

April 24, 2026

ALTO Rail Corridor Submission

GDA members have attended the ALTO sessions and contributed to the ALTO interactive map describing the broad corridor being considered. We support the idea of high-speed rail in Quebec-Ottawa-Toronto corridor, provided the route can be financially justified and meets the highest standards for biodiversity and habitat conservation to ensure ecological integrity and connectivity. We support the submission made by Ontario Nature to the Alto High Speed Rail project team on the importance of meeting these standards. We also expect that there will be meaningful consultation with the First Nations rights holders of all the lands associated with this project.

Green Durham Association is a charitable organization focused on what we have always considered Toronto's "Green Door". This includes land within the 43,000 acres expropriated by federal and provincial governments in the early 1970's and surrounding prime farmland further east and north in North Pickering and Durham Region. Green Durham Association's original name was the Green Door Alliance, reflecting that vision. We and many of our members have a history of more than fifty years fighting against an airport, combatting urban sprawl, and with land stewardship, land conservation and passive recreation. GDA members have served on provincial and federal advisory committees about the federal and nearby lands, worked with municipalities, conservation authorities and private landowners to significantly expand and better manage public conservation lands, create off-road corridors for the Trans Canada and Oak Ridge Moraine trails, and create nature/trail corridors connecting conservation lands to communities.

Last year the federal government decided against an airport and has indicated that the majority of the remaining 9300 acres of federal lands will be added to the Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP). GDA has made recommendations to the federal government on this issue. The ALTO high speed rail route has yet to be resolved but there is a real possibility that the route chosen will cross over the federal airport lands proposed above for inclusion in the RNUP.

The CPR line runs west from Myrtle Station, entering Pickering at Lakeridge Road north of Durham Regional Road 5 /Pickering Concession 9, continues west to Claremont and then travels through these federal lands. GDA members attending the ALTO sessions noted that the ALTO study corridor was not north of Regional Road 5/Concession 9 until east of Sideline 4 and would only extend far enough north to meet the existing CPR line once the line is east of Ashburn, approaching Myrtle Station. **Our comments are specifically focused on the possible routing of the corridor from Toronto through North Pickering.**

An opportunity: Based on our knowledge of the local rail system and the comments of Alto consultants at the open house events, it appears that the existing CPR line from west of Claremont to east of Ashburn may no longer be used for rail or freight. We propose that in such an event, this part of the line becomes a hiking/cycling trail. We believe that if the ALTO route uses the CPR route as it enters Toronto, support for the ALTO route in Durham would be very much greater if it could be announced that this portion of the CPR route not used for ALTO could become a rail trail for passive recreation.

Consider corridors: It will be important that the Alto line maintains robust environmental and trail corridors as the line crosses Reesor Creek, the West Duffins Creek, Michell Creek, Brock Road, East Duffins Creek and the TransCanada Trail and other north/south nature and rail corridors. It will also be critical that travel routes

between farm parcels north and south of the line be considered. Although ALTO will not be operational in this area for more than a decade, ALTO officials indicate the route choices will be greatly narrowed and perhaps even chosen over the next year so we recognize the importance of commenting quickly.

Additional stops: There has been some talk of creating a second ALTO stop on the outskirts of Toronto. We have a strong interest in this issue and had intended to communicate our thoughts at this time. However due to its complexity we have decided to wait a short while before commenting. We trust you will remain open to further submissions and dialogue after your submission deadline.

Questions about future rail line use:

1: If the CPR line is not used by ALTO, what is the future of this CPR line which is now used at most twice a day and solely for freight? Is this future use planned to grow or likely to decline? As long as a large airport was foreseeable, both freight and passenger use on that line would likely have increased and become more important. However now that there will be no airport, possible future revenue prospects are greatly diminished.

2: Under this changed situation, is continued future freight use of greater economic importance to the nation than ceasing such use? Using such a corridor in future as a cycling/walking trail would provide health and environmental benefits, promote economic tourism and create a spectacular “Green Door” for Toronto.

3: While freight prospects on this line might not be as important in future, would restarting passenger use as in the past become the best future alternative for the line? Considerations include population growth, an expanded Rouge National Urban Park on the doorstep of a large metropolitan area, and a new Provincial Park, all accessible by public transit.

4: If the CPR line were to provide passenger service between Peterborough and Toronto could that further change ALTO corridor routing decisions?

Finally: The City of Pickering has introduced three land use options and associated maps for the 9300-acre federal airport land holding. The City of Pickering is proposing that a very significant portion of the Federal airport Lands **not** be added to the Rouge National Urban Park. In their maps, Pickering designates the majority of these lands as “Agricultural System”, “Industrial Expansion”, or “Employment Lands”. We believe all 3 options are completely unacceptable. The lands Pickering proposes **not** be transferred to the RNUP are so extensive that they include a portion of the existing rail line. If the CPR line - which runs from the southwest to the northeast corner of the 9300 acres and is all within in the Provincial greenbelt – is unused by ALTO, it could become more heavily used for freight to support industrial and commercial use on these lands. **It is critical that Transport Canada and ALTO clarify as soon as possible what the future of this line will be.**

The federal government has already indicated the “great majority” of the 9300 acres will be transferred to the Rouge National Urban Park. We and so many others want them **all** to be transferred to the RNUP, or in our case at least to Parks Canada. We have submitted recommendations regarding these lands but because of Pickering’s recent proposals we will be making further comments stressing the urgency of a commitment to the protection of all of these lands. Given the uncertainty about the federal lands and the Alto route, there is high public concern. Unless the issues above are clarified, we believe support for ALTO in this area will be negatively impacted.

In summary, our recommendations:

- Consult meaningfully with the rights holders to all these lands.
- Apply nature-positive planning and design considerations through all stages of the project.

- Use a frequent network of wildlife crossing structures to preserve ecological corridors and “the Green Door” in Pickering.
- Preserve or improve existing trail corridors and farming systems connectivity.
- Consult local groups throughout the planning process to ensure connectivity opportunities are identified and maximized.
- Consider the role unused rail lines can play in expanding access to nature and contributing to tourism.
- Promptly communicate the preferred ALTO route and any existing rail lines which will become redundant.
- Provide information about the possible future uses of the line if the CPR line running through the federal lands is not to be used by ALTO.

On behalf of Green Durham Association:

Ranald McKay ranald.mckay@gmail.com

Brian Buckles buckles@zing-net.ca

Elizabeth Calvin elizabethcalvin1@gmail.com

David Morley C.M. davidmorley55@gmail.com