



Williams prefers to put pipeline under the bay

By Alexander Rich Staff Writer

A day after meeting with local oyster farmers, representatives from Williams, the company proposing the Pacific Connector Gas Pipeline project, officially announced its preference for the water route underneath Coos Bay, bypassing Glasgow Heights.

The company may change course if geotechnical boring samples from the estuary produce unexpected results, but company officials were confident Tuesday no such surprises would mar the route.

“Project representatives believe a suitable water route has been identified that is feasible and minimizes public and environmental concerns,” said a press release issued Tuesday morning. “Preliminary evaluations have indicated that construction through the water is viable, and soil samples are currently being collected from Coos Bay to confirm this.”

Williams Communication Specialist Michele Swaner said the decision was precipitated by a positive meeting with oyster farmers.

“We worked quite a bit with the farmers, asking them what routes would be best for them and finding out where the oyster bed locations are so we can avoid them,” she said.

Having determined a route the farmers found suitable, Swaner said there was little reason to wait to release the decision.

“Our preliminary work suggests the route is probably feasible. We have looked at this route for quite some time and we feel very confident that the borings will confirm the water route will work,” she said.

The impetus for more seriously examining a water route was produced by a general outcry from local citizens and communities against the idea of a pipeline cutting through a heavily residential area. Residents in Glasgow began receiving letters in March from Williams, requesting permission to survey a path for the proposed pipeline. Protests were staged and Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., spoke out against a pipeline route through any residential area. Several public bodies passed resolutions against such a route and the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay recommended avoiding such areas, too. Despite initial concerns that a water route would be more difficult to gain approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Williams began to examine water routes.

“There were some engineering issues with the land route and you don’t want to alienate people with a pipeline,” Swaner said. “Part of our goal is to listen to the community and then accommodate them.”



World File Photo After working with farmers to avoid oyster beds in Coos Bay, Williams announced its preference for a pipeline route.

Although Swaner said Williams had spent considerable time considering an alternative to cutting through Glasgow, the idea of a water route had not formally been put forward when Dr. Steven Shimotakahara took the podium at a Federal Energy Regulation Commission community meeting at Southwestern Oregon Community College.

The Glasgow resident created quite a stir when he came out in support of the economic development potential from a pipeline, but qualified his remarks by suggesting a route through his neighborhood was not the way to go.

"I believe ... there are safer and better routes for the pipeline than through the developing community of Glasgow," Shimotakahara wrote in a letter to the company. "The Glasgow Peninsula is undergoing active residential development, and this development is likely to continue for the next two decades. This exposes the pipeline to damage from accidental human incursion with heavy equipment ... Many of the landowners are accustomed to the development of their lands with little regard to the urban consequences of digging without checking."

Instead, he suggested the pipeline company consider examining the possibility of constructing a line through the bay's mudflats.

Several alternative routes cutting across the estuary bed were first announced at an Oregon International Port of Coos Bay meeting on July 20. A number of groups initially were contacted by the pipeline company, including the Coquille Indian Tribe.

Brett Kenney, Coquille tribal attorney, said the main concern was that the pipeline's construction might disturb the mudflats, which hold cultural significance to the tribe.

"We believe there are many cultural resources, and village sites and bones in the mudflats," he said. "Oregon state law creates all types of protections for these artifacts, so they came to speak with us, but we didn't take a position on the pipeline."

Aside from that meeting, however, the Coquilles were not contacted by Williams. That was not the case for the area's oyster farmers. An initial meeting in September produced a number of concerns by oyster farmers about cutting directly across the estuary's oyster beds. On Monday, a meeting was held that presented a newly devised water route that stuck more closely to the channel, away from the mudflats containing the Indian artifacts and oysters.

Lilli Clausen, co-owner of Clausen Oysters in North Bend, said she is disappointed any part of the pipeline is slated to go through the bay, but said Williams made adjustments to its original designs to avoid the majority of oyster beds.

"They rerouted the pipeline so it does not go as far through the oyster beds, but it looked like it might still go through some of the beds at the lower edge of the channel," she said. "I know I can't fight this, but I liked the new routing better than the last route."

Jess Hampel, manager of Coos Bay Oyster Co., said he wasn't at Monday's meeting, but his understanding is the new route will have little impact on the oyster beds.

"I don't have any concerns (about the new route)," he said.

What caused Clausen to pause was the construction of the pipeline itself. She said she is worried it could result in the suspension of mud and sand in the water, which could pose a health risk to the oysters.

"When they dig the line, the process stirs up the sand and mud. The tide carries it back and forth and the oysters will gobble up the sand and could die," she said.

Assurances that dredging would only take place in advance of an outgoing tide and the placement of in water curtains to hinder movement of mud in the water were of little comfort to Clausen.

Jerry Hampel, general manager of Pacific Seafood Co.'s oyster operations and a Port commissioner, agreed with Clausen that it would be better if the route went somewhere else, but the location chosen has the least impact of all the options.

"This is the one time where it actually worked to go speak with a company," he said. "They listened to our concerns and didn't shove the prospect of eminent domain down our throats. If we have got to have it, this is the very best location."

Bob Braddock, project manager of Jordan Cove Energy Project, agreed with Hampel insofar as he thinks the water route will have the lowest impact. He declines to speculate if it would improve the chances of FERC approval for the liquefied natural gas terminal.

"I have no idea whether the route will have any impact on how they view our terminal," he said. "I'm not sure it has any bearing with the FERC process."

Though Swaner said about the same thing when asked the same question, she did suggest Williams' effort to connect with the community could only be viewed as a positive.

"FERC wanted us to listen to the community," she said. "They definitely said pay attention to how people feel about the project."

Port of Coos Bay President David Kronsteiner submitted formal testimony to FERC, asking that the pipeline route minimize any impacts to residential areas. The port's director of marketing, Martin Callery, said Williams has not provided port officials with a map of the proposed route. At least from what he read in Williams press release Tuesday, this new proposal to apparently bury the pipeline through the bay is supportable.

"This one makes a heck of a lot of sense to us. Technology exists in the industry to do this very readily and very easily," he said.

Callery said he is satisfied that Williams is listening to local residents' concerns.

Lisa LaGesse made it difficult to ignore the community. A resident of Glasgow who was outspoken in her opposition to a pipeline going through her community, she organized rallies and worked to get local cities to come out against the proposed pipeline. She said she is glad to hear Williams indicate its preference for a route not going through Glasgow, but remains skeptical of the final outcome.

"If the information is true, then I would feel very relieved, as I am sure most of my fellow neighbors would," she said. "But we have received news like this before and then seen surveyors in town the next week. I want to see something definite before I get my hopes up."

LaGesse also expressed a desire that the line would not have to inconvenience anyone, which was also a chord struck by Jody McCaffree, of Citizens Against LNG.

"That's great news for Glasgow, but what about Shady Cove, and Eagle Point and all the other small inland communities that are going to be affected by this 223-mile pipeline?" she asked. "I don't see anybody over there waving a banner. All it takes is one little crack. And maybe it won't happen. But there are pipeline accidents all the time."

Glasgow resident Lyn Clarke expressed concern for other communities, especially for maintenance purposes.

"It's better, I guess, if it's in the bay, but I'm very concerned about the maintenance of a 223-mile pipeline," she said. "With these companies, they wait for it to break, and then they do something about it."

She also wanted to know when it will be possible for local residents to meet with Williams personnel and air

their concerns.

Swaner had an answer for this question, explaining a meeting has been scheduled for Jan. 24. Although a time and location have yet to be confirmed, the meeting is expected to include representatives from Williams.
