

Alaska: Gas Pipeline Or Bering Straits Crossing?

by Paul Gallagher

Reports that a new natural gas pipeline, running 1,300 miles from Alaska to the lower 48, was about to be announced—a fruit of the secretive energy task force of Vice President Cheney—circulated at a Jan. 15 conference in Juneau sponsored by the Alaska State Senate Transportation Committee. But the subject of the conference itself was the desire for new, through railroad corridors from Alaska down through Canada and back into the United States—one of the oldest infrastructure needs, and plans, in North America.

The juxtaposition of these two, quite different ideas of “economic infrastructure” was the subject of Canadian Broadcasting Company and CBS-TV interviews with rail consultants of the Alaska conference. It’s the difference between “energy profits” illusions—à la the California and national energy deregulation crisis since 2000—and infrastructure building for general economic recovery, whose finest expression is in Lyndon LaRouche’s proposals for the Eurasian Land-Bridge and a “Super TVA” recovery policy in North America. The question of a new connection to

Alaska—even if it’s Cheney’s energy-pirate friends’ plans for a new gas pipeline—actually involves the whole “world land-bridge” of transportation-centered corridors.

Veteran transportation consultant Hal B.H. Cooper, who presented a preliminary “Alaska-Canada Railroad Corridor Feasibility Study” to the Jan. 15 Juneau conference, pointed out one little-known aspect of the natural gas pipeline plan. Canadian natural gas production in Alberta rose dramatically from 1995 on, as the inflationary craze for natural-gas generation of electricity took off in North America; now Alberta production has peaked at 5 trillion cubic feet per year and is actually falling. Natural gas prices have skied up again to nearly \$9.50 per thousand cubic feet, nearing their level of the destructive 2001 price spike which shut down aluminum and other industrial facilities; average retail electricity prices have increased by .25¢ per kilowatt in one year.

An Alaska natural gas pipeline is aimed to replace dropping Canadian production in that energy-inflation geometry. Its capital cost—on the order of \$15 billion over five years—does not require the large-scale investment in new coal-fired and nuclear-powered electric plants around the United States, which would counter that inflationary pressure because of much lower fuel costs. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, in fact, is promoting an “alternative”: a big new U.S. dependence on *liquified* natural gas from the Mideast, to be brought into Gulf of Mexico ports. All this is part of the powerful inflationary forces which have been building up within the so-called “deflationary” U.S. economy during the productive economy’s collapse since July-August 2000.

Producing electricity with natural gas is a way to make quick, relatively small “emergency” additions to generating capacity in a localized electricity shortage crisis; but it makes no sense as a national energy strategy, as the spikes in heating-fuel costs and per-kilowatt-hour electricity costs have shown.

If a pipeline is to be built, a far more valuable resource to the economy to bring down through it, would be *water*, from the MacKenzie River and the overcharged Alaskan river system generally, into the arid Rocky Mountain longitudes of North America.

Rail Corridor Comes First

But *any* pipeline really requires a new transportation *de-*

FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



velopment corridor. Why? The pipeline itself can't be built, Cooper notes, without finishing off the already beaten-up Alaskan Highway and American roads which connect to it. U.S. Interstate Route 5, for example, running up the American West Coast from southern California, is already disintegrating in stretches from the tens of thousands of heavy trucks that use it per day. The construction of a pipeline from British Columbia to Alaska requires carrying 100-110 million tons of materials up along its route between 2005 and its completion before 2010. That will crush the long north-south highways of western North America—even if, for example, the steel pipeline sections are made shorter than is economical for their final assembly, so that trucks can carry them.

Therefore, if we're not going to ruin existing infrastructure (Cheney energy-pirate style) while building new "infrastructure," a new railroad corridor to Alaska has to be built first, before any pipeline!

