

# 10 questions to federal Transport Minister Omar Alghabra



Federal transport Minister Omar Alghabra announced that the government is seeking private proposals to develop and operate VIA Rail's High-Frequency Rail project along the Toronto-Quebec City corridor.

Unifor members in the sector, including the public, are concerned this will lead to the further privatization of VIA Rail, and negatively affect the quality, reliability and accessibility of national passenger rail services.

Here are 10 questions for Canada's Transport Minister Omar Alghabra:

1. Many countries across the world have expanded their high-speed rail services. Why is Canada focusing solely on high frequency and not looking at options for developing high-speed trains?
2. Where exactly will these new high-frequency rails be installed along the corridor route?
3. Why is the government prioritizing wifi capacity for travelers from urban areas while rural communities currently have unreliable train service with non-functioning equipment, such as heat and toilets?
4. Has the government taken into account ridership data over the last 5 years and determined how this project will best serve members of Indigenous communities, elderly passengers, workers and others who rely on rail for travel?
5. Is the government looking to contract out rail service to a non-Canadian company that will invest VIA revenues to projects outside of Canada?
6. Can the government be specific about the work opportunities that will be offered to VIA rail employees currently working in the corridor?
7. Current VIA rail equipment is largely outdated and does not allow for rail electrification along the corridor. How will the government upgrade rail infrastructure, including rail equipment and track electrification?
8. The government's documentations says that Canada is "seeking feedback from Interested Parties that are interested in the design, build, finance, operation and maintenance of the HFR Project". Can the government explain what changes VIA rail employees can effectively expect if the operations and maintenance of the current service moves to new private management?
9. Which Indigenous groups, organizations, municipalities, communities or individuals has the government consulted with so far? What is the consultation plan to connect with Indigenous communities along the VIA rail corridor?
10. The 2021 Federal Budget announced \$491 million for VIA Rail to go towards targeted investments for upgrades of existing infrastructure, to enhance train services and to improve the existing service network. How is this public money specifically being used?