

Trans-Mountain Pipeline Expansion

Tomorrow, June 18, 2019, as has been widely reported, the federal cabinet is set to make and announce a decision (again) on the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion (TMX) – the twinning of the oil pipeline from Edmonton to Burnaby. In advance of this decision and in the spirit of transparency and openness, I have decided to write down some thoughts on TMX – a project that has been and continues to be a hot topic of conversation in Vancouver and across the country, one with a diversity of views and positions. It should be of no surprise that many of you have asked my opinion on the pipeline. Media have asked me for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer on whether I support the expansion. The answer for me is not that simple. There are many considerations – which I touch on below. No question, TMX will continue to garner debate and I welcome your feedback and thoughts on this important issue.

Here is what I expect to happen tomorrow. The government will say further court-ordered consultations with Indigenous peoples have taken place, and that the effects on the marine environment have been addressed. And having done this work, and imposed further conditions, the project is, once again, approved. The immediate response to this decision will be the filing of multiple lawsuits against the government’s decisions. And being truthful, if the past is any precedent – and in no way condoning or encouraging the breaking of the law – there will be a rapid mobilization of on the ground conflict that will foster cycles of tensions. As a result, Canadians will be further divided. While there will be photo-ops and talk of “getting shovels in the ground”, no one will be able to say with certainty when – or if – actual pipe will be laid and if any product will ever flow through it.

Apart from what may or may not happen if TMX is approved, for me, and others, it is still an open question whether there is a compelling economic case for the expansion project. At the end of the day the economic viability of the project is ultimately tied to the question of how long the transition from fossil fuels to other energy sources will take place globally and until then, where countries will source their oil. Make no mistake there is, thankfully, a transition to renewables taking place; it is just a question of how long. At some point global demand for fossil fuels will, with regional variation, decline and at an accelerating rate. This timeline depends on many variables: government policies (domestic and international); affordability

and availability of alternative sources of energy (based on developing technology and level of investment); ability of interest groups to delay or speed up the transition; and, ultimately, the will of us – the people. A relevant question for those concerned with climate change (and most of us are – regardless of political stripe) is how fast will the necessary and inevitable transition from fossil fuels take? The big question is, will it be fast enough to put the brakes on human-made climate change? Time – as always – is of the essence.

Accordingly, for someone investing in pipelines with a time-limited future, it comes down to a basic equation of supply and demand and whether the investment is sound. The investment analysts have their views, as do the companies and people with “skin” in the fossil fuel game, as do those who oppose on principle any expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure. Who do you believe? Who do you want to believe? For me, I am not convinced of the economic case for TMX. I would also like more certainty about how long these pipelines will be operating during the transition. Yes, we need the existing pipeline today, but what capacity do we need in the future? There are no black and white answers.

There are other wildcards that could also happen – such as a further sale of the project, including a move to significant Indigenous ownership – but at this time these outcomes seem uncertain.

In my opinion, and truth be told, we did not need to land in this spot.

I recall the conversations I had with British Columbians and Canadians over four years ago when I first ran to be the Member of Parliament for Vancouver Granville. I heard – and continue to hear as I knock on doors in Vancouver Granville – from so many voices with the full range of views on pipelines, and other major resource development projects. I expressed then, as I believe now, that there are three prerequisites for such projects to proceed. These are: 1) a resetting of the legislative and policy foundations for transformed relations with Indigenous peoples, including support for Indigenous governance and decision-making; 2) robust investment in environmental protection; and, 3) a clear, predictable, and structured plan, with transformative investments, for rapid transition to a true green economy.

While I was in government I continued to carry forward the message about these three prerequisites. My views have not changed. What has changed is the environment (no pun intended) in which we are having this conversation. To date, in my view, the necessary prerequisites for building TMX have not fully been met.

Why are we in this spot? Unfortunately, we have arrived here because choices and actions that have been taken have resulted in a broad cross-section of Canadians of all backgrounds deciding they do not trust the federal government to own, operate, and regulate this project. And as an Indigenous person and leader I know how paralyzing mistrust can be to getting anything done. More than anything a lack of trust, and broken trust, breeds paralysis and maintains the status quo.

