route"

ALTO's presentation states, more than once, that a Permission to Enter does not indicate the final alignment and is not proof that a property sits on the route. Yet the same council package includes a map that identifies specific "Subject Lands," and the geotechnical work is targeted at named parcels. You do not drill boreholes everywhere; you drill where you expect to build.

On the public record. In March 2026 the Mayor of North Glengarry said the alignment had shifted from the existing rail line through town to the township's "far northeast corner", the area, next to Highway 417, where the identified study parcels sit. The claim that the studies reveal nothing about the route, and the targeted footprint of the work, do not sit easily together.

"A municipality holds and shares information on behalf of its residents. A non-disclosure agreement is the one condition it cannot quietly accept."

— the transparency question the request puts to a public body

A pattern, not an exception

A municipality holds and shares information on behalf of its residents; an Indigenous community is being consulted toward its free, prior and informed consent. In both settings, the value of the process depends on people being able to know and discuss what is proposed for their land. A precondition of silence cuts against that.

What makes this a pattern rather than a one-off is that the same condition appears in **two separate processes, applied to two different kinds of party, documented in the same set of reports**. It is part of how the project is being run.

Why confidentiality changes the calculus. A public body that signs a non-disclosure agreement narrows what it can tell residents about studies on public land, and narrows what is reachable under freedom-of-information law. A rightsholder asked to sign before seeing a map is asked to accept a

constraint before it has the information needed to weigh the project. Informed consent and an informed public both depend on having the information first.

The tension with consent and transparency

ALTO states that it consults Indigenous communities with the aim of securing their free, prior and informed consent. Consent is harder to call fully informed when the information is released only after a confidentiality agreement, and harder to call fully free when seeing the map requires signing first. None of this is to say that any community objected to the agreements, the report does not say so, and this brief does not speak for any community. The observation is narrower, and is about ALTO's process: the condition it attaches to its own information.

For municipalities, the duty runs the other way, toward openness. Ontario's freedom-of-information regime exists precisely so residents can learn what public bodies know. An access agreement that forecloses disclosure sits in tension with that duty, which is part of why the United Counties declined.

What the municipalities decided

The refusals were not isolated. The United Counties voted down the access request (By-Law No. 5538); councillors pointed to the impact on agriculture and were wary that granting access would itself be read as support for the project. North Glengarry, the host township where the parcels sit, had already endorsed the regional resolution opposing the project in its current form, and its mayor and council have continued to speak against it.

On May 27, 2026 the neighbouring United Counties of Prescott and Russell unanimously refused to sign a non-disclosure agreement and declined access for surveys, with the warden framing it as a stand for transparency and local autonomy ([Council minutes](#)). And the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus opposes the project in its current form. This is the resolution North Glengarry endorsed in April 2026.

What happens next

The field studies are active and, by ALTO's own account, will continue through 2026 and beyond. The southern route now under study through Kingston and the Frontenac Arch will not reach public consultation until 2027. Access to the ground, and the agreements that come with it, can arrive well before the public conversation does.

The next test is a willing host. Kingston has asked for a station and wants its staff to work directly with ALTO. A municipality that wants the outcome may accept terms a reluctant one refused. Whether the confidentiality precondition travels south, and whether it has already been signed anywhere, can be tested directly: through freedom-of-information requests to the municipalities along the route.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The question is not whether ALTO may protect commercially sensitive information, firms do that routinely. It is whether the public's information about a public project, on public land and on the territories of rightsholders, should be available only to those who first agree not to share it.

A reasonable standard would be simple: the corridor maps, field-study scopes, and access terms that affect a community should be available to that community without a confidentiality precondition. Better passenger rail and an open process are not in conflict.

Sources. ALTO, Indigenous Consultation What We Heard Report (June 2026), incl. p. 14 — altotrain.ca; ALTO, Public Consultation What We Heard Report (June 2026). United Counties of SDG council package, June 15, 2026 — [Key Information Report](#), [ALTO presentation \(May 5, 2026\)](#), and [Map of Impacted SDG Properties](#); and By-Law No. 5538; the access vote as reported by the Morrisburg Leader (June 18, 2026). North Glengarry's April 13, 2026 endorsement of the EOWC resolution and its mayor's continued opposition, per The Review (April 16, 2026) and Cornwall Seaway News. United Counties of Prescott and Russell, Regular Council Meeting, May 27, 2026 — [meeting agendas and minutes](#). Transport Canada announcement, Kingston (June 22, 2026). Page references are to ALTO's published reports; ALTO describes the non-disclosure agreements as a means of sharing information early.