That railroad would transport trucks and their drivers, as well as the heaviest construction loads on rail cars. It would carry 40-60 million tons or so a year to serve the construction of a pipeline or pipelines while it was underway; and in a few years as pipeline construction ended, would be carrying 60-70 million tons of other freight—lumber products, energy products, food and other agricultural goods, consumer goods, and still, trucks—as well as passenger service. In the representation in **Figure 1**, a water pipeline is shown above ground along the railroad corridor; a natural gas pipeline would be buried underneath it. The railroad would require electricity, and the corridor could be planned for transmission of electric-

ity, as shown; it would run north from the northern end of the Western Interconnection, the western-most transmission section of the U.S. electricity grid.

That railroad corridor is now being planned by the Canadian Arctic Railway Company of British Columbia. But funding for the project is more than uncertain, and is planned to be private.

This idea has been seen as a necessity by those who planned or envisaged industrial and economic growth, since the first half of the 19th Century when Alaska still belonged to Russia—the first proposal was made in 1845 by the governor of the then-Territory of Colorado. But it has never been constructed. As the planning has been redone several times during the 20th Cen-

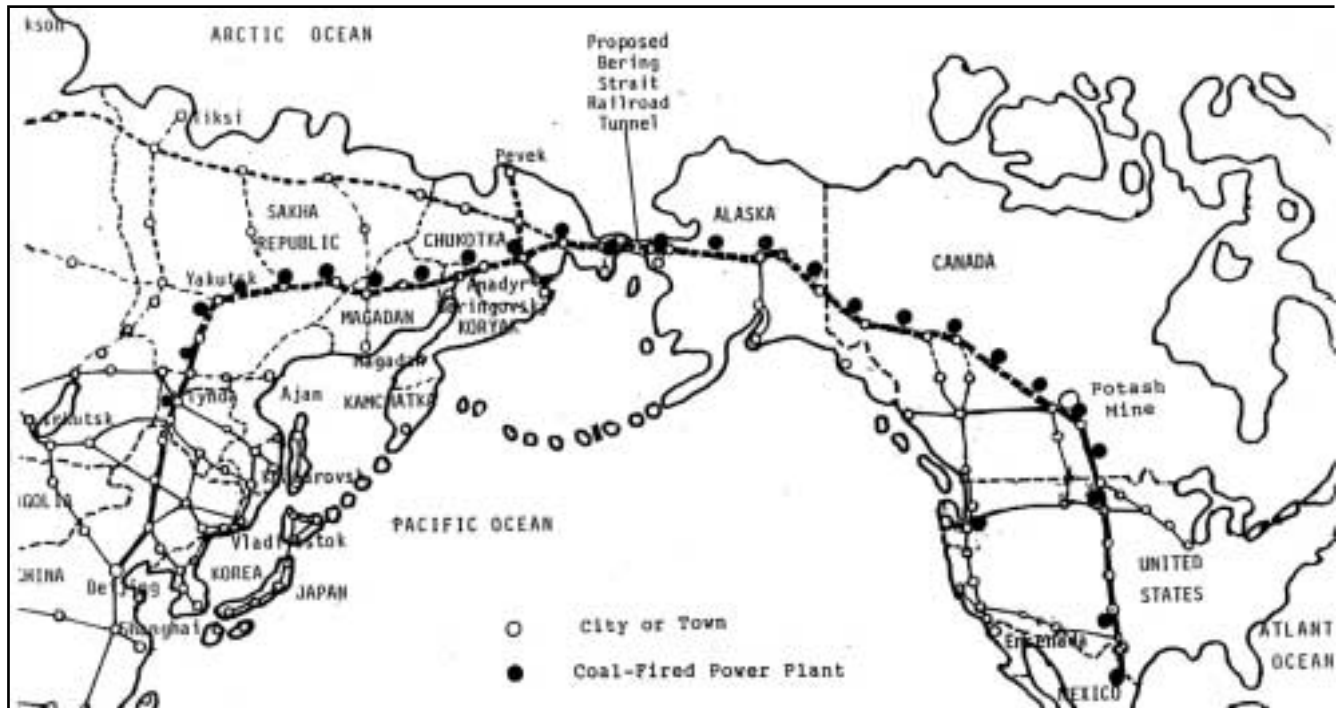
tury, it has been connected to the idea of crossing the Bering Straits into Russian and Chinese railroad corridors. In the first decade of the 20th Century, America and Russia were very close to launching construction of a U.S. West Coast-to-Siberia rail corridor, using freight ferries across the Strait. Again during World War II, President Roosevelt and Josef Stalin discussed the same thing, and Stalin attempted to revive the idea with President Truman after the war. But the rail corridor up over North America has never been built.

