

Integrated High Performance Rail Network

A true nation-building infrastructure vision

**An alternative option presented to the
Coalition for Better Rail**

April 19, 2026



Based on What We Know Now...



In its *current form*, the ALTO's HSR plan...

- Is out of context
- Has limited strategic long-term benefit for Ontario
- A weak response to real demand (existing and potential)
- Is almost certain to show cost over-runs
- Has not yet demonstrated how it has incorporated “lessons from the field”.



How Has Our World Changed?



What Has Changed?

- Disrupted trade, new tariffs, greater business uncertainty
- Reduced trade barriers between provinces
- Travel patterns and preferences
- Consumer and government purchasing preferences
- Greater emphasis on the essentials: food, shelter, energy, raw materials
- Urgency to invest in strategically important infrastructure

What Does This Mean for Rail Services?

- Increased east-west trade (freight) with potential for even greater congestion
- Increased east-west travel (passengers)
- Increased construction and operating costs (ex. steel; fuel)
- Passengers' price sensitivity
- Increased demand on electricity grid
- Increased importance of sovereign systems
- Increased strain on municipal, provincial and federal budgets

What is the Rail Service Response? (Canada)



Ontario Northlander Passenger Rail Line: returns to service in 2026, connecting Toronto and Timmins, and on to Cochrane with 13 intermediate stops; 740 kms; Venture train sets have max top speed of 200 km/hour.

Prairie Link Rail Partnership (Calgary-Edmonton): MOU between EllisDon & AECOM announced in 2021; planning under way; estimated 300 kms and cost: \$9 billion; stop in Red Deer contemplated; trains expected to have 400 km/hr speed.

Atlantic Canada passenger rail improvements: originally supported by federal government in 2024; now being referred to as 'Maritime Rail Corridor' (Saint John to Halifax, with later expansion to Fredericton, Sydney N.S. and PEI).

What is the Rail Service Response? (United States)



Brightline Florida (Miami–Orlando): The first new privately financed intercity rail service in the U.S., began in 2023, offering 125-mph (201 km/h) service from Orlando to Miami, a distance of 378 kms. The line is already expanding with a new station (Tampa) and capacity growth by adding more train cars and seats.

Chicago–St. Louis High-Speed Corridor: Service improvements now allow for AMTRAK trains to operate at 110 mph (177 kph), cutting travel time and enhancing one of the nation’s busiest state-funded corridors. Travel distance is roughly 475 kms. Chicago is also anticipating a multi-billion-dollar hub (station) improvement program.

Northern Lights Express (Minnesota): Minnesota is proposing a new passenger connection between Minneapolis–St. Paul and Duluth via Superior, Wisconsin. State funds and federal counterparts will finance the 152-mile/244 km corridor, which targets 90-110 mph (144.8 to 177 kph) speeds. Construction cost is estimated at \$592.3 million.

What is VIA's Future in this Region?



“Declining punctuality increases the risk of losing passengers to other modes of transportation, threatens revenue targets, and undermines VIA’s ability to meet its strategic objectives.”

Auditor General of Canada, Feb. 27, 2026

There were 2,136,024 passengers using VIA’s Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal services in 2023: 52% of the national total.

Source: VIA Rail Annual Report, 2023

Year	Government Operating Subsidy
2019	\$280.6 million
2020 (pandemic)	\$416.8 million
2021	\$370.5 million
2022	\$365.3 million
2023	\$381.8 million

What Is an Integrated High Performance Rail Network? (HPR)



- **Integrated**
 - With other rail lines
 - With other modes of travel
 - With the strategic priorities of provinces and regions
- **High Performance**
 - **Operational** performance
 - **Financial** performance --- both in construction and in operation
 - **Environmental** performance
 - **Community** performance
- **Network**
 - Strong market coverage/accessibility to potential ridership
 - Frequency of service

What Would “Better Rail” Look Like?



- Dedicated passenger rail tracks separate from freight tracks**
 - Better on-time performance (reliability)
 - Proximity to dense populations (communities and corridors)
- Shorter travel times compared to driving**
 - Reduced cars on the road
 - Improved safety
- Reduced GreenHouse Gas emissions** (achieved either by electrification or diesel-electric hybrid trains; reduced car travel)
- Accessible to more communities across Ontario**
- Financially responsible and sustainable (for taxpayers)**
- Reflects citizens’ priorities for limited public capital funds**
- Better aligned with Ontario’s strategic priorities.**

Five Opportunities to Think Differently



1. Integrate with/connections to related provincial (Ontario) transportation
2. Capitalize on Highway 401 widening through Eastern Ontario
3. Leverage new Canada-Ontario partnership to build
4. Use innovative construction and project management techniques
5. Leverage Parks Canada Pilot Project to protect wildlife

Opportunities to Think Differently



1. Integrate with/connections to related provincial (Ontario) transportation (urban transit, other passenger rail, buses, airports, ferries?)

