

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BEFORE THE
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION**

East Lateral Xpress Project Draft)	Docket No. CP20-527-000
Environmental Impact Statement)	
)	

**COMMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE FOR POLICY
INTEGRITY AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW**

The Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law (Policy Integrity)¹ respectfully submits this comment letter on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s (FERC or the Commission) draft environmental impact statement for the East Lateral Xpress Project (Project). Policy Integrity is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to improving the quality of government decisionmaking through advocacy and scholarship in the fields of administrative law, economics, and public policy. Last April, Policy Integrity submitted a comment letter on the Commission’s environmental assessment for the Project, which is attached hereto.²

The Commission prepared the draft environmental impact statement for the express purpose of “assist[ing] the Commission in its consideration of the Project’s contribution to climate change . . . [and] whether Columbia Gulf’s proposed Project is in the public convenience and necessity.”³ Yet while the environmental impact statement takes the helpful step of quantifying downstream greenhouse gas emissions, it concludes that “FERC staff continues to be

¹ This document does not purport to represent the views, if any, of New York University School of Law.

² Inst. for Pol’y Integrity, Failure to Project Indirect Greenhouse Gas Emissions or Monetize Emissions in Draft Environmental Assessment for the East Lateral Xpress Project (Apr. 15, 2021) [hereinafter Pol’y Integrity Comments on EA] (attached).

³ Fed. Energy Reg. Comm’n, East Lateral Xpress Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement ES-1 (Docket No. CP20-527-000) (June 2021) [hereinafter DEIS].

unable to determine significance with regards to climate change impacts.”⁴ The draft environmental impact statement also fails to quantify upstream emissions, assess the Project’s incremental climate harms, or consider avenues to mitigate its greenhouse gas contributions.

The Commission’s new approach to assessing climate impacts takes the legally required step of quantifying direct and downstream emissions using some reasonable assumptions. However, the Commission’s new “eyeball test” fails to meet the Commission’s statutory mandate to adequately assess environmental impacts of natural gas projects that it certifies.

This comment letter offers the following points:

- The Commission should quantify upstream greenhouse gas emissions in addition to operational and downstream emissions.
- Application of the social cost of greenhouse gases would enable the Commission to assess the significance of the Project’s climate impacts and facilitate the careful balancing that the Natural Gas Act (NGA) requires. A Commission analysis was recently rejected by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit for failing to adequately justify its disregard for the social cost of greenhouse gases, and the Commission’s continued objections to the tool are unpersuasive.
- The Commission’s approach of comparing the Project’s emissions to national and state emission totals and targets does not facilitate meaningful review and can trivialize climate impacts if not properly contextualized.
- The Commission should consider mitigation measures for the Project’s greenhouse gas emissions, particularly since it cannot conclude that those emissions are insignificant.

These points amplify the arguments in two comment letters that Policy Integrity filed with the Commission in May 2021 in response to the Commission’s Notice of Inquiry regarding certification of new interstate natural gas facilities, one of which Policy Integrity filed alone (Solo Comments)⁵ and the other it filed with seven other environmental groups (Joint

⁴ *Id.* at 1.

⁵ Comments of the Inst. for Pol’y Integrity, *Certification of New Interstate Natural Gas Facilities*, Docket No. PL18-1 (May 26, 2021) [hereinafter Solo Comments on Notice of Inquiry] (attached).

Comments).⁶ We attach those comments hereto, along with a 2019 report from Policy Integrity titled *Pipeline Approvals and Greenhouse Gas Emissions*.⁷

A. The Commission Should Quantify the Project’s Upstream Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Although the draft environmental impact statement takes the helpful step of quantifying both operational and downstream greenhouse gas emissions from the Project, the Commission’s analysis overlooks upstream greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Commission, “[b]ecause the source of the gas to be transported is unknown and may change throughout the life of the Project, analysis of specific environmental impacts of upstream natural gas production are not included.”⁸ The justification that the Commission provides for disregarding upstream emissions mirrors its bygone justification from previous analyses for overlooking downstream emissions, in which the Commission claimed that it could not assess downstream emissions because it lacked precise end-use information. But like with downstream emissions, upstream emissions can also be estimated by applying reasonable default estimates.

