

2430 South Swan Road
Tucson, AZ 85711

October 24, 2012



**U.S. Customs and
Border Protection**

Secretary Kimberly D. Bose
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street NE, Room 1A
Washington, DC 20426

Dear Ms. Bose,

I would like to take this opportunity to express some of the concerns with the Sasabe Lateral Project (Docket Number PF12-11-000) as it relates to Border Patrol operations under my command and to pass along what our partners with the Office of Field Operations (OFO) have also relayed to me.

There has been a significant decline over the past several years of illegal alien traffic in the portion of the Tucson Station's area of responsibility known as the Altar Valley. Human smuggling through this corridor has been dramatically reduced to a relatively manageable level. Although I consider any amount of illegal traffic to be unacceptable, we have made tremendous progress toward a secure border through a combination of improved technology, infrastructure, increased manpower and a lot of just plain hard work. As a result, there has also been a great decrease in complaints from the local residents and landowners. Many times they now provide positive feedback.

Even with the slowing of unlawful traffic as stated above, the Tucson Sector was still credited with approximately 33 percent of all the illegal alien apprehensions and 44 percent of marijuana seizures for the entire country during Fiscal Year 2012 which ended on September 30, 2012.

It is my position that creating a south to north road originating at the United States-Mexico border will undoubtedly lead to a considerable increase in alien and narcotics trafficking through the area. This will be amplified further if it bypasses our traffic checkpoint on State Route 286 near Milepost 26. Although there are other unimproved roads further north that can be used to circumvent the checkpoint, there is currently no access to them directly from the international boundary. The installation of a pipeline would inadvertently create a route of egress for transnational criminal organizations (TCO's). I understand El Paso Natural Gas does not intend for the 100-125 foot wide right-of-way easement initially cleared to become a permanent road. However, according to their own estimate, it will take approximately five years for the road to revert back to its natural state. As soon as the desert vegetation and any natural obstacles are removed for construction, I believe the criminal element will immediately begin using this route for their illicit activities, even before the pipeline is completed. This will prevent the area from returning to its pre-construction state for an indefinite period. Additionally, it will result in these organizations creating a large web of numerous other roads to link with the pipeline easement at different points, in order to defeat law enforcement efforts aimed at interdicting them.

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As these unplanned roads begin to form, members of the public and hunters, who legally use the area, will also begin using these routes and many will soon become full-fledged roads. It is difficult enough to stop the illegal flow of aliens and narcotics without facilitating their smuggling activities by building them a road. On July 16, 2012, the Houston Chronicle published an article authored by Dane Schiller entitled "Gas drilling a boom for drug traffickers, too" illustrating this exact problem already occurring in Texas.

A clear example of how the pipeline is used to circumvent checkpoints is the El Paso Natural Gas pipeline located just west of Amado, Arizona. There are regular complaints from landowners of hunters and smugglers using the road without permission. However, since this road already exists, it may be feasible to place the planned pipeline along that same route and have both side-by-side. If the pipeline must pass through Sasabe, maybe it can be routed in that direction south of the border where the construction could conceivably be much less expensive.

Public safety will also be affected with the expected increase in the use of vehicles for smuggling along the pipeline easement. In years past, when vehicle stops were attempted, they frequently tried to flee from the Border Patrol units despite the danger due to the vehicles being loaded beyond their designed capacity. These "failure to yield" tactics resulted in many high-speed chases almost on a daily basis. The smugglers have no regard for the safety of their passengers, the motoring public, or law enforcement. When engaged in a pursuit, they almost always drive erratically and break many traffic laws. In doing so, they sometimes also enter residential areas.

Our partners from the Office of Field Operations that work at the Port of Entry in Sasabe, Arizona have also expressed the following concern over the project. If smuggling were to significantly increase in the Altar Valley, there is a danger that Sasabe, Sonora, Mexico (adjacent to the border and immediately south of Sasabe, Arizona) would become a larger smuggling hub similar to what is currently the case in the town of Altar, Sonora, Mexico, 55 miles southwest of Sasabe, Arizona. Altar, Sonora, Mexico has received a lot of negative international media attention due to large-scale operations as the primary staging area for groups of people seeking to illegally enter the United States through Sasabe and Nogales, Arizona. The rise in illegal traffic would subsequently result in a more robust smuggling infrastructure and a higher crime rate to border communities on both side of the international boundary.

I strongly recommend seeking an alternate route for the pipeline which does not include the Altar Valley at all. I trust a suitable alternative can be found and thank you for your attention to these concerns.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at (520) 514-4700.

Sincerely,



Roger San Martin
Patrol Agent in Charge
U.S. Border Patrol - Tucson Station

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