



[BILLING CODE: 6750-01P]

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

[File No. 201-0041]

Arko Holdings Ltd. and Empire Petroleum Partners, LLC; Analysis of Consent Orders to Aid Public Comment

AGENCY: Federal Trade Commission.

ACTION: Proposed consent agreement; request for comment.

SUMMARY: The consent agreement in this matter settles alleged violations of federal law prohibiting unfair methods of competition. The attached Analysis to Aid Public Comment describes both the allegations in the complaint and the terms of the consent order—embodied in the consent agreement—that would settle these allegations.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: Interested parties may file comments online or on paper, by following the instructions in the Request for Comment part of the **SUPPLEMENTARY**

INFORMATION section below. Please write: “Arko Holdings Ltd. and Empire Petroleum Partners, LLC; File No. 201 0041” on your comment, and file your comment online at <https://www.regulations.gov> by following the instructions on the web-based

form. If you prefer to file your comment on paper, please mail your comment to the

following address: Federal Trade Commission, Office of the Secretary, 600

Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite CC-5610 (Annex D), Washington, DC 20580; or deliver

your comment to the following address: Federal Trade Commission, Office of the

Secretary, Constitution Center, 400 7th Street SW, 5th Floor, Suite 5610 (Annex D),

Washington, DC 20024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steven Couper (202-326-3349),
Bureau of Competition, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW,
Washington, DC 20580.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Pursuant to Section 6(f) of the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. 46(f), and FTC Rule 2.34, 16 CFR § 2.34, notice is hereby given that the above-captioned consent agreement containing a consent order to cease and desist, having been filed with and accepted, subject to final approval, by the Commission, has been placed on the public record for a period of thirty (30) days. The following Analysis of Agreement Containing Consent Orders to Aid Public Comment describes the terms of the consent agreement and the allegations in the complaint. An electronic copy of the full text of the consent agreement package can be obtained from the FTC Website (for August 25, 2020), at this web address: <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/commission-actions>.

You can file a comment online or on paper. For the Commission to consider your comment, we must receive it on or before [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*]. Write “Arko Holdings Ltd. and Empire Petroleum Partners, LLC; File No. 201 0041” on your comment. Your comment—including your name and your state—will be placed on the public record of this proceeding, including, to the extent practicable, on the <https://www.regulations.gov> website.

Due to the public health emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the agency’s heightened security screening, postal mail addressed to the Commission will

be subject to delay. We strongly encourage you to submit your comments online through the <https://www.regulations.gov> website.

If you prefer to file your comment on paper, write “Arko Holdings Ltd. and Empire Petroleum Partners, LLC; File No. 201 0041” on your comment and on the envelope, and mail your comment to the following address: Federal Trade Commission, Office of the Secretary, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite CC-5610 (Annex D), Washington, DC 20580; or deliver your comment to the following address: Federal Trade Commission, Office of the Secretary, Constitution Center, 400 7th Street SW, 5th Floor, Suite 5610 (Annex D), Washington, DC 20024. If possible, submit your paper comment to the Commission by courier or overnight service.

Because your comment will be placed on the publicly accessible website at <https://www.regulations.gov>, you are solely responsible for making sure that your comment does not include any sensitive or confidential information. In particular, your comment should not include sensitive personal information, such as your or anyone else’s Social Security number; date of birth; driver’s license number or other state identification number, or foreign country equivalent; passport number; financial account number; or credit or debit card number. You are also solely responsible for making sure your comment does not include sensitive health information, such as medical records or other individually identifiable health information. In addition, your comment should not include any “trade secret or any commercial or financial information which . . . is privileged or confidential” – as provided by Section 6(f) of the FTC Act, 15 U.S.C. 46(f), and FTC Rule 4.10(a)(2), 16 CFR 4.10(a)(2) – including in particular competitively

sensitive information such as costs, sales statistics, inventories, formulas, patterns, devices, manufacturing processes, or customer names.

Comments containing material for which confidential treatment is requested must be filed in paper form, must be clearly labeled “Confidential,” and must comply with FTC Rule 4.9(c). In particular, the written request for confidential treatment that accompanies the comment must include the factual and legal basis for the request, and must identify the specific portions of the comment to be withheld from the public record. *See* FTC Rule 4.9(c). Your comment will be kept confidential only if the General Counsel grants your request in accordance with the law and the public interest. Once your comment has been posted on the public FTC Website – as legally required by FTC Rule 4.9(b) – we cannot redact or remove your comment from the FTC Website, unless you submit a confidentiality request that meets the requirements for such treatment under FTC Rule 4.9(c), and the General Counsel grants that request.