For instance, the Environmental Protection Agency provides a set of methods and emission factors that can be used to calculate the quantity of greenhouse gases emitted by oil and gas production wells, gathering lines, and processing facilities—which EPA advised the Commission about in 2018 comments to the Notice of Inquiry regarding the policy statement for natural gas infrastructure.⁹ Alternatively, the Commission could return to its past practice of

⁶ Comments of Env’t Def. Fund et al., *Certification of New Interstate Natural Gas Facilities*, Docket No. PL18-1 (May 27, 2021) [hereinafter Joint Comments on Notice of Inquiry] (attached). This comment letter corrected a prior submission that was timely filed to the same docket on May 26, 2021 (but failed to include one of the signatories, necessitating the correction).

⁷ JAYNI HEIN ET AL., INST. FOR POL’Y INTEGRITY, PIPELINE APPROVALS AND GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS (2019) (attached).

⁸ DEIS at 15–16.

⁹ U.S. Env’t Prot. Agency, Detailed Comments on FERC NOI for Policy Statement on New Natural Gas Transportation Facilities at 2, Docket No. PL18-01 (June 21, 2018) (discussing EPA regulations at 40 C.F.R. Part 98 Subpart W).

using generic estimates for upstream emissions from natural gas production developed by the Department of Energy’s National Energy Technology Laboratory and Energy Information Agency.¹⁰ While there is some variation in emission rates among sources, production sources need not be known with certainty in order to be useful in a NEPA analysis or when making a determination that a project is required by the public convenience and necessity. And the Commission must engage in reasonable forecasting of emissions—including using national average or regional average emission rates—when tools are available.¹¹

Indeed, other federal agencies have applied reasonable assumptions to assess the upstream emissions from fossil-fuel transmission and transportation projects. For instance, the State Department’s 2014 supplemental assessment of the Keystone XL pipeline included direct construction and operating emissions, including fugitive emissions, as well as indirect emissions from production, refining, and combustion of the oil transported by the pipeline.¹² Likewise, the Surface Transportation Board projects direct, upstream, and downstream greenhouse gas emissions for rail lines that regularly transport coal.¹³ Following this precedent, the Commission should assess the Project’s upstream greenhouse gas emissions and take those emissions into account when assessing whether and on what terms and conditions to approve the Project.

B. The Commission Should Apply the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases to Assess and Contextualize the Project’s Climate Impacts

While the Commission asserts that “staff have not identified a methodology to attribute discrete, quantifiable, physical effects on the environment to the Project’s incremental

¹⁰ New Market Project Rehearing Order, 163 FERC ¶ 61,128, at 2–3 & nn. 5–6 (LaFleur, Comm’r, dissenting in part) (identifying available tools and previous Commission orders utilizing those tools).

¹¹ *Sierra Club v. FERC (Sabal Trail)*, 867 F.3d 1357, 1374 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (“NEPA analysis necessarily involves some reasonable forecasting, and that agencies may sometimes need to make educated assumptions about an uncertain future.”) (internal quotation marks omitted).

¹² U.S. State Dept., Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Keystone XL Pipeline at 4.14-4 (2014), <https://2012-keystonepipeline-xl.state.gov/documents/organization/221190.pdf>.

¹³ HEIN ET AL., *supra* note 7, at 17 (providing examples).

contribution to [greenhouse gases],”¹⁴ the social cost of greenhouse gases offers precisely that tool. In fact, the draft environmental impact statement elsewhere acknowledges that the social cost of greenhouse gases “constitute[s] a tool that can be used to estimate incremental physical climate change impacts, either on the national or global scale.”¹⁵ And as Policy Integrity explained both in its previous comments to this docket¹⁶ and in the Joint Comments to FERC’s Notice of Inquiry,¹⁷ the social cost of greenhouse gases can be applied to fulfill the Commission’s duty under the NGA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to meaningfully assess and weigh climate impacts.

In the draft environmental impact statement, however, the Commission raises several objections to the social cost of greenhouse gases methodology, arguing that the tool “cannot meaningfully inform the Commission’s decision whether and how to authorize a proposed project under the NGA”; is not relevant because the Commission “does not use monetized cost-benefit analyses as part of the review”; and features “methodological limitations,” including “substantial variation in results and no basis . . . to designate a particular monetized value as significant.”¹⁸ As detailed below, however, these arguments are unpersuasive.¹⁹

¹⁴ DEIS at 11.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 15.

¹⁶ Pol’y Integrity Comments on EA at 5–9.

¹⁷ *See* Joint Comments on Notice of Inquiry at 2–12.

