

The Next Spike: High-Speed Rail comes to Canada

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By and Dylan Dilks

[Today the Prime Minister announced that the Government of Canada is developing a high-speed rail network in the Toronto-Quebec City corridor.](#)

The High-Speed Rail Network, officially named “**Alto**”, will operate between Toronto and Quebec City with stops in Peterborough, Ottawa, Montreal, Laval, Trois-Rivières and Québec City, though the final alignment will be developed in collaboration with [Cadence](#), the consortium chosen to design, build, finance, operate, and maintain the project.

Cadence is composed of CDPQ Infra, AtkinsRéalis, Keolis, SYSTRA, Air Canada and SNCF Voyageurs. Cadence will work with [Alto](#) (VIA HFR – VIA TGF Inc.), the federal Crown corporation established to oversee and manage the implementation and delivery of the HSRN, in a public-private collaborative development model to leverage private-sector expertise in design, construction, and innovation, while ensuring the project aligns with Canada’s long-term goals.

A few early thoughts:

- While the alignment / stop locations are not yet finalized, interestingly Kingston and Cornwall are not yet on the preliminary list of potential stops for *Alto*.
- While *Alto* is in development and construction, Via Rail will continue to operate and will eventually be integrated with *Alto* services into a single network. It remains to be seen how integrated the services will be, with hopes that rural communities currently serviced by Via Rail continue to be serviced as the HSRN tracks forward.
- The network will largely be electrified to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- *Alto*’s development phase (i.e. when Cadence and Alto will design the project) is expected to last 5 years. Construction will begin following the development phase. Let us hope important lessons have been learned from other delayed rail projects in Ontario.

As stated best by Sir John A. Macdonald in comments about the Canadian Pacific Railway,

“Late events have shown us that we are made one people by that road, that that iron link has bound us together in such a way that we stand superior to most of the shafts of ill-fortune.”

Alto is the next spike, and a welcome and necessary advancement for the future of interprovincial transit in Ontario and Quebec. Interprovincial trade and mobility are keys to the success of the Canadian federation. *Alto* brings to the fore a grand vision for connecting Canadians, with the promise of a great impact on the construction industry in Ontario.

The information and comments herein are for the general information of the reader and are not intended as advice or opinion to be relied upon in relation to any particular circumstances. For particular application of the law to specific

situations, the reader should seek professional advice.

For more information or inquiries:

Toronto

Email:

WeirFoulds^{LLP}

www.weirfoulds.com

Toronto Office

4100 – 66 Wellington Street West
PO Box 35, TD Bank Tower
Toronto, ON M5K 1B7

Tel: 416.365.1110
Fax: 416.365.1876

Oakville Office

1320 Cornwall Rd., Suite 201
Oakville, ON L6J 7W5

Tel: 416.365.1110
Fax: 905.829.2035