

Rocky Mountain Rumble: Alberta, B.C. residents at odds over TransMountain Pipeline

Albertans are most supportive of the pipeline's approval, while British Columbians are most opposed

June 16, 2016 – As Vancouver mayor Gregor Robertson and Calgary mayor Naheed Nenshi [trade barbs](#) over the National Energy Board's decision to approve – [with 157 conditions](#) – the proposed expansion of Kinder Morgan's TransMountain Pipeline, a new survey from the Angus Reid Institute finds the mayors' views to be roughly representative of public opinion in the provinces they call home.

British Columbians are nearly four times as likely as Albertans to say the NEB made the wrong choice, while almost two-thirds of respondents in Wild Rose Country say it was the right one.

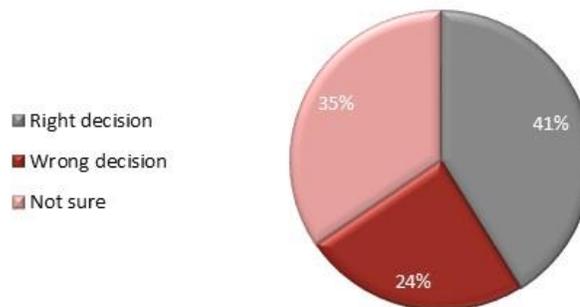
Underlying these views are significant differences in opinion on whether the economy or the environment should take precedent in shaping Canadian energy policy – differences that will complicate the federal

government's efforts to bolster Alberta's struggling oil industry without alienating voters Metro Vancouver, many of whom cast ballots for the Liberal Party last October.

Key Findings:

- Overall, Canadians are almost twice as likely to say the NEB made the right decision to approve with conditions (41%) as say it made the wrong one (24%), while one-third (35%) say aren't sure
- Albertans register the highest level of agreement with the NEB decision (63%), while B.C. residents are most opposed (34%)

Do you think the NEB made the right decision or the wrong decision in approving the TransMountain Pipeline expansion with conditions?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 30 – June 6, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1,505 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- That said, British Columbians who believe the board made the right decision still outnumber those who believe it made the wrong one (41% versus 34%, with 25% uncertain)

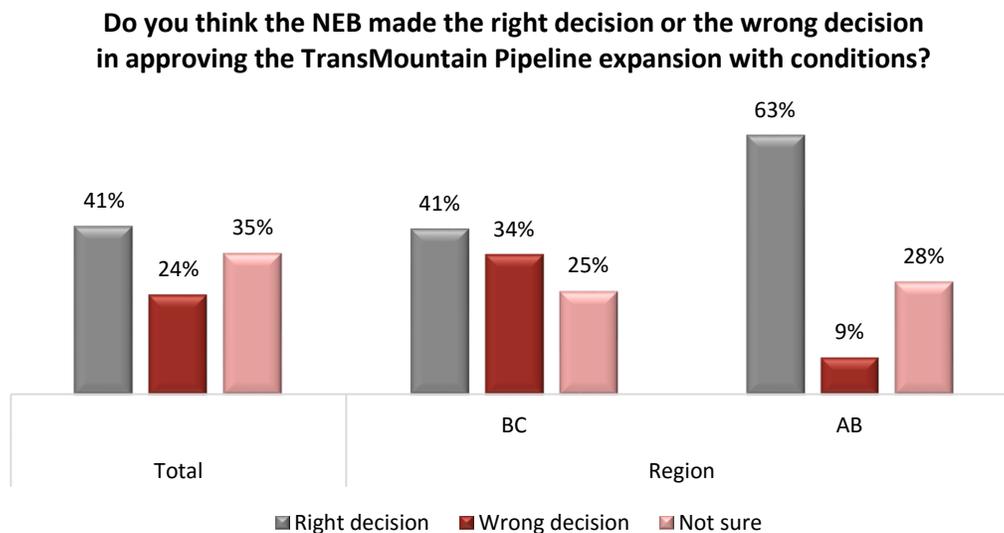
TransMountain popular in Alberta, not so much in B.C.