¹⁸ DEIS at 15.

¹⁹ For additional argument as to why the Commission should apply the social cost of greenhouse gases—including responses to other concerns that the Commission has previously expressed—see HEIN ET AL., *supra* note 7, at 37–51.

1) The social cost of greenhouse gases contextualizes climate impacts and readily facilitates comparison to other project effects

While the basis for the Commission’s first objection is not entirely clear, the social cost of greenhouse gases in fact can meaningfully inform the Commission’s decision as to whether and on what terms and conditions to authorize the Project.

For one, the social cost of greenhouse gases allows for a clearer understanding of a project’s climate impacts because it captures many important incremental climate impacts and presents them in the common metric of money. The relative significance of, for instance, 20,000 additional tons of carbon dioxide per year versus 2 million additional tons per year may be somewhat challenging to discern because such emission tallies may seem opaque and incommensurate with other project impacts. In contrast, the relative significance of \$1 million per year in climate damages versus \$100 million per year in climate damages is more salient and easier to discern because it is presented in the common metric of money—a metric that an economic regulator like the Commission is very familiar with and routinely uses to measure other project impacts. And because the social cost of greenhouse gases captures so many key climate impacts within a single metric, it allows the Commission (and, importantly, the affected public) to understand the scope of those impacts better than individualized projections of climate impacts (such as temperature increase or sea-level rise) or volumized greenhouse gas emissions standing alone, and can facilitate a more meaningful comparison to monetized project benefits.²⁰

Use of the social cost of greenhouse gases can also help facilitate the “hard look” at climate impacts that NEPA requires.²¹ Under NEPA, agencies must “consider and disclose the actual environmental effects” of a proposed project in a way that “brings those effects to bear on

²⁰ For further detail, see Joint Comments on Notice of Inquiry at 8–12.

²¹ See generally *Balt. Gas & Elec. Co. v. NRDC*, 462 U.S. 87, 97 (1983) (mandating “hard look” assessment under NEPA).

[the agency's] decisions.”²² As the Commission itself acknowledges, the social cost of greenhouse gases can assess the actual climate change impacts of a project proposal.²³

2) The social cost of greenhouse gases is useful outside of formal cost-benefit analysis and can facilitate a rational balancing of beneficial and adverse impacts

While the Commission does not apply formal cost-benefit analysis to assess the Project's merit, it must broadly weigh beneficial and adverse impacts as part of its mandate to promote the “public convenience and necessity.”²⁴ As the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia has explained, the Commission must “balance the public benefits against the adverse effects of the project . . . including adverse environmental effects”—requiring it to fully assess the “environmental effects of pipelines it approves,” including climate harms.²⁵ Because the social cost of greenhouse gases offers a simple and salient metric to comprehend the scope of the Project's climate harms—and is presented in a unit (dollar values) that mirrors the unit used for other economic considerations the Commission weighs—it can inform a determination of public convenience and necessity even if it is not incorporated into a formal cost-benefit analysis.

Applicable NEPA regulations confirm that even if the Commission does not monetize all other Project impacts, the social cost of greenhouse gases can still constitute the best method to assess the significance of the Project's climate-related impacts. Specifically, these regulations provide that when monetization of costs or benefits is “relevant to the choice among environmentally different alternatives,” that analysis can be presented alongside “any analyses of unquantified environmental impacts, values, and amenities.”²⁶ In other words, contrary to

²² *Id.* at 96.

²³ *See supra* note 15 and accompanying text. For further detail, see Pol'y Integrity Comments on EA at 5–7.

²⁴ 15 U.S.C. § 717f(e).

²⁵ *Sabal Trail*, 867 F.3d at 1373 (internal quotation marks omitted).

²⁶ 40 C.F.R. § 1502.22.

FERC’s suggestion, the inability or unwillingness to monetize some impacts does not preclude the monetization of other impacts—like climate damages—that can be readily monetized.

3) The social cost of greenhouse gases is rigorous and reliable

While the Commission’s last objection to the social cost of greenhouse gases emphasizes supposed “methodological limitations” such as “substantial variation in results” depending on the discount rate and a lack of basis “to designate a particular monetized value as significant,”²⁷ this too misses the mark.

