

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). The 2024 Supplemental Transportation Budget (HB 2134, Section 217 (9)) directed WSDOT to conduct a study of highway, local road, and freight rail transportation needs if the dams were removed. The study is evaluating scenarios for changes in infrastructure and operations that will be necessary to address the redistribution of shipments via barges to alternate modes such as road and rail. The assessment includes quantitative analysis based on available data in terms of both financial and carbon emission costs. The analysis also includes a robust inclusive public engagement process to solicit feedback from interested community members.

Overall Progress

During the third quarter of 2024, WSDOT completed the following tasks:

- Conducted draft analyses covering the barge, rail, and truck modes.
- Completed an initial iteration of the base year model.
- Continued outreach activities.
- Developed an initial draft of the Current Conditions Report.

Draft analyses covering the barge, rail, and truck analysis

The consultant team conducted analysis on the existing freight and goods movement by barge, rail, and truck in the geographic areas expected to be affected by dam removals. This information is being included in the Current Conditions Report which is scheduled for completion by mid-December.

Initial iteration of base year model

The consultant team completed an initial iteration of the model using the information derived from the barge analysis, along with extensive outreach to freight industry stakeholders along the Lower Snake River. The model will reflect shipments of grain, fertilizer, and wood products. Preliminary model outputs look at routing these shipments to waterway, rail, and highway networks. Additionally, the model has gone through a validation process to compare it to actual results for the 2020 base year conditions. The model results are under review by additional members of the consultant team and WSDOT to determine additional adjustments that may be needed before its used to project future freight and goods movements. The base year model will be included in the Current Conditions Report published in December 2024.

Continued outreach activities

The study team continued coordination with several entities through a series of meetings during the 3rd quarter including:

- FHWA
- The US Army Corps of Engineers
- The Joint Transportation Committee
- Governor's Office

In addition, the team collected freight data for analysis through extensive outreach to industry stakeholders and participated in a tour of eastern Washington freight infrastructure. The project manager continues to make presentations to interested parties.

The team also initiated a Technical Advisory Committee and a Community Advisory Committee to support the study development process. The Technical Advisory Committee conducted two meetings during the 3rd quarter to introduce members to the study and review initial analysis conducted for the barge, rail, and truck modes. The Community Advisory Committee met once during the 3rd quarter to be introduced to the study. Both advisory committees will meet for the duration of the study.

Initial draft of Current Conditions Report

The study team developed an initial draft of the Current Conditions Report based on work done so far on the study. The Current Conditions Report is structured into the following sections: Introduction, Barge Analysis, Rail and Truck Analysis, Engagement, Total Logistics Cost Model Development, and Next Steps. The Current Conditions report was reviewed by the WSDOT Study Lead and is being edited based on the comments from this initial review. Once it has completed internal WSDOT review, it will be sent to the Joint Transportation Committee and US Army Corps of Engineers for review before being finalized. The final product is expected to be completed by mid-December.

Next Steps

The work anticipated to be completed during the next quarterly period includes:

- Respond to comments on draft Current Conditions Report.
- Provide final Current Conditions Report to Washington State Legislature.
- Complete development of the base year model and begin development of the future year scenario analysis.
- Execute an agreement for Phase 2 of the study and begin Phase 2 work.
- Continue outreach to interested parties.

TIMELINE

