

Humble Oil Suspends Icebreaking Tanker Concept

HOUSTON—The use of icebreaking tankers to transport crude oil from Alaska's North Slope to U.S. markets is commercially feasible, Humble Oil & Refining Co. said last week, but pipeline transportation appears to have an economic edge at present.

The company has decided to suspend its icebreaking tanker studies while concentrating efforts on pipeline alternatives.

Humble said Arctic tanker development work could be resumed on short notice if economic factors change or other circumstances warrant.

The company said its Arctic marine studies indicate that icebreaking tankers could move North Slope oil through both the Northwest Passage to the U.S. East Coast and through the Bering Strait to the West Coast.

Preliminary design studies for icebreaking tankers have been completed for Humble by Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co.

The studies were based on a 1,250-foot ship of 300,000 deadweight tons. Such a vessel would be capable of year-round Arctic operations without icebreaker assistance.

Use of the giant icebreaking ships would require construction of an offshore loading terminal in the Arctic waters of the Beaufort Sea.

Feasibility and basic design studies on the terminal facility have been completed by Santa Fe-Pomeroy, San Francisco, and

Van Houton Associates, Inc., New York.

"The two Arctic voyages of the SS Manhattan were highly successful in providing valuable data for our studies concerning the various transportation alternatives for moving Alaskan crude oil to U.S. refineries," M.A. Wright, Humble board chairman, said. "We now know that icebreaking tanker transportation is a workable alternative, and this gives us much greater flexibility in meeting future transportation needs."

Wright also noted that the first commercial ship to traverse the ice-covered Northwest Passage, has contributed to marine history and to the scientific knowledge of the Arctic.

The Humble board chairman pointed out that the Arctic marine studies were an international effort with assistance from Humble affiliates, private consulting firms and the U.S. and Canadian governments.

Although Humble is suspending its icebreaking tanker studies for the present, the company said it will continue marine studies concerned with tanker movements of oil from Valdez,

an ice-free port on the southern coast of Alaska, to the U.S. West Coast.

Humble is firmly committed to the proposed Trans Alaska

Pipeline—extending 800 miles from Alaska's North Slope to Valdez—which would serve as a key link in the transportation system to serve West Coast crude

oil needs.

Conventional tankers, with no icebreaking equipment, would load crude oil at Valdez for delivery to West Coast refineries.