While it is true that different discount rates introduce the possibility of varying social cost values, the Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases (Working Group) has endorsed the use of a 3% discount rate as a central value, and agencies have frequently relied on that discount rate in assessing the climate cost or benefit of a proposed action, including non-regulatory actions.²⁸ Thus, while the Commission could apply the Working Group’s full range of social cost values at different discount rates, it could alternatively conduct a single analysis using only the central value if it finds that approach more useful.²⁹ Note that the Working Group is currently in the process of updating its social cost of greenhouse gases valuations to incorporate the most up-to-date science and economics;³⁰ if it revises its

²⁷ DEIS at 15.

²⁸ See, e.g., Bureau of Land Mgmt., Environmental Assessment for Little Willow Creek Protective Oil and Gas Leasing 81 (DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2014-0036-EA) (Feb. 10, 2015) (using central 3% value to calculate climate harms from oil and gas lease sale); see also Peter Howard & Jason A. Schwartz, *Think Global: International Reciprocity as Justification for a Global Social Cost of Carbon*, 42 COLUM. J. ENV’T L. 203, 270–84 (2017) (listing all uses of social cost of greenhouse gases by federal agencies through mid-2016, including eight assessments conducted under NEPA).

²⁹ See *Vecinos Para El Bienestar de la Comunidad Costera v. FERC*, No. 20-1045, slip op. at 12 (D.C. Cir. Aug. 3, 2021) (explaining that FERC could “cho[ose] a discount rate according to recommendations by the Office of Management and Budget in 2013, see Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Office of the President, OMB Circular A–4, at 30–35, or else used a range of rates, and articulated its own criteria for assessing the significance of the projected costs of the projects’ greenhouse gas emissions”).

³⁰ The Working Group is expected to release updated estimates by January 2022.

recommended central discount rate as part of that update, the Commission and other agencies should follow suit.

While the Commission is also correct that the social cost of greenhouse gases does not itself “designate a particular monetized value as significant,” this is not a modeling limitation because assessing significance is a legal conclusion that requires reasoned judgment by the Commission.³¹ All environmental and economic impacts present the same line-drawing challenge in this regard, yet this has not prevented the Commission from assessing the significance of non-monetized environmental impacts, nor has it prevented the Commission from assessing the significance of monetized values when it comes to a proposal’s beneficial economic impacts. To the contrary, on numerous occasions the Commission has labeled monetized economic impacts of roughly \$8–\$20 million as “significant,” despite the lack of either clear precedent or a purely objective basis for concluding as such.³² To facilitate an evenhanded and consistent comparison, the Commission should do the same with monetized climate costs. Even smaller damage estimates could be relevant to assess whether and on what terms to approve a certificate application, particularly where estimated project benefits are relatively minor.³³

In this case, the Project’s climate impacts from operational and downstream emissions, assuming full burn (i.e., all the gas transported is eventually combusted), total more than \$204 million in climate damage costs per year, according to the central estimate of the social cost of

³¹ *Spiller v. White*, 352 F.3d 235, 244 n.5 (5th Cir. 2003) (“[D]etermining whether significance exists inherently involves some sort of a subjective judgment call.”); *see also* 40 C.F.R. § 1501.3(b) (“In considering whether the effects of the proposed action are significant, agencies shall analyze the potentially affected environment and degree of the effects of the action.”).

³² Joint Comments on Notice of Inquiry at 14–15.

³³ For further detail, *see id.*

greenhouse gases³⁴—meaning that the Project will cause roughly \$4 billion in climate costs over the twenty-year precedent agreement underlying it.³⁵ This includes over \$9 million of harm from annual operational emissions alone.³⁶ Accordingly, the Commission should deem the Project’s greenhouse gas emissions to be significant.

4) The social cost of greenhouse gases is a research method generally accepted in the scientific community, thus meriting usage under 40 C.F.R. § 1502.21

When an agency is unable to obtain sufficient “information relevant to” assess “reasonably foreseeable significant adverse impacts,” as the Commission believes may be the case here with climate impacts, it must perform an “evaluation of such impacts based upon theoretical approaches or research methods generally accepted in the scientific community.”³⁷ The social cost of greenhouse gases, as a research method that is “generally accepted in the scientific community,” meets that standard and thus further merits use.

