

Summary of Public Scoping Comments

Trans-Alaska Pipeline System Right-of-Way Renewal Environmental Impact Statement

Bureau of Land Management

Alaska Department
of Natural Resources

Joint Pipeline Office

Anchorage, Alaska

November 2001



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ACRONYMS

BLM	Bureau of Land Management	NOI	Notice of Intent
DNR	Department of Natural Resources	ROW	Right-of-way
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement	TAPS	Trans-Alaska Pipeline System
JPO	Joint Pipeline Office	VMT	Valdez Marine Terminal
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act		

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENTS

TRANS-ALASKA PIPELINE SYSTEM RIGHT-OF-WAY RENEWAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The owner companies of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) have applied to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Alaska Department of Natural Resources (Alaska DNR) for renewal of the federal pipeline right-of-way (ROW) grant and lease. The current grant permits the TAPS facilities to occupy specified federal lands through January 22, 2004.

The BLM has determined that renewal of the grant would be a major federal action, which in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that an environmental impact statement (EIS) be prepared before a decision is made. A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare the TAPS ROW Renewal EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on July 31, 2001. The renewal team announced the intent to prepare an EIS and advertised the opportunity for public involvement in local media throughout Alaska.

One means of providing for public involvement is through the “scoping” process, which is intended to give interested parties the chance to comment on a proposed action and to offer suggestions as to what issues should be considered in the EIS analyses. The BLM and Alaska DNR conducted scoping for the proposal to renew the TAPS ROW grant from July 31 to October 19, 2001. During that period, the BLM invited the public and interested groups to provide information and guidance,

suggest issues that should be examined, and express their concerns and opinions on all aspects (past, present, and future) of the proposal to renew the federal grant.

Following brief background information on the TAPS and on the scoping process itself, this report presents a summary of the scoping comments submitted to the BLM for its consideration in preparing the EIS. It does not present an exhaustive list of all the comments received. Neither does it present responses to the comments, conclusions, or decisions related to the content of the scoping comments.

BACKGROUND

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) has been operated since 1977 on a right-of-way (ROW) that was granted in 1974. TAPS begins at Pump Station 1 near Prudhoe Bay at Deadhorse, Alaska, and ends at the Valdez Marine Terminal on Prince William Sound at Valdez, Alaska. The ROW crosses 375 miles of federal lands, 344 miles of state-owned land, 51 miles of lands owned by Native Alaska Corporations, 8 miles of land owned by the pipeline company owners, and 22 miles of other private lands.

The TAPS owner companies are BP Pipelines (Alaska), Inc., Phillips Transportation Alaska, Inc., ExxonMobil Pipeline Company, Williams Alaska Pipeline Company, L.L.C., Amerada Hess Pipeline Corporation, and Unocal Pipeline Company. Alyeska Pipeline Service Company

operates the TAPS under contract with the owner companies.

The BLM and Alaska DNR regulate operation of the TAPS in coordination with other federal and state agencies that authorize and oversee pipelines on federal and state lands. These agencies contribute personnel to the Joint Pipeline Office (JPO), and together they are concerned with safety, environmental protection, pipeline integrity, and regulatory compliance of the TAPS.

SCOPING PROCESS

During the scoping process, seven ways were provided for the public to submit comments to the BLM on the proposal to renew the TAPS ROW:

- Open public meetings held in Anchorage, Barrow, Delta Junction, Fairbanks, Glennallen, and Valdez, Alaska;
- Traditional mail delivery;
- Hand delivery;
- Toll-free facsimile transmission;
- Toll-free voice message;
- Electronic mail; and
- Directly through a Web site on the Internet.

The reason for providing such a variety of ways to communicate issues and submit comments was to encourage maximum participation. All comments, regardless of how they were submitted, received equal consideration.

More than 1,700 people participated in the scoping process by providing comments, requesting information, attending public or tribal consultation meetings, or visiting the TAPS Renewal EIS Web Site. In addition,

more than 100 organizations, including Native Alaska; environmental; private industry; and local, state, and federal government agencies, provided comments. Several comments were documented during conversations and facilitated discussions at the public meetings. More than 230 individuals and organizations provided comments. Those comments were submitted in the following ways:

- 53% via the TAPS Renewal EIS Web Site,
- 15% orally at public meetings,
- 11% by fax,
- 9% by regular mail,
- 7% by e-mail,
- 4% delivered by hand, and
- 1% by telephone.

Comments originated from 37 states and the District of Columbia. Of those comments, 48% were from Alaska and 52% were from the other states. States with the most commentors were Alaska, 100; California, 19; Wisconsin, 8; and Texas, 6. Georgia, New York, and Pennsylvania each had 5 commentors. Other states had 4 or fewer commentors, with 11 states having just one commentor. No comments were received from other countries. During the scoping period, a total of 2,411 visits were made by 1,370 visitors to the TAPS Renewal EIS Web Site.

