

# **Pontoon Construction Project EIS Scoping Comments Report - Jan. 15 – Feb. 19, 2009**

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## **Introduction**

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) team held a 30-day scoping period about the Pontoon Construction Project from Jan. 15 to Feb. 21 2009 as a continuation of the scoping process that began in January 2008. The project team held a second comment period due to the following:

- Changes to the purpose and need statement.
- Addition of two sites to the range of alternatives: Anderson & Middleton and Aberdeen Log Yard.
- Two construction methods were removed from further consideration: barge launch and barge slip.

The intent of the scoping period is to provide an opportunity for early public review and comment on a proposed project, including all of the project alternatives and the potential environmental effects of those alternatives to be evaluated in the draft environmental impact statement (EIS).

WSDOT is advancing pontoon construction to restore the SR 520 floating bridge in the event of a catastrophic failure, and to store these pontoons until needed. The project EIS will evaluate potential effects to the surrounding environment from constructing and storing pontoons.

The project team solicited comments from interested citizens, government agencies, and affected tribal nations in order to determine the range of alternatives and identify potentially significant issues that the team will evaluate in detail in the EIS. The project team received 144 comments during the comment period (123 from the public and 21 from agencies), which included a few comments received a few days before or after the official comment period dates.

This report summarizes the comments made by agencies and the general public and is organized into the following sections:

- 1) Agency scoping meeting and comments.
- 2) Public scoping meeting and comments.

## **Agency Scoping**

A combined National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Scoping and Cooperating and Participating Agencies Meeting was held in Olympia on Jan. 15, 2009, from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Local, state, and federal agencies and tribal nations were encouraged to provide comments regarding the range of alternatives and proposed purpose and need statement. A total of 16 agency representatives and one tribal representative attended the meeting.

## **Agency Comments**

A total of 21 comments were provided by the following participating and cooperating agencies:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Department of Ecology
- City of Hoquiam
- City of Aberdeen
- Port of Grays Harbor
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Quinault Indian Nation

## **Summary of agency comments:**

### **Site selection**

- The development of the Industrial Development District #1 (IDD#1) site would result in one of the largest permitted fills since wetland permitting began in the state.
- Given the extensive wetlands located on IDD #1, it does not appear that support exists for this site to proceed forward as a practicable alternative.
- Evaluate the Anderson & Middleton site as a reasonable alternative, based on size, overall impacts to state-owned aquatic lands, proximity

away from natural areas, smaller dredge prism, less shoreline armoring, and closer proximity to Grays Harbor.

- The Aberdeen Log Yard offers public utilities and services, such as rail spur, waterlines, sewer lines, and wastewater treatment.
- Understand the potential for military or security inconveniences.

### **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and permitting**

- Incorporate the revised purpose and need and range of alternatives into an updated project description.
- WSDOT may encounter delays as a result of federal regulatory programs, such as Endangered Species Act consultation and Section 404 permitting.
- It is possible that less environmentally damaging sites could arise and receive credence during the NEPA or permitting process, resulting in project delays.

### **Natural resources**

- Consider the potential for substantial effects to aquatic resources at each of the three sites.
- Evaluate impacts associated with the near-shore dredging required for the needed launch channel.
- Understand the potential to encounter hazardous materials. Recognize that such discovery could result in project delays.
- Conduct microalgae and eelgrass surveys at the Anderson & Middleton site and the Aberdeen Log Yard site.
- Conduct surveys to determine existence of jurisdictional wetlands at the Anderson & Middleton site and the Aberdeen Log Yard site.

### **Mitigation**

- Consider the IDD #1 site as an effective compensatory mitigation site.
- Exhaust practicable avoidance, minimization, and conservation measures before resorting to compensatory mitigation.

### **Pontoon moorage**

- Analyze short and long-term open water pontoon moorage alternatives.
- Explore the possibility of onsite pontoon storage.
- Conduct a detailed analysis of open-water moorage impacts. Long-term shading and sediment effects associated with open-water pontoon storage in Grays Harbor are of concern.

- Disclose potential impacts of long-term pontoon storage to marine mammals, birds, benthic communities, recreational and commercial fishing, and invasive species being transported by pontoons into Puget Sound and Lake Washington.
- Conduct further analysis of short-term pontoon moorage effects near the proposed casting basin facility.
- Incorporate temporary and permanent moorage locations into the project's range of alternatives.
- Consult with resource agencies as soon as possible regarding its proposed temporary and permanent moorage locations.
- Permanent anchors left embedded in state-owned aquatic lands are viewed as a permanent encumbrance and/or habitat issues, and must be removed.
- Clarify the necessity for long-term moorage areas in Grays Harbor.