The Working Group’s methodology and valuations have been repeatedly endorsed by independent reviewers, demonstrating its general acceptance in the scientific community. A few examples are particularly notable. In 2014, the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded that the Working Group had followed a “consensus-based” approach, relied on peer-reviewed academic literature, disclosed relevant limitations, and adequately planned to

³⁴ The Project will contribute up to 3.66 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year in operational and downstream emissions. DEIS at 10–11. According to the latest estimates from the Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, the central value (i.e., using a 3% discount rate) of the social cost of carbon for 2025 emissions is \$56. INTERAGENCY WORKING GRP. ON THE SOC. COST OF GREENHOUSE GASES, TECHNICAL SUPPORT DOCUMENT: SOCIAL COST OF CARBON, METHANE, AND NITROUS OXIDE – INTERIM ESTIMATES UNDER EXECUTIVE ORDER 13,990 at 5 (2021). \$56 multiplied by 3.66 million equals approximately \$204.96 million.

³⁵ We note that the social cost of carbon increases each year, so this is an underestimate and represents the climate damages the project would cause only if the social cost of carbon were worth \$56 every year from 2025 forward. However, for year 2045 emissions, for example, the social cost of carbon is \$79/metric ton. In a full cost-benefit analysis, the project lifetime climate damages total would be discounted back to present value.

³⁶ The Project will contribute an estimate 165,830 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year in operational emissions. DEIS at 10. \$56 multiplied by 165,830 equals approximately \$9.28 million.

³⁷ 40 C.F.R. § 1501.21(c)(4).

incorporate new information through public comments and updated research.³⁸ In 2016 and 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine issued two reports that, while recommending future improvements, supported continued agency use of the Working Group’s estimates.³⁹ Leading economists and climate policy experts have also endorsed the Working Group’s values as the best available estimates.⁴⁰ And the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit has upheld agency reliance on the Working Group’s valuations.⁴¹

A ruling last week from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit further supports the applicability of this provision to the social cost of greenhouse gases.⁴² As the Court explained, this regulation “appears applicable on its face” to the social cost methodology,⁴³ and may indeed “obligate[]” FERC “to use the social cost of carbon protocol” in its environmental impact statements, notwithstanding the Commission’s various concerns about the methodology.⁴⁴ At the very least, the Commission should “explain whether 40 C.F.R. § 1502.21(c) calls for it to apply the social cost of carbon protocol or some other analytical

³⁸ GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-14-663, REGULATORY IMPACT ANALYSIS: DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COST OF CARBON ESTIMATES 12–19 (2014), <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665016.pdf>.

³⁹ NAT’L ACAD. SCI., ENGINEERING & MED., VALUING CLIMATE DAMAGES: UPDATING ESTIMATION OF THE SOCIAL COST OF CARBON DIOXIDE 3 (2017), <https://www.nap.edu/read/24651/chapter/1>; NAT’L ACAD. SCI., ENGINEERING & MED., ASSESSMENT OF APPROACHES TO UPDATING THE SOCIAL COST OF CARBON: PHASE 1 REPORT ON A NEAR-TERM UPDATE 1–2 (2016), <https://www.nap.edu/read/21898/chapter/1>.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Richard Revesz et al., *Best Cost Estimate of Greenhouse Gases*, 357 SCIENCE 655 (2017); Michael Greenstone et al., *Developing a Social Cost of Carbon for U.S. Regulatory Analysis: A Methodology and Interpretation*, 7 REV. ENV’T ECON. & POL’Y 23, 42 (2013); Richard L. Revesz et al., *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, 508 NATURE 173 (2014) (co-authored with Nobel Prize winner Kenneth Arrow) (explaining that the Working Group’s values, though methodically rigorous and highly useful, are very likely underestimates).

⁴¹ *Zero Zone v. Dept. of Energy*, 832 F.3d 654, 679 (7th Cir. 2016).

⁴² *Vecinos Para El Bienestar de la Comunidad Costera v. FERC*, No. 20-1045, slip op. at 9–13 (D.C. Cir. Aug. 3, 2021).

⁴³ *Id.* at 12.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 13.

framework, as generally accepted in the scientific community’ within the meaning of the regulation, and if not, why not.”⁴⁵ The Commission has not done so here.

In light of the information in these comments and the attached documents—and the broad consensus that the Working Group’s social cost valuations offer a rigorous and reliable approach to assess a project’s incremental climate impacts—the Commission should now apply the social cost of greenhouse gases to assess the Project’s climate effects.

