

What has the project team done to ensure public involvement?

As part of the environmental review process, the Surface Transportation Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) prepared a Public Involvement Plan that explains how the project team will distribute informational materials; solicit input; develop two-way communication with the community, local citizens, and other interested parties; and document public opinions regarding the proposed project and the Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA). Public meetings and outreach included a Public Open House held on July 19, 2007; presentations to the Moses Lake City Council and Port of Moses Lake on October 17, 2007; and website information.¹ A second Public Open House will be held in the City of Moses Lake during the public review period of this EA.

The purpose of the Public Open House held on July 19, 2007, was to introduce the proposed project, gather initial comments from the public, and identify any concerns the public might have about the proposed project or its impact to the human and natural environment. The Public Open House was attended by 85 people, and 45 comments were received in response to the meeting. Of those comments, 13 supported the project as proposed, two thought that the existing rail line should be refurbished and no new line constructed, and 26 requested that the project team consider a northern route that would entirely bypass the existing developed area of the City of Moses Lake. Suggested locations for a northern route varied and included constructing a rail line: (a) parallel to Road 4 NE (Cherokee Road), (b) parallel to Road 7, or (c) along the former Northern Pacific Railway Wheeler-Adrian railroad right of way.² Of the comments that suggested a northern route, 16 did not describe a specific location.³

The comments also indicated concerns about the following:

- Traffic delays at railroad crossings;
- The safety of students who attend Longview Elementary School, who may cross or trespass on the existing track (Segment 3);
- Incompatibility with an existing residential area near Segment 3;

¹ WSDOT (Washington State Department of Transportation).

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Rail/NorthernColumbiaBasinRR/>

² The community of Wheeler is located at the eastern end of the study area; the community of Adrian is located approximately 18 miles north of Wheeler. The Northern Pacific Railway formerly operated a rail line between the two locations. Although that line has been abandoned and no right of way retained, some of the old railroad grade remains.

³ Note that numbers of comments do not match because some people made more than one suggestion.

- Noise;
- Pedestrian and bicycle safety;
- Aesthetics and community cohesion;
- Economic impacts, including the loss of land suitable for development; and
- Delays to response time of emergency vehicles.

Comments were also received in support of the proposed alignment, and in support of rail service in the City of Moses Lake. Some commenters requested that the project team consider a range of environmental and land use impacts.⁴

Following the Public Open House, written comments were also received from Grant County Fire District No. 5 and from the Principal of Longview Elementary School in the Moses Lake School District. Grant County Fire District No. 5 asked that the project team consider the impact of rail crossings on heavily traveled roads, specifically Wheeler Road (Road 3 NE) along Segment 1, and impacts of the Build Alternative on the ability of the Fire District to provide effective and efficient service to citizens in the area. Longview Elementary School expressed concerns about the impact of the proposed increase in the number of trains from one round trip per month to two trips (one round trip) per day on the safety of students who attend the school.

To ensure meaningful community representation and participation, the Public Involvement Plan was developed to meet specific public and project needs, incorporating the Hispanic population and Limited English Proficiency requirements of Presidential Executive Order 13166.⁵

The following outreach activities were conducted to be responsive to Spanish-speaking residents: (a) a bilingual fact sheet was distributed that announced the proposed project and invited the public to the Public Open House on July 19, 2007; (b) 17 announcements were aired on the La Nueva radio station, a popular Spanish-language radio station in the study area; and (c) a certified Spanish language interpreter was available during the Public Open House.

Based on input received at the Public Open House, the project team developed a project alternative that combined many of the suggestions for an alternate

⁴ There were several comments about the possible abandonment of an existing Columbia Basin Railroad (CBRW) line. At this time, CBRW has not filed for abandonment of that rail line. If CBRW elects to abandon any rail lines in the future, it would be required to apply to the STB for abandonment authority, and SEA would conduct an environmental review of the proposed abandonment at that time.

⁵ Executive Order 13166 requires federal agencies to provide access to services for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). It requires federal agencies to examine the service they provide, identify any need for services to those with LEP, and develop and implement a system by which LEP persons can meaningfully access those services consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the fundamental mission of the agency.

alignment to the north (the July Alternative), which was withdrawn from further consideration, as described in Chapter Three.

The project team presented the proposed project and the July Alternative to the Moses Lake City Council and Port of Moses Lake on October 17, 2007. A new alternative for the proposed project was developed for analysis based on these meetings (the October Alternative), but was withdrawn from further consideration. More information about the October Alternative is provided in Chapter Three.

Agency and Tribal Consultation and Coordination

SEA and WSDOT contacted federal, state, and local agencies about the proposed project construction and operation, asking them to identify any issues and concerns related to the proposed project, and requesting information on permits and approvals that might be required. SEA and WSDOT also contacted Native American Tribes that may have ancestral connections to the project area. On April 2, 2007, consultation letters were sent to the following agencies, groups, and Tribes:

Federal Agencies

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- NOAA Fisheries Service
- National Park Service
- Federal Railroad Administration
- Federal Aviation Administration⁶

State Agencies

- Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (State Historic Preservation Office or SHPO)

⁶ A consultation letter was sent to the Federal Aviation Administration on June 27, 2008.

- Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington State Department of Natural Resources
- Washington State Department of Transportation, North Central Region
- Washington State Parks
- Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission

Local Agencies

- Grant County Community Development Department
- Grant County Economic Development Council
- Grant County Public Utility District
- Port of Moses Lake
- City of Moses Lake Community Development Department
- Moses Lake Irrigation and Rehabilitation District
- TransCo, via the Washington State Potato Commission
- Quad-County Regional Transportation Planning Organization

Tribes

- Colville Confederated Tribes
- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation
- Wanapum Tribe

The consultation letters described the proposed project, included a map of the study area showing the proposed rail alignment, and requested that any concerns be identified. The intent of early consultation was to provide agencies, officials, and Tribes with an opportunity to provide input at an early stage in the environmental review process, prior to the preparation of the EA.

The early notification and coordination was also intended to facilitate the timely identification, evaluation, and resolution of environmental and regulatory issues during preparation of the EA. Copies of response letters and comments that were received during the consultation process are provided in Appendices A and B.

How can I comment on the Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project?

Questions or comments about the proposed Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project may be directed to:

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Written comments may also be filed electronically on the STB's website: <http://www.stb.dot.gov/stb/efilings.nsf>. From this link, click on "Environmental Comments" to be directed to an electronic comment form. Please reference STB Finance Docket No. 34936 in all correspondence.

All comments must be postmarked by **December 8, 2008**.

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