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In the public interest.

March 29, 2023

The Honorable Kimberly D. Bose
Secretary of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street NE
Washington, DC 20426

Re: Letter in Opposition to Gas Transmission Northwest LLC's Proposed GTN Xpress Project (Docket No. CP22-2-000)

Dear Madam Secretary:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Gas Transmission Northwest's (GTN) recent application to increase capacity on its pipeline. The Pipeline Safety Trust (the Trust) is the only national non-profit organization that focuses on pipeline safety. We do this through education and advocacy, increasing access to information, and building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government, and industry to promote safe communities and a healthy environment. As part of this work, the Trust monitors FERC dockets and submits comments where its technical expertise may be beneficial. It is the Trust's position that because of the pipeline safety risks and incident history of GTN and its parent company, TC Energy, that the Commission should deny this application.

GTN and TC Energy have a history of failing to meet regulatory requirements, accidents, and controversies relating to safety and reliability of its systems. Since 2003, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has initiated five Notice of Probable Violation cases, three Notice of Amendment cases, and nine Warning Letter cases against GTN.¹ From 2006 to 2023, TC Energy the company has had 21 cases initiated against it and five Corrective Action Orders issued.²

TC Energy's controversial Keystone Pipeline, which carries crude oil from Canada to the United States, has had 12 significant incidents in 12 years causing millions of dollars in damage and polluting hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil into the environment.³ Following two large spills in 2017 and 2019, lawmakers requested the Government Accountability Office to produce

¹ PHMSA, *Summary of Enforcement Actions: Gas Transmission Northwest LLC*
https://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/comm/reports/enforce/Actions_opid_15014.html#_TP_1_tab_1 [Exhibit 1].

² PHMSA, *Federal Enforcement Data: TC Oil Pipeline Operations Inc.*
https://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/comm/reports/operator/OperatorIE_opid_32334.html?nocache=7202#_OuterPanel_tab_1 [Exhibit 2].

³ PHMSA, *Summary of Enforcement Actions: TC Oil Pipeline Operations Inc.*
https://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/comm/reports/enforce/Actions_opid_32334.html [Exhibit 3].

a report to find out why such large spills occurred.⁴ The GAO concluded that construction issues contributed to spills more frequently on Keystone than on other pipelines. It also determined that Keystone’s largest spills were “caused by issues related to the original design, manufacturing of the pipe, or construction of the pipeline.”⁵ Just a few years later, the line was responsible for the largest crude oil spill in 10 years just last year when land movement and a failed weld caused the release of over 12,800 barrels of crude oil into a creek in Kansas.⁶

While the Trust is aware that these incidents occurred on a different line carrying different products, the high number of serious enforcement actions taken against TC Energy and GTN is extremely concerning given the fact that this application asks to increase the amount of pressure in this pipe which could increase the risk of pipe failure. It also begs the question of whether TC and its subsidiary’s design, manufacturing, and construction standards and safety culture are sufficiently robust. We encourage FERC to carefully consider whether any benefit of increased capacity on this line is outweighed by this risk.

FERC should also consider the upstream emissions and the potential for increased emissions associated with higher pressure gas transmission when considering whether to grant this permit. Upstream emissions are indeed, “reasonably foreseeable” and including these in the calculations about the emissions impact of the project are extremely important. In the FEIS, GTN is quoted stating “emissions from the proposed modifications would be minimal, and there would not be any increase in fugitive emissions from the Athol and Kent Compressor Stations.”⁷ It is unclear to the Trust what exactly this statement relies upon, but as the Commission knows, higher pressure systems leak more gas,⁸ and incidents on higher pressure lines release more methane into the environment, given the greater amount of methane in a higher pressure pipeline, all else being equal, and have larger “blast zone” in the case of explosion⁹. Further, compressor stations like those planned for use on this project increase the total emissions of the pipeline because compressors are prone to leaks and are gas-fired systems themselves.¹⁰ With the Starbuck compressor station already being one of Washington state’s largest

⁴ U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, *Report to Congressional Requesters: Pipeline Safety, Information on Keystone Accidents and DOT Oversight*, GAO-21-588 (July 2021) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-588.pdf> [Exhibit 4].

⁵ *Id.* at 23.

⁶ PHMSA, *Corrective Action Order, In the Matter of TC Oil Pipeline Operations, Inc.*, CPF No. 3-2022-074-CAO (Dec. 8, 2022) <https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/sites/phmsa.dot.gov/files/2022-12/TC%20Oil%20CAO.3-2022-074.pdf> [Exhibit 5] (the release was later found to be approximately 12,800 barrels; Pipeline Safety Trust, *Press Release: TC Energy Releases Cause of Dec. 7 Keystone Pipeline Oil Spill* (Dec. 8, 2022) <https://pstrust.org/tc-energy-releases-cause-of-dec-7-keystone-pipeline-oil-spill/> [Exhibit 6].

⁷ FERC, *GTN Xpress Project Final Environmental Impact Statement*, 4-39 (Nov. 20, 2022).

⁸ Fang Yuan et al., *Prediction of Leak Mass Rate in High-Pressure Gas Pipeline*, *Pipeline Tech. Journal* (June 26, 2020) <https://www.pipeline-journal.net/ejournal/ptj-2-2020/#72> [Exhibit 7].

⁹ Mark Stephens, *The Potential Impact Radius Formula, Background to Development and Validation* (Dec. 14, 2022) <https://primis.phmsa.dot.gov/meetings/FilGet.mtg?fil=1321> [Exhibit 8].

¹⁰ U.S. EPA, *Lessons Learned from Natural Gas STAR Partners: Directed Inspections and Maintenance at Compressor Stations*, (Oct. 2003) https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-06/documents/ll_dimcompstat.pdf [Exhibit 9].

emitters,¹¹ FERC should strongly consider whether the project’s increased risk to people, the environment, and climate is truly “minimal.”

Finally, the FEIS minimizes the impact the proposal could have on environmental justice communities. Increased pressure on the system presents an obvious increased risk of failure and environmental dangers such as fires and increased air pollutants. Three of the proposed areas for upgraded compressor stations are located near communities identified by FERC as potentially affecting minority populations. While it appears these stations are not in close proximity to densely populated communities, air pollutants move uncontrolled through the atmosphere, meaning they could negatively affect air quality for EJ communities, especially if blowdowns occur. Methane emissions present a serious health risk to communities and have an impactful effect on the climate.¹² It is also important to consider the fact that environmental justice communities are more likely to face the adverse impacts of climate change.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important matter. If you would like to discuss this comment or have questions, feel free to contact me at (360) 543-5686 (x107) or erin@pstrust.org.

Sincerely,

Erin Sutherland
Erin Sutherland
Policy & Program Director/Counsel
Pipeline Safety Trust

(exhibits)

¹¹ Isabella Breda, *Emitting Greenhouse Gases in WA? Here’s Who Will Need to Pay Up to Pollute* (Feb. 26, 2023) <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/emitting-greenhouse-gases-in-wa-heres-who-will-need-to-pay-up-to-pollute/> [Exhibit 10].

¹² Env’tl. Defense Fund, *Methane Pollution from the Oil & Gas Industry Harms Public Health* https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/content/methane_rule_health_fact_sheet_reboot_final_no_citations.pdf [Exhibit 11].