The TransMountain Pipeline has been carrying oil from Alberta to Burnaby, B.C., [since 1953](#). For much of that history, disagreements over the pipeline between the two provinces have been minimal.

But since owner Kinder Morgan announced its expansion plans in 2013, massive protests on Burnaby Mountain have led to [dozens of arrests](#), and British Columbia's provincial government [has come out against the project](#), arguing that Kinder Morgan has not laid out an adequate plan to prevent or respond to a spill.

Albertans, meanwhile, have embraced the plan. Premier Rachel Notley [has argued](#) that the pipeline "is good for all Canadians," and nearly two-in-three (63%) residents in her province say the NEB made the correct decision in approving it, and fewer than one-in-ten (9%) say the board was wrong to do so.

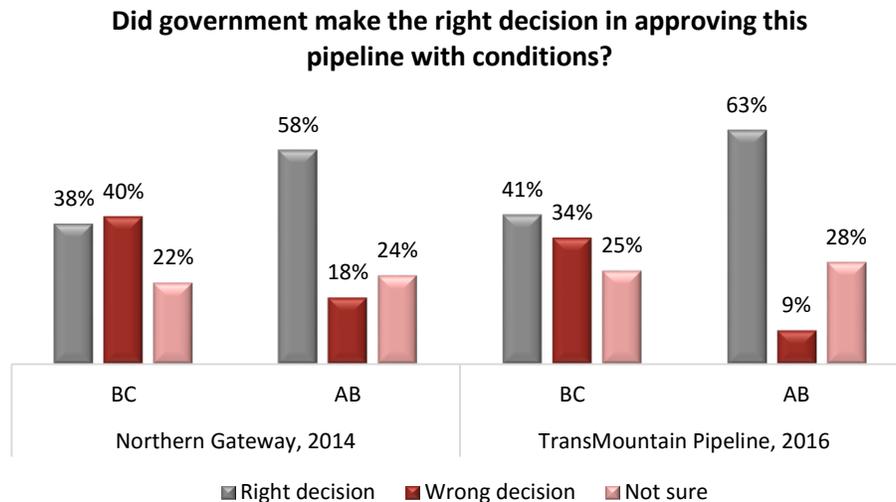
As the following graph indicates, British Columbians are nearly four times more likely to oppose the NEB decision than Alberta residents:



It should be noted, of course, that British Columbian opinion is in line with the national mood when it comes to approval of the NEB decision (41%). This was also the case in June 2014 when [an Angus Reid survey](#) asked Canadians to weigh in on the NEB approval of Enbridge's also-controversial Northern Gateway pipeline.

The results of that survey are shown alongside the results of this one in the graph that follows. TransMountain fares slightly better in each province than Northern Gateway did, but in each case, it's

clear that the pipeline debate is highly polarized on the Pacific side of the B.C.-Alberta border, in a way that it simply isn't on the other side of the Rockies.

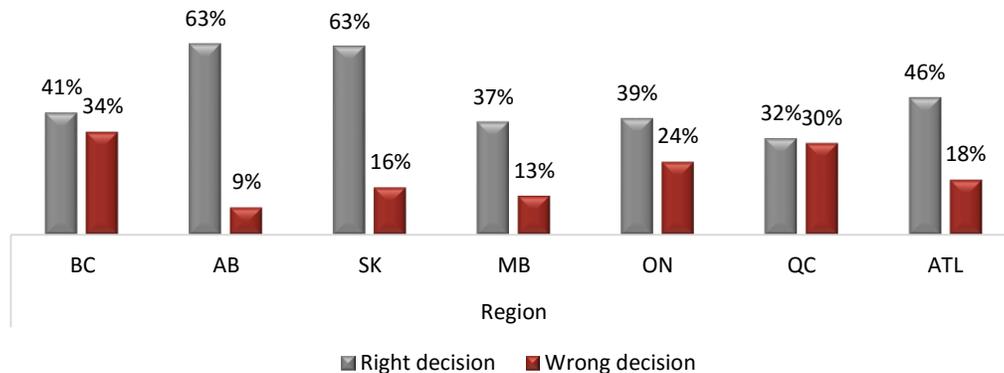


For his part, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [has repeatedly promised](#) that his federal government will be a “referee” for pipeline projects, not a “cheerleader,” as he accused the former Conservative government of being.

