

NEXUS Pipeline support faked?

Protest groups claims phony supporters flood FERC with comments

[By GLENN WOJCIAK The Post staff writer](#)

Aug 19, 2016

WADSWORTH – Members of the Coalition to Reroute NEXUS have complained to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission that more than a hundred letters in support of the proposed NEXUS Pipeline are fake.

CORN spokesman Paul Gierosky said members of his group noticed that a rash of recent letters supporting the project have appeared among the comments sections on a FERC website created for the \$2 billion pipeline project. According to Gierosky, the letters were all very similar in content and were mailed to FERC without signatures.

Gierosky said a random check of a dozen or more of those letters uncovered the people named in the letters did not actually write them. Gierosky filed a formal complaint with FERC and also brought up the matter at a public comment session FERC conducted in Wadsworth Aug. 17.

Joanne Wachholder, the environmental project manager for FERC, said she noted Gierosky's complaint, but said her agency was unlikely to take any action on the matter.

“Once a comment is put into the docket, it is never removed,” she said. “If the comments are inaccurate, the people who made them can put another comment in the record stating that.”

Jeff Van Loon, director of the Medina County Soil and Water Conservation District, did just that. He said he did not write one of the comment letters attributed to him and filed another comment on the FERC website stating so.

More than a thousand comments on the NEXUS Pipeline project have been filed with FERC, the majority of which contained objections. Wachholder said comments often appear to be form letters and the agency takes note of that in its review process.

“It's not a vote in which the highest number of comments wins,” Wachholder said. “We're more interested in specific comments about how the pipeline route impacts property, wetlands or forests.”

The hearing in Wadsworth, as well as several other hearings around the region, were scheduled specifically to hear comments about the draft environmental impact study FERC released earlier

this summer. That study recommended further evaluation of a few minor and one major route adjustment for the proposed pipeline. Property owners along the route alternatives were notified and given the chance to voice their concerns at the Wadsworth hearing.

Wachholder said many of the 60 people who registered to speak in Wadsworth had objections to the alternate route proposed by the city of Green and CORN.

Spectra Energy has proposed plans to build the 36-inch NEXUS Pipeline to carry pressurized natural gas along a 250-mile route from Kensington in eastern Ohio to a gas storage facility in Ypsilanti, Mich. from where it will be sent along existing pipelines to western Ontario.

The original route proposed by Spectra would take it through parts of Wadsworth, Guilford, Montville, Lafayette, Litchfield and York townships in Medina County. Corn worked with city of Green engineers to develop an alternative route which would carry the pipeline through the southern edge of Stark and Wayne counties and away from Summit and all but the southwest corner of Medina County.

According to Gierosky, the alternative route would have less impact on the environment and affect fewer residents than the original route proposed by NEXUS developers. The new route would also eliminate the need for a compressor station in Guilford Township, which has generated a separate wave of protests from neighboring residents.

The current comment period on the proposed route alternatives will result in a final route recommendation contained in FERC's environmental impact study. Wachholder said that report should be done in December.

Although FERC is still considering the Green alternative, Wachholder said it is too early to determine if it will be recommended in the final environmental impact study. Even if it is, that still does not guarantee that the pipeline will be moved to the new route.

The impact study will be presented to FERC commissioners who have the final word on the project and issue the certificates required to allow construction.

"They usually follow our recommendations, but they could decide contract and economic issues take precedence over the environmental issues and approve the original route," Wachholder said.

Gierosky is frustrated with the process.

"The system is corrupt; it's just broken," he said. "It's pretty clear that all those letters are frauds and it doesn't seem to matter. This is another example of how NEXUS will use any means possible to press their point of view."

Asked to comment about the veracity of the letters sent to FERC, NEXUS spokesman Adam Parker released the following statement: "NEXUS has received support for the current proposed route and the many economic benefits for schools, local governments and residents in Ohio and

Michigan. Supportive testimony continues at the FERC hearings recently held along the route and letters being submitted directly to the docket.

“NEXUS is currently supported by numerous individuals and organizations who share our mission of building the necessary infrastructure to support the growing demand for clean-burning natural gas. For many of these organizations, such as the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Manufacturers Association and the Consumer Energy Alliance, NEXUS has been a key advocacy issue. Throughout the permitting process, project proponents have voiced their support in addition to encouraging other supporters to advocate for the approval and construction of the NEXUS project.”