



# OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Municipality of Mississippi Mills  
3131 Old Perth Rd · Almonte ON · K0A 1A0

Phone: 613-256-2064

Fax: 613-256-4887

E-mail: [clowry@mississippimills.ca](mailto:clowry@mississippimills.ca)

March 30, 2026

Mr. Scott Reid  
Member of Parliament, Lanark – Frontenac  
224 Bridge Street  
Carleton Place, ON K7C 3G9

Dear Mr. Reid,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Mayor of the Municipality of Mississippi Mills regarding the ALTO high-speed rail project currently under federal review and consultation. I wish to share our municipal perspective and outline concerns specific to Mississippi Mills as a rural municipality that may host national infrastructure without receiving corresponding or proportionate benefits.

Mississippi Mills understands the federal government's interest in advancing inter-city passenger rail and recognizes the importance of strategic, nation-building infrastructure. However, it is vital that the impacts on rural municipalities be fully understood, equitably mitigated, and appropriately compensated as decisions move forward.

ALTO is currently reviewing two corridor options, with the Northernmost section of one potential corridor passing through Mississippi Mills. The proposed corridor between Ottawa and Peterborough is approximately 10 kilometres wide, making it difficult at this stage to fully assess site-specific impacts. While we recognize that this is an evolving process, the scale of the study area raises significant concerns for local transportation systems, land use planning, agriculture, the environment, municipal services, and long-term economic development.

From a transportation and municipal services perspective, the potential severance of local and county roads is a significant concern. A fully fenced, grade-separated high speed rail corridor risks creating dead-end or orphaned road segments, could result in longer travel times for fire, ambulance, and police services, impacts to school bus routing, snow clearing, and waste collection, and increased ongoing operational costs for the municipality. These impacts also extend to recreational trail networks, including snowmobile and ATV trails, walking, and cycling routes, and other multi-use pathways that contribute to local quality of life, tourism, and economic development.

Substantial investments have been made in local recreational and trail systems, which are an important economic driver for our community and the broader region. Disruption or fragmentation of these networks risks undermining tourism, local businesses, and

community well-being. These impacts must be clearly assessed and not treated as incidental or secondary considerations.

The potential **impacts on agriculture and rural land-use are of particular concern**. Mississippi Mills has a strong agricultural base and has deliberately strengthened protections for prime agricultural land through recent Official Plan updates. Bisecting active farmland, particularly without appropriate grade separations, can significantly disrupt farming operations by restricting access, dividing fields, creating orphaned parcels, and interfering with drainage systems. These impacts **threaten not only individual operations but also the long-term viability of agriculture as an economic and cultural cornerstone** of our municipality.

Beyond individual properties, there is concern about the overall cohesiveness of Mississippi Mills. Depending on the alignment selected, the municipality could be physically divided in a way that isolates communities, alters service delivery patterns, and affects how residents perceive their identity and connection to Mississippi Mills. These social and governance impacts are real and should be assessed alongside engineering and economic considerations.

Environmental impacts must also be carefully evaluated. Mississippi Mills includes **sensitive watershed systems, wetlands, and natural heritage features** that are foundational to our environmental resilience and climate adaptation efforts. Drainage and water management impacts are particularly significant in rural settings, where changes to surface and subsurface water flows can affect farmland, municipal drains, private wells, and downstream ecosystems. The long-term costs of mitigating these impacts often fall to municipalities.

Economic development impacts extend well beyond short-term construction activity. While ALTO has identified broad economic benefits associated with high-speed rail, these benefits are predominantly urban-focused. Mississippi Mills is not currently positioned to receive direct economic benefit as there is no planned station within or near the municipality. Temporary construction employment or site restoration activities do not constitute meaningful or lasting economic benefit for rural host communities, particularly when weighed against long-term constraints on land use, agriculture, tourism, and growth potential.

This concern is amplified by the fact that **Mississippi Mills, with Almonte as a designated urban centre, is one of the fastest growing communities in Eastern Ontario**. The municipality has undertaken an extensive infrastructure planning and growth management initiative in order to accommodate this growth which was developed thoughtfully and collaboratively with the community through to 2048. This planning applies not only to Almonte, but also to our villages and rural areas. A high-speed rail corridor has the potential to significantly disrupt these long-range plans and undermine investments already made by the municipality and taxpayers. At this time, it is unclear what compensation or consideration is being given to municipalities for this type of planning and infrastructure investment risk.

