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Bayou Bridge pipeline's impact on SBC: Not in My Bayou, Part 2

Lex Talamo, alexa.talamo@shreveporttimes.com 8:53 a.m. CT Jan. 14, 2017



(Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Trundle)

Shreveport-Bossier locals are keeping a close eye on the progress of a proposed pipeline that could be coming to Louisiana as early as March. While the pipeline could mean lowered gas prices up north, it could also have potential negative health and environmental effects on those down South— including the families and loved ones of many Shreveport-Bossier residents.

A Thursday night public hearing in Baton Rouge raised questions by concerned members of the public about the safety, environmental and human impact of the proposed Bayou Bridge Pipeline Project. The proposed pipeline, if approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, would cut a 162 mile underground route through the Atchafalaya Basin and 11 of the state's parishes.

The hearing was attended by dozens of elected officials, pipeline company representatives, members of the New-Orleans branch of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality. About 300 members of the public also packed into Baton Rouge's Galvez Building on North 5th Street— including the Shreveport-Bossier environmental group North Louisiana for Climate Justice.

"A few including myself were upset about the billions of dollars our state gives wealthy oil companies, while gutting programs that actually help people like TOPS," said Ryan Trundle, the coordinator for the Shreveport-Bossier group. "It is inconceivable that there is more benefit to let a Texas company destroy our beautiful wetlands to transport North Dakota oil that will be sold overseas than education, health and the livelihood of the people that depend on the Atchafalaya Basin."



Sonya Bratie, left, and Mary Thoma, right, traveled from Shreveport to attend the Bayou Bridge pipeline protest in Baton Rouge. Here, they hold a banner with a Standing Rock solidarity symbol. (Photo: Courtesy of Mary Thoma)

Whether the pipeline company's permit will be approved, when the pipeline's construction would begin and whether its impact would be positive or negative are the subjects of ongoing and heated debate. At this point, New Orleans- U.S. Army Corps of Engineer spokesperson Ricky Boyett said only one thing is for certain.

"There will be no decisions made tomorrow," Boyett said. "We are a long way away from deciding whether or not to grant this permit."

Potential impacts of the pipeline

Southern Louisianians are not the only ones concerned about the pipeline. Shreveport-Bossier residents also have intense, and divided, views on the pipeline— which have exploded through emails, phone messages and social media posts.

RELATED: Not In My Bayou, NWLA speaks out (</story/news/2016/12/30/not-my-bayou-local-group-prepares-protest-southern-louisiana-pipeline/95995580/>)

"Drill, baby, drill!" wrote Bettina Morris, a member of the Facebook group Highland Cares. "We will never get to the point we will not need oil. It's just getting started again and will help save our state."

Others said they want nothing to do with the pipeline, including Shreveport resident and tribal member Sonya Bratie.

"I don't want that company in Louisiana because of what they did to the natives," Bratlie said. "I don't want them to touch us."

Even though the SBC community is located about four to six hours north of the pipeline's proposed route, those who have family members in southern Louisiana or those who pay to pump gas into their vehicles or heat their homes will be impacted.

In its permit, the pipeline company asked to start construction by March of 2017. But Boyett said that making a decision on whether to approve the permit, by itself, could take between six months and a year.

The DEQ and Army Corps have to analyze the benefits against the risks of the pipeline, and that has to take into account public safety, public interest, and destruction to wetlands and the surrounding environment among other factors, Boyett said.



Shreveport resident Ron Hagar talks to media about being a part of North Louisiana for Climate Justice, a group that opposes the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. (Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Trundle)

Issues of public safety

Currently the nation uses four methods to transport oil and gas: trucks, trains/rails, boats and pipelines.