In practice, this has meant [creating a new panel](#) to conduct an environmental review of TransMountain that will consider the “upstream” impacts of the project on carbon emissions, but it’s unclear that this additional review will change the fundamental calculus of pipeline politics.

Ultimately, the federal government will have to decide to either approve or reject Kinder Morgan’s proposal. Either choice is unlikely to be universally well-received. If it does the former, it risks alienating many of the people who voted for it – especially in Metro Vancouver. If it does the latter, it puts itself at odds with an even larger group of Canadians, as support for the NEB’s decision outpaces opposition to it across all regions, as seen in the following graph:

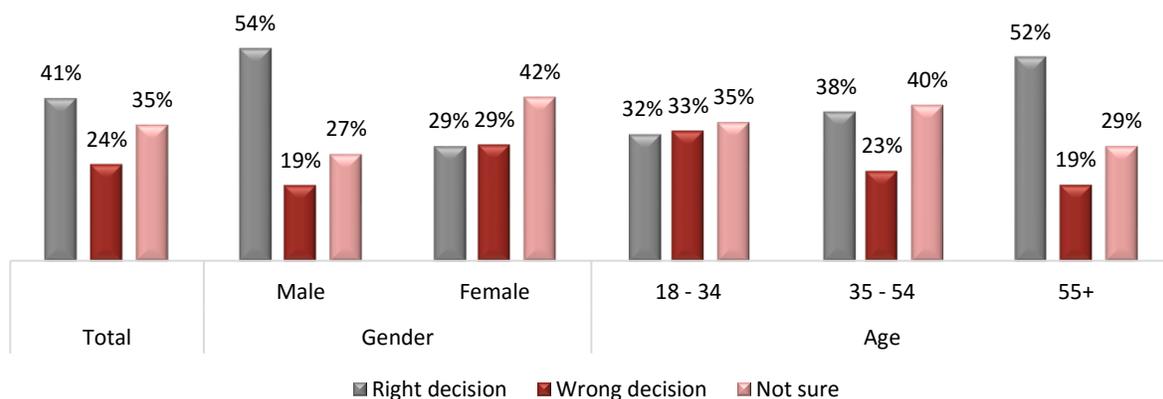
Do you think the NEB made the right decision or the wrong decision in approving the TransMountain Pipeline expansion with conditions?



Respondents are considerably less likely to have an opinion on the pipeline decision east of Saskatchewan, where “not sure” responses rise to more than one-in-three in each region ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

There are also notable age and gender divides in opinion on the board’s decision, with men and Canadians aged 55 and older much more likely to say it was the right choice, while women and those ages 18 – 34 are more likely to say it was the wrong one, or to be unsure:

Do you think the NEB made the right decision or the wrong decision in approving the TransMountain Pipeline expansion with conditions?



These patterns become even more pronounced when looking at age and gender in combination. Men aged 55 and older are most inclined to say the NEB made the right decision (65% do), while fewer than one-in-five young women (17%) say the same. Most women in this 18-34-year-old group are split between opposing the decision (42%) and not offering an opinion (41%, [see comprehensive tables](#)).

Energy policy priorities

The NEB's decision is far from the final step in [the pipeline approval process](#), but it is nevertheless an important one for the future of the TransMountain expansion project.

