



NATIONAL

# THE TRANS MOUNTAIN IMPASSE



Oil company Kinder Morgan's plan to expand the Trans Mountain Pipeline running from Edmonton, Alberta to Burnaby, B.C. has ignited a heated controversy.

## WHAT IS THE TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE?

Built in 1953, the 1183-kilometre Trans Mountain pipeline carries up to 300,000 barrels per day (BPD) of crude oil and refined oil products to the West Coast.

In 2013, Kinder Morgan proposed building a second pipeline alongside the original one. The new pipeline would carry diluted bitumen. Together, the twin pipelines could transport 890,000 BPD, almost triple the current capacity.

Kinder Morgan said the \$7.4-billion project would also include 12 new tanks, 19 extra pumping stations, and three additional berths at the marine terminal in Burnaby. That would allow the terminal to accommodate 34 tankers a month, instead of five – a seven-fold increase.

## ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Kinder Morgan said the expansion was necessary because Canada's oil producers are already manufacturing more oil than existing pipelines and railways can carry. Twinning the pipeline would eliminate that bottleneck, which is costing Canada's oil industry about \$15 billion a year. It would also open the door to new markets, allowing the oil to be sold to China and other Pacific Rim countries, rather than mainly to the U.S.

The company argued that increasing capacity would benefit not just the oil industry, but all Canadians. The oil and gas sector employs 710,000 workers, generates eight percent of Canada's GDP, and helps fund healthcare, education, and infrastructure through taxes. If the oil industry grows stronger, then the Canadian economy does, too.

## FOR AND AGAINST

The federal government has jurisdiction over interprovincial

## PIPELINE PRIMER

Pipelines move raw fuel over long distances to refineries. There, the fuel is converted into products we use every day, such as heating oil or gas for cars.

Canada's pipeline network runs above and below ground and covers about 840,000 kilometres. Many of these pipelines originate in Western Canada, where most of the nation's oil is found.

Supporters say that pipelines are the safest and most environmentally-friendly way to transport crude oil – but they are not failproof. In 2004, the National Energy Board (NEB) estimated that large petroleum pipelines experience a spill every 16 years for every 1000 kilometres of length.

pipelines, and in November 2016, it approved the project.

The Alberta government was pleased; Premier Rachel Notley believes the expansion is key to boosting her province's sagging economy. However, B.C.'s government, some

## DEFINITIONS

**BITUMEN:** a black, thick form of crude oil extracted from the oil sands

**CRUDE OIL:** oil that is still in its natural state

**JURISDICTION:** the right or power to make legal decisions

**NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD (NEB):** an agency created in 1959 by the federal government to oversee Canada's oil and gas industry



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B.C. municipal governments and First Nations, and environmentalists are strongly against Kinder Morgan's proposal. They're concerned that the pipeline could leak in an environmentally sensitive area, or that increased tanker traffic could lead to a spill in already-busy coastal waters. They also argue that an expansion would undermine Canada's commitment to take measures to slow climate change.

## LET THE COURTS DECIDE

B.C. Premier John Horgan says that his province should be able to stand up for its environment, economy, and interests. So in April, the B.C. government asked the B.C. Court of Appeal to rule on whether the province has the power to restrict increased amounts of oil from entering it. If it does, then Premier Horgan said he won't allow the Trans Mountain expansion to go ahead.

Premier Notley was incensed. She called the court case a stalling tactic and threatened to cut the flow of Alberta oil to B.C. refineries in retaliation. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that the pipeline is in Canada's "vital, strategic interest." He pledged that the pipeline would be built despite B.C.'s opposition – even if that meant paying for the project using taxpayers' money.

"Canada is a country of the rule of law, and the federal government will act in the national interest," he stated.

## WHERE DO FIRST NATIONS STAND?

Of the more than 133 Aboriginal communities and groups with an interest in the pipeline or interests potentially affected by it, 43 have signed benefit agreements with Kinder Morgan – including 33 groups in B.C. They will receive revenue, employment opportunities, and business contracts if the expansion goes ahead.

One-third of the pipeline route in B.C. traverses the traditional lands of the Simpcw First Nation – one of the Indigenous groups in favour of the project.

"We have lived with this existing pipeline for about 60 years and we have real concerns about it... but it's there and we see the... need for oil and gas to power our lives and our economy and we are realistic about that," said Chief Nathan Matthew. "If oil is going to be needed from Alberta, and it has to be moved to the coast of B.C. through our territory, I believe... that pipelines are probably the safest alternative."

