



Energy infrastructure needs should underpin any debate about reconciling our economic and environmental aspirations

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The Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion is the current focus of an increasingly polarized debate that is fundamentally about the future of Canada's critical energy infrastructure. Opponents of the pipeline expansion say the environmental risks of building it are too high – supporters say the economic risks of *not* building it are too high.

While Kinder Morgan is a very public flashpoint today, the issues around, and threats to Canada's critical energy infrastructure are much broader and have deep ramifications for the future of our country.

Canada and its closest allies define critical infrastructure as "Systems, assets, facilities and networks that provide essential services and are necessary for the national security, economic security, prosperity, and health and safety of a nation". Furthermore, they all identify energy as one of five critical sectors, the others being communications, healthcare and public health, transportation and water.

Energy and the services it provides - lighting, heating and cooling, transportation, and industrial power – is an essential underpinning of our society. Without access to these essential energy services, we'd be forced to revert to an economy and a standard of living far removed from what we enjoy and expect today. Canada's critical energy infrastructure – including petroleum refineries – provides that access.

The role energy infrastructure plays in our daily lives should anchor any conversation or debate about reconciling our economic and environmental aspirations, including approval processes for new energy infrastructure, the speed with which we can convert to new energy sources, or expectations for emissions reductions from existing infrastructure assets like refineries.

Disruptive change will be exactly that – disruptive to the lives of millions of Canadian families who today rely on our energy infrastructure to heat their homes, fuel their cars and power their places of work. Any authentic examination of Canada's track record of environmental performance improvement will confirm the impressive results of an incremental approach, underpinned by continuous improvement, and balanced by an aspiration to sustain economic growth and improve our standard of living.

Two reports published last week drive this home. The first, from the Fraser Institute, found that despite claims to the contrary, Canada has an excellent environmental record when compared to most of the other OECD countries. According to the study, Canada is in the top 10 among high income countries for overall environmental performance. In short, Canadians enjoy high levels of environmental quality in absolute terms and in comparison to our OECD peers.



The second, from the Province of Ontario, reported that air quality in Ontario has improved significantly over the past 10 years due to substantial decreases in pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide. In its **Air Quality in Ontario 2016 Report**, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change also confirmed that there has been a significant decrease in fine particulate matter which is emitted directly into the atmosphere as a by-product of fuel combustion or formed indirectly in the atmosphere through a series of complex chemical reactions.

Is there more to be accomplished and can we do better for ourselves and generations to come? Yes, absolutely. Can we do it without jeopardizing economic growth and our current standard of living? Yes, again. But sustainable transitions take time.

I am reminded of the parable of the tortoise and the hare.

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