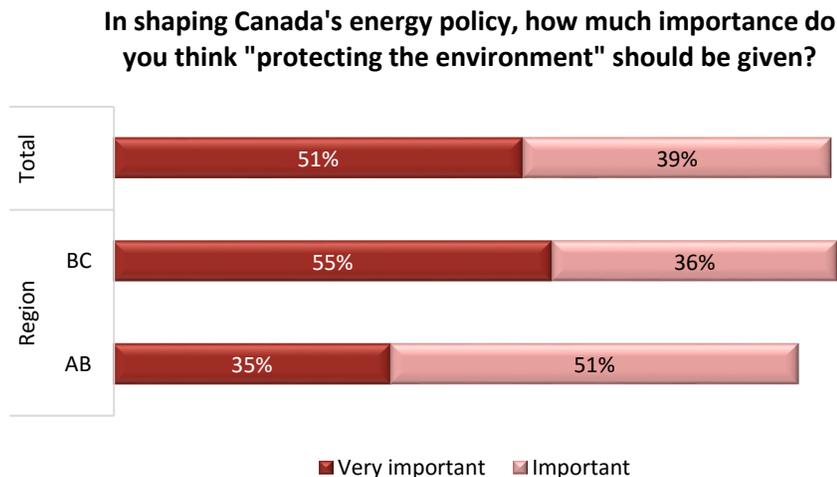
Underpinning Canadians' views on this proposal and other pipeline plans are broader ideas about the country's energy policy – and especially how it relates to environmental protection.

Asked about the importance of five different issues in shaping their country's energy policy, Canadians are in near-universal agreement that each of them is important. Fully nine-in-ten say this about “the cost of energy,” “maintaining a steady energy supply,” “promoting economic growth,” and “protecting the environment.”

And on the remaining issue – “promoting export opportunities” – nearly eight-in-ten (79%) say this should play an important role in shaping Canada's energy policy.

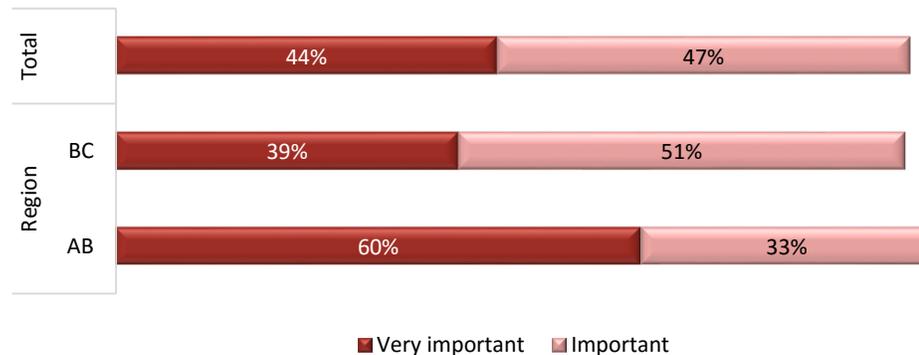
The belief in the importance of each of these considerations is consistent across regions, but the rate at which B.C. and Alberta say each item is “very important” helps illustrate the divide between the two provinces on TransMountain.

On “protecting the environment,” for example, most B.C. respondents say such consideration is “very important,” while in Alberta, the total is closer to one-in-three:



These views are essentially flipped on the question about promoting economic growth:

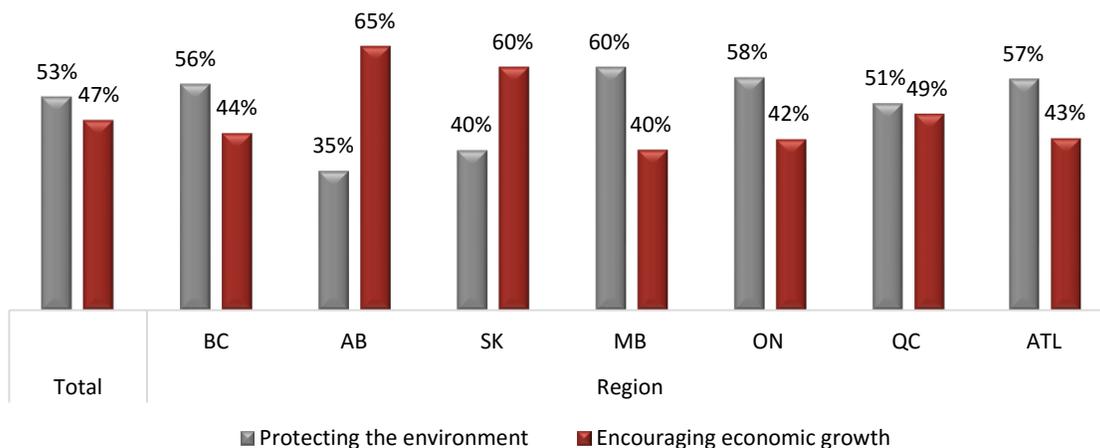
In shaping Canada's energy policy, how much importance do you think "promoting economic growth" should be given?



