

Deep Water Port *notes*

The News Portfolio of The Connecticut Deep Water Port Community

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Offshore Wind Energy – Will it Come to Connecticut?

By Donald B. Frost

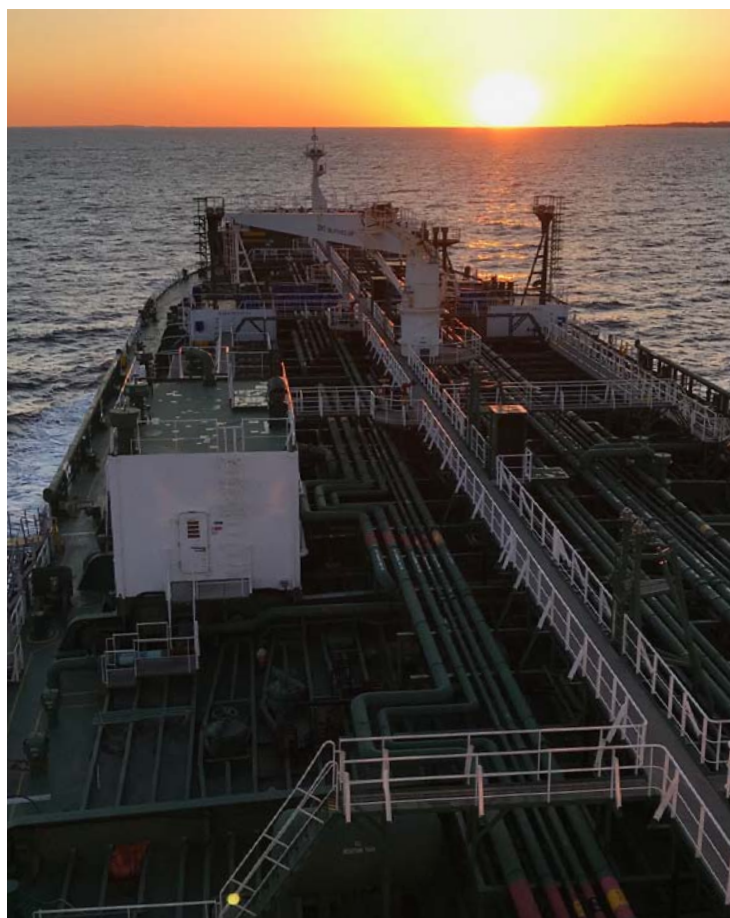
Last month I attended a briefing in Washington by the Chief, Office of Renewable Programs, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), focusing on Wind as an energy resource. You can probably locate the Power Point Slides at www.boem.gov.

The audience was shipping people representing US ports which may eventually host offshore wind farms. There were concerns about the safety of the ships entering and leaving their ports. Most of the conversation was about the location of wind farms relative to frequently used shipping lanes, and suggested safety margins between the towers and the shipping lanes as below.

Recognition of these essential lanes by consulting marine charts and studying AIS tracks included in the USCG Atlantic Coast Port Access Route Study.

- A minimum setback of 5 miles be established from all entry and exit points of the Traffic Separation Scheme lanes.
- To the maximum extent possible, at least a 2-mile setback from all other traffic lanes.
- Lighting of the construction area, and later the towers, not to interfere with mariners' night vision.
- Construction perimeter AIS transponders to allow detection in poor weather.
- The PP slides also dealt with keys to successful wind farms:
- Steady and/or dependable wind.
- A buildable environment. What is the depth of water and is the bottom suitable for construction?
- Market Demand. The nearer the consumers are to the wind farm the lower the transmission costs and more competitive wind driven electricity can be with closer sources. Besides the construction costs there are power losses in transmission lines over long distances. Building power lines ashore require expensive third party permits and are often resisted by environmentalists and home owners.

Twenty years ago, the idea of "distributed generation of electricity" was a hot topic among those who were planning where to site new generating plants. Should the US continue to build very large centrally located coal, oil fired, and/or nuclear-powered plants connected to consumers via the "grid", or increase the number of smaller gas turbine driven "peaking plants" located close to the consumers. This was the beginning of the move to unpackaged electric utility bills into two parts - the generation of the power and the transmission



Tanker SILVER HANNAH 600 ft LOA bound for Shell, NH with a load of gasoline loaded in St John's, NB. Photo by Connecticut Master Pilot Charles P. Jonas

of it to the consumers. Rate payers are living with that brilliant idea today. Remember "ENRON" and their manipulation of power rates in California?

Connecticut does not have direct access to ocean wind. The turbines will be in Federal waters twenty or more miles from shore. Long cables must be laid to connect the offshore generators to the nearest shore and new shore lines strung to connect to the grid to reach the population centers of New London, the New Haven-Hartford



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corridor or further west of New Haven.

A February 2018 study by McKinsey & Company titled “Sticker shock: Why utilities now must rethink customer affordability” introduced questions of whether wind energy will be able to compete with cheaper gas turbines using natural gas for fuel. Their study is aimed at all of the costs (permitting, construction, ongoing maintenance including new high-priced boats needed to service the towers, generation and transmission). Many of these costs will involve third and fourth party providers who will also demand a profit that rate payers must shoulder. Promoters of the Block Island Wind Farm emphasized their generating costs versus those of the diesel generators on the island that used fuel brought to the island in barrels by ferry.

After the state of Rhode Island approved the project the real costs became much higher. In fact, so much higher that the ISO New England Power Grid operator passed on some of those costs to rate payers in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Presumably, the market for the wind driven power electricity is not as robust as estimated. Residents of Block Island tell me that two or three of the turbines are

often idle. Is the problem “demand” or, as McKinsey suggests, the availability of cheaper sources?

Which brings me to the Parable of the Boiling Frog and the questions: What do boiling frogs and transitions in energy have in common? If you are a frog, you jump from a pot of boiling water. But if you are placed in a pot that is gradually heated to boiling, you perish. This parable is used to explain why humans react quickly to sudden events but fail to react to slowly changing conditions until it is too late.

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