SUMMARY OF SCOPING COMMENTS

The following paragraphs summarize the comments received during the scoping period. The wording is intended to categorize and summarize the substance of the comments, not reproduce the exact wording of individual comments. The order in which the issues are presented is not intended to reflect their relative importance.

The summary does not evaluate the comments, nor does it attempt to depict any majority opinions or trends. Because of the wide-range of interests and opinions about TAPS, many of the comments in each issue category illustrate the varied, and perhaps contradictory, issues, concerns, and desired future conditions expressed by individuals, organizations, and public agencies.

Age and condition of the TAPS:

Commentors noted that the TAPS was approaching 25 years of operation and questioned the condition of the equipment and its ability to safely operate for an additional 30 years and to operate at design capacity. Commentors recommended that the effects of metal fatigue, corrosion, changes in pipeline design and construction criteria, and climate change be considered in evaluating future TAPS operations. Commentors recommended that comprehensive hazard analyses, technical reviews and audits, and reviews of best available technology (e.g., leak detection) be conducted routinely. It was stated that the pipeline in the area of Thompson Pass (near Valdez) was vibrating and that the pipeline had movement at numerous locations.

Air quality: Commentors highlighted that there are significant emissions (particularly of benzene, ethylbenzene, toluene, and xylene) from ballast water treatment processes, oil storage facilities, terminal operations, and the vapor control system at the Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT).

Agency interactions: Commentors thought that the interactions of the JPO with other agencies should be considered, particularly in terms of their regulatory roles. Comments were received that Alaska Native governments should be cooperating agencies in preparing the EIS; that is, they

should participate in preparing the EIS document.

Access to Interior Alaska and the North Slope: Commentors wanted the EIS analysis to include impacts resulting from access to Interior Alaska, the North Slope, and traditional hunting areas provided by the Dalton Highway, access roads, and airstrips along the TAPS ROW. It was stated that increased recreational use of the areas along the TAPS ROW and the on-road and off-road traffic and traffic hazards associated with the access created by TAPS should be considered in the EIS.

Archaeological, historical, and cultural resources: People recommended that the EIS consider the effects of TAPS and oil spills and spill cleanup on archaeological, historical, and cultural resources.

Catastrophic incidents: Individuals commented that the TAPS is subject to catastrophic events, such as aircraft crashes, earthquake, fire, landslide, tsunami, flood, vandalism, and terrorism. The ability to respond to such incidents and to prevent or control any resulting large oil spills was questioned. A number of commentors questioned the adequacy of existing contingency plans, response capabilities (e.g., the ability to seal high-pressure leaks, the ability to respond in adverse weather conditions and in the event of high water conditions along streams), number of tug boats available at Valdez, training and employment of local communities, spill detection, and the ability of valves to operate reliably. They recommended that these issues be evaluated in the EIS.

Climate change: Some commentors suggested that the contribution of TAPS to

global climate change and the impact of climate change on TAPS be considered.

Completion of use: Commentors recommended that funds be set aside for removal and restoration after completion of use of TAPS and that the national implications of impacts associated with completion of use (as an alternative to TAPS ROW renewal) be considered. It was recommended that the cumulative effects of completion of use (e.g., economic impact) be considered and that associated actions to be taken be defined (e.g., the expected level of restoration).

Definition of TAPS: Commentors suggested that TAPS should be viewed as a holistic system, to include support facilities off of the ROW, from Prudhoe Bay to the Hinchinbrook Entrance and beyond. It was noted that the Exxon Valdez oil spill extended to the southern Kenai Peninsula and the Kodiak Island area.

Land use: Commentors said that the BLM and the State of Alaska should consider reducing the amount of land withdrawn from the public domain for TAPS and allowing the land to be used for other purposes (e.g., recreation and mining), that private and Native Alaska lands are inappropriately considered public lands, and that government regulators should not allow the use of TAPS ROW for non-TAPS related private and commercial activities. Some commentors raised concerns that rental rates for Native Corporation lands are too low.

Maintenance and support operations: It was stated that impacts from TAPS maintenance and support operations (e.g., snow removal, shutdown, and startup) and lack of maintenance or support operations (e.g., failure to maintain

components, poor communications, and inadequate oil spill containment) should be considered in the EIS.

Native employment opportunities: Commentors noted that commitments made to Native Alaskans regarding employment, contract opportunities, compensation for lands, and protection of subsistence should be respected, continued, and improved.

Noise: Questions were raised regarding the impacts of acoustic energy imparted to the air and water by tanker traffic and other operations at the Valdez Marine Terminal. Commentors also were concerned about noise associated with vibrations in the pipeline near Thompson's Pass.

Oversight and regulatory requirements: Comments both advocated and opposed establishing citizen's oversight groups to monitor the operation of the TAPS and related facilities, and policies related to the TAPS ROW, an oversight group to receive and review employee concerns regarding safety and environmental protection, and additional regulatory requirements. Commentors also recommended consideration of providing Alaska Native representation in the JPO. Some commentors advocated that the BLM should have the authority to fine the owner companies or Alyeska for failure to comply with terms of the grant.