VICTORIA'S BIG BUILD Pro

Melbourne Airport Rail



**Melbourne
Airport Rail**

[f](#) [in](#) [YouTube](#)



**1. Connect to airport/enable electrification 2. Untangle 6 km of track (passenger and freight)
3. Add new or upgraded stations... 1,000 trains a day in future (by 2030)**

Opportunities to Think Differently



2. Capitalize on Highway 401 widening:

- Planned expansion to 8-10 lanes in Eastern Ontario
- Requires bridge reconstruction for north-south traffic
- +150 interchanges in the “401-CN Lakeshore” corridor
- “Kingston Sub” (CN line) runs quite close to Highway 401 for most of the Toronto-Montreal distance
- +30 rail spurs (for freight) in this corridor; need to be considered
- Not necessarily running passenger or freight trains within the highway right-of-way. Could be on the outside edge.

This corridor represents heavy use of VIA Rail services AND CN freight. Can we reduce congestion while widening the 401?

Opportunities to Think Differently



3. Leverage new Canada-Ontario Partnership to Build (mentions “partnership with municipalities”)

NEWS RELEASE

Ontario and Canada Sign Historic Partnership to Build Homes, Transit and Communities

Agreement includes \$8.8 billion to support housing by lowering development charges and support for major transit projects, including Waterfront East Transit and GO 2.0

March 30, 2026

[Office of the Premier](#)

Includes commitment to
“working collaboratively to support the planning and advancement of the ALTO HSR initiative that will connect millions of people living along the Toronto-Quebec City corridor.”



Opportunities to Think Differently

4. Use Innovative Construction and Project Management Techniques

Think parallel construction
(different parts of the project get built simultaneously rather than in sequence/one after another)

Can dramatically reduce construction time

CAUTION:

This requires very detailed planning and “freezing” plans so seamless connections are made!



Ottawa bridge to be replaced within 48 hours this weekend



Rafael Albino, P.Eng.
Public Services and... • 261 followers
Published Oct 23, 2015

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Opportunities to Think Differently

5. Leverage Parks Canada Pilot Project to Protect Wildlife (based on Banff CPKS freight line)



Best Ways to Reduce Wildlife Train Deaths:

- No-stopping zones for humans in cars
- Escape trails just off railway tracks; network of alternative paths through the woods
 - Wildlife overpasses and underpasses
- Focus measures on high-mortality areas
- Consider train speed, proximity to water and track curvature

[Parks Canada 2021](#)



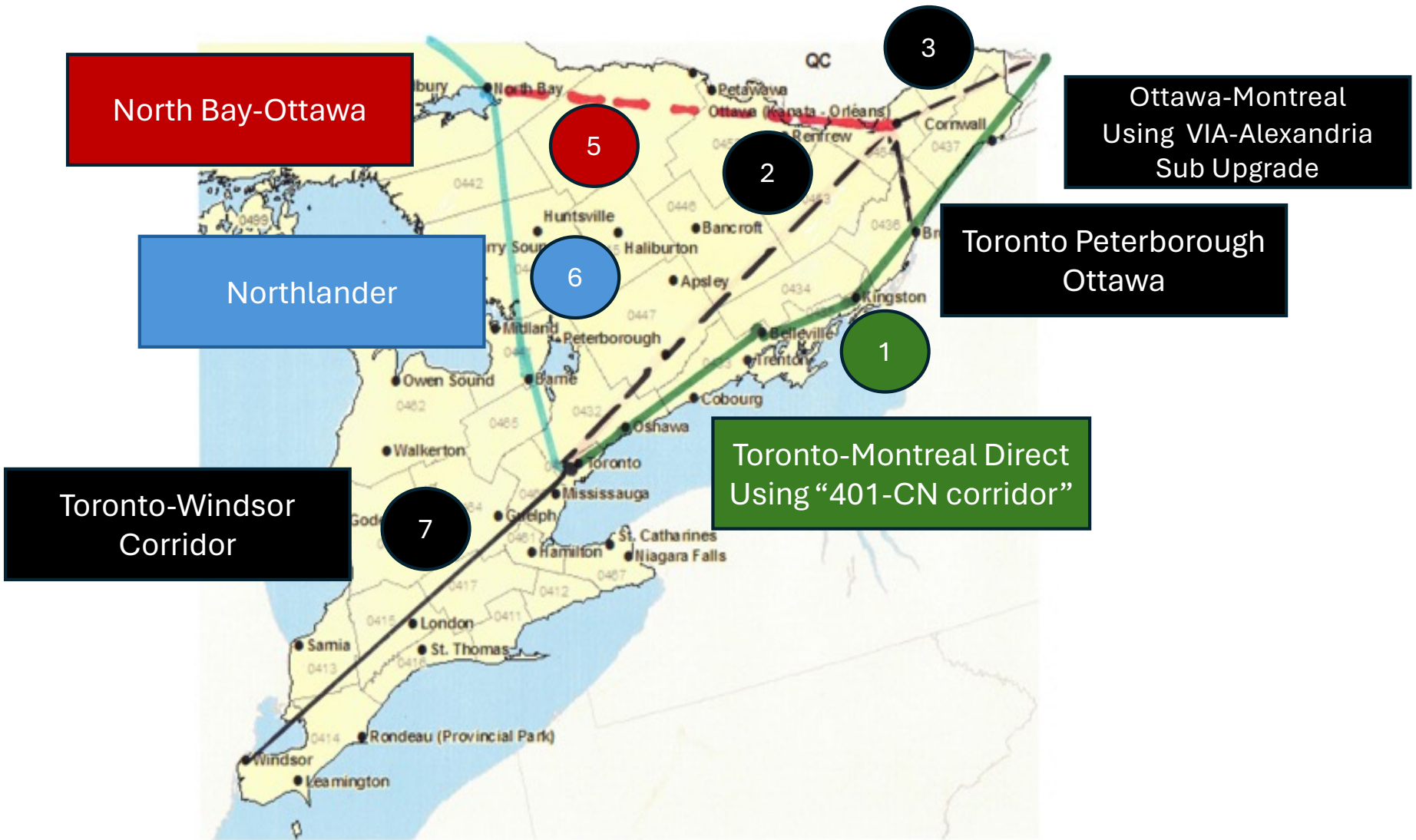
What Could Integrated High Performance Rail Look Like Here?

