

REPORT

ACTION

INFORMATION

TO: Reeve Jennings & Members of Council
FROM: Clerk/Planning Manager, K. Cote
DATE: February 17th, 2026

RE: Alto High-Speed Rail Working Group

Recommendation:

THAT Reeve Jennings be appointed to the Township's Alto High-Speed Rail Working Group, and as the delegate representing the Township of Montague, in place of Councillor Johnson;

AND THAT Council direct the Township's delegate to bring forth the comments as discussed at the Regular Meeting of Council dated February 17th, 2026, to the roundtable discussions being held on March 3rd.

Background:

On December 8th, 2025, a Special Meeting of Council was held to allow for a presentation regarding a proposed high-speed rail network that would extend from Toronto to Quebec, with the potential to impact the Township of Montague and surrounding communities.

At the January 20th, 2026, Regular Meeting of Council, correspondence was reviewed by Council regarding a request for a municipal delegate to attend a Roundtable Discussion on March 3rd, 2026, in Perth regarding the proposal.

Council passed Resolution 17-2026 to appoint Councillor Johnson as the Township's delegate. Additionally, Councillor Johnson and Councillor Crabtree, as well as the Township's Clerk, were appointed to a working group to prepare discussion points, to be brought back to Council for review and approval.

Discussion & Options:

Reeve Jennings, Councillor Crabtree and the Clerk met on Friday, February 6th, to discuss the public information available to date, and have the following comments:

1. This project will require the expropriation of lands. This requires serious thought, as it will impact landowners and the municipal tax base.
 - a. How will compensation be calculated? Appraisal? Fair Market Value? Other means?
 - b. When would that compensation be paid to the landowner? At the time of "agreement"? When the land is expropriated?

- c. Will relocation costs be provided if the landowner does not want to live adjacent to a high-speed rail or if the impacts (sights, sounds, vibrations, etc.) are so undesirable that they do not wish to remain?
 - d. If the landowner also operates a farm and/or business that will be impacted by the high-speed rail, will they be appropriately compensated for loss of income or relocation?
2. The Provincial government has made housing a priority in the past few years, evidenced by the many legislative and policy changes that have been introduced.
 - a. How will this project achieve the Province's housing goals when developing rural lands can already be sometimes challenging, and will become even more so when there are less of them after expropriation has taken place?
 - b. What will the development setback from the high-speed rail right-of way be for residential, commercial/industrial, and institutional development?
 - c. What mitigation measures will need to be implemented (ie. buffers, berms, sound barriers, certain construction standards)?
3. This project claims to contribute to reducing the negative impacts that contribute to climate change by "providing a low-carbon transportation option". While the proposed mode of transportation may be powered by electricity, the environmental impacts do not include the vehicles and equipment utilized during the construction phase, or the travellers to and from the high-speed rail stations that originate outside of those hubs.
4. Alto's Public Consultation Platform includes a proposed "annual economic impact of \$24.5 billion" that will "stimulate the regional economy". While it can be assumed that this will be true of the cities where the proposed stations are located, we would be interested in receiving information as to how our community, and others like us, would benefit.
5. The estimated costs for this project are not provided, nor is the estimated revenue (and sources of this revenue). It is understood that the final route has not been established, which would undoubtedly impact costing, but a "Scenario A" and "Scenario B" proposal would be beneficial for those reviewing this information.
 - a. What would the average estimated cost be to a taxpayer for each scenario?
 - b. How will these costs be prorated between Ontario (with three proposed stops) and Quebec (with four proposed stops)?
6. While it is understood that travel by high-speed rail will incur lower fares than air travel, there is concern regarding its implied affordability for its users. The information provided is lacking in that it does not include:
 - a. Average cost for fares? On-site parking?
 - b. Is it actually more beneficial to arrive sooner but pay more than you would taking VIA rail or driving?
 - c. Have the costs for outliers who have to drive or take a bus or VIA train to a station been considered?
7. It is clear that high-speed rail travel will be quicker for its users to get from "Point A" to "Point B", but what are the impacts for road users as a result?

- a. Will these rail lines create longer commutes for its users arriving by motor vehicle, or those drivers avoiding these areas?
 - b. Will detours to existing road networks be required?
8. Machinery and equipment require ongoing maintenance and are subject to breakdowns and inoperable periods. Has this been considered and how will this be addressed?
 9. How was the demand for this mode of transportation arrived at? Were there surveys or public consultations? If so, when were they completed and are they available for public review?
 10. This high-speed rail could be considered a “nice to have” but does not address the actual, real concerns facing Canadians today:
 - Economic uncertainty and cost of living
 - Homelessness
 - Health care disparity
 - Mental health
 - Lack of affordable housing for many
 - Policing costs
 - Downloading onto municipalities; and
 - **Existing** infrastructure that requires replacement and/or repair

These are far more important matters than reducing travel time by an hour or two.

The Working Group is looking for Council to add any additional comments, or revise those noted above.

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications associated with the preparation of this report.

Attachment:

None.