This pattern – of energy-producing Alberta placing greater importance on economic growth and lesser importance on environmental protection – is underscored when respondents are asked which of these two concerns is a bigger priority.

Overall, Canadian opinion tilts slightly toward protecting the environment – 53 per cent choose this compared to 47 per cent who choose “encouraging economic growth.” As the following graph indicates, however, residents of resource-extracting provinces fall strongly on the side of growth:

Putting this another way, in shaping Canada's energy policy, what do you see as the biggest priority?



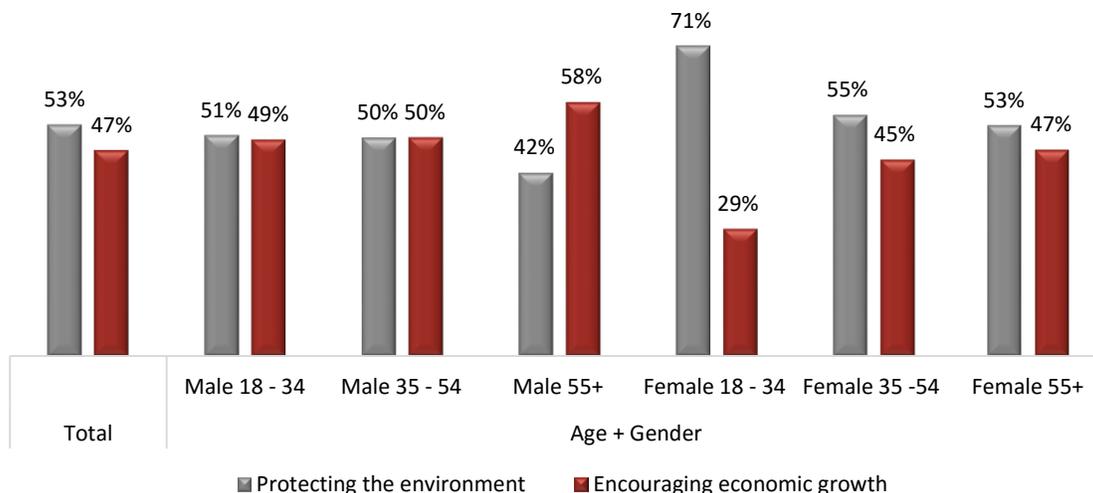
Responses to this question also follow age and gender patterns that help explain the differing opinions on the NEB decision.

Men – who are more likely to say the board made the correct choice – tend to choose economic growth over environmental protection (53% versus 47%, respectively), while women – who are more skeptical of the board’s decision – favour the environment (58% versus 42%).

The same pattern holds true for age, with older respondents more likely to choose growth, and younger respondents more likely to choose the environment ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Looking at these variables in combination, we again see young women as a significant outlier:

Putting this another way, in shaping Canada's energy policy, what do you see as the biggest priority?



Do conditions address concerns?

In November 2014, with protests against Kinder Morgan’s proposal to expand the TransMountain Pipeline garnering national headlines, [a majority of Canadians told ARI](#) that they supported the protesters. In the same survey, half said they supported the expansion project itself, and roughly one-in-three actually supported both the pipeline and the people protesting against it.