What caused this mistrust with TMX? In my view, and just to name a few:

- There is mistrust because of the lack of meeting standards the government committed to enshrine in legislation and policy regarding Indigenous rights;
- There is mistrust that stems from a continued lack of confidence in the regulatory process;
- There is mistrust because of how long it has taken the government to move this forward, while also not pursuing the exploration of alternative pipelines;
- There is mistrust because it seems inconsistent with the imperative of addressing climate change, including how building a pipeline will actually help transition to a new green economy;
- There is mistrust because leaders of all stripes, at many points of time, have seemed incapable of sitting down, collaborating, and sorting this issue out; and,
- There is mistrust because of poor communication and insufficient information sharing on the part of government, matched with misinformation and hyperbole by those in opposition. Simply put, when making decisions about the relationship between major resource development, climate change, and Indigenous reconciliation becomes dominated by politics and political expediency, the end result is never good.

To re-iterate, I believe today what I believed four years ago. There are contexts where pipeline projects, are viable and important – and I certainly understand and appreciate the economic imperative for millions of Canadians. But the place we have landed at this moment in time is one in which a climate of failure and conflict has prevailed. The vision of how such projects fit into the future of Canada, including addressing climate change and Indigenous reconciliation, has been lost in a fog of confusion, mixed messaging, and a lack of leadership from multiple governments. We need to get beyond this.

How do we do this? We often hear about the intersection of climate change, reconciliation, and jobs and economic growth. And this is true – they are all intimately related. But I think Canadians are tired of just hearing they intersect – we need to be talking about *how* they intersect, and actually design our policies and decisions around these three matters in ways that make sense. While some progress has been made, more needs to be done.

Let me give examples. When we hear from Indigenous peoples and the courts that processes and decisions were “too little – too late”, we need to be designing with Indigenous peoples far earlier what is proactive and appropriate, based on legislative and policy foundations that are helping Indigenous Nations re-build their governance and decision-making structures – to become full partners in Confederation. When we confront the urgent need of addressing climate change, we need to explain, illustrate and entertain how pipeline development is actually only one part of the substantial investment, job creation, and transition to a green economy that must take place in a fixed timeframe. Pipelines have a limited lifespan. When we recognize that changing global and local conditions disproportionately impacts a particular region or people, we need to intervene early in partnership to implement plans for job growth in new sectors within those regions. We know there is clear evidence that with bold and big investment in environmental innovation and renewables we will create exponentially more sustainable green jobs.

And we need to do this through recognition that all of this work on these issues revolves around the same fundamental challenge – building the most resilient Canada for the 21st century. Resilience means many things – but more than anything it means toughness. And Canada needs to be increasingly tough to confront a world where forests burn, seas rise,

opportunities close, tensions heighten, and uncertainty rules. And the resilience – toughness – that we need as a country never has its foundation in division. We all have to make sacrifices for the survival of our climate, our planet. Whether we want to or not – it is our duty to the next generation and the generations unborn. And most of us are ready – indeed driven. We just want leadership to make the right decisions with the least amount of pain and the most impact. We want informed decisions based on evidence and common sense, and to limit the roles of special interests and excessive partisanship.

Yet, while a majority of people will accept a pipeline with conditions, we risk increasing division around this project. Leadership demands looking beyond the next election cycle or meeting or moment in time, changing course where the course has failed, and being bold in new ways. In this case, we need leadership that can help stop the mistrust and division, and reset a proper economic course that accounts for the real connections to reconciliation and climate change.

It has been famously said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. I expect that is what we will see this week, as the government chooses to try to proceed, again, in a context of ongoing conflict and mistrust. That decision will undoubtedly please many Canadians – though I imagine that will be tempered by continued skepticism that government will be able to follow through and actually build the project. Time has changed many things.

Given this unfortunate reality, a better approach, in my view, is to acknowledge the broken context, and not proceed with TMX at this time. This approach requires leadership, collaboration and commitment along with bold and concrete plans that actually reset the direction of our energy future in a way Canadians can trust and get behind – from coast-to-coast-to-coast. What are your thoughts?