C. The Commission’s Approach of Comparing Project Emissions to Geographic Targets and Inventories Can Misleadingly Trivialize Climate Impacts if Not Properly Contextualized

While the Commission attempts to contextualize the Project’s greenhouse gas emissions by comparing them to national and state emission totals and state emission targets,⁴⁶ this approach offers limited insights about the Project’s climate impacts (particularly compared to using the social cost of greenhouse gases) and can misleadingly trivialize those impacts.⁴⁷

Comparing a project’s greenhouse gas emissions to geographic climate targets or inventories frequently makes large quantities of emissions from an individual project seem relatively small. As one federal court recently recognized, “[t]he global nature of climate change and greenhouse-gas emissions means that any single . . . project likely will make up a negligible percent of state and nation-wide greenhouse gas emissions.”⁴⁸ Yet while agencies assessing percentage comparisons of greenhouse gas emissions should recognize this phenomenon and adjust their standards accordingly, agencies in the past have frequently fallen victim to probability neglect—the cognitive tendency to improperly trivialize small probabilities.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ DEIS at 12–13.

⁴⁷ For further detail, see Joint Comments on Notice of Inquiry at 9–11.

⁴⁸ *WildEarth Guardians v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 457 F. Supp. 3d 880, 894 (D. Mont. 2020).

⁴⁹ See Cass R. Sunstein, *Probability Neglect: Emotions, Worst Cases, and Law*, 112 YALE L.J. 61 (2002).

other words, agencies all too often fail to recognize, as one federal court explained, that even a seemingly “very small portion of a gargantuan source of . . . pollution” may “constitute[] a gargantuan source of . . . pollution on its own terms.”⁵⁰

In the draft environmental impact statement, the Commission concludes that the Project’s operational and construction emissions could increase national carbon dioxide emissions by up to 0.0039%.⁵¹ However, the Commission does not include the Project’s downstream emissions in the comparison to national emissions “because the natural gas would be transported to a LNG terminal for export.”⁵² These significant downstream emissions, which are 20 times greater than projected operational emissions, should not be ignored. If downstream emissions were considered in the comparison, they would further increase national emissions by 0.06%.⁵³ While this number may still seem like a negligible contribution at a quick glance, contextualizing the Project’s annual greenhouse gas emissions as contributing over \$205 million in annual climate damage costs to total harm—as application of the social cost of greenhouse gases would reveal⁵⁴—demonstrates the fallacy of that conclusion.

The draft environmental impact statement also estimates that the Project’s operational emissions would consume between 0.11% and 0.16% of Louisiana’s greenhouse gas emission goals by 2025 and 2030, respectively.⁵⁵ But, again, this analysis excludes the Project’s significant downstream emissions. If downstream emissions were considered in the comparison, the Project’s emissions would consume 2.37% and 3.41% of Louisiana’s greenhouse gas

⁵⁰ *Sw. Elec. Power Co. v. EPA*, 920 F.3d 999, 1032 (5th Cir. 2019) (internal quotation marks omitted).

⁵¹ DEIS at 12.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ The DEIS reports U.S. national emissions as 5,769.1 million (or 5.769 billion) metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2019. DEIS at 12. To calculate the percentage, we divide 3.5 million metric tons by 5,769.1 million metric tons, which equals 0.06%.

⁵⁴ See *supra* note 34 and accompanying text.

⁵⁵ DEIS at 13.

emission goals by 2025 and 2030, respectively.⁵⁶ This is a large percentage that should give the Commission pause. Yet when faced with a similar scenario recently of a pipeline project that would contribute up to 4.5% of Minnesota’s greenhouse gas emission goals by 2050, the Commission brushed aside those emissions as insignificant without explanation.⁵⁷

Comparing project emissions to state and national totals and targets does not provide a clear picture of a pipeline’s climate impacts, and has been used by the Commission to trivialize significant climate harms. The Commission also selectively applies this percentage-comparison approach to greenhouse gas emissions. Other quantified impacts, such as payroll or employment projections, could also be presented as miniscule percentages of global, national, or statewide totals. By presenting greenhouse gas emissions as small percentages of larger totals, while measuring other impacts without resorting to this misleading approach, the Commission makes it difficult to accurately balance project impacts. Use of a more objective standard to measure a project’s climate impacts is preferable to the Commission’s approach of eyeballing a project’s significance through percentage comparison to geographic totals and targets.⁵⁸

D. The Commission Should Consider Measures to Mitigate the Project’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Impacts

Despite failing to rule out the possibility that the Project will cause substantial harm by exacerbating climate change, the Commission does not consider any mitigation measures with respect to greenhouse gas emissions. The Commission should not approve the Project, without first considering measures to mitigate its climate impacts.

