



**Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future
Public Meeting on Its Draft Report to the Secretary of Energy
Boston, Massachusetts
October 12, 2011**

On October 12, 2011, the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future (BRC) held a public meeting in Boston, Massachusetts about its July 29, 2011 Draft Report to the Secretary of Energy. The purpose of the meeting, which was the second in a series of five meetings around the country, was to provide an opportunity for interested parties to discuss and comment on the Draft Report.

The BRC was formed by the Secretary of Energy at the request of the President to conduct a comprehensive review of policies for managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle and to recommend a new plan. The Draft Report highlights the Commission's findings and conclusions to date and articulates a preliminary set of consensus recommendations for public review and input.

During the afternoon, approximately 90 meeting attendees participated in breakout sessions to discuss the Draft Report's recommendations in more detail. The purpose of the breakouts was to enable information exchange and discussion among participants – not to seek consensus or to gather comments for the record. Attendees were divided equally among the breakouts and distributed to provide a diverse cross-section of viewpoints in each group. The five sessions (with between 15-18 persons in each) lasted for about two hours and focused on the major topics addressed in the Draft Report and discussed during the morning panel sessions:

- Policy implications for consolidated vs. on-site interim storage options;
- Development of a consent-based siting process;
- Radioactive waste transportation system planning and stakeholder cooperation; and

- West Valley mixed federal and commercial high-level waste challenges.

Below is a high-level summary of key points from across the breakout discussions. It is intended to convey the general tenor of the deliberations and to describe some of the themes and ideas that were discussed – not to capture every point that was made. Nothing in the summary should be interpreted as being endorsed by, or reflecting the views of, any specific individual who participated.

Consent-Based Siting Process

Many participants supported the notion of a consent-based siting process, but said there needs to be more clarity and detail in the BRC Report about what such a process would entail. Some also expressed skepticism about whether such a process could really work – especially given the widely divergent perceptions of risk associated with high level nuclear waste storage, the degree to which stakeholders are polarized, and the prevalent “not in my backyard” sentiment in many communities. Others noted that some people in a few communities have already said they would welcome the benefits of a facility.

Following are some of the specific ideas offered for how to strengthen the BRC Draft Report’s section on consent-based siting:

- Specify minimum standards for how to conduct processes that ensure fair, equal and meaningful participation by community interests alongside other interested parties (e.g., at the state and national levels).
- Emphasize the need for science-based assessment and decision making – particularly around ascertaining which sites meet geologic, hydrologic, and other essential criteria for consideration as a potential high level repository or consolidated storage site. This is a key component of building confidence in the nuclear waste management system.
- Detail how to identify and prioritize for consideration those communities that may be most comfortable with possibly hosting a waste disposal facility in their area, e.g., ones that already house nuclear facilities and/or that are already familiar with the possible risks and benefits associated with nuclear power.

- Recommend as a part of the consent-based siting process that any community under consideration conduct an analysis in which the full suite of potential benefits, risks and costs that might accrue from a facility are fully and carefully enumerated and evaluated.
- Provide more detail about the kinds and amounts of incentives that should be given to communities who site nuclear waste facilities. (Participants mentioned funding for local infrastructure improvements, jobs – both direct and indirect, cash, and local services).
- Identify ways to ensure long-term monitoring at storage and disposal facilities. In particular, citizen-led monitoring should become a part of any ongoing engagement with communities.

Transportation

Some participants suggested that transportation of nuclear waste is the “weak link” in the entire nuclear waste system, and suggested that the BRC Draft Report does not currently provide sufficient direction for ensuring safe transportation of nuclear material. Several recommendations were offered for strengthening this part of the Draft Report:

- Place more emphasis on advance transportation infrastructure planning and improvements for routes to proposed storage sites, and address how such planning and improvement costs could be funded (e.g., through the Nuclear Waste Fund (Section 180(c)) and/or by having a requirement for utilities to contribute funding to transportation infrastructure costs through facility licensing fees). It was noted that the amount of money coming from Section 180(c) and other federal sources would likely be small compared to what is spent by state, tribal, local, and private sources on transportation maintenance, improvements, and operations.
- Address the fact that many short line and intermediate railroads running from commercial nuclear power and federal high-level waste storage facilities to major transport routes are either non-existent or in particularly bad shape, and need attention prior to handling any high level waste shipments. Studies should be initiated now (rather than waiting for waste sites to be confirmed) to identify where there are deficiencies in

transportation infrastructure and to determine what would be needed to address those deficiencies so that nuclear wastes could be safely transported. The BRC should recommend that federal and state transportation system improvement funds and utility funding be used to develop these short transport routes.