Access to the Ottawa station is therefore a critical issue. Station location decisions will directly affect whether residents of Mississippi Mills and neighbouring rural communities can realistically benefit from the high-speed rail system. **A regional approach to station selection is essential**, with consideration for driving times, availability of

parking, and integration with existing transit systems. Stations that are difficult to access for rural residents significantly limit equitable benefit from the project.

There is also a broader regional transportation concern that must be acknowledged. Rural Eastern Ontario has experienced longstanding underinvestment in passenger rail service, including along the existing VIA Rail corridor. Many rural communities already face limited frequency, reliability, and accessibility of inter-city rail. There is significant concern that the investment focus on high-speed rail could further deprioritize VIA Rail services in Eastern Ontario, resulting in reduced service levels or delayed improvements. For rural communities that will neither host a station nor have practical access to high-speed rail, this represents a double impact: hosting national infrastructure while facing diminished access to existing regional rail services. This risks further marginalizing rural communities within Ontario's transportation network rather than improving equity and mobility.

To date there have been two corridors proposed that will cause significant community impacts no matter which one is chosen. This is a project that has an estimated \$60-\$90 billion cost and the CEO of Alto has stated that land costs and expropriation costs have been factored into this projection. The dismissal of the Highway 401 Corridor as a possible route because it is "not straight enough" seems to lack any published feasibility reports or public discussion on the cost to make this corridor "straight enough". The cost of construction for all obvious alternatives versus the cost to our rural communities needs to be completely understood and not causally dismissed.

Community benefits, as currently described, remain a significant gap. ALTO has indicated an intention to leave construction sites in better condition than before construction. In rural contexts, returning farmland or environmentally sensitive lands to pre-construction condition is not a benefit but a baseline expectation. Meaningful community benefits for rural municipalities must account for long-term municipal costs, service impacts, and foregone economic development opportunities, including impacts to agriculture, recreation, trails, and tourism.

There are also unresolved questions regarding fiscal responsibility. If the corridor results in orphaned parcels, dead-end roads, or reduced service efficiency, municipalities may be required to invest in new infrastructure or services, including potential new fire halls, revised emergency coverage models, or new financial agreements with neighbouring municipalities. It remains unclear who would bear these costs. Mississippi Mills seeks clarity on whether municipalities will be compensated for new or expanded infrastructure and service obligations that arise directly from hosting a national project.

Finally, I must raise concerns regarding the consultation process itself. While we appreciate that this is an evolving project, the consultation approach to date has left many important questions unanswered. Municipalities have not been provided consistent or equitable opportunities to ask questions and receive clear responses in a meaningful way. Significant information gaps remain, particularly regarding mitigation, compensation, long-term municipal liabilities, and rural-specific impacts.

What has also been striking is the extent to which project proponents and consultants consistently lead with benefits that are relevant to large urban centres, without acknowledging that many of these benefits do not translate to rural host communities. This imbalance risks undermining confidence in the consultation process and

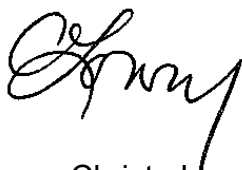
contributes to a perception that rural impacts are secondary considerations rather than central elements of a truly national project.

Mississippi Mills is not a decision maker in this process. We are a stakeholder, alongside residents, landowners, and neighbouring municipalities. That makes meaningful consultation, transparent analysis of rural impacts, and fair treatment of host communities even more important. National infrastructure should not shift long-term costs and risks onto rural municipalities without corresponding benefit or compensation.

At its core, this project raises a fundamental question of fairness. A major federal initiative that may force the expropriation of farmland and fracture rural communities must demonstrate how those impacts are justified. That obligation is heightened when the primary benefits of the project are realized in urban centres, while rural communities are left to absorb the long-term effects. We struggle to understand how this imbalance is justified.

If ALTO is intended to be a truly national project, it must clearly explain how rural host communities will be treated fairly, and what substantive changes will be made to move beyond urban-centric benefits toward genuine rural consideration and compensation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christa Lowry', written in a cursive style.

Mayor Christa Lowry  
Municipality of Mississippi Mills