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Brooklyn Daily Eagle



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Coronavirus: Construction worker tests positive, but North



Brooklyn Pipeline proceeds

March 24, 2020 Scott Enman





Residents and members of the Sane Energy Project opposed the project at January's meeting. Photo: Paul Frangipane/Brooklyn Eagle

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The coronavirus pandemic has severely disrupted life in Brooklyn and beyond, with residents working from home and others losing their jobs entirely. But for some of the city's largest utility companies, work has continued as usual — despite employees testing positive for the disease.

A Con Edison worker came down with the illness in Queens, **according to ABC7**, but the company was still sending employees to read gas meters in customers' homes as of March 17. A spokesperson for Con Edison said home visits have stopped.



Similarly, construction on National Grid's **controversial North Brooklyn Pipeline** has proceeded with workers in close contact, despite the city and state's aggressive social distancing measures, which are now **being enforced** by the NYPD, and call for at least six feet between people in public.

Related: Explosions, health risks, higher bills: Why North Brooklyn residents are fighting this project.

The company is currently building an underground gas main underneath Williamsburg and Greenpoint, which residents have opposed, citing risk of explosions, health hazards, higher bills and climate impacts.

Metropolitan Natural Gas Reliability Project

Project Overview

Current phase construction began October 2019
Completion anticipated Fall 2021
Installing approximately 14,000 feet of new underground gas main

 Project Route

Smell Gas. Act Fast. Indoors or outdoors – know what to do. From a safe location away from the smell, call 911 and call National Grid's gas emergency contact number 718-643-4000 for Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island and 1-800-490-0045 for the Rockaway Peninsula.

This map shows where the pipeline will be built through North Brooklyn. Map: National Grid

The business plans to install about 14,000 feet of pipes and is asking customers to foot the \$185 million bill through rate hikes for the final phase of the project.

Elected officials, residents and environmentalists have protested the pipeline for months, but they are now calling on the business to immediately cease construction in order to protect the surrounding community as the number of confirmed cases of the coronavirus in New York City **rose to 14,776** as of Tuesday morning.

In a letter sent on Monday to National Grid President John Bruckner, more than 60 local residents, 100 neighboring customers and 50 organizations, including the Brooklyn Bar Association, called for a moratorium on the pipeline.



“This pipeline is not needed — and its construction is certainly not needed in the middle of a pandemic,” Councilmember Stephen Levin, who cosigned the letter, told the *Brooklyn Eagle*. “The construction we should be focusing on right now is setting up new hospital sites; companies that are performing non-essential construction should cease immediately and donate their particle masks, goggles and safety equipment to those who urgently need it right now.”

The project was approved by the Public Service Commission in 2017 and is 80 percent complete. The pipeline has already been built in East New York, Brownsville, Bushwick and East Williamsburg. Phase four, already underway, will extend from Wilson Avenue to Montrose Avenue and is expected to be completed this fall. That portion of the project has already disrupted businesses in Bushwick and East Williamsburg.



Kim Fraczek of the Sane Energy Project presents a map that shows an estimated evacuation zone for the new pipeline. Photo: Paul Frangipane/Brooklyn Eagle

Phase five will extend from Montrose Avenue to Maspeth Avenue near Newtown Creek and is expected to be completed next year.

“The North Brooklyn community has never consented to this pipeline being built through our neighborhoods using our rate payer dollars, and for National Grid to continue to potentially expose our community to novel coronavirus shows a further lack of disregard for our safety,” the letter reads.

In a separate message sent to Mayor Bill de Blasio last week, Public Advocate Jumaane Williams **called on the mayor** to cease all non-essential construction citywide to prevent construction workers, their families and the public from contracting the disease.



“Although some construction is outside, even in those cases workers gather in groups, travel via subway or van, and have to place their kids in childcare,” Williams wrote in the letter, which was cosigned by Brooklyn councilmembers Carlos Menchaca and Brad Lander.

“Those are exactly the kinds of contact we must reduce in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by keeping all non-essential workers in their homes.”



Citing risk of explosions, health hazards, higher bills and climate impacts, Community Board 1 unanimously opposed a controversial pipeline that National Grid wants to build in Greenpoint and Williamsburg. Photo: Erik McGregor

Assemblymember Joe Lentol, who directed National Grid to present to Community Board 1 in January, said if the utility company did not stop construction, he would ask de Blasio to use his mayoral privileges to halt it.

“National Grid is continuing their work despite this project not being essential in this time of emergency,” Lentol told the *Eagle*. “They are putting their workers at risk and incurring a significant liability for their investors.

“I call on them to stop immediately. If they refuse, the mayor may need to force them to stop this project.”

National Grid spokesperson Karen Young said her company was focusing on providing essential services, while temporarily suspending non-essential work that requires access to customers' homes and businesses.

“Our field force is following CDC guidelines, including maintaining recommended social distancing, while performing their work,” Young said. “We have no reports of positive cases at the work site.”

*Follow reporter **Scott Enman on Twitter.***