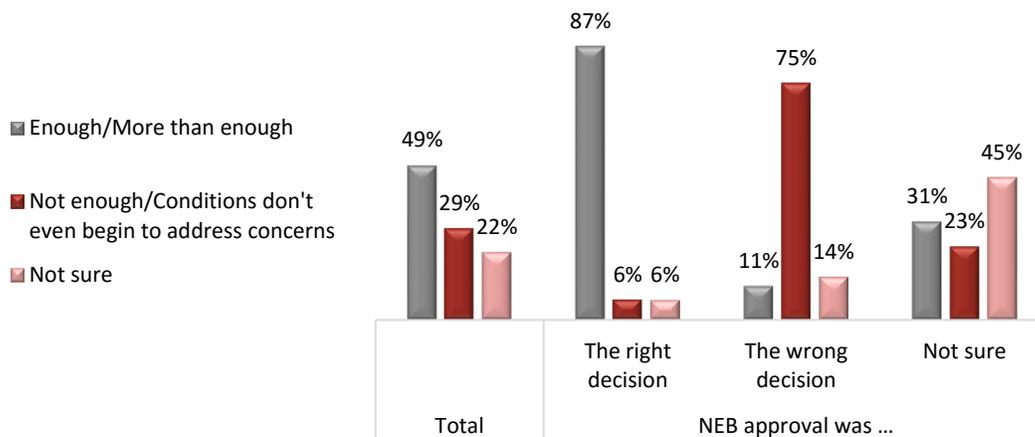
Clearly, Canadians have mixed feelings about the expansion of the pipeline, but will the conditions the NEB placed on the project bring them peace of mind or breed further ambivalence?

Overall, roughly half of Canadians (49%) say the conditions will be “enough” or “more than enough” to address concerns about the pipeline, while three-in-ten (29%) say the conditions are insufficient (22% are unsure).

As might be expected, those who think the NEB made the right decision in approving the project overwhelmingly believe the conditions are enough, while those who think the board made the wrong choice are almost as united in the belief that the conditions don't address concerns.

That said, one-in-four opponents of the board's ruling leave themselves open to the possibility that the conditions will address their concerns, either by saying they're not sure (14%) or saying that the conditions are enough (11%):

Do you think the conditions are enough to address concerns about the TransMountain project?



The B.C.-Alberta split can be seen in responses to this question as well, with nearly three-quarters of Albertans (73%) saying the conditions are sufficient, while fewer than half (47%) in B.C. say the same.

British Columbians, by contrast, are more than twice as likely as Albertans to say the conditions aren't enough to address concerns (36% versus 16%). This sentiment is even stronger in Quebec, where 38 per cent believe the conditions are insufficient.

Ultimately, will the project go ahead?

Perhaps the only thing B.C. and Alberta agree on with regard to the TransMountain Pipeline expansion is that the project is likely to be built.

Overall, two-in-three Canadians (64%) think the pipeline will either "definitely" (11%) or "probably" (53%) be expanded. In British Columbia, this rises to nearly three-in-four (74%), while in Alberta it's three-in-five (61%).

Interestingly, on this question, respondents in each province seem to be slightly pessimistic that their region's preferred outcome will actually come to fruition, with British Columbians more inclined to expect the pipeline to be built (even though they're more opposed to it) and Albertans less so (even though most of them would prefer to see it happen).

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by region, age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

As we mentioned, the decision to allow the pipeline comes with 157 conditions that must be met before the pipeline can be built, such as environmental protection measures, further consultation with First Nations and increasing spill-response capacity.

Based on what you know or have heard, do you think the conditions are enough to address concerns about the TransMountain project?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1505)	NEB approval was ...		
		The right decision (619)	The wrong decision (367)	Not sure (519)
More than enough	19%	43%	2%	2%
Enough	31%	44%	9%	30%
Not Enough	18%	5%	42%	17%
The conditions don't even begin to address concerns	11%	2%	34%	6%
Not sure	22%	6%	14%	45%