What We Heard Report

Community perspectives on the proposed ALTO rail corridor – Red flags

Input gathered through the collaborative work of the Business and Economic Development Department and the Communications Office of the Mohawk Council of Kanehsatà:ke

Draft report shared with the community for feedback in May of 2026.

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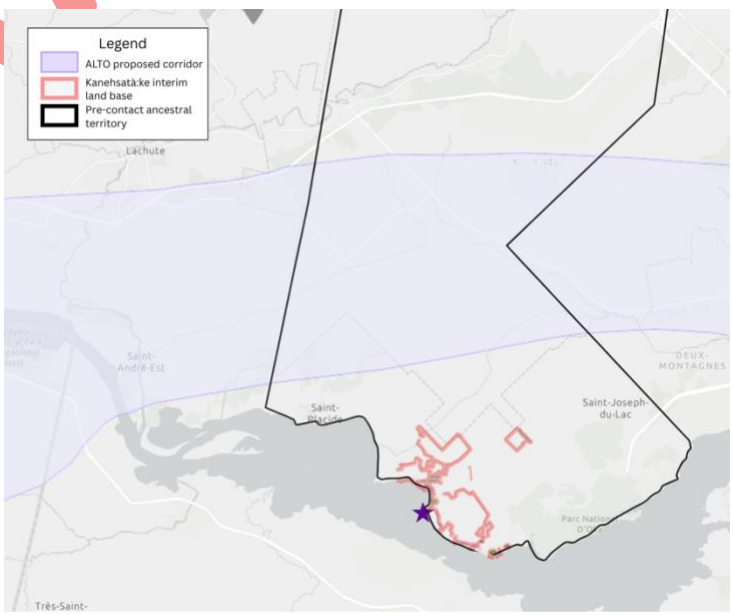
Community Profile

Kanehsatà:ke is a Kanien'kéha community whose deep historical, cultural, and spiritual connections to the land extend far beyond the current, imposed community boundaries. Kanehsatà:ke has existed long before European contact, and has always been a place of gathering, learning, and resilience. Long before borders or towns, our people walked here, lived here, and protected the land for future generations. Our ancestors managed the land according to sustainable practices, including hunting, fishing, and gathering, and we continue to protect our lands and waters for those yet to come, with gratitude and determination. Sacred sites remain important for ceremonies and community activities : the land is recognized not only as a resource but as a foundation of identity and well-being. It provides food, medicines and other resources, and continues to hold cultural and spiritual significance. We honour the relationship between people and the natural world through respect, and stewardship.

Our ancestral lands, including the Lake of Two Mountains, the Ottawa River corridor, surrounding forests, wetlands, and agricultural lands, form part of a living homeland that continues to sustain the community culturally, spiritually, and materially. For Kanehsatà:kehró:non, the entire territory is culturally significant. It is not defined by external boundaries or administrative designations and is understood as a continuous and interconnected whole where cultural practices, ecological systems, and responsibilities to the land are inseparable.

Community members continue to use these lands for hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering medicines, ceremony, teaching, travel, and agriculture. These activities are expressions of identity, law, and responsibility, and our territory remains subject to ongoing land claims and unresolved questions of title and jurisdiction: these lands were never ceded or surrendered. The 1990 Kanehsatà:ke Resistance, which was formed over the threat of a golf course expansion and residential development project on our unceded land, demonstrates how colonial encroachment continues to threaten our territory. These issues remain unresolved and all Kanehsatá:ke lands remain at risk whenever decisions are made without the participation or consent of Kanehsatà:kehró:non.



Procedural summary

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The perspectives reflected in this report were gathered through several means of engagement, to identify early community concerns, priorities, and red flags related to potential impacts on Kanehsatà:ke's traditional territory, rights, and future generations.

Feedback was gathered through several channels. The community was invited to an open doors event to express their concerns, identify potential risks, and ask questions. This *open doors* event ran for 8 hours, during which community members came in according to their availability and interest. A virtual option was also offered for those who could not make it in person. In addition to in-person and virtual meeting feedback, a survey was also used to gather information. Lastly, the input from informal exchanges, emails received, and Facebook comments, was also gathered and included in this report.