⁵⁶ The DEIS assumes Louisiana’s 2025 greenhouse emissions in carbon dioxide equivalent will be 147.7 metric tons and the state’s 2030 emissions will be 102.6 metric tons (based on a 28 percent reduction in emissions from 2005 levels by 2025 and a 50 percent reduction by 2030). DEIS at 13 n.20. To calculate the percentages, we divide the Project’s 3.5 million metric tons by 147.7 million metric tons for 2025 and 102.6 million metric tons for 2030, which equals 2.37% and 3.41%, respectively.

⁵⁷ *Northern Natural Gas Co.*, 175 FERC ¶ 61,146, at PP 33–34 (May 20, 2021).

⁵⁸ See *Freeport LNG Development, L.P.*, 175 FERC ¶ 61,237, at PP 1–2 (June 21, 2021) (Danly, Comm’r, concurring in part and dissenting in part).

There are many greenhouse gas mitigation measures that the Commission could implement through its power to impose certificate terms and conditions. As Policy Integrity previously explained, the Commission could require mitigation measures such as “minimizing leakage and mandating energy efficiency at natural gas facilities (for direct emissions) and attaching conditions that limit the quantity of gas transported through a pipeline or the time period over which the pipeline operates (for indirect emissions).”⁵⁹ For unavoidable emissions that remain after avoidance and minimization measures have been imposed, the Commission could require the applicant to offset the project’s emissions as a form of compensatory mitigation.⁶⁰ Other government agencies, including the California Air Resources Board and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, administer successful carbon offset programs to which the Commission could look for guidance.⁶¹

The Commission’s failure to even consider mitigation measures for greenhouse gas emissions stands in stark contrast to its treatment of other potential adverse Project impacts. The draft environmental impact statement outlines dozens of mitigation measures that the Commission would impose for other Project impacts,⁶² which the Commission deems “necessary to reduce adverse impacts associated with the Project” and fundamental to its determination that the Project will have no significant environmental impact beyond its effects on climate change.⁶³ It is not clear why the Commission fails to consider similar mitigation measures with respect to

⁵⁹ Solo Comments on Notice of Inquiry at 15.

⁶⁰ For further detail on both the logistics of and legal precedent for carbon offsets, see *id.* at 14–27.

⁶¹ See *Compliance Offset Protocols*, CAL. AIR RES. BD., <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/compliance-offset-program/compliance-offset-protocols>; *Offsets*, REGIONAL GREENHOUSE GAS INITIATIVE, <https://www.rggi.org/allowance-tracking/offsets>; see also U.S. GOV’T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-11-345, CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES: OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO CARBON OFFSET QUALITY 1–2 (2011), <https://perma.cc/QHN5-DYJ5> (discussing various types of offset projects including forestation, carbon capture, and installation of energy-efficient equipment).

⁶² DEIS at 39–44.

⁶³ *Id.* at ES-3.

climate change, particularly since climate impacts are the only class of environmental effects that the Commission does not conclude are insignificant.

CONCLUSION

While the Commission's quantification of downstream emissions represents a step forward, the Commission continues to subject climate impacts to a different standard than other Project impacts by refusing to assess their significance, disregarding the best available tool to contextualize their impacts, and overlooking reasonable mitigation measures. The Commission should further assess the Project's climate impacts and carefully weigh those effects in assessing whether and on what terms and conditions to approve the Project.

Respectfully submitted,

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Dated: August 16, 2021

Enclosed:

- 1) Inst. for Pol'y Integrity, Failure to Project Indirect Greenhouse Gas Emissions or Monetize Emissions in Draft Environmental Assessment for the East Lateral Xpress Project (Apr. 15, 2021)
- 2) Env't Def. Fund et al., New Information and Additional Perspectives on Using the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases to Weigh Climate Impacts in the Certification of New Interstate Natural Gas Facilities (May 27, 2021)
- 3) Inst. for Pol'y Integrity, Comments on Certification of New Interstate Natural Gas Facilities (May 26, 2021)
- 4) Jayni Hein et al., Inst. for Pol'y Integrity, *Pipeline Approvals and Greenhouse Gas Emissions* (2019)