

Testimony of Rich Cowan
Quadrennial Energy Review Meeting
Hartford, CT, April 21, 2014

My name is Rich Cowan. I have a master's in Electrical Engineering from MIT, but I do not work in the energy field currently. I speak as a consumer and a parent, and I also work with the Mass. Pipeline Awareness Network. My remarks are in response to some of the comments made in earlier portions of this meeting.

Many speakers expressed concern about pipeline constraints during the winter months. One panelist even said we urgently need to add 2 billion cubic feet of capacity in order to serve our needs. However, a recent letter from all six regional DPU commissioners stated that only 1 billion cubic feet of new pipeline capacity was needed. As many speakers pointed out today, much of that new pipeline capacity is already scheduled to go into service in only two years. So actual requirements for gas pipeline expansion are relatively modest and could be addressed by other measures if we so choose.

For example, when I grew up on the South Shore of Boston, I remember driving by the Dorchester gas tanks on I-93. There were at the time two gas tanks there that supplied LNG during the winter, so that during peak months the Boston area had an adequate natural gas supply. Since 1993 there has only been one natural gas tank in Dorchester. I'm wondering if the situation is really as urgent as some of the panelists say. If so, would it make more sense as a short term solution to add more peak shaving storage tanks in Dorchester, in Portland Maine, and at existing gas fired power plants? According to recent documents filed by Boston Gas (see: <http://www.env.state.ma.us/dpu/docs/siting/efsb14-1/22114ngrdptn.pdf>) this could be achieved at a lower cost than adding new 36 inch high pressure gas lines in populated areas and conservation lands.

Consumers should not have to bear the burden of a high-cost solution when alternatives are available. We also heard from a few panelists that natural gas has a much lower global warming potential than oil or coal. As many of you may be aware, Professor Moniz was the director of the MIT Energy Initiative and was involved in an academic disputes with other scientists who claimed that natural gas produced by fracking may produce even more global warming than coal due to "fugitive" methane emissions. Professor Moniz provided testimony before the US senate urging that the EPA be involved in more studies to determine "the methane emission factors associated with fossil fuel production, transportation, storage, distribution, and end-use." (see: <https://mitei.mit.edu/news/key-results-recently-published-mit-multi-disciplinary-study-future-natural-gas>) However no definitive study has been completed and evidence is mounting that EPA's early estimates of methane emissions were far too low (see: <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2014/04/10/1316546111>).

If it is true that the climate benefits of natural gas have been overstated, then do we really want to add billions cubic feet of new pipeline capacity to New England? We don't want a situation where our consumers are paying tariffs to support new infrastructure that actually does not make any meaningful contribution to reducing global warming. Furthermore, overreliance on one fuel creates dependency and security concerns.

To correct the imbalance between delivery capacity and demand, changes in state conservation program may be needed. For example, there is no reason why programs that help people insulate their attics, air seal their basements, or replace 40-year old heating equipment should only kick in if you convert your heating system to gas. Clearly, encouraging more gas conversions could worsen what some panelists described as an emergency situation. If we really have an emergency, should we be talking about placing a moratorium on gas conversion incentives until new gas capacity is added, and instead allow people with oil heating to get their homes evaluated and weatherized? Doing so would decrease emissions from hundreds of thousands of homes now using antiquated equipment. (see: <http://www.oilheatsaveenergycoalition.org/MA-Oil-Heat-Facts--2014.pdf>)

Finally, although this was a very cold year in the Northeast, it is quite possible that we will never see winters as cold as this one -- because the planet is warming. In a warmer world, small adjustments to storage capacity and continuation of conservation programs funded by RGGI can eliminate the need to dramatically expand natural gas infrastructure.