This process captured some voices from across the community but reflects an early stage of engagement only. More time is necessary to allow the community to get informed and provide informed feedback. Many noted that they were being asked to react to a project for which many details remained unclear, including a precise route, additional details, full extent of impacts, and the nature of potential benefits.

There was a clear call for additional engagement that would allow the community to deepen their understanding of what is being proposed, without the pressures of time and other constraints of colonial perspectives and ways of doing. There is also a strong expectation that future engagement must go beyond information gathering. This includes avoiding rigid timelines and opting for more flexibility, and providing information and space necessary for Kanehsatà:kehró:non to determine their position in accordance with their rights and responsibilities.

Community members also expressed concern about the broader context in which this engagement is taking place: with a history of projects moving forward on Indigenous lands without meaningful consent, the level of caution and skepticism expressed in the feedback is understandably high.

Initial Feedback

Important context

Before any feedback is shared, it's important to begin by acknowledging that the ALTO high-speed train project inserts itself within a broader context of historic and ongoing land dispossession, unresolved land claims, and external decision-making on Indigenous lands. The feedback as a whole reflects a high level of concern and caution, with a majority of community members expressing strong opposition to the project as currently understood, but conditional openness contingent on compensation measures.

Across these perspectives, there is a shared understanding that Kanehsatà:ke is not a stakeholder in this process, but a rights-holder whose authority over its lands must be recognized.

While this engagement represents an early stage in the process, the body of responses provides a clear and consistent message: the proposed corridor intersects with ancestral lands that are deeply significant to Kanehsatà:ke, and any consideration of the project must be grounded first and foremost in the recognition of rights, unresolved land claims, and the requirement for free, prior, and informed consent as a starting point.

Land claims, title, and jurisdiction

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A defining reality that shapes all perspectives shared by Kanehsatà:kehró:non during this process is that much of the territory intersected by ALTO's proposed corridor is subject to ongoing land claims and unresolved questions of title. The project is therefore not being assessed on neutral ground. While perspectives vary, there is a strong and consistent message that this project cannot be separated from the broader realities of land, rights, and jurisdiction.

Community members expressed concern that development of this nature risks prejudicing land claims and limiting future options, and worry that this project could affect the long-term ability of the community to exercise jurisdiction over its lands. Many indicated that any consideration of the project must come with explicit recognition of Kanehsatà:ke's rights, title, and jurisdiction. There is a clear expectation that the project must avoid undermining land claims, but rather be structured in a way that acknowledges and supports long-term self-determination. This includes ensuring that any use of the land reflects equitable participation in its value, does not negatively impact future governance authority, and respects the community's inherent stewardship and relationship to the territory.

Connection to the Land

Community members described a profound and ongoing relationship with the territory extending beyond the imposed boundaries of the community. The lands within the proposed corridor are actively used for hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering medicines, cultural and ceremonial practices, teaching, recreation, travel, and agriculture. These lands are not viewed as separate zones, but as part of a continuous and interconnected system. Community members repeatedly emphasized that the entire territory holds significance: Cultural sites, teaching spaces, ecological systems, and harvesting areas are understood to exist throughout the landscape and the notion of isolating specific "sensitive areas" was widely challenged. Many stated that the territory as a whole must be respected and protected. Land is central to identity, governance, and transmission of knowledge, and any disruption is understood as having far-reaching consequences beyond the immediate footprint of any project.

Environmental and Ecological Concerns

Environmental impacts are among the most frequently raised concerns, and closely linked to land claims, as degradation of the land may reduce its future use, value, and cultural integrity. Community members view the land as a living system in which all species are interconnected and integral to cultural practices and ways of life.

The concerns voiced include habitat destruction, fragmentation of ecosystems, disruption of migration routes, and risks to all forms of life, including important species such as deer, fish, turtles, birds, and pollinators. Wetlands and waterways were also identified as particularly sensitive, with potential impacts on water quality and fish habitats raising alarm. Many stressed that environmental damage would have long-term and potentially irreversible consequences, including ecological loss and impacts on the ability to exercise rights, maintain traditional practices, and sustain future generations.

