



## Not Digging It: Unpopular Pipeline Sparks North Brooklyn Ire

Opponents of the MRI pipeline and the rate hike it comes with it are raising their voices. Photo: Sean Montazami.



**CARRIE KLEIN** Mar 5, 2020



In front of Victorino Cleaners on Moore Street, the pavement is jagged and cars are absent. Since April 2018, National Grid has been tearing up streets throughout North Brooklyn to install a 30-inch-wide, 36,000-foot-long fracked-gas pipeline.



## been flat, if not decreasing.

Despite Mayor Bill de Blasio's announcement in January that the city will oppose new fossil fuel projects, construction continues. The pipeline, called the Metropolitan Reliability Infrastructure Project (MRI), will not, however, supply city residents with energy. It will instead transport natural gas to Long Island and Massachusetts. Nevertheless, it comes with a proposed \$185 million rate hike for National Grid's customers across the state over three years.

Meanwhile, business has dropped dramatically for shops along the pipeline's route, as workers carve its path from Brownsville to a depot in Greenpoint. Customers who can't park along the street are bringing their money elsewhere, says Lenin Hernandez, whose mother, Maria, owns Victorino Cleaners in Bushwick.

"It's hard," he says. "At the moment, there's nothing we can do."

Construction is set to continue into April and National Grid has not revealed any plans to compensate businesses for their losses.

On Sunday, Feb. 15th, demonstrators halted work on the pipeline, chanting, "Enough is enough!" They then marched to the Hernandezes' laundry to show their support for local shopkeepers opposing National Grid.

Encouraged by de Blasio's declaration, as well Gov. Andrew Cuomo's denial of a permit for the Williams Pipeline — a 23-mile project that would carry natural



officials and environmental groups are hopeful MRI can be stopped too.

According to National Grid, the pipeline is necessary to provide energy reliably to New Yorkers, as well as maintain system pressure.

“What National Grid is not saying is that this pipeline is actually part of a much larger project,” said Robert Wood, a climate activist with 350 Brooklyn, who noted the gas transported to the Greenpoint depot will be loaded into trucks and transported out of the city.

New York City doesn’t apparently have much need for the gas anyway.

Reports show that gas demand in New York City has been flat, if not decreasing, due to energy efficiency measures. And thanks to high temperatures this winter, National Grid hasn’t used its backup energy supplies.

The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), passed by the state legislature last year, commits the state to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent in the next 10 years and 85 percent by 2050. The City Council passed similar legislation last year as well.

“These are huge milestones in the fight for climate justice and a huge vindication of the years of advocacy and pressure from climate activists all over the city,” said Laura Shindell of Food and Water Watch. “But New York has set climate goals before and we’ve gone right past them. There’s nothing to say we won’t miss those marks again.”



in the Bronx, Queens and Manhattan. For them to approve of Con Ed's rate hike is climate denialism," said Lee Ziesche of Sane Energy Project.

National Grid has not carried out an assessment of greenhouse gas emissions for the MRI pipeline, a step required by the CLCPA. The company has a long history of malfeasance. In 2016, inspectors discovered that National Grid was potentially liable for over 1,616 state safety rule violations concerning a pipeline in Queens. Violations included workers cheating on qualification tests and faulty installations that led to gas leaks.

Brooklyn Community Board 1, which serves Greenpoint and Williamsburg, voted unanimously in opposition to National Grid's rate hike and is calling on Gov. Cuomo and the Public Service Commission to do the same.

The commission is expected to vote in mid-March or April on the rate hike and National Grid's application to expand its liquified natural gas facilities. The regulatory body is made up of five people, all appointed by Cuomo. Environmentalists consider the vote a test as to whether the state is ready to commit to fighting fossil fuels.

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