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Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission  
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To the Commissioners:

The City of Portland has a moral obligation to reject the Pembina propane terminal. In these dying days of the all-too-short Holocene, the burning of fossil fuels threatens a vast portion of the Earth's species, massive segments of the human population, and the fundamental biophysical stability on which complex societies are predicated. In such times any policymaker or other ostensible servant of the public interest with a shred of sanity or integrity would be desperately examining options for a rapid and radical decommissioning of the fossil fuel economy. Instead of embarking on this urgent endeavor, we find that those with the power to regulate the fossil fuel industry in North America are everywhere complicit in its expansion, forcing us to instead engage in an absurd dialogue about whether we should lock ourselves even further into ever-worsening climate destabilization.

To be clear: the notion that we should expand the scale of our current fossil fuel infrastructure so long as the fossil fuels in question are less emissions intensive than some others is absurd. The notion of "bridge fuels" entirely misses the point that our current baseline of greenhouse gas emissions is massively above an acceptable level. Justifying new infrastructure on the premise that the emissions it will produce are below this baseline ignores the very simple fact that the atmosphere can only absorb so much before globally destabilizing effects are felt. The atmosphere is not willing to negotiate, nor commend us for our tentative efforts.

Moreover, there is the hardly trivial question of whether the fossil fuels in question are indeed any less emissions intensive than any other. There is little doubt that propane produces less carbon dioxide than, for instance, coal when combusted. There is little clarity, however, as to whether the *overall* emissions of greenhouse gases are less with natural gas, particularly fracked natural gas, than with coal. At least one study concludes these emissions, when fugitive methane emissions in extraction and transmission are taken into account, are approximately equivalent to coal (Howarth et al. 2011).

To enunciate a point that everyone in power loves to miss: you *are* responsible for addressing climate change. If you adopt the perspective that it is not your mandate, or that it is a problem inherently better addressed at some larger scale of governance, you simply replicate the logic of *every* holder of power around the globe who has allowed the current death spiral of greenhouse gas emissions to continue unmitigated on the premise that it would unfairly disadvantage their own nation, or state, or city to act unilaterally in a sane and morally defensible manner, while others perhaps chose not to. It is the logic exhibited even in international dialogues on climate, which deteriorate into absurd spectacles of childish mutual distrust, with no party willing to simply take the initiative to stave off imminent catastrophe, fearing their efforts will not be matched (and thus be to no avail).

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In a 2010 paper utilizing game theory to analyze international climate policy, a not terribly surprising conclusion was reached: someone has to go first. After twenty years of pointless dialogue, yielding

nothing but a sky choking on ever-greater quantities of poison, it is clear that in our current economic and political setting international negotiations are doomed. Meaningful action on climate can only occur *from the ground up*. Initiative must be demonstrated at small scales of government to create a political atmosphere in which action feels not only plausible but inevitable, and inaction is clearly revealed as the small-minded betrayal of life on Earth that it is. Grassroots pressure and small-scale government action are necessary to create the political will for large-scale governmental entities to take action. They are helpless children on their own.

Infrastructure matters. The current, ubiquitous focus on technological and market-based solutions that fastidiously avoid even considering the prospect of simply shutting down emitting activities, and in the process costing industries money, is pathological. The Oregon Global Warming Commission, tasked with developing strategies to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions 75% below 1990 levels by 2050, frankly acknowledges in its most recent biennial report that it simply cannot develop a scenario in which this occurs, *not even on paper* (OGWC 2013). This is perhaps not surprising when one considers it is comprised of representatives from polluting industries—they are simply incapable of questioning their fundamental assumptions that we must maintain our current levels of consumption and that our economy must grow indefinitely. What the world desperately needs is government entities willing to simply take initiative to shut down emitting industries without establishing the nth degree of detail about how exactly society will adapt to a world without fossil fuels because it is acknowledged we cannot adapt to a world with them. We need to shift the burden away from those who want what we've always required—a liveable world—to those who want to maintain our historically unprecedented socioeconomic conditions.

If the City of Portland cannot demonstrate initiative of this manner, who, realistically, will?

Finally, I'd like to be frank that this project will encounter considerable resistance should it be approved. Since returning to the Pacific Northwest in 2013, I have devoted a considerable amount of my time to organizing, with many other talented and dedicated individuals, blockades of tar sands equipment and oil trains throughout the region. Without wishing to be overly combative, I can personally promise you that should this project clear its administrative hurdles, it will face physical ones. The string of arrests and general social unrest you will engender is just one more of the many terrible liabilities associated with the Pembina terminal.

Love and rage,



Scott Schroder

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