Past impacts: Commentors stated that the actual impacts of past TAPS operations on the environment should be considered when future impacts from TAPS are being evaluated.

Renewal options: Commentors recommended that the ROW renewal be for less than 30 years. Suggestions included annual renewal and 2-, 3-, 5-, and 10-year

renewal. Commentors suggested that the TAPS ROW could be renewed for some, but not all, TAPS owner companies. Options of public ownership of the TAPS, or ownership by a company or companies other than the current TAPS owner companies, were also raised.

Safety of workers: Commentors stated there was a lack of safety and fire protection equipment for response to incidents at pump stations and the Valdez Marine Terminal, that mechanical and electrical deficiencies existed in TAPS, that monitoring was inadequate, that food supplies were unhealthy for workers, and that safety measures for workers (e.g., safety inspections, protection of “whistleblowers,” and protective equipment) were inadequate.

Security: Concerns were raised regarding security for the TAPS and the level of surveillance, to include the security of computer and electronic systems associated with the TAPS. Additional surveillance of TAPS was recommended by commentors. Some commentors advocated restricting access on the Dalton Highway to improve security.

Socioeconomic: Suggestions were received that the positive and negative impacts from TAPS on the social, economic, and cultural well being of people should be considered. Commentors also noted that the impacts on the social structure and health of Native Alaskans should be considered, including the blockage of traditional trails and of access to cultural resources. Comments were also received on the following categories of socioeconomic effects:

- **Indirect effects:** Comments recommended that the indirect

effects of monies from TAPS be considered. Examples included the use of taxes and royalty payments, the effects of TAPS depreciation on local tax bases, the effects of the purchase and sale of executive homes in the Valdez area on housing costs, and the transient nature of TAPS personnel.

- **Subsistence:** Commentors stated that a number of issues related to subsistence should be included in the EIS analysis, such as use of parking in Deadhorse, entry into hunting areas from the Dalton Highway by off-road vehicles, and changes in wildlife migratory patterns, including caribou movement and the reduction of game along the pipeline corridor. Some commentors wanted compensation awarded under Section 30 of the grant for damages to subsistence as a result of TAPS construction and operation. (See also **Access to Interior Alaska and the North Slope.**)

Wildlife and aquatic habitat: Some commentors asserted that fish and wildlife and their habitat, including migration routes, had been and were continuing to be impacted by TAPS and/or the Dalton Highway. Citizens questioned whether impacts on wildlife and habitat (e.g., changes in migratory routes, habitat, and hunting pressures, such as in Game Management Unit 13) had occurred subsequent to the most current studies and surveys. Concerns were raised regarding the impact of oil spills within watersheds, including several locations in the Copper and Yukon River watersheds. A mitigation measure of blending (camouflaging) passage points across the pipeline to

enhance animal movement was recommended. Some commentors contended that there was a lack of information on impacts to wildlife and stated that more studies are needed.

Water resources and water quality in Prince William Sound: Commentors questioned the hydrocarbon discharge limits for the ballast water treatment system at the VMT. Concerns were raised about the amount of oil from permitted operations and small spills entering the water daily in the Valdez loading area and the cumulative effects of normal operations on the environment. It was suggested that the toxicity and persistence of North Slope crude oil entering Prince William Sound is greater than estimated in laboratory studies because of environmental conditions (e.g., amount of sunlight). Commentors noted that elevated levels of hydrocarbons are present in the sediments of Prince William Sound beneath the mixing zone and that the density of marine life beneath the mixing zone had decreased. Commentors questioned the ability of the Ballast Water Treatment Facility to treat the varying concentrations of hydrocarbons in the tanker ballast water as the existing single-hulled tankers are replaced with double-hulled tankers with segregated ballast. Commentors also noted that double-hulled tankers could be discharging non-indigenous species into Prince William Sound.

Other actions with implications for TAPS: Comments were received opposing or supporting some or all of the following: oil exploration and production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, tourism, logging,

abandoning vehicles along road systems, road dust and de-icing, planned road improvements, a National Park Service Visitor Center at Copper Center, plans for a resort lodge (Princess Lodge) at Copper Center, a hut-to-hut system along the Gulf of Alaska coast from Cape Yakataga to the Bering Glacier, the proposed gas pipeline, and an extension of the Glennallen sewer system.

Other issues: Commentors expressed concern about the lack of quality and/or lack of data as well as the accuracy and completeness of information contained in the Environmental Report prepared by the TAPS owner companies and submitted with the application to renew the TAPS ROW. Comments were received regarding corporate character and claims associated with the *Exxon Valdez*. Commentors suggested that publications critical of TAPS, Alyeska, and the owner companies should be reviewed for the EIS.

FURTHER PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Additional opportunities for public involvement will be provided during the preparation of the TAPS ROW Renewal EIS. The next public comment period will open upon publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, scheduled for the summer of 2002.

The BLM and Alaska DNR appreciate the public's and interested organizations' participation and comments during scoping and welcomes their continued involvement at the next stage in the EIS process.