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TANKER TRAFFIC

B.C. mayors steel themselves for fight against Kinder Morgan pipeline

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Local governments on B.C.'s west coast are girding for a fight with energy giant Kinder Morgan over its \$5-billion pipeline expansion plans to move more Alberta oil to the Vancouver Harbour for transport overseas.

A phalanx of mayors is vowing to fight the project, including coastal communities far from the pipeline but exposed to increased oil tanker traffic.

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“This is not a comfortable position for Kinder Morgan, they’ll be relying on the federal government to override local government,” said Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan. “This may be the hill the Conservatives die on. The response from the public in British Columbia is, not only is this a potential danger to us, but there’s nothing in it for us.”

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson challenged B.C. Premier Christy Clark to take a stand on the plans, saying city residents – including her own Vancouver-Point Grey constituents – won’t support risking an oil spill.

“I will fiercely oppose the expansion of oil tankers in Vancouver’s harbour and the pipeline that feeds them,” he said in an interview. “The Premier should weigh in and I hope it is on the side of our local economies. It’s hard to imagine an oil spill on Kits Beach and Stanley Park – the impact it would have for generations.”

Ms. Clark did not return calls Friday. The Premier has balked at taking a position on a better-known pipeline proposal, the contentious Northern Gateway project.

That project is a key part of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's goal to take Canadian resources to Asian markets, but the B.C. government has yet to come out for or against it despite its “Canada starts here” marketing strategy.

The Gateway project is currently the subject of a national review, but the southern pipeline project is further ahead because Kinder Morgan already has a right of way for its relatively small pipeline – called Trans Mountain – from Edmonton to the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby.

On Thursday, Kinder Morgan Energy Partners LP, a Houston energy and pipeline company, announced it has enough customers lined up to begin the official regulatory review process of its plan, which would put another pipeline on the route, nearly tripling the current capacity and bringing an oil tanker a day into Burrard Inlet.

On Friday, at a meeting of Metro Vancouver mayors, talks began on forming a united front, Mr. Corrigan said. “This is something that is going to gain momentum as the mayors put their resources together to respond.”

Mr. Corrigan predicted it will also put the BC Liberal government in a tough position as it struggles to keep federal Conservatives on side. “They are going to be expected by the Conservative government to welcome access for Alberta oil. Their relationship with the federal government is going to be severely tested,” he said.

The BC Liberals, a coalition party made up of federal Liberals and Conservatives, has been bleeding support to the upstart BC Conservative Party. But Mr. Corrigan predicted: “Christy Clark will be taking her political life in her hands if she appears to be supporting this.”

Mr. Corrigan’s community is host to the existing Kinder Morgan pipeline terminal, but he said any additional jobs will be outweighed by job losses at local oil refineries as crude oil is shipped overseas for processing.

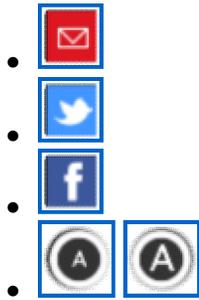
And Burnaby experienced a pipeline rupture in 2007 that left residents with vivid memories.

Construction crews digging a sewer-line trench punctured holes in a pipeline carrying synthetic crude to the shipping terminal. Nearly 250,000 litres of oil gushed out in less than half an hour, with some coating nearby residential properties and about 70,000 litres spilling into the Burrard Inlet. Last year the pipeline's owner, Kinder Morgan subsidiary Trans Mountain Pipeline, pleaded guilty to environmental charges, along with a construction company and an engineering firm involved in the accident.

Victoria Mayor Dean Fortin said Vancouver Island communities also have a stake in this debate: "For us, it's about what happens if we have an oil disaster – to our fishery, to our tourism industry. The risk may be low but a single event could be catastrophic."

Local governments may not be able to block a project that appears to have the federal government's favour, but Mr. Fortin said they can ensure that the public gains a voice in the decision.

"Part of our role as municipal leaders is to be sure there is real and meaningful consultation," he said. "The responsibility now falls on to the National Energy Board to do their job."



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