

Natural gas transportation is close to becoming a reality

As I see it, there are three possible methods to transport natural gas from the producing offshore fields in Atlantic Canada. The pipeline concept that is presently being utilized offshore Nova Scotia is working for the Sable project because of its close proximity to shore. Running a pipeline from 300 kilometres offshore in the North Atlantic from the Grand Banks to land is entirely a different matter.

The liquified natural gas facilities presently being built in Nova Scotia are heavily dependent on supplies of natural gas from other areas of the world. These supplies are coming from large fields and being transported for processing and delivery to the northeastern United States.

The Hibernia, Terra Nova, and White Rose developments are fundamentally oil-producing projects, with associated natural gas that is presently being re-injected back into the reservoir due to a lack of transportation system to bring this gas to market.

For these projects, and to maximize the benefits from other stranded gas fields offshore Newfoundland and Labrador, the development of compressed natural gas (CNG) technology is vital. The problem with CNG to this point has been centred around the high cost of building vessels to transport the gas. However, this method of transportation has long been favoured by the petroleum industry and has driven research to the point where several design concepts are close to becoming a reality.

In fact, many of the world's top-producing energy companies are on the verge of making the critical final decision to proceed with plans for compressed natural gas transportation. Higher prices for natural gas, coupled with a global drive towards using cleaner fuels, has propelled energy companies, classification societies, gas transporters, ship companies, and shipbuilding yards to collaborate on finding a solution to the problem.

This thriving industry will also pay big dividends for Atlantic Canada. Houston, Texas-based EnerSea Transport is working with Memorial University of Newfoundland and has established the Centre for Marine CNG. This centre will promote large-scale marine transportation concepts and provide a forum through which industry issues can be advanced.

Trans Ocean Gas, the project spearheaded by local engineer Steve Campbell, predicts that his company will have its concept operational within the next 12-18 months. Campbell is already looking at facilities in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia to construct the transportation modules in Atlantic Canada.

While the production of natural gas offshore Atlantic Canada may be several years away, at least the transportation system will be in place once that day arrives.

Bill Abbott