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Supertankers could take over Vancouver Harbour

Patrick Brown

Increasing numbers of loaded oil tankers leaving Kinder Morgan's Westridge terminal for California and Asian destinations could seriously tie up ship traffic in Vancouver Harbour.

Planned increases in the amount of tar sands oil being pumped down a twinned Trans Mountain pipeline from Alberta are expected to lead to the dispatch of some 360 tankers per year, or one per day. Recent reports on the possibility of increasing the pumping capacity of the pipeline lead to suggestions of even more tanker traffic in future.

For loaded tankers to squeeze through Second Narrows though, the ships can only move at slack water high tide in daylight. And while they are moving, all other ships must stay out of both Second Narrows and First Narrows, under the Port Authority's 'Clear Narrows' order.

'Clear Narrows' is intended to ensure that there are no ship collisions or unexpected alterations of course while tankers are moving. The order applies from the Westridge terminal to a line well into English Bay, and for all ships carrying hazardous cargo. Tankers must move at limited speed, and such an order could apply for well over an hour, thus tying up all other ship traffic.

In addition, tanker movements must be co-ordinated with openings of the Second Narrows railway bridge.

Kinder Morgan has suggested that additional dredging of Second Narrows may be necessary in order to accommodate Suezmax tankers at full draft. The larger VLCC tankers cannot be navigated through Second Narrows. ✐

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