Visit the FTC Website at <http://www.ftc.gov> to read this Notice and the news release describing this matter. The FTC Act and other laws that the Commission administers permit the collection of public comments to consider and use in this proceeding, as appropriate. The Commission will consider all timely and responsive public comments that it receives on or before [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*]. For information on the Commission’s privacy policy, including routine uses permitted by the Privacy Act, see <https://www.ftc.gov/site-information/privacy-policy>.

Analysis of Consent Orders to Aid Public Comment

I. Introduction

The Federal Trade Commission (“Commission”) has accepted for public comment, subject to final approval, an Agreement Containing Consent Orders (“Consent Agreement”) from Arko Holdings Ltd. (“Arko”), GPM Southeast, LLC, and GPM Petroleum, LLC (collectively with Arko, “GPM”) and Empire Petroleum Partners, LLC (“Empire,” and collectively “Respondents”). The Consent Agreement is designed to remedy the anticompetitive effects that likely would result from GPM’s proposed acquisition of retail fuel assets from Empire.

Under the terms of the proposed Consent Agreement, Respondents must divest certain retail fuel assets in seven local markets in Indiana, Michigan, Maryland, and Texas. Respondents must complete the divestiture within 20 days after the closing of the acquisition. The Commission and Respondents have agreed to an Order to Maintain Assets that requires Respondents to operate and maintain each divestiture outlet in the normal course of business through the date the up-front buyers acquire the divested assets.

The Commission has placed the proposed Consent Agreement on the public record for 30 days to solicit comments from interested persons. Comments received during this period will become part of the public record. After 30 days, the Commission will review the proposed Consent Agreement and the comments received, and will decide whether it should withdraw from the Consent Agreement, modify it, or make it final.

II. The Respondents

Respondent Arko is a publicly traded company headquartered in Tel Aviv, Israel. Arko, through its subsidiaries GPM Southeast, LLC, and GPM Petroleum, LLC, supplies wholesale fuel to or operates approximately 1,400 retail fuel and convenience stores in

twenty-two states across the South, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest. In 2019, GPM ranked as the sixth largest operator of retail fuel and convenience stores in the United States.

Respondent Empire is a privately held Delaware limited liability company headquartered in Dallas, Texas. Empire also distributes fuel on a wholesale basis and operates retail fuel and convenience stores in 30 states and Washington, D.C. With respect to wholesale fuel distribution, Empire is a “super jobber,” a company that supplies over one billion gallons of fuel each year. Empire has supply relationships with all major oil companies, and distributes both branded and unbranded fuel. Empire supplies fuel to 1,555 retail sites, and operates 76 retail fuel and convenience stores itself.

III. The Proposed Acquisition

On December 17, 2019, GPM entered into an agreement to acquire certain retail and wholesale fuel assets from Empire and related entities (the “Acquisition”). With the Complaint, the Commission alleges that the Acquisition, if consummated, would violate Section 7 of the Clayton Act, as amended, 15 U.S.C. 18, and that the Acquisition agreement constitutes a violation of Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, as amended, 15 U.S.C. 45, by substantially lessening competition for the retail sale of gasoline in seven local markets in Indiana, Michigan, Maryland, and Texas, and by substantially lessening competition for the retail sale of diesel fuel in three local markets in Indiana, Michigan, and Texas.

IV. The Retail Sale of Gasoline and Diesel Fuel

The Commission alleges that the relevant product markets in which to analyze the Acquisition are the retail sale of gasoline and the retail sale of diesel fuel. Consumers require gasoline for their gasoline-powered vehicles and can purchase gasoline only at

retail fuel outlets. Likewise, consumers require diesel fuel for their diesel-powered vehicles and can purchase diesel fuel only at retail fuel outlets. The retail sale of gasoline and the retail sale of diesel fuel constitute separate relevant markets because the two are not interchangeable. Vehicles that run on gasoline cannot run on diesel fuel, and vehicles that run on diesel fuel cannot run on gasoline.

