

# OPINION COLUMNISTS

## Oil-by-rail is here to stay

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As of the time of writing, two tanker cars remained on fire at the scene of a CN oil train derailment that occurred Tuesday near Plaster Rock, N.B. The 150 residents whose homes were within two kilometres of the crash were still evacuated.

Along with the fiery derailment of a mile-long BNSF Railway oil train near Casselton, N.D., between Christmas and new year's and, of course, the horrific disaster at Lac-Megantic, Que., last summer, the safety of transporting crude oil, natural gas and refined petroleum products by rail is top of mind at the moment.

So how come it seems as if the continent's railroads have suddenly become oily infernos? (And, no, it's not, as the NDP have insisted, because Prime Minister Stephen Harper has relaxed safety regulations.) The prevalence of dangerous derailments is a new thing because, believe it or not, transporting large amounts of oil by rail is a relatively new thing.

Last year, just 5% of Canada's oil shipments went by rail, but even that was nearly double the year before and almost five times the amount in 2009.

Before 2009, very little petroleum moved to refineries by rail.

The numbers are very similar in the U.S.

Because oil companies are pumping their product out of the ground faster than pipelines are expanding, transporting oil by rail has become a necessity. A large part of the problem, of course, has been caused by governments and environmentalists standing in the way of new pipeline construction.

Pipelines are safer — by far — and less likely to foul the environment, too. Yet "green" politicians and activists have done everything they can (including threatening eco-terrorism) to obstruct pipeline construction.

So we're stuck with oil-by-rail.

Frankly, rail transport can be made much safer. And it should be, because even if major pipelines such as Keystone XL and Northern Gateway are eventually built, the demand for oil is likely to outstrip pipeline capacity for years to come.

Oil will need to get to markets, refineries and marine terminals by rail, so the Harper government in Canada and the Obama administration in the U.S. had better get used to it and regulate accordingly. (Indeed, in recent weeks both governments have moved to improve the safety of oil-by-rail.) But politicians of all stripes and at all levels also need to get out of the way of pipeline building.

In a study produced for the Fraser Institute last fall by environmental scientist Kenneth Green, the safety of pipelines was shown to be 30 times better than that of rail and

37 times that of truck transport. The incidence of injury to workers requiring hospitalization was a tiny fraction on pipelines compared to what it was on railroads and highways.

Equally importantly, pipelines were much safer for the environment.

There were just 0.6 leaks per billion ton-miles along pipelines, compared to two leaks per billion for rail and 20 leaks for highway haulers.

Every day in North America, vast quantities of oil ship via pipeline without incident. The trouble is, although pipelines leak very little of the oil they carry, when they do leak, the spills are more dramatic.

It's like air travel vs. highway driving: On a passenger-mile basis, air travel is safer. It's just that the crashes are bigger news.

Last year across North America, nearly 500 billion gallons of oil moved by pipeline. Just 0.0005% spilled.

Two of Canada's largest pipeline companies — Enbridge and TransCanada — have already begun working on technology that detects leaks the moment they develop so even less will be spilled.

We won't ever get around the need to ship oil by rail. But we could make oil transporting safer by laying pipe.