

Public addresses commissioners about pipeline issues

By Melanie Wilkinson Staff Reporter | Posted: Thursday, October 18, 2012 12:00 am

***Editor's note:** This is the second installment regarding this week's county commissioners' meeting regarding a haul route agreement and road crossing permits for the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. See Wednesday's publication for the first installment.*

YORK – A number of people addressed the York County Commissioners this week, as the board readdresses its haul route agreement with TransCanada for the proposed Keystone XL pipeline.

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Donna Roller told the commissioners that she and her sister own a farm nine miles west of York.

“It’s a family farm,” Roller said.

“I saw the first well drilled at the age of four. I’d like to respond to Mr. (Jeff) Rauh (a representative of TransCanada on the pipeline project who spoke earlier in the meeting). The history of TransCanada is that they say one thing and do another.

This is not a crude oil line, this will be carrying Dilbit. It’s a cancerous substance to make it flow from where they’re strip mining. They don’t care about the little people in Nebraska.

We don’t need this. They say they’ll pay for all the liability, but look at the Kalamazoo River (where there was an unrelated spill from a pipeline owned by a different company). They can’t clean it up.

“Mr. Rauh says that a spill wouldn’t impact the aquifer, but there’s no evidence, no studies to back that up,” Roller continued. “I’ll be six miles away from this thing. He talks about reclamation – get that in writing. And there’s no time limits for reclamation, that has to be done.

“Their money has spoken,” Roller continued. “They paid \$12 million to the federal representatives and \$11 million to our state senators. This is politics and money well spent to get what they want.

“And please look at their response time (in the event of a leak),” Roller said. “They have no emergency response equipment. Their training is limited to a boom in a boat. This is a very highly controversial issue. Nothing is more important to me than that land and that water and I’ll be damned if I’m going to let somebody come in here and ram rod it through York County and destroy it.

We fought to keep this farm and now TransCanada is threatening it. Whatever authority you have, exercise it – and get it in writing. We are fighting and will fight to the bitter end. We won't let TransCanada succeed. If (the pipeline goes through, we're all in trouble.

There are people suffering in Michigan from being six miles away from that thing. We've been sold out by our own government – and it'll all be heading straight to China anyway. Don't let anyone tell you anything different. I'm tired of being held hostage.

“And when it comes to the equipment they will be hauling on our roads – you have no idea the size,” Roller told the county board.

“The roads and bridges will be destroyed because they can't handle the weight of that equipment. So if you are talking with them about road repair, you better get it right.”

“We're obviously opposed to the pipeline,” said Jane Kleeb, representing Bold Nebraska, an organization which has led the fight against the proposed Keystone XL pipeline since the beginning. “But we also want to make sure the property owners and counties are protected.”

She offered an extensive publication to the commissioners that details actions taken by other counties and states regarding haul route agreements and permits.

“Whether it be a penalty structure to keep things accountable, or maybe damage prevention, there are laws you can put in place,” Kleeb said.

“You don't have to fly by the seat of your pants. There are guidelines and examples of what can be put in place. There are also organizations that can help you formulate your agreements.”

“Do you know of any other counties in Nebraska that have agreements with these stipulations in order?” asked Commissioner Kurt Bulgrin.

“None of the counties are prepared,” Kleeb said. “York and Holt Counties have been the most engaged.”

“It's my understanding that they don't have to have a haul agreement, they can use a public road as long as they obey the weight limits, right?” asked Commissioner Paul Buller.

“The intent of the haul agreement is to keep them on certain roads,” answered Mitch Doht, the county's highway superintendent.

“But damage will be done,” Kleeb said. “With the first Keystone pipeline, they went on roads where they weren't supposed to, so it's a good idea to have fines and policies in place.”

“Last year, I came before the board to ask you to postpone your haul agreement until the presidential permit was issued,” said Susan Dunavan.

“I was surprised, then, to see in the York News-Times that you passed it. You shouldn’t have signed it before the presidential permit because that’s a waste of your time and taxpayers’ dollars.

“One issue is that your agreement is with Keystone, but now my question is if TransCanada is building it or if Keystone is building it. I thought that TransCanada owned the line,” Dunavan said.

“There should also be a timeframe for the repairing of the roads and the agreement should include bonding. York County should also have a third party evaluate the conditions of the roads. And who decides what’s timely or who is liable? Please do not sign anything until they’ve received all their permits.”

“As far as this agreement, I want to wait until it (the pipeline) is finalized,” Doht said. “And then we can drive the route, make sure it makes sense.”

“Are there any suggestions or changes the board wants to make to (Doht) regarding the formulation of the agreement?” asked Commissioner Chairman Kurt Bulgrin.

“Will we still keep them off our newly paved roads?” asked Commissioner Paul Buller, to which Doht responded that he understood that to be the case.

“We have time to get specific, we just need to make sure that everyone is on the same page. And we need to see if there are enough conditions.”

“One thing that’s come up since the last time we discussed this -- is bonding and also possibly how soon after the pipeline goes through will the roads be returned to the way they were before,” Bulgrin noted.”

“The board isn’t ready to make a decision on this,” said Commissioner Bulgrin, noting the issue would be turned over to Doht and the county attorney.

“Let (Doht) know if there are more conditions you want added and we’ll go from there.”

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