

# What ALTO Told Parliament

*For the first time, ALTO has had to list its contractors by name. The picture is of a head office — not a railway.*

ALTO HSR Citizen Research Initiative · Source: Written Question Q-1087, House of Commons (Sessional Paper 8555-451-1087, tabled June 5, 2026)

## IN PLAIN TERMS

A Member of Parliament asked the federal government, in writing, five basic questions about ALTO: how much public money it has received, what its budget is, how it is organized, how many people it employs, and every contract it has signed worth more than \$10,000. The government's written answer was tabled in the House of Commons on **June 5, 2026**.

The answer is the most detailed look yet at where ALTO's money has gone — and the first time its contracts have been disclosed by vendor. What it shows: after more than three years and roughly a quarter-billion dollars, the money has gone into **building an organization** — staff, software, advisers, and communications — and **almost none of it into building a railway**.

## HOW THIS CAME TO LIGHT

### What a written question is — and what this one asked

In Canada's Parliament, any MP can put a question to the government in writing. The government is then required to research it and table a formal written answer, which becomes part of the public record. It is one of the main tools MPs have for getting specific facts out of departments and Crown corporations that do not otherwise publish them.

This question — numbered **Q-1087** — was asked on April 20, 2026 by **Michael Barrett**, the MP for Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands–Rideau Lakes, and answered on June 5, 2026 on behalf of the Minister of Transport. It asked ALTO five things:

- a Total funding:** how much money ALTO has received from the government since it was created.
- b Operating budget:** ALTO's yearly budget, broken down by type of spending.
- c Structure:** how the corporation is organized.
- d Employees:** how many people it employs, broken down by position.
- e Contracts:** every contract over \$10,000 — with the date, amount, vendor, what was bought, and the start and end dates.

*The full question and the government's answer are on the House of Commons website (link at the foot of this page).*

## THE ANSWER

# Four numbers that tell the story

<b>\$266M</b> Received from the government since ALTO was created in November 2022 (precisely \$265,976,355)	<b>~11%</b> Share of that money that appears as listed contracts (~\$29.5M of ~200 contracts). The rest is mostly salaries and smaller spending	<b>216</b> Employees — of whom 67 (about a third) are directors or above, and only 7 are managers	<b>1</b> Engineering contract among nearly 200 — the rest is software, advisers, recruitment, and communications
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The first figure is the eye-catching one, but it needs care: receiving \$266 million is not the same as wasting it. Most of that money pays the people who work at ALTO and covers spending too small to be listed. The point is what it is being spent *on* — and the contract list answers that plainly.

## WHERE THE CONTRACTS GO

# Software, advisers, and communications — not track

ALTO listed close to 200 contracts over \$10,000. Grouped by what they paid for, the pattern is clear. (The groupings below are ours; the figures are ALTO's.)

WHAT THE CONTRACT PAID FOR	SHARE	IN PLAIN TERMS
<b>Software &amp; IT systems</b>	25%	Software licences and one large \$4.09M IT system build — the single biggest contract
Strategic & management advice	23%	Outside consultants advising the corporation on how to run itself and the project
Individual consultants	13%	Named and self-employed contractors
Data & mapping	7%	Land-registry data and GIS mapping — growing sharply in 2025–26
Communications, branding & polling	6%	PR firms, design agencies, video, and opinion surveys
Executive recruitment	6%	Headhunting firms hired to build out the senior team
Indigenous engagement	4%	Consultation and advisory work
<b>Engineering</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	A single engineering consulting contract

*There are no contracts for civil works, track, signalling, or trains — the things a railway is made of.*

*The most expensive single thing ALTO has bought is not a piece of railway. It is a computer system.*

WHAT IT ADDS UP TO

## An organization, not yet a railway

The numbers describe a head office that is still hiring, buying software, and shaping its public image. For 216 people there are **23 executives** — a CEO, 9 chiefs, and 13 vice-presidents — but only **7 managers**. ALTO has spent far more telling its story and standing itself up than on the engineering a railway actually requires.

This is the same pattern our earlier analysis found inside ALTO's own corporate plan, where communications staff outnumbered environmental scientists 18 to 1. Q-1087 now confirms that pattern with named contracts. After more than three years and a quarter-billion dollars, ALTO is a fully-staffed, executive-heavy organization — and the railway it exists to plan is still entirely on paper.

### A COMPANION DISCLOSURE

## What ALTO paid itself in bonuses

A second written question — **Q-1058**, asked by Andrew Scheer and answered on June 1, 2026 — required every federal Crown corporation to report the bonuses it paid. ALTO's answer is striking for an organization that has yet to lay a metre of track.