### **Built environment and cultural resources**

- Determine the potential presence of historic and cultural resources at and near each site.
- Conduct in-depth traffic studies to determine effects to local traffic flows should be conducted.

### **Socio-economic considerations**

- The Pontoon Construction Project is of great economic importance to the Grays Harbor community.
- Conduct an in-depth economic analysis to determine the economic opportunities and risks associated with each site alternative.
- Consider the long-term use of the property and long-term economic opportunities.
- Potential impediments to long-term local development plans are a concern.
- Examine the socio-economic impacts of closing the currently active Aberdeen Log Yard site.
- Continue agency collaboration beyond NEPA and permitting.
- A high-quality labor force is available in the Grays Harbor area.
- Examine potential conflicts with existing operations, businesses, and plans.
- Explore and disclose opportunities for employment of tribal members.

## Public Scoping

WSDOT hosted a public scoping meeting and open house in Hoquiam on Jan. 29, 2009. The meeting was held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Hoquiam High School. Attendees began arriving at 5 p.m. After signing in, they were provided with these materials:

- Pontoon Construction Project scoping folio
- Environmental process fact sheet
- Scoping comment form

Informational materials and the comment form were also available in Spanish.

WSDOT invited attendees to review program display boards and speak with members of the project team. Julie Meredith, SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV Program Director, gave a short presentation to explain the latest information regarding the Pontoon Construction Project. She encouraged the attendees to ask questions of the project staff and submit their comments. She also announced that WSDOT will initiate some early pontoon work in Grays Harbor in 2009 to field test innovative pontoon construction techniques. State Representative Kevin Van De Wege spoke on behalf of the Coastal Caucus.

Approximately 350 people attended the public meeting, including local and state elected officials. Attendees were able to share their comments by completing a written form or recording comments with a court reporter.

### Notification

WSDOT began public notification approximately two weeks prior to the opening of the comment period. During the scoping period, the project team used several notification methods to solicit comments and encourage attendance at the Jan. 29 public scoping meeting and open house:

- Mailed 14,548 postcards to Hoquiam and Aberdeen zip codes, and to 547 mailing addresses in the project database.
- Placed legal notices in the Seattle Times, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Tacoma News Tribune, Tacoma Daily Index, Vidette, and Daily World.
- Placed a display ad in the Daily World.
- Announced the meeting on the SR 520 Pontoon Construction Project Web site and WSDOT Project of the Week Web site link.
- E-mailed the announcement to the project database contact list, including potential contractors.

- Placed posters in English and Spanish in 54 community locations in Hoquiam, Aberdeen, and Montesano.
- Announced the meeting at the Coastal Caucus Legislative Luncheon, sponsored by the Grays Harbor Chamber of Commerce, on Jan. 6, 2009.
- Julie Meredith participated in a KBKW AM 1450 radio interview on Jan. 27, 2009.

## Public Comments

Attendees at the public scoping meeting were encouraged to provide written feedback by completing a comment form, which included the following questions:

- Please provide your comments on the project's purpose and need statement.
- Please provide your comments on the project's range of alternatives. We plan to analyze the Anderson & Middleton site, the Industrial Development District #1 site, and the Aberdeen Log Yard site in the draft environmental impact statement. What topics should we study for each alternative?
  - What do you think are the benefits of the Anderson & Middleton site? What concerns do you have about this site?
  - What do you think are the benefits of the Industrial Development District #1 site? What concerns do you have about this site?
  - What do you think are the benefits of the Aberdeen Log Yard site? What concerns do you have about this site?
- Are there any additional topics you are interested in that were not covered tonight?
- How can we improve future meetings?

The project staff received a total of 123 public comments. Scoping meeting attendees submitted 71 written comment forms. A court reporter transcribed 21 scoping meeting comments during the public scoping meeting. The remaining comments were submitted via mail and e-mail.

The public comments focused on the topics included in the following table. Most comments included multiple topics. Topics that were mentioned only once are not listed in the table.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Comments Received</b>
Add to mailing list	214
Anderson & Middleton site	69
Industrial Development District #1 site	44
Aberdeen Log Yard site	32
Transportation (Construction and Operation)	29
Project Purpose and Need	18
Land Use and Economics	15
Potential Contractors	11
Wetlands	11
Water Quality/Groundwater/Stormwater/Surface Water	10
Social/Environmental Justice	9
Navigation and Waterways	9
Financial/Funding/Costs/Sales Tax	9
Utilities and Public Services	9
Ecosystems (Plants & Animals)	9
Pontoon Transportation	6
Indirect/Cumulative Impacts	6
Geology and Soils	6
Superstructure/Roadway Design	6
Public Involvement	5
Other Environmental Effects	5
EIS Alternative (sites & moorage locations)	5
Schedule/Timing	5
Noise and Vibration	4
Plans and Policies	4
Project Phasing/Decision Making	4
Other Projects (Hood Canal, I-90, etc.)	3
Hazardous Materials	3
Historic and Cultural Resources	3
Request for miscellaneous	2
Agency Coordination	2
Catastrophic Failure Planning	2
Moorage	2
Pontoon Construction Methods	2

### **Opportunities and risks identified for each site alternative**

Public comments addressed the potential opportunities and risks associated with each site.

