

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Impacts on Agriculture and Farmers from the ALTO High-Speed Rail Southern Corridor

Eastern Ontario | Farm Severance, Land Loss, and the Lessons of HS2

## CRITICAL FINDING

The ALTO southern corridor would bisect Eastern Ontario’s agricultural heartland with a continuously fenced, impassable rail line. At 300 km/h, no level crossings are possible. Farms will be permanently severed. The UK’s HS2 project affected 213 farm holdings—and farming families reported “generational devastation.”

## The Problem in Numbers

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">~2,800 farms</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">in the four affected counties (Frontenac, Lennox &amp; Addington, Hastings, Leeds &amp; Grenville)</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">~12 acres/km</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">of farmland permanently removed by dedicated HSR right-of-way (OFA estimate)</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">\$695 million</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; color: white;">annual tourism GDP at risk in the Rideau Heritage Route region (BDO Canada, 2017)</p>
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## Why the Southern Route Harms Farmers

Impact	What It Means
 <b>Impassable barrier</b>	3-metre security fencing along entire corridor. No level crossings at 300 km/h. Farms split in two with equipment and livestock unable to cross.
 <b>Farm severance</b>	Mixed dairy/livestock farms depend on daily cross-farm movement. A severed 200-acre operation may lose the critical mass needed for viability.
 <b>Road destruction</b>	Thousands of daily construction truck trips on roads designed for farm equipment. Spring weight restrictions compress hauling into fewer months.
 <b>Drainage disruption</b>	200 km linear excavation intercepts tile drain and watershed systems across hundreds of farms. Waterlogging and crop loss for years.
 <b>Blight &amp; uncertainty</b>	From announcement to construction could be 10+ years. Property values fall, credit tightens, farm investment freezes immediately.
 <b>Land loss</b>	1,000–1,500+ acres of active farmland permanently removed—in a region that lost 15.4% of Frontenac’s cropland between 2011 and 2021.

## What HS2 Taught Us

The UK’s HS2 project provides direct evidence of what happens when HSR is built through farmland:

- 213 agricultural holdings directly affected along London–West Midlands route (NFU)
- Access promises broken: underpasses delayed until after construction—up to 7 years without farm access
- Compensation chronically delayed; crop loss payments outstanding years after construction

- Farmers reported to Parliament as “feeling suicidal” from prolonged uncertainty and broken commitments
- “A chronic lack of respect for farm businesses, which are often viewed as just being in the way” — CLA surveyor

## Eight Recommendations

#	Recommendation	Key Requirement
1	<b>Agricultural Impact Assessment</b>	Map every affected farm before route selection
2	<b>Binding Farm Access Guarantee</b>	Grade-separated crossings every 2 km, built before construction severs farms
3	<b>Enhanced Compensation</b>	Going-concern value, not just land price; capital gains tax relief
4	<b>Anti-Blight Protections</b>	Guaranteed purchase at pre-announcement value; interim income payments
5	<b>Construction Protections</b>	Enforce spring weight limits; independent ag liaison with stop-work authority
6	<b>Independent Ag Commissioner</b>	Binding dispute resolution without requiring farmer litigation
7	<b>Mitigation Land Limits</b>	Cap environmental offset land take from productive farmland
8	<b>High-Performance Rail Study</b>	Assess 200 km/h alternative that allows level crossings and avoids severance

### BOTTOM LINE

Alto prefers the southern route because agricultural land is cheaper to build on than Canadian Shield granite. The construction savings are captured by the project; the costs—severed farms, destroyed roads, disrupted drainage, and a decade of uncertainty—are borne by rural communities that will never board the train. If Canada builds HSR, it must treat farming communities fairly. These eight recommendations provide the framework—but only if adopted before the route is selected.

**Sources:** This summary draws from the full 32-footnote policy brief citing Alto consultation materials, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, National Farmers' Union (UK), CBC News, Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture 2021, OMAFRA county profiles, BDO Canada/RHRTA tourism economic impact study, Farm Credit Canada, COSEWIC/Ontario ESA species assessments, Parks Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, and HS2 Ltd/GOV.UK farmer guidance.

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Research conducted using publicly available materials and AI tools