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FERC agrees to review revised plans for LNG port

By Dotti Farrington

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has agreed to review the revised plan for transporting liquefied natural gas through Narragansett Bay and related inland waterways. No date has been announced for the review.

The review was prompted by the decision of the Hess Company's Weaver Cove to use 725-foot tankers as transportation to and from its proposed LNG storage terminal at Fall River, Mass., after plans to remove a bridge that is too small for 850-foot tankers were dropped.

The city of Fall River, the attorneys general of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the Massachusetts Energy Facility Siting Board, and the Conservation Law Foundation jointly asked the FERC to revisit its Weaver Cove approval last July and its subsequent confirmation approval in January that denied several requests for review.

These entities contend that the

smaller tankers would mean twice as many annual trips with a total of 285 bridge openings. They said the impacts of more frequent trips need to be studied.

The U.S. Coast Guard said the LNG tankers might not safely pass between the old and new Brightman Street bridges, or would require extraordinary maneuvers to do so.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also asked the FERC to review the new transit plan and determine whether it requires additional analysis.

FERC sources acknowledged it was unusual that opponents sought further review after the FERC had already denied appeals, and it was unusual for the FERC to agree to another review.

Ordinarily, jurisdiction would move to the U.S. District Court, but the FERC asked the court for permission to retain jurisdiction and to conduct further review.

The joint petitioners said the extra trips would impose considerably more hardship on and

along the inland waterways, with closures during each trip of four bridges, including the Newport Bridge.

"Real and substantial hardships" would affect individuals, as well as authorities with responsibility for security and safety, the Weaver Cove opponents said.

Weaver Cove responded with claims that suggested the hardships would be minimized by such factors as "mandatory exclusion zones not being respected," a claim that authorities said cannot occur under existing rules for mandatory compliance.

The petitioners said Weaver Cove tried "to belittle" the significance of the new maneuvers that would be required, and they said the new maneuvers would "increase both security and navigational challenges."

The opponents also complained to the FERC about Weaver Cove's "disturbing trend of redefining reality to align it with (LNG) requirements."

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