

Green Way or Future Environmental Disaster? ^[1]

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The Gas Pipeline will impact several acres of rivers, forests and residential areas.

For some time, in Puerto Rico we have been hearing about the Gas Pipeline project or the Green Way. Since CienciaPR's mission is to impartially educate the general public, we have prepared this small special story about what is in reality the Gas Pipeline and what are the possible advantages and risks associated with the construction, management and maintenance of it.

What is the Gas Pipeline or Green Way?

The Gas Pipeline is a project from the Puerto Rico Energy Power Authority (PREPA) that aims to construct a natural gas pipeline that goes from the EcoElectrica Liquid Natural Gas Terminal in Peñuelas, to the central thermoelectric facilities of Cambalache in Arecibo, Palo Seco and San Juan. The pipeline will have 92 miles and it might impact both public and private lands.

How PREPA and the Government of Puerto Rico Justify the Project?

A reality that we have in Puerto Rico and the rest of the world is that the electricity is super expensive and prices are still rising. According to PREPA data, in December, 2010, residential clients were paying 23.0 cents per kilowatts hour (¢/kWh), while in the states of California and Florida, costs by March 2010, were of 15.26 and 11.58 (¢/kWh), respectively.

Why the Electricity is More Expensive in Puerto Rico than in the United States?

It is because of the way to generate electricity. In PR, more than 69% of the electricity is generated from oil, and the rest from carbon (15%) and natural gas (15%). Meanwhile in Florida and the contiguous Atlantic states, the production is 14% oil, 35% natural gas 34% carbon and 16% nuclear. In both cases the remaining percentages use alternative hydroelectric energies. It is due to this, that PR as in Hawaii, that also generates electricity from oil (76%, 27.79 ¢/kWh) are the territories with the highest prices.

What Would be the Benefit of the Gas Pipeline or Greenway Project?

With this project, PREPA claims that it will result in a reduction of gas emissions and a reduction of the electricity cost by 20%, because they will not depend on oil pricing that affect all of us. To produce electricity from natural gas is beneficial because its combustion is more complete and less contaminants are emitted to the atmosphere.

Then, What is the Problem with the Gas Pipeline? What are the Environmental Implications?

Environmental and economical benefits come from the use of natural gas and the reduction of carbon and oil use. However, gas needs to go through the Gas Pipeline. Various analyses performed by agencies and scientific groups have concluded that the mentioned benefit does not justify the high environmental cost that the country will incur by constructing the gas pipeline. CienciaPR.org consulted the positions emitted by the US Army Corps of Engineers, which is the federal agency in charge of approving these projects with multiple impacts to both the environment and the population. They consolidate the concepts released by other federal and state agencies that emit concepts on projects of great impact like the Gas Pipeline. These agencies include the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Federal Highway Administration (FHA) and even the College of Engineers and Surveyors of Puerto Rico. All these agencies, recommended to not honor the permits to PREPA, because they found insufficient justification to construct the project and that there are lots of things that need explanation.

For example, the EPA, through the PR Office emitted the following concept. Initially they explain that: *the total project area is approximately 1,672 acres and the pipeline would traverse 235 rivers and wetlands, resulting in an estimated impact to 369 acres of jurisdictional waters of the United States.*

In addition they state that:

after evaluating the information contained in the November 19, 2010 PN [public notice], the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) believes that the applicant has not adequately demonstrated the need for the proposed pipeline in accordance with the Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines requirements. The applicant must better document the need for a natural gas pipeline by presenting a more thorough alternatives analysis. Such analysis should evaluate other fuel sources other than natural gas since the stated purpose does not specify fuel type, the construction of an

alternative terminal near one of the north coast power plants and the installation of a shorter length pipeline between Arecibo and Toa Baja

For these and other numerous technical and unjustified reasons, both the US Army Corps of Engineers and EPA, recommended not to approve the project until many stated problems are justified and clarified.

What are the Dangers of Having the Gas Pipeline in Puerto Rico?

Undoubtedly, any combustible pipeline will have a great risk of explosions and accidents. From 2010, more than 25 accidents have been reported in gasoline, natural gas and oil pipelines. 90 % of these accidents have occurred in the US and 90% were natural gas pipelines. In some cases, the explosions have taken lives. It is important to remark, that some cases have been acts of apparent terrorism (Mexico accident) have been the cause of the problem. However, in most of the cases problems with leaks on the lines has been the main cause.

Conclusions

Certainly, with the evidence provided we see that in Puerto Rico there is an urge to produce energy in an environmentally friendly way and at a substantially lower cost. However, as the reports from the different regulatory agencies state, PREPA, at this moment, has not provided sufficient justification to construct such a wide project and has not complied with the minimum regulatory standards to demonstrate the environmental viability of the project. Due to this, we believe that the Green Way project, as it was submitted, is not in accordance with the minimum requirements and should not be developed. We echo the voices of the puertorrican and international scientific community and state that the project must not be developed as proposed.

If you would like to learn more about the Green Way project, visit their website at <http://www.aeepr.com/viaverde.asp> [4]. If you would like to read in detail about the concepts emitted by the EPA and the US Army Corp of Engineers, follow this [link](#). [5]

In addition, we recommend you visit the web site of the [Puerto Rico Sierra Club](#) [6] and [Casa Pueblo](#) [7].

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