The Commission alleges that the relevant geographic markets in which to assess the competitive effects of the Acquisition with respect to the retail sale of gasoline are seven local markets in and around the following cities: Knox, Indiana; Kokomo, Indiana; South Bend, Indiana; Stevensville, Maryland; Edmore, Michigan; Hastings, Michigan; and Arlington, Texas. The relevant geographic markets in which to assess the competitive effects of the Acquisition with respect to the retail sale of diesel fuel are three local markets in and around the following cities: South Bend, Indiana; Edmore, Michigan; and Arlington, Texas.

The geographic markets for retail gasoline and retail diesel fuel are highly localized, depending on the unique circumstances of each area. Each relevant market is distinct and fact-dependent, reflecting many considerations, including commuting patterns, traffic flows, and outlet characteristics. Consumers typically choose between nearby retail fuel outlets with similar characteristics along their planned routes. The geographic markets for the retail sale of diesel fuel are similar to the corresponding geographic markets for retail gasoline, as many diesel fuel consumers exhibit preferences and behaviors similar to those of gasoline consumers.

The Acquisition would substantially lessen competition in each of these local markets, resulting in seven highly concentrated markets for the retail sale of gasoline and

three highly concentrated markets for the retail sale of diesel fuel. Retail fuel outlets compete on price, store format, product offerings, and location, and pay close attention to competitors in close proximity, on similar traffic flows, and with similar store characteristics. In each of the local gasoline and diesel fuel retail markets, the Acquisition would reduce the number of competitively constraining independent market participants to three or fewer. The combined entity would be able to raise prices unilaterally in markets where GPM and Empire are close competitors. Absent the Acquisition, GPM and Empire would continue to compete head to head in these local markets.

Moreover, the Acquisition would enhance the incentives for interdependent behavior in local markets where only two or three competitively constraining independent market participants would remain. Two aspects of the retail fuel industry make it vulnerable to such coordination. First, retail fuel outlets post their fuel prices on price signs that are visible from the street, allowing competitors to observe each other's fuel prices without difficulty. Second, retail fuel outlets regularly track their competitors' fuel prices and change their own prices in response. These repeated interactions give retail fuel outlets familiarity with how their competitors price and how changing prices affect fuel sales.

Entry into each relevant market would not be timely, likely, or sufficient to deter or counteract the anticompetitive effects arising from the Acquisition. Significant entry barriers include the availability of attractive real estate, the time and cost associated with constructing a new retail fuel outlet, and the time associated with obtaining necessary permits and approvals.

V. The Proposed Consent Agreement

The proposed Consent Agreement would remedy the Acquisition's likely anticompetitive effects by requiring Respondents to divest certain retail fuel assets to an independent competitor in each local market. Each buyer of divestiture assets is an experienced operator or supplier of retail fuel sites, and will be a new entrant into the local market.

The proposed Consent Agreement requires that the divestiture be completed no later than 20 days after Respondents consummate the Acquisition. The proposed Consent Agreement further requires Respondents to maintain the economic viability, marketability, and competitiveness of each divestiture asset until the divestiture is complete. For up to 15 months following the divestiture, Respondents must provide transitional services, as needed, to assist the buyers with the divestiture assets.

In addition to requiring outlet divestitures, the proposed Consent Agreement requires Respondents to provide the Commission notice before acquiring retail fuel assets within a fixed distance of any GPM outlet in a market involving a divestiture for ten years. The prior notice provision is necessary because an acquisition in close proximity to divested assets likely would raise the same competitive concerns as the Acquisition, and may fall below the Hart-Scott-Rodino Act premerger notification thresholds.

The proposed Consent Agreement contains additional provisions designed to ensure the effectiveness of the proposed relief. For example, Respondents have agreed to an Order to Maintain Assets that will issue at the time the proposed Consent Agreement is accepted for public comment. The Order to Maintain Assets requires Respondents to operate and maintain each divestiture outlet in the normal course of business, through the

date Respondents complete the divestiture. The Commission may appoint an independent third party as a Monitor to oversee Respondents' compliance with the requirements of the proposed Consent Agreement.

The purpose of this analysis is to facilitate public comment on the proposed Consent Agreement, and the Commission does not intend this analysis to constitute an official interpretation of the proposed Consent Agreement or to modify its terms in any way.

By direction of the Commission, Commissioner Slaughter and Commissioner Wilson not participating.

April J. Tabor,

Acting Secretary.

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