

Project: Community Relations Program

Background

The Fayetteville Shale Play is a large repository of natural gas in Central and Northwest Arkansas. Over the last several years, it has generated an enormous amount of economic activity for the state as natural gas drillers have moved in to collect the fossil fuel and pipeline companies have followed to transport the natural gas to market.

Because they are based in another state, Texas Gas Transmission (Texas Gas) had no relationships in Arkansas. They hired The Communications Group to help them reach out to public stakeholders and create a positive public opinion for their proposed 167-mile pipeline construction project. The proposed pipeline, called the Fayetteville-Greenville Expansion Project, is comprised of two pipeline laterals in Arkansas and Mississippi to be constructed in the summer of 2008.

The Goal

A construction “certificate” must be issued by a federal agency in order for any natural gas pipeline to be constructed. To get a construction certificate to build a natural gas pipeline, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) requires that the organization conduct extensive “pre-certificate” work communicating with potentially affected stakeholders. In other areas of the country, pipeline projects have been halted or delayed by community group opposition, picketing, petitions and demonstrations. Without complete buy in from the community, the company could potentially



Lexington, Mississippi Open House



Forrest City, Arkansas Open House



Belzoni, Mississippi Open House

face federal permitting and construction delays causing considerable financial consequences (for example, over \$3 million worth of pipe had to be ordered 12 months before construction began in order to ensure the pipe was manufactured and delivered on time. If the company had experienced any FERC permitting delays, millions of dollars would have been tied up in pipe not being used). Our goal was to ensure that Texas Gas developed and implemented a responsible public relations program that ensured they met all the FERC's stakeholder communication requirements. This would ensure their project stayed on its anticipated construction timetable.

Target Audience

The target audiences included 1,100+ landowners within three miles of the proposed pipeline, elected officials in the affected communities, environmental agencies, law enforcement and emergency management personnel in 15 counties across two states.

Objectives

Our counsel to the client on this outreach project was to adopt a strategy of complete accessibility to the public and to elected officials, to listen to the concerns of individual landowners and to



Example of Print Coverage

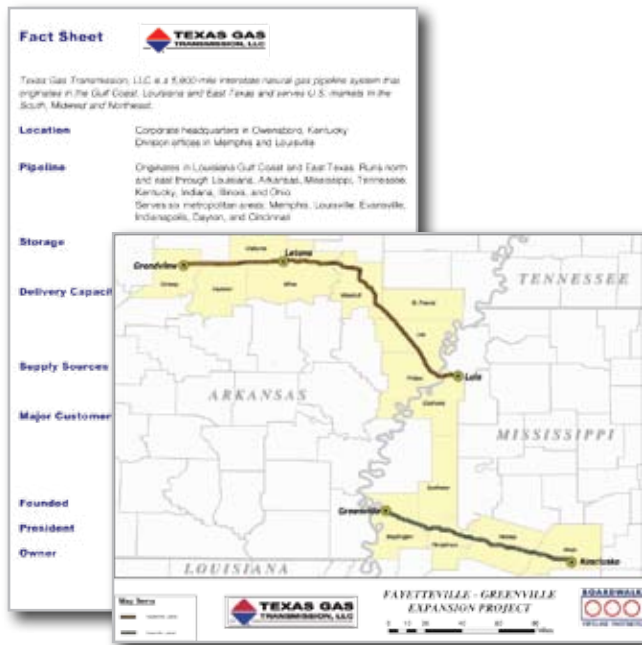


Newsletter

make sure that all stakeholders had the most up-to-date information as the project progressed. Despite the fact that the news media were not a primary target audience, The Communications Group recommended that proactive meetings occur with all major media outlets along the route to ensure that the media had a face-to-face contact, a business card and knew exactly who to call in the event they needed information. This program occurred from January to April 2007.

Recommendation

We created a comprehensive community relations plan that included one-on-one visits with newspaper editors, elected officials, county judges, quorum court members, law enforcement and emergency management personnel in each of the 15 counties. Following the visits, public open houses were held in six communities to allow affected landowners, public officials and the media access to Texas Gas Transmission engineers, safety supervisors, environmental specialists, project foremen and communication staff.



