

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 system impacts of removing these lower Snake River dams has not been sufficiently addressed in recent studies. As a result, the 2023-2025 Supplemental Transportation Budget (ESHB 2134, Section 217 (9)) 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, operations, and safety that will happen as a result of 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 first quarter of 2024, WSDOT completed the following tasks:

- Fully executed prime contract
- Fully executed Project Management task order
- Fully executed Phase 1 task order: Understanding Needs
- Conducted initial coordination meetings

Fully Executed Prime Contract

The prime contract with Jacobs Engineering was executed on February 6, 2024. This is to agree that Jacobs Engineering and its subconsultants are on board for the entire length of the study. This prime contract set a high-level scope of work for the entire study but does not define the details of each task that will be completed. The task details are determined in additional contracting steps. The high-level scope in the prime contract has a total of 14 expected tasks. Jacobs Engineering is consolidating this into four Phases:

- Project Management task order for the entire study period (explained below).
- Phase 1 – Understanding Needs: Existing and future conditions for barge, rail, truck, and other vehicular traffic along with development of a Total Logistics Cost modal diversion model. Development of the Interim Report. Phase 1 includes the community engagement for all phases of work.
- Phase 2 – Impacts and Safety: Estimation of geological, geographical, rail, road, and utility impacts from dam closure along with a safety analysis. Engagement with the communities will happen during this phase.
- Phase 3 – Solutions and Competitive Impacts: Estimate the competitive and freight flow impacts of modal diversion at the commodity level and identify potential mitigation options for these impacts.

- Phase 4 – Draft and Final Report: Development of the draft and final report, including reviews by WSDOT PM, Steering Committee, JTC, Governor’s Office, and a public comment period.

A more detailed scope of work will be entered into and agreed upon for each phase and related tasks before that phase can begin.

Fully Executed Project Management Task Order

The first task order on the contract covered project management and was signed on February 28, 2024. Project management includes general administrative tasks, internal consultant team meetings, and general meeting support for the duration of the study. Project administrative activities include items such as developing monthly progress reports, managing consultant team staffing, updating the project schedule, budget tracking, filing, and developing monthly invoices.

Fully Executed Phase 1: Understanding Needs

The task order to perform Phase 1 work was executed on April 26. Phase 1 will cover:

- Literature review and assembling information on barge and goods movement
- Assembling and analyzing information on truck and train movement
- Development of the total logistics model, scenario development, running the model, developing model results, and the development of the Interim Report

This work is expected to be complete by the end of 2024. Phase 1 will include outreach to the industry regarding the movement of freight. In addition, the community engagement included in Phase 1 will be for all other phases of the study. The first order of work on the community engagement is to create a community engagement plan. The plan will set a path for engaging communities listed in the proviso that initiated this study (see ESHB 2134, Sec. 217 (9)(a)).

Initial Coordination Meetings

The study team conducted a series of initial meetings during the 1st quarter with the following entities:

- WSDOT Executive Steering Committee
- The US Army Corps of Engineers
- The Joint Transportation Committee
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Federal Highway Administration
- Governor’s Office

Meetings with the above entities have been scheduled on a reoccurring basis for the length of the study. The WSDOT has also setup a [website](#) for the project as well as a [GovDelivery](#) notification system.

Any additional meetings that have been requested by interested parties have been responded to by the WSDOT LSRD Study Lead. Engagement directly with the consultant has been reserved for the community engagement process that they will be conducting.

Next Steps

The work that we anticipate completing during the April to June 2024 period includes the following activities:

- Full execution of subcontractors to be utilized by Jacobs to conduct Phase 1 of the study.
- Develop a Project Management Plan to specify the workstreams needed to complete each task and the schedule of deliverables through the project.
- Develop a Community Engagement Plan and Communications Plan to develop the participation list, timing, and forums.
- Assemble and analyze data on freight, barge, rail, truck, and other vehicular movement in the project study area.
- Develop the framework and specifications for formulating the Total Logistics Cost (TLC) modal diversion model that will estimate the amount of freight traffic that diverts from current barge operations to truck, rail, or downstream barge locations in current and future scenarios.

STUDY TIMELINE

