

Opinion on the BAPE project "projet d'augmentation de la capacité d'un oléoduc dans le Parc d'Oka".

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When I buy new boots for my kids, I choose a size that is bigger than their immediate need. Investment choices are not based solely on solving immediate needs as they arise, but have to involve planning for future growth.

Now, it is true that oil-product companies have a budget that is considerably more flexible than that of my own family, but, like me, they are definitely dealing with a growth phenomenon, they do count their dollars carefully. Much more carefully: the bigger the investment, the farther one looks ahead.

It is scandalous that an organization such as the BAPE, which claims to promote a perspective of sustainable development, is presenting the proposed project in isolation, and not within a context of the longer-term plan for accommodating future growth. The specifications for the original pipeline, put in place over 50 years ago, were surely chosen so as to allow room to grow. The company is now running at maximum capacity within that system, hence the proposed upgrade. The currently-proposed upgrade will enable a much larger maximum capacity, but at what point in time will the company be operating the pipeline at the new maximum capacity? Immediately after completion, it appears! Hardly sounds like a plan for the next 50 years.

Another service the BAPE claims to offer the general public is due consideration of the relevant economic issues surrounding the project. Everybody is talking about the oil industry these days, why isn't the BAPE? Where are the charts of projected growth in the oil industry, the projected increases in energy consumption in Quebec and Ontario, the new demands anticipated of the related oil transport infrastructure?

The proposed upgrade is actually only a partial upgrade: a large portion of the pipeline will remain at the original 10-inch diameter. Future increases in capacity will obviously be accommodated by upgrading these sections as well. (The fact that PTNI claims to have no such plans only underlines the importance of relying on common sense in this study, and not on public statements of interested parties.) The project should only be evaluated in the context of the full project completion, in which the entire pipeline has been replaced by 16-inch diameter pipes.

In particular, project completion will include a new larger-diameter pipe under the Lake of Two Mountains. The current under-lake pipe leads directly into Oka park, and so this question is directly linked to the question at hand, viz. how best to relocate the pipeline to minimize environmental impacts.

An environmental impact study is fundamentally a long-term view, it makes no sense to evaluate a partial modification when there are such strong reasons to expect additional modifications in the future. The future of the entire PTNI section from St.Marthe to the Como station must be evaluated as a whole, in order to make an informed, long-term decision about which relocation scheme represents the best balance between environmental impact and economic necessity.

There are many other loose ends and unanswered questions surrounding this project, that many of my fellow citizens have taken the time to bring to your attention. The conclusion is clearly that more time and information is needed in order to make an informed decision. At the same time, it would be unrealistic to bring PTNI's entire upgrading project to a halt while we resolve this. The converse danger is that economic pressures foreshorten the debate and cause hasty decisions about long-term environmental impacts.

In face of this, the most important question to evaluate is the impact of leaving Oka Park out of PTNI's upgrading project. A rough calculation suggests that this omission should only reduce their anticipated target capacity by a small amount. ( It would limit the flow rate to one that produces a pressure gradient of 350 kPa/km instead of 400 kPa/km : see Appendix I ). The only responsible response to the current situation is to leave out Oka park from the upgrading project for now, until a proper understanding of the situation has been established.