




- SUBSCRIBE
- GIVE A GIFT
- LOG IN TO ACCESS THE DIGITAL ISSUE
- SIGN UP FOR AQ UPDATES



ENTER ZIP COD 

SEARCH OUR SITE 

- [Subscribe](#)
- [About](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [News](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Archive](#)
- [Partners](#)

ARCHIVE

From issue: **Energy in the Americas** (Summer 2013)

■ AQ FEATURE

Will the Darién Gap Stop the Region’s Electrical Integration?

by

[Diana Villiers Negroponte](#)



An impenetrable fog?: A man bathes in a river in the Darién province on the Colombia–Panama border. Photo: Arnulfo Franco/AP

The last barrier to an integrated electricity grid in the region.

In April last year, the Colombian government announced its intention to pursue the creation of an interconnected electrical grid from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego. Naming the project “Connecting the Americas 2022” (“Connect 2022”), the Colombians had picked up the idea from Washington and included it in last year’s agenda at the Summit of the Americas.

The goal, as defined by the hemispheric governments that attended the summit, is to create an integrated electrical grid that can provide universal access to electricity through enhanced energy interconnections, power sector investments, renewable energy development, and cooperation. Should it succeed, the project will bring together regional electricity grids, including the Central American electrical grid, known by its Spanish acronym, SIEPAC (see Jeremy Martin’s article on the difficulty of completing SIPAC on page 102 of this issue), with South American networks. Completing it, though, requires passing through the Darién Gap.

A thin neck of impenetrable rain forest the size of Jamaica, linking Panama to Colombia and South America, the Darién Gap has long served as a buffer zone between the two neighbors. Stemming from historic concerns for its own geopolitical security, Panama has also sought to protect the rain forest and its Indigenous peoples against incursions.

The proposed power grid is not the only project that has been stalled by efforts to keep that buffer zone intact. Plans to complete the Pan-American Highway, which started in 1997 and involved closing the last unconstructed section of the 29,800-mile (470,960-kilometer) north-south road link in the hemisphere, have been held up in a similar way. Today, the northern section of the road stops just north of Darién province,

and only a few intrepid tourists enter the rain forest on dirt trails.

Could a hemispheric electrical connection plug the Darién Gap, if a highway can’t? The answer is a cautious “maybe”...

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

Tweet 0 4

[Comment on this post](#)

To read more, [subscribe and receive an instant digital copy of the latest issue](#).
 Already a digital subscriber? [Log in now](#).

3 Comments

Americas Quarterly

Login ▾

Sort by Best ▾

Share Favorite

Join the discussion...



Zoe • 8 months ago

Darien is one of the few pristine areas that remain, an important home to immense biodiversity, naturally “progress” aims to replace it with roads and inefficient, unnecessary electricity grids.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



Ned Stone • 8 months ago

The sad state of mathematical literacy is shown here in the acceptance of 471 thousand kilometers as equivalent to 30 thousand miles. The former number would get you past the moon!

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



Apolo → Ned Stone • 8 months ago

haha I noticed that too, first the mathematics has never been something a Journalist can handle very well and this kind of flops happens every time though being a Jornalist and not knowing this kind of math/phyisics is pathetic.

Regarding the use of the comma that is hard for me sometimes as a Mexican(we are very americanized), in Spain and a lot of countries in Latin America the comma indicates the decimal and the point the thousands, I don't know where the author is from but this might be the case, but im not sure given the zeroes after the comma.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

ALSO ON AMERICAS QUARTERLY

WHAT'S THIS?

Head of Mexico National Security

From “Make-Sicko” back to Mexico City:

Commission Resigns

1 comment • 20 days ago



Matthews Bark Criminal Defense — Manuel Mondragón y Kalb, thanks for all the effort you gived to ...

The Greening of ...

2 comments • 2 months ago



ApoIO — wouldn't it be cool to have an article about Line 12 from Mr. Ebrard's, i would read that, unlike ...

Changing U.S. Policy Toward Cuba: Another View

8 comments • 2 months ago



maria elena messina — What are the right circumstances for Florida magnate Alfonso Fanjul to be ...

The Candigato is back in Mexico

3 comments • 4 days ago



Danita — Will there be a red carpet before the awards?

[Subscribe](#)

[Add Disqus to your site](#)



SUBSCRIBE TO AQ
1-Year Print, Digital, and New App Subscription for only \$20.95
Save 30%!

Connect with AQ



Venezuela in Depth

View AQ Online's special in-depth page for updates on the crisis in Venezuela.

» **Read more.**

Sustainable Cities



Roberto Alvarez @robertoalsa

1h

@metropolis_org @youthfulcities is very excited for your event. #youthfulcities #WUF7

Retweeted by METROPOLIS

Expand



The Atlantic Cities @AtlanticCities

13m

How can so many demonstrations accomplish so little? @MoisesNaim asks bit.ly/1oHyS7T

Show Summary



Next City @NextCityOrg

20m

“Why are we going to make sacrifices and why does Twitter need a tax break?” bit.ly/1gBop30

Show Summary

WEB EXCLUSIVES

- [Can Venezuela's Economic Strategy Keep Protests From Spreading?](#)

March 24, 2014

by [Thomas O'Donnell](#)



Thanks to Chinese and Russian loans, Venezuela's new Sicad 2 foreign exchange system may mitigate shortages, but will it keep protests from spreading?

- [Venezuela's Escalating Protests, Violence and Political Instability: The Legacy of Chávez](#)

March 7, 2014

by [Mariana Rodríguez](#) and [Jonathan Hiskey](#)



Data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project show that political instability in Venezuela was a likely outcome after Chávez' death.

[MORE WEB EXCLUSIVES »](#)



[Read our new series of first-person articles.](#)

Most Popular

MOST POPULAR ON AQ ONLINE

Most Viewed

Past: **1 day** [1 week](#) [1 month](#) [1 year](#)

Monday Memo: Costa Rican Elections – U.S. Deportations – Venezuela-Spain Spat – FIFA Delays (180 times)

Brazil's Long To-Do List (169 times)

Colombian Oil: Scraping the Bottom of the Barrel (158 times)

Business Innovator: Lendo, United States and Colombia (157 times)

Challenges facing Hillary Clinton for President (116 times)

[AQ Course Packets: Now Available for Your Classroom!](#)



[Browse our catalogue.](#)

NOW ON AS/COA ONLINE

[Press Release - Unity of Nature: Alexander Von Humboldt and the Americas](#)

11 hours ago

Guest Curators Georgia de Havenon and Alicia Lubowski-Jahn Press Preview and Reception: Tuesday, April 29, 5:00 p.m. New York, ...

[Por qué los precandidatos presidenciales apuestan a Estados Unidos](#)

by Julieta Nassau and Mauricio Caminos - Apr 04, 2014

Los casi 8500 kilómetros que separan Buenos Aires con Nueva York parecen ser insignificantes para los políticos argentinos, ...

[Weekly Roundup: Chile's Earthquake, LatAm's Mega-Cities, Cuban Twitter](#)

Apr 04, 2014

Amid Protests, Maduro Seeks Support from International Community As protests continued this week, Venezuelan President Nicolás ...



AQ MEDIA PARTNER

FINANCIAL TIMES

World

[Picture site Imgur raises funds to expand](#)

Apr 03, 2014

Andreessen Horowitz and community news

platform Reddit are investing \$40m for a minority stake in the five-year-old ...

Companies

[BoE to support lending for exporters](#)

7 hours ago

Chancellor George Osborne believes the central bank's support could cut the cost of private sector export finance loans by 5 to ...