However, 53 First Nations in B.C. are against the project. Three groups – the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, the Musqueam Indian Band, and the Coldwater Indian Band – have launched a legal challenge against the expansion, arguing that the federal government failed to meet its obligations to consult and accommodate their concerns over the project. The Tsleil-Waututh say they are determined to protect the coast from what they believe would be an inevitable oil spill from the increased pipeline volume and tanker traffic.

"We've been here for thousands of years," said Rueben George, manager of the community's Sacred Trust, which was set up to stop the pipeline expansion. "We need the money [the project would bring], but we don't need it enough to sell out the things we love and are spiritually connected to – and that's our land, our water, our people."

## BIG CONSEQUENCES

Yet by mid-May, how and when the project would proceed was still uncertain. All the acrimony between the B.C., Alberta, and federal governments prompted Kinder Morgan to announce that it was putting the project on hold and would walk away from it altogether unless the legal challenges were settled by May 31.

Some observers, however, say that who wins and loses this controversy isn't as important as what the disagreement has shown about the ability of Canada's different governments to work together to find solutions to difficult problems.

"Where we are as a federation is in a dangerous spot," said former federal Liberal cabinet minister and former B.C. premier Ujjal Dosanjh. ★

## ABOUT THE OIL SANDS

Oil sand is a naturally occurring mixture of sand, clay, water, and bitumen. It is found in several places on Earth, but Canada's deposits in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan are the largest in the world. They cover over 140,000 square kilometres, and contain enough bitumen to produce as much as 315 billion barrels of oil. That makes them the second-largest crude oil reserve on the planet, next to the one in Saudi Arabia. However, extracting bitumen from oil sand is difficult, costly – and takes a toll on the environment. Critics say the process of extracting Alberta's oil pollutes the air and water, destroys habitats, and threatens the health of surrounding communities. They also claim that the oil sands produce a tenth of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.



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## ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. Describe the oil sands located in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan.

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2. What are pipelines used for?

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3. What is the Trans Mountain Pipeline?

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4. How does Kinder Morgan plan to expand the capacity of this route? Explain.

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5. Explain why Kinder Morgan wants to do this.

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6. Which two governments are in favour of the proposed expansion? Name the leaders of these governments.

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7. Which provincial government is against the project? List at least two other groups or organizations that are opposed.

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8. List at least three reasons why supporters are in favour of the Trans Mountain expansion project.

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9. List at least two reasons some people are opposed to the Trans Mountain expansion project.

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## BETWEEN THE LINES

An *inference* is a conclusion drawn from evidence. A *plausible inference* is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.

What inference(s) can you draw from the fact that Kinder Morgan wants to sell oil to China and other Pacific Rim countries?

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## JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. a) What is your understanding of the reasons for and against the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion? Explain.
- b) Are you more in favour of or more opposed to the pipeline expansion? Give reasons to support your response.
2. As you see it, what is the significance of the controversy over the proposed Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion? Explain.

## ONLINE

*Note:* The links below are listed at [www.lesplan.com/en/links](http://www.lesplan.com/en/links) for easy access.

1. Watch "The Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline controversy, explained," by Maclean's magazine at <https://youtu.be/rcCZkFoZYv8> [9:16]
2. Find out more about the Trans Mountain Pipeline on the National Energy Board website at <http://www.neb-one.gc.ca/nrg/ntgrtd/pplnprtl/pplnprfls/crdl/trnsmntn-eng.html>
3. Watch "How are pipelines constructed" at [https://youtu.be/Gap\\_IhBIrGI](https://youtu.be/Gap_IhBIrGI) [4:37]
4. Learn how oil sands are mined by watching the Alberta Energy Regulator's "What Really Happens at an Oil Sands Mine?" at <https://youtu.be/SGQZMKoBoWI> [3:34] and "Canada's Tar Sands: The Most Destructive Project on Earth?" at <https://youtu.be/Sjla7BsP4Bw> [7:49]. Compare these two accounts. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? Explain.
5. Listen to a talk show on the proposed Trans Mountain expansion and why it's so controversial at <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thesundayedition/the-sunday-edition-april-29-2018-1.4638038/a-primer-on-the-kinder-morgan-pipeline-1.4638118> [30:31] ★