Research & Planning

County-by-county research – Community profiles were developed for each of the 15 counties with detailed information regarding local media outlets, county and city elected officials, public affairs analyses, major employers and other details pertinent to understanding the demographic, economic and political makeup of each affected county.

Media monitoring – TCG subscribed to a clipping service and obtained subscriptions for all of the weekly and daily newspapers in the 15 counties along the pipeline route. Our public relations staff had to conduct daily electronic monitoring of the local print publications to ensure timely awareness of any potential stories written about the Texas Gas project and to stay abreast of natural gas activity (there was a lot, particularly with competitors).

Implementation/Tools & Tactics

Message Mapping and media training – The Communications Group felt that the Texas Gas representatives who were actually going to be out in the communities needed to be able to articulate the company's message. Our public relations staff

conducted a day-long Message Mapping session to help Texas Gas' key leadership team – including the pipeline engineers, environmental surveyors and land managers – develop its primary messages and supporting talking points. We conducted a second day-long media training session to help them get comfortable speaking to key stakeholders and reporters and communicating the company's message in a way that positively reflected the values and mission of Texas Gas.

Meetings with public officials – Our public relations staff planned and implemented a series of meetings prior to the open houses with county judges, mayors and other municipal officials along the pipeline route. The purpose of these meetings was to provide information to public officials and introduce them to the project engineers. These meetings provided a face-to-face opportunity to ask questions about the project. The Communications Group wanted to make sure that community leaders heard details about the project directly from the company so they would not be taken by surprise by the inevitable questions that would come to their offices from community residents and area landowners once the project began.

Newspaper editor meetings – Understanding that the grapevine can often be the fastest form of communication in small communities and rural areas, TCG advised Texas Gas to hold a series of meetings with the editors of print publications in the communities where they held public officials meetings. This gave Texas Gas the opportunity to frame the issues on their own terms and develop relationships with local media.

Open house planning and implementation – In early 2007, our public relations staff held six open houses in Arkansas and Mississippi. The open houses consisted of several information stations. Landowners and interested members of each community could visit to learn more about subjects like safety, environmental concerns and



precautions, and pipeline construction and have a chance to see on a series of aerial maps where the proposed pipeline would cross their land. We provided company experts to help guide people through the process of finding their land tracts and to answer any questions. A company spokesperson was on hand to answer

media questions on the company's behalf and several of the project's engineers spoke with the media as well during the open houses. Our firm coordinated the planning, logistics, locations selection, signage and set up at each of the open houses.

Outreach Materials

To aid in the meetings with public officials and subsequent public open houses, The Communications Group developed or produced the following materials:

- Open house display boards that outlined pertinent topics about the pipeline such as construction, safety and environmental concerns
- A Texas Gas Fact Sheet that included company background information, a toll-free company information line, the company's Web site address, a company e-mail contact and a proposed pipeline route map
- A FAQ sheet that included questions and answers that we heard from landowners and elected officials
- Public notice print ads to invite the public to attend the open houses
- Aerial township maps that showed the pipeline route and how it crossed individual landowners' properties

- Invitations sent to the offices of state legislators, U.S. legislators, governors and lt. governors in Arkansas and Mississippi

Results

- Conducted seven face-to-face public officials meetings, talking with a total of 30 public officials from the affected counties.
- Conducted seven meetings with newspaper editors of county and community print publications along the proposed pipeline route. Contacted the remaining editors by phone.
- Conducted six landowner open houses covering 15 counties in Arkansas and Mississippi, with a total approximate attendance of 550.
- Community outreach, open houses and media relations generated positive or neutral print coverage in 11 statewide, community and county newspapers along the pipeline route, generating a total of 715,983 gross impressions.
- No negative stories appeared during the process.
- All stakeholder communication requirements were documented, submitted to FERC in the summer of 2007, and the company was granted a construction certificate by FERC on schedule in November of 2007. Construction began in May 2008.

