

# Martha Hall Findlay: We need a national strategy for energy infrastructure

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Canada's economic future depends on our ability to develop and export our energy resources. And the premiers' meeting in Halifax set out, in stark detail, one of the more significant challenges we face. At a time when co-operation among the provinces and the federal government is needed to achieve that objective, Stephen Harper was missing in action.

Working together is the only way we can achieve our energy objectives.

Some call for a national energy strategy. I believe we can make greater progress by focusing on an achievable objective, a national strategy for energy infrastructure.

Canada has an abundance of energy – and the world wants it. Yet, Canada is a captive supplier to the U.S., which results in a significant discount in the price we receive. And with the International Energy Agency's prediction that America will become the world's largest oil producer by 2020, our reliance on the U.S. market is even more worrisome.

Getting to offshore markets is an economic imperative. The emerging high-growth markets of Asia, China in particular, offer tremendous opportunity – but not if we can't get there. Whether that be by pipeline, additional capacity to Vancouver or rail through Alaska, Canada's ability to access Asian markets will determine the strength of our economy.

Yet, West Coast access is at risk because we've dropped the ball. Neither the private sector nor government has effectively addressed environmental and first nations concerns. That lack of engagement has delayed, and may even frustrate, finding an acceptable solution.

To achieve West Coast access, business and government must work with first nations to allow development without having to relinquish

positions on unresolved issues. We must work together to meet legitimate environmental requirements. We need better environmental regulation, not less of it, which Mr. Harper wants. We need the best contingency plans technologically available, and clear lines of risk accountability.

Pipelines to the east have also been proposed. New Brunswick Premier David Alward is interested. Alberta's Alison Redford and Quebec's Pauline Marois have agreed to discuss the idea further.

There's pipeline capacity stretching to Montreal and, although there are some technical challenges, the idea is gaining strength. Former New Brunswick premier Frank McKenna has promoted the idea, saying: "This essential infrastructure project would be good for all regions of Canada. It would be an extraordinary catalyst for economic growth. It would be a powerful symbol of Canadian unity."

This is why a national infrastructure strategy is needed.

These projects – their benefits and their risks – cross provincial boundaries. No province, territory or federal government can operate in isolation; each has a role to play. There's tremendous benefit in the various participants working together for a common goal, rather than one-off regional efforts.

A national energy infrastructure strategy will provide the federal government with the ability to deliver coastal solutions. It will enable provinces to reap the regional and national economic benefits. The same logic applies to natural gas. For hydro and our increasing renewable energy capability, we need to address transmission grid challenges.

We have far more to gain working together than not – with Ottawa playing a key facilitating and brokering role. We can do more, and we can do it better, together.

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