- **7 corridor segments**, all of which go through an environmental assessment process; business case must support investment decision
- **Use existing corridors as much as possible**
- **Train speeds in the 160-200 km/hour range**
- **Station stops assessed for inclusion based on criteria such as:**
 - a) next closest station 80-100 kms away
 - b) travel time to get to the station ~ 30 minutes
 - c) evidence of additional ridership (and associated revenue) potential that offsets extra time the stop would require

Seven Corridors Forming a Rail Network

- **Corridor 1** – Toronto-Montreal Direct (“401-CN” Corridor Route)
 - New dedicated passenger rails; multiple stops in existing corridor
- **Corridor 2** – Toronto-Peterborough-Ottawa (Havelock Sub Route)
 - Business case required/cost-benefit analysis; Brockville-Ottawa route an option
- **Corridor 3** – Ottawa-Montreal (VIA-Owned Alexandria Sub Upgrade)
- **Corridor 4** – Montreal-Quebec City (CN/VIA Corridor Upgrade)
- **Corridor 5** – North Bay-Ottawa (Ottawa Valley Missing Link)
 - Dual use corridor; tie-in to NORAD/defence and critical minerals
- **Corridor 6** – Northlander Plus Ontario Northland Network
 - Already exists; in service in 2026; fares have been published
- **Corridor 7** – Toronto-Windsor (Southwestern Ontario Corridor)
 - Options well-studied; Pearson airport connection possible.

Hint: “Sub” means subdivision. The organization that operate rail services think in these terms.



Process Matters Too!!!



- **Environmental assessment** for all segments undertaken BEFORE detailed route design is undertaken
- **Full work-up of *business case*** for each segment BEFORE detailed route design is undertaken
- ***Independent master plan oversight and financial/budget oversight*** put in place before further commitments of public funds are made
- **Detailed planning** verifies ability to make cost-effective entry/exit from Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal stations BEFORE any land acquisition
- **Full project plan** developed considering opportunities for parallel construction.

What Must We Do to Achieve Better Rail?

- Premier Ford must work with Prime Minister Carney to ensure that any **passenger rail investments align** with Ontario's priorities and opportunities... and this needs to start immediately.
- Minister MacKinnon must require ALTO to **look at alternative options for achieving better rail**, not just the "northern" and "southern" routes presented.
- Minister MacKinnon must require ALTO to **develop and cost "first mile/last mile" solutions** for Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal stations before detailed design on routes or before any land acquisition takes place.
- Minister MacKinnon must require **business cases** for each segment prior to detailed design with public disclosure and independent review.
- Minister MacKinnon must ensure that Parks Canada and Ontario Parks are included in designing **wildlife protection measures**.
- Prime Minister Carney must put proper **governance and financial management structures** in place to ensure independent assessment of proposals and in-project financial controls.