

Lower Snake River Dams Transportation Study

Julie Meredith
Secretary of Transportation

Jim Mahugh
Lower Snake River Dams Transportation Study Lead

January 2025



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 (ESHB 2134, Section 217 (9)) directed the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to study highway, local road and freight rail transportation needs if the dams were removed. The study evaluates 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 soliciting feedback from interested community members.

Overall Progress

During the fourth quarter of 2024, WSDOT conducted the following activities:

- Engagement
- Online Open House
- Literature Review Document
- Status Report (previously referred to as the Current Conditions Report)
- Total logistics cost (TLC) modal diversion model
- Export Port Tour

Engagement

The study team hosted a Technical Advisory Committee meeting in November 2024. In this meeting, the following information was shared:

- A description of the contents of the Status Report.
- An update on the specific workstreams feeding into the report, such as supply chains and commodity flow graphics.
- An update on community engagement, including activities completed so far, the online open house and upcoming engagement activities.

The study team also met with the Community Advisory Committee in December 2024 covering similar topics with less technical detail. The group discussed additional parties that should be consulted as part of this study.

The study team presented to a wide variety of interested groups to provide project status updates across Washington. The groups who connected with our team between September and December include:

- September: Palouse Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) and WSDOT Traffic Engineers.
- October: Six-Sovereigns Lewiston Meeting, Pacific Northwest Infra Day, and Washington State Transportation Commission.

- November: Statewide Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)/RTPO meeting and WSDOT Project Engineers.
- December: Washington State Good Roads & Transportation Association and Washington Public Ports Association.

Online Open House

The study team hosted an online open house on the WSDOT website from Nov. 15, 2024, to Dec. 6, 2024. Background and study information was provided in English and Spanish. During the online open house 2,276 people visited the site, 405 responded to feedback questions and 63 responded to an optional demographic and public involvement survey. The number and type of visits are summarized in the following table.

Metric	English language site	Spanish language site
Total site users	2,262	14
Total site views	6,776	132
Average time on each page (minutes)	2:41	2:19
Desktop users	54.5%	90.2%
Mobile/Tablet users	45.5 %	9.8%

The project team used the following channels to promote the online open house:

- GovDelivery email to project subscribers.
- News releases to area media outlets which resulted in six news stories.
- Postcard mailing to more than 19,000 homes targeting areas with low or no internet access.
- Social media post on WSDOT Facebook with over 59,000 impressions.

The consultant team compiled the open house results into a stand-alone summary document that provides information on the types of responses received and key takeaways from the feedback.

Literature Review Document

The consultant team added to the list of reference documents used for this study. Most notably, documents featuring graphics on in-service, out-of-service and abandoned lines in eastern Washington were added. This report will continue to be updated throughout the study as more relevant literature is identified.

Status Report

The study team developed an initial draft of the Status Report based on work completed to date on the study. The report was structured into the following sections:

- Introduction
- Barge analysis
- Rail and truck analysis
- Engagement
- TLC model development

- Next steps

The Status Report was reviewed by the following interested parties:

- Joint Transportation Committee (and their consulting team)
- US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- WSDOT Executive Steering Committee

Additionally, the Status Report was summarized and presented to the Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee for their comment and review.

The Status Report was updated based on the feedback received through the review process. The draft was then made 508 compliant by editing maps, graphics, and providing text for all of the figures in the report. The final version was submitted to WSDOT on December 16, 2024, and posted to the study [website](#).

Total Logistics Cost Model

The consultant team has continued to refine the total logistics cost (TLC) model as it moves through the calibration and validation process. The team has frequent communication and meetings with the Joint Transportation Committee and their consultants to ensure that the model structure adequately reflects real-world activities. Recent refinements of the model include:

- Adjustments to the rail rates.
- Adjustments for the throughput from real data.
- Alignment with the USACE updates.
- Addressing comments from the previous total logistic cost modeling call.

Export Port Tour

Twelve individuals from various agencies, including WSDOT, Joint Transportation Committee, USACE and Jacobs Engineering participated in an export ports tour December 3-4. The tour included visits to the Port of Longview, Port of Kalama, Port of Vancouver, the Tidewater facility and Port of Portland. We also met with Clearwater Paper who ships upriver to Clarkston from Columbia City, Oregon. Topics covered during the tour include:

- Types of equipment used at each berth and port.
- Types of storage, processing facilities and terminals at each berth and port.
- Access for trucks, rail and barges at each port.
- Types of commodities moved through the port and share of these commodities from Eastern Washington.
- Potential capacity, traffic and competitive impacts of traffic diverting from barges to other modes.

Information from the tour will help to identify scenarios to analyze in the TLC model and the improvement projects to consider in later phases of this work.

Next Steps

During the next quarter, the study team will conduct work on the following major activities:

- Complete calibration and validation of the current conditions TLC model.
- Conduct base year and future year model runs.
- Complete contracting for Phase 2 of the study focused on infrastructure impacts and safety.
- Begin Phase 2 work on rail and road infrastructure impacts.
- Finalize the scenarios to be considered using the TLC model.
- Continue additional outreach through the ongoing road show activities.

