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Offshore LNG terminal a safer alternative
Californians are going to need more energy in the future and the offshore LNG terminal is a practical, positive proposal.
Daily Breeze editorial

One way or another, Southern California is going to get plenty of natural gas to fuel its continuing growth. The latest offer comes in the less controversial form of a floating terminal to unload LNG miles off the coast.

LNG, or liquefied natural gas, is a lifeline connecting our continent with supplies in parts of the world unreachable by pipelines. It is gas that has been superchilled to reduce it to liquid form, one-600th of its normal volume, so it can be transported by ship.

Esperanza Energy is stepping into an opening left when the Port of Long Beach canceled talks to build an LNG terminal in the middle of the harbor complex, which had provoked months of conflict about risks of terrorism, explosions and fire.

The risk level was limited, but the concerns of opponents was not. What if terrorists bombed an LNG ship? What if they attacked the LNG terminal where LNG would be unloaded?

By contrast, Esperanza's project would be at least 10 miles off the coast, a little less than half way to Catalina Island, which is far enough away to calm the worst case of jitters. Instead of an onshore terminal for conversion of LNG to its natural state, the liquid would be warmed offshore, then transferred by underwater pipe to existing pipelines onshore.

Two L-shaped platforms, partially submerged and capable of functioning in waves of up to 14 feet, could handle 2.5 shiploads a week. That is about the same quantity, 1.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day, as the onshore proposal by Sound Energy Solutions.

The conversion of the liquefied gas would be done by piped-in warm water effluent from power generating plants, which is a nice solution for that potential problem as well. The only by-product from the floating LNG terminal would be water at a temperature that the most sensitive fish couldn't complain about.

Nonetheless this is not a perfect solution. Environmentalists are far from unanimous about LNG.

Last year, an Australian energy company, Woodside Natural Gas, proposed creating a similar LNG processing site more than 21 miles offshore from Los Angeles International Airport.

Natural gas is clean-burning, but it does generate carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming. Opponents of LNG say that importing it simply transfers Americans' dependence on

foreign oil to dependence on foreign sources of natural gas.

That's not totally accurate because the LNG would originate from Pacific Rim nations that are more stable and generally less hostile to the United States than the Middle East oil suppliers.

So as an energy source, LNG looks like a good option. If Esperanza's project or similar ones get built, it also should be plentiful.

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