



Council opposes LNG terminal

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Local company adds city to a growing list of opponents

By [Kevin Herrera](#)

Daily Press Staff Writer

SM BAY A Santa Monica-based energy company looking to build a liquefied natural gas terminal off the coast of the Los Angeles International Airport can add another opponent to its list.

In addition to Congresswoman Jane Harman, Los Angeles City Councilman Bill Rosendahl and the environmental watchdog group Santa Monica Baykeeper, the City Council is now on record opposing Woodside Natural Gas' OceanWay Secure Energy project, which would be located in federal waters, 27 miles offshore.

The council voted against the project earlier this week and is making its concerns known to those in charge of reviewing Woodside's proposal — the city of Los Angeles, U.S. Coast Guard and Maritime Administration.

"Santa Monica plays a special role as steward of the Santa Monica Bay," said Councilman Kevin McKeown, who brought the issue before the council. "Thanks to vigilant resident Diane Moss, who brought this to my attention, we were able to oppose yet another proposal for a massive offshore fueling complex traversing Santa Monica Bay.

"Santa Monica loves alternative fuels, but not at the risk of damage to marine life or our bay and beaches."

The Maritime Administration is primarily responsible for project financial reviews, while the Coast Guard is primarily responsible for project engineering, operations, safety and environmental reviews, including compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The city of Los Angeles will process an application for a pipeline franchise both on and offshore, and review the OceanWay proposal for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

Woodside, an affiliate of the largest independent energy company in Australia, is disappointed the council took a position on OceanWay before an environmental impact report has been drafted, said Michael Hinrichs, public affairs manager for the energy company.

"We are also disappointed that we were not able to brief the Councilmembers or receive notice that the issue was on the agenda for Tuesday's meeting," Hinrichs said. "We believe that natural gas will act as a backbone for the economy, especially in the Los Angeles basin, as renewable energy sources are developed and California transitions away from dirty coal-fired electric generation."

HEARD IT THROUGH THE PIPELINE

Woodside is seeking approval to place two delivery buoys more than 20 miles offshore in 3,000-foot-deep waters. Tankers carrying LNG would link up to specially equipped Woodside ships at least 35 miles from shore, where the liquid would be vaporized using an air regassification system. The company ships would then connect to the buoys, and the gas would be funneled to the coast via underwater pipelines.

The company would run a pair of 24-inch-diameter pipes along the ocean floor, eventually crossing the northern end of Dockweiler Beach.

Buried onshore pipelines would then snake through a section of vacant airport sand dunes and link up to a transfer facility before tying into existing Southern California Gas lines.

Woodside touts LNG as a clean-burning fuel and the terminal as a project that can help the state meet growing energy demands.

Natural gas production in California satisfies only 13 percent of statewide demand, with the remaining 87 percent coming from other states and Canada via interstate pipelines, according to a 2005 California Energy Commission report cited in the application. Because of growing demand, competition is expected to drive prices higher.

Although several LNG terminals have been pitched along the Southern California coastline — including proposals at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and, most recently, Malibu — none have been approved, and each has generated plenty of opposition.

Woodside believes its project is considerably different than the others proposed and will be virtually invisible from shore. The ships will use a forced-air vaporization system to convert the liquid to gas with minimal emissions.

“OceanWay is designed to meet California's environmental policies as well as address many concerns coastal residents expressed during the public reviews of other projects,” Hinrichs said. “Woodside representatives have met with thousands of residents, knocking on over 18,000 doors as part of our education outreach to the local communities. Of those we spoke to — almost 5,000 people — we found that over 1,700 residents supported the OceanWay project and only 375 expressed opposition, with the remaining being undecided on the issue.”

Time for public comment ended on Oct. 31, Hinrichs said. The environmental impacts will be studied and a report released in the coming months.

The license review process, including a decision on the license application, must be completed within 356 days of the deemed complete application.

Harman has come out against the project because of concerns about terrorism. She said LAX has already been a target of terrorist plots before and the LNG pipeline could make it an even more attractive target.

Tom Ford, with Santa Monica Baykeepers, said the group is opposed to the project because of concerns about it disrupting the ocean floor.

“We also have concerns about impacts to environmental justice,” Ford said. “Pipelines would run through communities that are already taking quite a hit because of LAX and the industrial corridor. They’ve done their share shouldering this infrastructure.

“There are better places for this kind of a facility.”

kevinh@smdp.com