Medicinal Plants

Concerns are also widespread when it comes to the presence of medicinal plants and natural resources throughout the territory, essential to community well-being and cultural continuity. Kanehsatà:kehró:non identified a wide range of plants, trees, and fungi used for medicine, food, and

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ceremony, and spoke about the importance of these plants for health, culture, and knowledge transmission, and expressed concern that they could be destroyed or made inaccessible.

There is significant worry that construction and operation of the rail corridor would lead to the destruction of these resources, a loss that cannot easily be replaced. While the community values all plant life, the loss of medicinal plants is not only an environmental issue, but also a cultural and health-related one, affecting knowledge systems that have been passed down through generations.

Cultural, archaeological, and burial sites

For Kanehsatà:kehró:non, the land is understood to contain widespread cultural, archaeological, and burial sites that are not confined to specific locations, but may be present throughout the territory. There is a clear expectation that any disturbance of such sites is unacceptable, that they must be fully protected, and that the community must have full authority over how any discoveries are handled, with involvement of community members in all related processes. There is a clear insistence that the community must retain authority over any artifacts or remains and be directly involved in all related processes.

Access to land and continuity of use

Maintaining access to the land emerged as another critical concern. Community members noted that a railway anywhere inside of the proposed corridor could create physical and practical barriers across the territory, limiting access to important existing trails, travel routes, and connections between different parts of the territory. This includes connections to places like Tioweró:ton (Doncaster) which remain vital to the community. The fragmentation of the territory would affect not only movement, but also the ability to maintain cultural practices and relationships with the land. This is particularly significant in the context of land claims, as infrastructure could restrict future land use and governance options.

Impacts on rights and future generations

Concerns emerged in terms of responsibility to future generations, as decisions made today will have lasting impacts. Once land is altered or lost, it may not be recoverable. This includes concerns about the transmission of knowledge, the ability of future generations to access and use the land, and the long-term integrity of the territory.

The potential impacts are seen as long-term and, in some cases, permanent. These include the loss of land, reduced ability to practice traditional activities, and disruption of knowledge transmission, resulting in diminished opportunities for future generations to maintain a relationship with the territory. Decisions made today will shape the future of the community for generations to come, which for community members increases the need for caution and protection on a long-term basis.

Cumulative impacts

There are several existing pressures on the territory, including highways, urban expansion, and industrial development. These cumulative impacts have already altered the landscape and reduced the available land base. The addition of another major infrastructure project is very concerning to the

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community, as it contributes to a broader pattern of environmental degradation and land loss that is reaching a critical point.

Consent and decision-making authority

Community members emphasized that consultation alone is insufficient. Engagement must move beyond information-sharing toward decision-making structures where Kanehsatà:ke has real authority. Across all responses, there is a clear and consistent expectation that Kanehsatà:ke's free, prior, and informed consent is required before any aspect of the project can proceed. However, there is a significant level of skepticism and concern regarding whether consent will be meaningfully respected: several community members questioned whether the project would proceed regardless of input.

While the bar for some is set at consent, which must be obtained prior to key decisions including route selection, environmental approvals, and construction activities, co-development is the preferred way forward for the community. Kanienké:ha perspectives and ways of doing must be given equal footing and a seat at the table.

It is also made clear that any discussion of the project must directly address certain realities: land claims, title, and jurisdiction cannot be treated as secondary considerations and must form the foundation of future engagement and collaboration. Any approach that fails to recognize this is viewed as a continuation of past patterns.

Economic opportunities and long-term benefits

Some community members acknowledged the potential opportunities related to employment, training, and economic development. However, the overarching concern expressed is that such opportunities are simply insufficient, and shared that any socioeconomic benefits must be meaningful, equitable, and long-term; in short, it should reflect the value of the land and the rights of the community. Questions were also raised regarding whether the community would share in the broader economic value of the project, including revenues generated over time. In the context of land claims, this is a matter of fairness and equity.