According to the Pipeline Safety and Hazardous Materials Commission, the United States already has more than 507,000 miles of hazardous liquid and carbon dioxide and gas transmission pipelines. (<https://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov/PublicViewer/>) most of which are located underground and beneath rivers, roads, farmlands and parks. (<http://pipeline.consumerenergyalliance.org/faqs/>)



Tommy Foltz, executive director for Consumer Energy Alliance, the group behind the campaign Pipelines for America (Photo: Courtesy of Leo Rommel)

Tommy Foltz, executive director for the Consumer Energy Alliance and a supporter of the [Pipelines for America campaign](http://pipeline.consumerenergyalliance.org/) (<http://pipeline.consumerenergyalliance.org/>), said pipelines are the safest, most environmentally friendly and cost-efficient way to transport oil and gas.

“The people who are against pipelines in general would have you believe that these are environmental disasters waiting to happen,” Foltz said. “A lot of these pipelines will last 100 years or more without incidences. I have a hard time seeing the negative impacts.”

The Louisiana Bucket Brigade, a New Orleans-based environmental health and justice organization has been tracking the number of Louisiana pipeline accidents, reported a total of 144 accidents in 2016 alone (<http://labucketbrigade.org/blog/louisiana-pipelines-falling-apart-144-accidents-2016>)— an average of 2.7 spills, leaks or other accidents per week.

In a [press release](http://labucketbrigade.org/blog/louisiana-pipelines-falling-apart-144-accidents-2016), (<http://labucketbrigade.org/blog/louisiana-pipelines-falling-apart-144-accidents-2016>) Anne Rolfes, the brigade’s executive director, said that the oil industry is “like an addict— unable to even acknowledge the problem.”

“The oil industry will say that the problems aren’t so bad and minimize these accidents,” Rolfes said. “Given the gross mismanagement and terrible conditions of our pipelines, there is absolutely no way that the state or the Army Corps of Engineers should permit another pipeline in Louisiana.”

A letter sent to the LDEQ about the Bayou Bridge pipeline project from nine environmental groups, including the Atchafalya Basinkeeper, 350 Louisiana and the Gulf Restoration Network, identified several specific accidents, among them:

- On February 13, 2012, a Florida Gas Transmission company pipeline burst north of Baton Rouge. Residents had to evacuate the area.
- On Oct. 13, 2014, a Sunoco crude oil pipeline ruptured and released about 168,000 gallons of oil in Caddo Parish, killing fish, reptiles and other animals and vegetation

A [2014 Forbes report](http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesconca/2014/04/26/pick-your-poison-for-crude-pipeline-rail-truck-or-boat/#41b4ddb35777) (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesconca/2014/04/26/pick-your-poison-for-crude-pipeline-rail-truck-or-boat/#41b4ddb35777>) said pipelines' safety rankings compared to other modes of transportation varied. While pipelines were safer than trucks or rails when it came to human deaths, they were the second worst form of transportation for the amount spilled and also overall environmental impact.

Issues of the public interest

The Bayou Bridge project would connect Louisiana refineries to fuel terminals around the state, create about 2,500 temporary jobs and would bring a \$750 million long-term investment to the state, the CEA website stated.

Foltz said more pipeline capacity means lower energy prices and that's a huge factor when considering the public interest of low-income families, of which Louisiana has thousands.

"Economically disadvantaged people at or near the poverty line, when energy prices rise they don't have a lot of options besides turning out the lights," Foltz said. "Prices rising really hurts low-income families."

The letter sent to the LDEQ from the environmental groups, however, said that the pipeline company is only looking out for itself and its profits.

"No mention is made regarding how neighboring residents would benefit from the proposed project," the letter said. "The proposed pipeline presents the following imbalanced interests: on the one hand, unidentified and uncertain economic gain; and on the other hand, the concrete and quantifiable risks to human health and safety and destruction of wetlands."



A protest outside of the public hearing in Baton Rouge about the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. (Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Trundle)

The letter also said the pipeline would also run under Bayou Lafourche, the source of drinking water for about 300,000 people. Several pipelines already run under the bayou and have had accidents, and the LDEQ should "assess how much risk this critical drinking water supply is already under." (<http://phmsa.dot.gov/pipeline/phmsa-issues-corrective-action-order-to-belle-fourche-pipeline-following-early-december-leak>) the letter stated.

