Bill Proposes to Ban Fracking in Massachusetts

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In November, the Massachusetts State Legislature’s Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture approved a bill that would ban the use of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in the state for 10 years. The bill would also restrict wastewater produced by fracking operations from being treated, stored, or disposed of in Massachusetts. The bill needs to be passed by the state legislature and approved by the governor to become law.

Fracking is a technique in which a fluid that typically contains water and other chemicals is mixed with sand and injected at high pressure into a well to create small fractures in rock to allow gas, petroleum, or other resources to migrate to the well. The process is most commonly used once during the production life of a well, but there is an increasing trend toward fracking a well multiple times as production declines. The fracking process was developed over 60 years ago though it was not until more recently that it was used effectively to obtain gas from shale deposits in the United States. According to sources cited on Wikipedia, “as of 2010, it was estimated that 60% of all new oil and gas wells worldwide were being hydraulically fractured. As of 2012, 2.5 million hydraulic fracturing jobs have been performed on oil and gas wells worldwide, with more than 1 million of them in the United States.”

Those in favor of fracking cite the economic benefits from the large amount of gas that can now be made available for energy use. Opponents to fracking have concerns over the potential environmental impacts, including contamination of groundwater, air pollution, noise pollution, the release of gases and chemicals used in the process, and the associated health effects of these concerns. For these reasons this process has become scrutinized, with restrictions and bans occurring. Fracking has been used for some time in western states such as Texas, Wyoming, and North Dakota and then in the southeast. However, the huge push in recent years is east at the Marcellus Shale deposit, primarily in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

A shale deposit called the Hartford Basin extends into western Massachusetts. According to a study by the US Geological Survey in 2012, the deposit may contain gas, but it is thought to be in limited quantity. It requires further exploration to better understand the potential, which is not likely to occur unless the gas industry is interested. Many of the communities in western Massachusetts are concerned about the impacts of fracking in the future because, being more rural, they depend on groundwater supplies as their only source of drinking water. The Massachusetts bill is anticipated to be a preventive measure that would deter energy companies from considering fracking or disposing of its wastewater in the state.

Although Vermont has less potential for significant shale oil and gas deposits, it became the first state to ban fracking in 2012. There are additional restrictions and bans on fracking that are being proposed at the state and local levels in other parts of the country. California recently enacted regulations that focus on wastewater instead of pursuing an outright ban on fracking. Several communities in Colorado voted to ban fracking, but are now facing legal challenges from both the industry and the state government. It would appear Massachusetts’ proposal to place a moratorium on this contentious process is a prudent approach until fracking can be further understood and managed.

Clayton Street Bridge

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This partnering approach was used throughout the project. Construction issues have to be resolved immediately; delays in schedule could prove catastrophic. It took meticulous review of all details and constant communication between the designer, the contractor and the MBTA to create a smooth workflow with contingency plans on the ready, all while meeting specified deadlines.

The abutment modification work was completed in the same manner as the bridge replacement. In lieu of weeks of work interrupting Red Line operations and traffic, abutment micro piles and tie backs were installed on weekends with around-the-clock work. All street and track services were fully operational each Monday morning.

Overcoming an initial delay due to fabrication postponements, a few resident complaints regarding noise levels at night, and a surprise snowfall during the Veteran’s Day weekend, the team partners of Barletta Heavy Division, the MBTA and Louis Berger successfully completed the bridge replacement to the gratification of the client, residents and the state. Work on finishing touches continues today. The project will be fully completed with new sidewalks in the spring of 2014.

Click here to view a YouTube video of the time-lapse camera.

New structure was wheeled into position on SPMT units.

New bridge was assembled on temporary scaffolding and lifted by the SPMT units ready for the move.

New structure erected in one weekend, in time for Monday morning train service.