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Conclusion

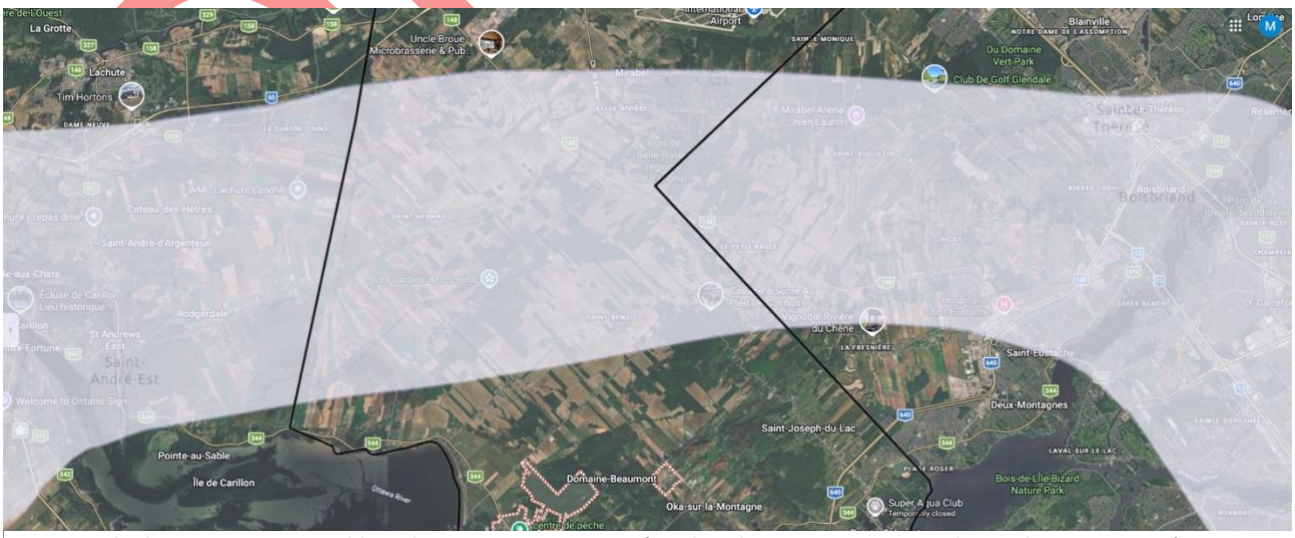
Kanehsatà:ke as a community is deeply connected to its territory and well aware of the long-term implications of development on its lands. While perspectives vary and include strong opposition, conditional openness, and interest in potential opportunities, all raised concerns related to the same principles.

For some, the fundamental question at this stage is not how they can provide input for the project, but whether it should proceed at all within Kanehsatà:ke's traditional territory. For others, there is openness, provided that the project respect jurisdiction, ensures meaningful participation, and delivers long-term benefits. Without consent, and without an equitable relationship based on partnership, mutual benefits, and mutual understanding, this project does not have legitimacy on our lands.

Across all responses, there is a shared expectation that Kanehsatà:ke must retain authority over decisions affecting its lands and future. Responses reflect not only concerns about this specific project, but a broader understanding of history, responsibility, and inherent rights as Kanien'kehá:ka. Any path forward must be grounded in a rights-based approach that recognizes Kanehsatà:ke not as a stakeholder, but as a rights-holder with authority over its lands.

PLEASE PROVIDE COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK ON THIS REPORT:

1. Form available via QR code for complete feedback.
2. Send comments and feedback directly to:
   communications@kanesatake.ca or gelinas.patrick@kanesatake.ca
   or bonspiel.tracey@kanesatake.ca
3. Contact Patrick Gelinas at 450-479-6006 or Tracey Bonspiel at 450-479-6767



Map of major infrastructure and cities with overlay of Kanehsatà:ke interim land base (red/white outline), Kanehsatà:ke ancestral territory (black outline) and ALTO proposed corridor (light purple)

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