The long-term negative effects don't outweigh the temporary benefits, the letter continued, and the company's permit should be denied.

Foltz countered by saying the pipeline company would not make a \$670 million investment "unless the heart of that pipeline is needed." He also took issue with claims that only the number of permanent jobs to the area should be considered.

"Temporary jobs aren't good enough? Tell that to the pipeline workers who use these jobs to feed their families," he said.

Issues of environmental impact



The major waterway crossings of the proposed Bayou Bridge Pipeline route (Photo: *disastermap.net* and *Louisiana Bucket Brigade* websites)

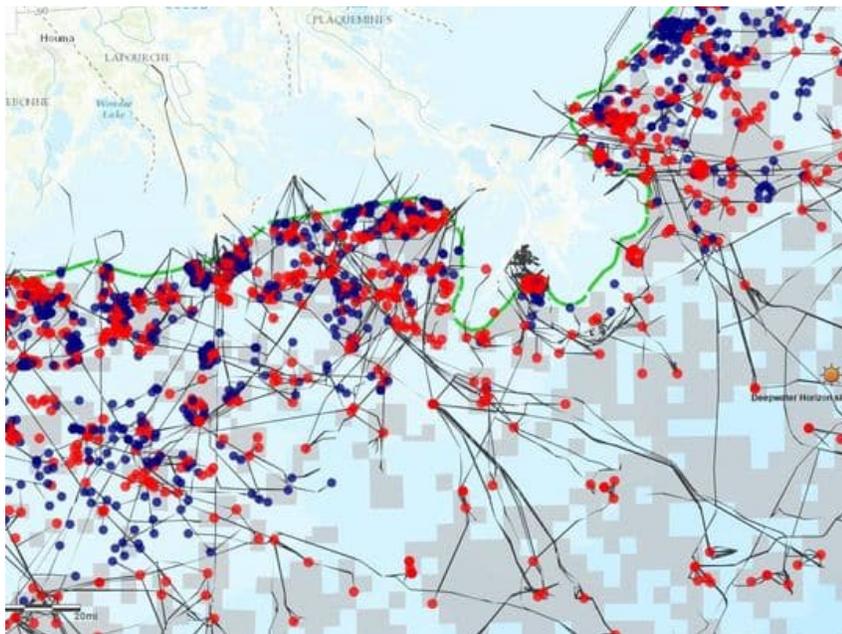
As a part of its permit application, the company noted the pipeline’s proposed route would cross 69 streams and six open water areas and would result in the temporary impact or permanent destruction of almost 454 acres of wetlands.

The environmental groups state that the destruction of the wetlands will be devastating for the earth and its animals. The pipeline company says in its permit application that it’s most likely the construction “will not likely adversely affect” the animals and surrounding area at all.

Boyett, of the New Orleans Army Corps, said that the agency has to review multiple environmental factors before approving a permit, including fill, placement of sediment patterns and whether the company has the required water quality certification.

He also stressed that the LDEQ and Army Corps is paying careful consideration to all public comments and that the public should continue voicing their views.

“All public comments will be considered as we move forward with our evaluation of the costs and benefits and what is in the public interest,” Boyett said.



Existing Gulf of Mexico oil and gas drilling sites (Photo: Fracktracker.org)

TO VOICE YOUR THOUGHTS (in alphabetical order):

If you want to oppose the pipeline, [sign the petition here.](http://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/50843/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=19572) (http://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/50843/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=19572)

If you want to support the pipeline, [sign the petition here.](http://consumerenergyalliance.org/2017/01/voice-support-louisiana-infrastructure-development/) (<http://consumerenergyalliance.org/2017/01/voice-support-louisiana-infrastructure-development/>)

To send your thoughts by email or mail:

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