

Lower Snake River Dams Transportation Study

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Background

The Snake River from Clarkston to Pasco contains four dams (Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite). There is interest in removing these dams for the benefit of salmon, steelhead, Pacific lamprey, bull trout, sturgeon, and other native fish species. Understanding the transportation impacts of removing these lower Snake River dams has not been sufficiently addressed in recent studies. As a result, the 2023 Transportation Budget (ESHB 1125, Section 217 (11)) directed the WSDOT to conduct a study of highway, road, and freight rail transportation needs if the dams were removed. The study needs to consider options and impacts from shifting the movement of freight and goods (that currently move by barge through the lower Snake River dams) to highways, other roads, and rail. The study must generate freight volume estimates along with origin-destination data and evaluate scenarios for changes in road/rail infrastructure and operations that will be necessary to address the redistribution of those additional volumes from river barges. The assessment must include quantitative analysis based on available data in terms of both financial and carbon emission costs. The analysis must also include a robust inclusive public engagement process to solicit feedback from interested community members.

Progress

During the fourth quarter of 2023, WSDOT completed the following tasks:

- Request for Qualifications (RFQ)
- Consultant Selected – Jacobs Engineering
- Initiated consultation with Corps of Engineers

Request for Qualification (RFQ)

The RFQ was advertised September 26 with responses due October 24. A WSDOT review team was assembled to review all RFQs, to conduct applicant interviews, and select a consultant. This review team consisted of WSDOT employees from the following divisions:

- Transportation Operations: Jim Mahugh
- Rail, Freight & Ports: Jason Beloso
- Multimodal Planning Division: Jessica Brand
- Eastern Region: Glenn Wagemann

Only one consultant responded to the RFQ (Jacobs Engineering). The review team graded Jacobs' application and conducted an interview on November 13. Taking all the information into consideration, the review team determined Jacobs had assembled a qualified team and met all contractual requirements. Jacobs was notified they were selected on November 20.

In the months of December and January, the WSDOT and Jacobs assembled the required financial forms to be able to sign an agreement. That process is near completion and the agreement should be done by the end of January.

Next Steps

The work that we anticipate completing during the January to March 2024 period includes the following activities:

- Fully execute the project contract.
- Conduct initial project management activities, including convening a kick-off meeting with WSDOT and Jacobs, convening an internal kick-off meeting with the full consulting team, and developing a schedule for project management meetings throughout the study.
- Hold discussions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on coordination between this study and ongoing work at USACE.
- Develop draft Project Work Plan to specify the workstreams needed to complete each task and the schedule of deliverables through the project.
- Develop a Community Engagement Plan to develop the participation list, timing, and forums.
- Begin to assemble data on freight, barge, rail, truck, and other vehicular movement in the project study area.

TIMELINE

