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Dilbit tankers already crossing the strait weekly ~ Patrick Brown

At least once a week, oil tankers carrying diluted bitumen already sail past British Columbia's Southern Gulf Islands, and the San Juan Islands in the United States. This is happening despite the fact that, if there were a spill, the industry doesn't know how to clean it up (see Box, page 2). The tar sands industry is pushing to make it one tanker every day.

Kinder Morgan bought the Trans Mountain pipeline in 2005, as part of the purchase of Terasen from the BC government. They sold off the rest of Terasen, but retained the pipeline, which even then had insufficient capacity to serve its original customers, refineries in BC and Washington State, with conventional crude oil.

Kinder Morgan proposes to 'twin' the pipeline, increasing flow from 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 750,000 bpd. This additional capacity would be entirely devoted to shipping tarsands dilbit, from the Westridge Terminal in Burnaby, to California and Asia, where it would attract prices higher than in central North America. It's estimated this would mean a tanker every day from Westridge. Those once-a-week tankers now embarking now are just samplers.

Spilling Dilbit

Nobody has any experience with a spill of dilbit into salt water. And while the industry-financed Western Canada Marine Response Corporation is set up to respond quickly to a spill, half a dozen tidal cycles could distribute a spill over many miles of water and shoreline before they could arrive to contain it. And then they could corral only what remained on the surface.

If the spill happened on land, the situation is not much different. The worst dilbit spill ever recorded in North America occurred on the Kalamazoo River in Michigan in July 2010. So far it has cost over \$700 million to clean up, and it's not finished yet. People who lived near the river are still suffering from

breathing the fumes. The Enbridge pipeline which burst into the Kalamazoo was built in 1953, the same year as the Trans Mountain pipeline. And Trans Mountain is now carrying the same product.

Cutting Back Local Supply

Trans Mountain's original purpose was to supply crude oil to BC and Washington refineries. Historically, the original refinery

customers of the Trans Mountain pipeline had priority. Back in 2003, requests for use of the pipeline exceeded its capacity and, for the first time, all shippers did not get the space they wanted. The Burnaby Chevron refinery applied to the National Energy Board (NEB) for a Priority Destination order, and the NEB limited ship-loading from Westridge to three per month. In 2005, this was cut back to two ships per month. However, by 2010, there were 71, an average of almost six per month.

Meanwhile, Kinder Morgan and the shippers negotiated an elaborate 'apportionment' system, with land shipments split between Canadian and export customers in

the US. Trans Mountain combined the land categories in 2008. This seemed to result in shippers requesting more space than they needed in order to ensure they got enough.

For this September, Chevron found that they could only get one-third of the pipeline space they needed, and have resorted to bringing in crude oil by a combination of rail and truck. They say that apportionment since November 2010 has been 'more severe, more longlasting, and less predictable than ever before'. Once more, it has applied for priority consideration, but the NEB will not hear its application until January 2013.

Meanwhile, Kinder Morgan claim to be 'the only oilsands pipeline serving the west coast of Canada'. They are undoubtedly watching the Enbridge Northern Gateway hearings very closely.

The Tanker Route & Spill Hazard

The Trans Mountain pipeline's dilbit comes from the Alberta tar sands, and is loaded into tankers at the Westridge Terminal on Burrard Inlet in Burnaby.

The tankers are navigated (with two pilots and escort tugs) through Second Narrows, across Vancouver Harbour, past Stanley Park, under the Lions Gate Bridge at First Narrows, across English Bay, out into the Strait of Georgia, through Boundary Pass, past Saturna's East Point, down through Haro Strait between the Southern Gulf Islands on the Canadian side, and the San Juan Islands on the US side, past Victoria, and out into the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

The potential for damage and pollution from an accident is massive and unprecedented. And, as Enbridge was forced to admit at recent Northern Gateway hearings, oil spill clean-up plans are based on conventional heavy crude, using containment booms and skimmers. A spill of diluted bitumen separates into the bitumen, a thick, sticky, tarry substance that sinks below the surface, and the lighter petroleum condensate used as diluent, most of which evaporates in a toxic cloud.

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