



Backgrounder: Alto High-Speed Rail Project

South Nation Conservation's (SNC) Role

Date: February 19, 2026



1. What is the Alto High-Speed Rail Project?

Alto is a proposed high-speed passenger rail network in the Toronto–Québec City corridor. The project is led by a federal Crown corporation and would operate on dedicated, electrified tracks at speeds of over 300 km/h, connecting major urban centres including Toronto, Peterborough, Ottawa, Montréal, Laval, Trois-Rivières, and Québec City.

The project is intended to:

- Reduce travel times between major cities
- Improve regional connectivity
- Provide an alternative to automobile and air travel
- Support economic growth and climate objectives

For official project information and updates:

- Alto Project Website: <https://altotrain.ca>
- Public consultation portal & FAQs: <https://en.consultation.altotrain.ca/>
- Transport Canada High-Speed Rail Initiative page: <https://tc.canada.ca/en/rail-transportation/railway-lines/high-speed-rail-initiative-toronto-quebec-city>

2. Where is the proposed corridor?

The corridor under study extends approximately 1,000 km between Toronto and Québec City.

Within South Nation Conservation's jurisdiction in Eastern Ontario, the corridor under study includes lands within and around the City of Ottawa and extends eastward through the United Counties of Prescott and Russell toward Montréal.

Important:

- The corridor represents a broad study area.
- Alto has **not yet confirmed** a final track alignment (exact location of the track corridor)
- The alignment will be refined through technical analysis, consultation, and environmental review.



3. What stage is the project at?

The project is currently in the **development phase**.

This phase includes:

- Defining and refining the study corridor
- Consultation with municipalities, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities
- Baseline environmental studies
- Completion of a federal Impact Assessment

A final federal investment decision has not yet been made.

4. What approvals are required?

Federal Impact Assessment

As a major federal infrastructure project, Alto is subject to a federal Impact Assessment (IA).

An Impact Assessment:

- Evaluates environmental, economic, health, and social impacts
- Includes consultation with Indigenous communities
- Assesses mitigation measures
- Must be completed before the project can proceed

As a federally led project, Alto has indicated it is subject to the federal *Impact Assessment Act* and is not subject to provincial environmental assessment legislation. Alto has also indicated it will work cooperatively with provinces and municipalities.

Depending on the final design, legislative requirements in force at the time, and applicable jurisdictional authority, additional federal, provincial, municipal, or Conservation Authority authorizations could be considered.



5. Who decides what? (Roles & Responsibilities)

It is important to distinguish between agencies:

Federal Government

- Leads the Impact Assessment
- Makes the final federal decision on whether the project proceeds

Provinces & Municipalities

- Review provincial and municipal matters within their jurisdiction

Conservation Authorities (including SNC)

- Regulate development within natural hazard areas and certain water features
- Issue permits in accordance with the *Conservation Authorities Act*
- Provide technical input related to watershed features

SNC does not approve or reject the overall project.

6. What is South Nation Conservation's role?

SNC has two primary roles:

A) Technical Advisory Role

During planning and assessment stages, SNC may:

- Participate in technical discussions
- Share mapping and watershed data (e.g., wetlands, floodplains, regulated areas)
- Identify environmentally sensitive or hazard-prone areas
- Provide comments when circulated for review

This ensures watershed features, natural hazards, and natural heritage are appropriately considered during project planning.



B) Regulatory Role Under the Conservation Authorities Act

Under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, development activities within regulated areas requires authorization from the local Conservation Authority.

If works associated with the project occur within areas regulated by SNC, authorization may be required in accordance with the legislation in effect at that time and subject to jurisdictional applicability.

Regulated areas may include:

- Flood plains
- River and stream valleys
- Hazardous slopes and soils
- Watercourses
- Shorelines
- Wetlands

Examples of works that may require a permit:

- Bridges or culverts
- In-water works
- Track crossings of rivers or streams
- Grading within flood-prone areas
- Drainage alterations

SNC's regulatory role focuses on:

- Public safety related to flooding, erosion, and unstable soils or slopes
- Protection of people and property from the risks of natural hazards
- Protection of wetlands, shorelines, watercourses, and valley features

More information about regulated areas within SNC's jurisdiction — including an overview of SNC's regulations and access to an online interactive property portal — is available at:

<https://www.nation.on.ca/development/regulations>

7. What SNC does NOT do

To clarify:

- SNC does **not** select the corridor or final alignment
- SNC does **not** conduct the federal Impact Assessment
- SNC does **not** expropriate land
- SNC does **not** approve or deny the overall project

SNC's authority is limited to its legislated role under the *Conservation Authorities Act*.



8. What environmental studies are being completed?

According to project materials, Alto is conducting baseline field studies on:

Natural Environment

- Wetlands
- Forests
- Fish and fish habitat
- Wildlife and birds

Physical Environment

- Surface water
- Hydrogeology
- Soil quality
- Noise and vibration

Socio-Economic Environment

- Archaeology and cultural heritage
- Sensitive community land uses

The project has indicated it will apply a mitigation hierarchy: avoid impacts where possible, minimize where unavoidable, and compensate where necessary.

9. Has SNC approved anything?

No.

- SNC has not issued any permits related to the Alto project at this time.
- Alto has not confirmed a final alignment corridor within SNC's jurisdiction
- Engagement to date has focused on information sharing and technical input.

Any future permit applications related to the project would be reviewed in accordance with legislation in place at the time of submission and subject to applicable jurisdiction.



10. Who can residents contact?

For project-specific questions or to participate in consultation:

Alto High-Speed Rail Project

Website: <https://altotrain.ca>

Consultation Portal:

<https://en.consultation.altotrain.ca/shaping-the-canada-of-tomorrow-with-high-speed-rail>

Key Takeaways

- Alto is a federally led high-speed rail project currently in development.
- A federal Impact Assessment is underway.
- SNC's role is advisory and to administer the *Conservation Authorities Act* – where applicable – within its watershed jurisdiction.
- SNC does not determine the location of the corridor.
- SNC does not determine whether the overall project proceeds.
- Any work within regulated natural hazard or water features may require a permit from SNC.