- Recommend that authority for managing transportation of nuclear waste be broadened to include state, tribal, and local governments, as well as community and private interests, in meaningful ways. Current reductions in funding for these groups to participate in decision making works counter to the notion of meaningful public involvement and efforts to build a common base of knowledge among all interested parties.
- Feature barge transport and combinations of transportation (known as intermodal movements) more prominently. There are good examples of domestic (e.g., Shoreham-Limerick and Brookhaven shipping routes) and international experience that can provide lessons for shipping nuclear waste successfully by barge.

Consolidated vs. Onsite Interim Storage Options

There were a variety of opinions expressed about the relative value of consolidated versus onsite storage, but across the breakout groups, most participants recognized that, in any case, onsite storage of nuclear waste will continue for some time. Some felt strongly that on-site storage is in fact the best storage option until a long-term geologic repository is established. Consequently, much of the discussion focused on how to best ensure safe on-site storage:

- Focus on determining the safest manner in which fuel can be stored at specific sites.
- Recommend moving spent fuel that has been stored in onsite pools longer than five years to more secure storage, i.e., specify that older spent fuel be moved from pools into dry storage casks for eventual transport (preferably with some limit on the amount of time those dry casks can remain onsite).
- Provide further consideration to the transportability of dry casks.

- Use lessons learned from the experiences in West Valley and Yucca Mountain and identify practices used in other nations (i.e., vault storage concepts in the Netherlands) to establish protocols for consolidated and onsite storage going forward.
- Identify a legally enforceable system of accountability that would govern storage protocols, one that would reward or penalize decision makers based on the consequences of their decisions.
- Provide a better explanation of how consolidated interim storage would result in financial savings compared to on-site storage.

Federal and Commercial Waste Issues

Participants in some of the breakouts suggested that lessons derived from the experience of the Seneca Nation and other residents near the West Valley nuclear site could help inform the BRC Report, and recommended the following:

- Develop a case study (in cooperation with the Seneca Nation and other local and regional residents and stakeholders) to provide a clear set of recommendations for similarly situated sites.
- Review the lessons inherent in the West Valley experience that deal with the economics of reprocessing, as well as other operational issues such as the successful solidification through vitrification of the original liquid form of the high level wastes.
- Make note of how the West Valley case provides an example of the need for a consent-based siting process. The members of the Seneca Nation and nearby residents were not necessarily in favor of the site initially, and the promised jobs from the site for local residents did not materialize in the way some had hoped.

Other Thoughts

- The BRC report assumes that nuclear power will be part of the US energy mix for the foreseeable future. Nuclear power needs to be viewed alongside other energy types and assessed compared to those other fuel

sources based on full costs to taxpayers/ratepayers, environmental issues, social and health concerns, etc.

- The BRC should clearly explain the process by which comments from the public sessions will be considered and included in the final BRC Report.
- The BRC should be clearer in its final Report about problems they perceive with how DOE and NRC currently manage nuclear waste, and about the rationale for creating a new entity, as well as providing an explanation of what continuing role DOE and NRC would play in waste management.
- The impacts that resulted from the Fukushima reactor disaster in Japan need to be further understood and incorporated into thinking about nuclear power here at home. In particular, there should be greater understanding of how spent fuel in wet and dry storage fared during the Fukushima catastrophe.
- The BRC should recommend a mechanism that forces decisions on both interim storage and long-term disposal. Many participants bemoaned the inaction of Congress and federal agencies and encouraged the BRC to promote swift action to move beyond the current stalemate.
- The BRC should carefully consider and state its intentions to conduct a follow-up role past the final Report release date (January 29, 2012). Without the Commission's active support, action on many of the findings and recommendations in the Report are likely to languish in the current partisan political environment in Washington, DC, where advancing important policy initiatives, as are contemplated in the Report, is extremely difficult. Continued delays and inaction will doom the federal high-level nuclear waste disposition program to the nation's great detriment.