### **Anderson & Middleton site:**

#### *Opportunities:*

- Existing industrial site with fewer wetland issues.
- Proximity to Hoquiam wastewater lagoon. If the lagoon is used for fill materials, then this site may reduce traffic impacts.
- Largest site alternative may allow expansion and additional flexibility.
- Less traffic.
- Available rail access.
- Currently a vacant site.
- Less impact on recreational fishing.

#### *Risks:*

- May be better suited for other future industrial or commercial development.
- May require relocation of Grays Harbor Motorcycle Education range training.
- Increased traffic over Hoquiam River bridges.
- Lack of industrial water supply.

### **Industrial Development District #1 site:**

#### *Opportunities:*

- Adjacent to the Hoquiam and Chehalis waterways.
- Potential to access industrial water line with a short connection under the river.
- Proximity to Hoquiam wastewater lagoon. If the lagoon is used for fill materials, then this site may reduce traffic impacts.
- Available rail access.
- No adjacent neighbors.

#### *Risks:*

- More wetland impacts and the associated mitigation.
- May be more expensive to develop.
- Increased traffic over Hoquiam River bridges.
- Smaller size than the other alternatives.

## **Aberdeen Log yard site:**

### *Opportunities:*

- Proximity to existing railroad.
- Easy access to industrial water and sewer utilities.
- May have the least impact on local traffic.

### *Risks:*

- May be better suited for other uses and conflicts with plans for Port activities and expansion.
- May conflict with Port and rail traffic. Rail cars often block intersections in this area.
- Proximity to Chehalis bridge may cause congestion problems for accessing open water.
- More impact on recreational fishing.
- Disruption to local businesses.

## **Summary of frequently received public scoping comment topics**

### **Transportation (construction and operation), noise, and vibration**

Community members commented on the potential impacts to local transportation, requesting improvements for paving of local streets and increased capacity. Others noted increased noise due to traffic and construction.

- Consider potential traffic effects to local schools.
- Determine the capacity and reliability of the existing bridges across the Hoquiam River.
- Consider effects to local traffic flows.
- Consider noise levels from traffic and construction.
- Consider site proximity to truck route.

### **Land use and economics**

Many comments expressed strong support from the community for pontoon construction in Grays Harbor County due to expected job opportunities. Several comments expressed a priority for using union labor to build the pontoons.

- Consider the need for increased job development in Grays Harbor.
- Support the local economy, including small businesses.
- Encourage union labor.
- Recognize the labor force available in Grays Harbor.
- Clarify the long-term use of the property and long-term economic opportunities.
- Consider the current economic situation in Grays Harbor.
- Consider effects on local businesses.
- Consider site acreage and potential for expansion and flexibility.

### **Utilities and public services**

Several scoping comments addressed the importance of considering the proximity and capability of local public utilities to serve the pontoon construction site.

- Proximity to potential fill sites for excavation materials.
- Access to industrial water lines and city sewer.
- Location of existing rail lines and potential for rail spur expansion.
- Potential for rail conflicts.

### **Navigation, waterways, geology and soils, and water quality**

Public comments discussed the potential effect of the project on waterways and navigation. Some noted concern over the potential to encounter hazardous materials.

- Consider dredge requirements and impacts for each site.
- Consider the effects to navigation patterns.
- Evaluate the likelihood of encountering hazardous materials.
- Determine proximity to existing dock facilities.
- Examine site location and inclement weather vulnerability.
- Consider effects to water quality.

### **Wetlands and ecosystems**

Public comments addressed the potential effects on fish, wildlife and species habitat.

- Consider the habitat of Canadian Geese and other birds in the area.
- Minimize the effects to shorelines and wetlands.

- Consider effects to water quality.

### **Funding and costs**

Several comments addressed the overall funding and cost for the Pontoon Construction Project.

- Provide information regarding the cost associated with developing each site.
- Develop the most economical site.
- Expressed concern over unnecessary spending associated with performing additional studies and surveys at each site.

The complete text of all comments is available upon request. Please contact us at [pontoons@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:pontoons@wsdot.wa.gov) or call the project hotline at 1-888-520-NEWS (6397).

Please visit our project Web site for more information:  
<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/SR520/Pontoons>.