Bering Strait Imperative

The intensity of use of this railroad corridor, and its effect on overall economic productivity of North American and Eurasian nations, changes entirely when it crosses the Bering Strait—as is now definitely technologically feasible by tunnel (**Figure 2**), using the two islands, (Little Diomed and Big Diomed) which lie along the Strait crossing in order to break up its total length. The long-awaited Alaska-Canada railroad corridor then becomes an extension of the northern Eurasian Land-Bridge—involving the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur lines, and the Chinese northern rail line construction extending to them—and part of the "world land-bridge."

For example, whereas American consultant Cooper in Juneau estimated that a railroad corridor between Alaska and Canada would reach 70 million tons of freight per year, he reported that the Siberian State Transport University has done extensive study of traffic over a Bering land-bridge. The freight traffic on the same corridor, if so extended, would then more than quadruple, to as much as 300 million tons per year

FIGURE 3
Bering Strait Tunnel Connection for Rail Corridors



among the nations of North America, Russia, China, Korea, Japan, and Europe.

This would be propelled by the savings of time in moving most kinds of freight. Take a 40-foot standard freight container being shipped from Shanghai to New York City. Entirely by sea—the cheapest means—it takes 30-35 days (by air, the cost per pound is nearly 20 times higher). By sea across the Pacific and then rail across America, takes 20-22 days; ship and truck, 20-25 days. But entirely by rail on the “world land-bridge,” the container would arrive in only 10-12 days, and cost just 3-5% more than all-sea shipping.

Moreover, in this context of world infrastructure building and connection, the transport corridor from Alaska down the West Coast of North America is then not enough. An additional corridor from Alaska becomes necessary and, in fact, more important: This corridor, as consultant Cooper has drawn it, will come southeast across Western Canada to cross into North and South Dakota, and continue as the Central North American Land-Bridge Corridor. This section of it is the long-“missing” major north-south rail corridor down the center of the United States—following the route of U.S. Highway 83—to Texas, and into Mexico.

This combination of two new rail and *development corridors*, both flowing across the Bering Strait to join the Eurasian Land-Bridge (**Figure 3**), connect North America to the “world land-bridge.”

They also make clear the complete coherence between

the Eurasian Land-Bridge idea—for which Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche is known internationally, and which is being carried out in projects by China and other countries—and his “Super-TVA” policy for the United States’ recovery from economic depression.

The North American side of this railroad corridor construction would involve tens of thousands of new productive jobs directly, and many tens of thousands more resulting from that economic activity. If double-tracked, the Alaska-to-West Coast and Midwest corridor routes would cost \$7-10 billion in construction; the much greater Bering Strait-crossing land-bridge corridor construction, by several nations, \$70-100 billion.

The American Federal states, including Alaska, have all been forced to cut their budget spending—despite more than half of them raising taxes—by the depression tax revenue drops since 2000. They—as in the cases of Alaska, Texas, California, and other states with ambitious transport corridor plans—can put no money into the the new infrastructure public works that would create new revenue and productive jobs. LaRouche’s Super TVA will target credits from the Federal Treasury—which uniquely has the power to create them—to assist states and the regulated public corporations they create to carry out such great projects. Through treaty agreements, credits will be created for international projects. His recovery program is modern economic infrastructure for the general welfare—like the Alaska/Central North America Corridor.