<b>\$2.76M</b> Paid in bonuses, for a short-term incentive covering roughly the first half of 2025	<b>100%</b> Of ALTO staff — every executive and every non-executive employee — received a bonus	<b>~30×</b> ALTO's bonus pool compared with VIA Rail's in the same disclosure	<b>\$1M+</b> Potential annual compensation for ALTO's chief executive
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ALTO reported paying **\$2,758,967.68** in bonuses to 134 people: all 18 of its executives and all 116 of its below-executive staff. The executives shared about \$1.23 million (an average near \$68,000 each); everyone else shared about \$1.53 million (an average near \$13,000 each). The payment covers January 1 to July 16, 2025, which ALTO describes as its most recent short-term incentive payment.

The same parliamentary return lets us set ALTO beside the railway it is meant to complement.

CROWN CORPORATION	BONUSES PAID	RECIPIENTS	TRAINS RUNNING?
<b>ALTO</b>	<b>\$2,758,968</b>	134 — 100% of staff	None — still in planning
VIA Rail Canada	\$95,500	10	National network, ~3,500 staff

*VIA Rail's bonus program reaches only a small group of managers; ALTO's reaches its entire staff. ALTO, which runs no trains, paid out roughly thirty times what the operating national railway did.*

The pattern starts at the top. ALTO's chief executive, Martin Imbleau — formerly head of the Port of Montreal — has a base salary reported at up to roughly \$662,000, paired with an incentive program

worth 32.5% to 65% of that base. At the top of that range, his compensation for a single year of work would reach about **\$1,091,310**, before allowances and insurance. At the time of that reporting ALTO employed around 150 people; by the June 2026 disclosure it was 216. ALTO's six other top executives have base salaries of \$170,000 to \$330,000, with bonuses of up to 40%.

*ALTO's chief executive can earn more than \$1 million a year. The head of VIA Rail, who runs an actual national railway with some 3,500 employees, earns about \$575,000.*

When ALTO's executive pay was first reported, it drew sharp criticism. **Nicolas Gagnon**, Quebec director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, called it unacceptable for the senior executives of a barely-operational Crown corporation to award themselves compensation on this scale amid deficits and pressure on public services, and questioned rewarding executives so richly before anything concrete has been delivered. An unnamed ALTO insider, quoted by *Le Journal de Québec*, described the payments as "exorbitant bonuses paid with Crown money."

ALTO defended the structure. Its spokesperson, **Benoit Bourdeau**, said the compensation is necessary to attract and retain the talent needed to deliver the project while managing public funds rigorously, and that the pay levels were set through an independent comparative analysis of similar roles in the private sector and at other state-owned enterprises. ALTO declined to disclose the individual salaries and bonuses of its top executives, citing the legal protection of personal information.

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#### ONE FIGURE TO READ CAREFULLY

## The operating budget is almost certainly missing three zeros

The answer reports ALTO's 2026–27 operating budget as **\$710,158** — \$549,754 for operating costs and \$160,404 for capital. Read at face value, that is impossible: salaries alone for 216 employees run into the tens of millions of dollars a year.

### What almost certainly happened

Government financial statements are routinely presented "in thousands of dollars." Read that way, \$710,158 becomes **about \$710 million** — which closely matches the roughly \$695 million that ALTO's own corporate plan projects for 2026–27. The likeliest explanation is simply that the answer dropped the "in thousands" notation. The substance is the more important point: ALTO's operating budget for a single pre-construction year, before any track is laid, is on the order of **\$700 million**.

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READ MORE

## The fuller picture

Q-1087 confirms, with named contracts, what ALTO's own planning documents already implied. Our budget analysis sets out the full \$3.9-billion pre-construction spending plan, the workforce breakdown, and the cost-estimate accuracy problem behind it.

### RELATED ANALYSIS

**The \$3.9 Billion Before the First Shovel** — the full budget breakdown, workforce analysis, cost-estimate accuracy, and how ALTO compares with every other project on the government's nation-building list. → [citizenresearch.ca/alto-budget](https://citizenresearch.ca/alto-budget)

### SOURCES

Written Question **Q-1087**, House of Commons of Canada — Sessional Paper 8555-451-1087, tabled June 5, 2026 (asked by Michael Barrett, MP; answered on behalf of the Minister of Transport). Funding received, workforce by position, and all contracts over \$10,000. [ourcommons.ca/written-questions/45-1/q-1087](https://ourcommons.ca/written-questions/45-1/q-1087)

Written Question **Q-1058**, House of Commons of Canada — Sessional Paper 8555-451-1058, tabled June 1, 2026 (asked by Andrew Scheer, MP). Bonuses awarded at Crown corporations, 2025–26, including the ALTO and VIA Rail figures used above. [ourcommons.ca/written-questions/45-1/q-1058](https://ourcommons.ca/written-questions/45-1/q-1058)

Executive compensation and reaction: ALTO (VIA TGF) business plan summary, as reported by *Le Journal de Québec*, May 26, 2025 — base-salary and incentive ranges for the chief executive and senior executives, the VIA Rail chief-executive comparison, and comment from ALTO and its critics. [journaldequebec.com/2025/05/26](https://journaldequebec.com/2025/05/26)