

Lower Snake River Dams Transportation Study

Fall 2024 - Online Open House Engagement Summary

Overview

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) hosted an online open house for the Lower Snake River Dams Transportation Study from November 15 - December 6, 2024, at engage.wsdot.wa.gov/lower-snake-river-dams. The online open house provided study information in English and Spanish. During the period of the online open house 2,276 people visited the online open house, 455 responded to feedback questions, and 63 responded to demographic and public involvement survey. Note that the demographic and public involvement survey was optional.

Online open house analytics

A total of 2,276 people visited the site. The English language site recorded 2,262 users and 6,776 total views, with an average time of 2 minutes and 41 seconds per page. Desktop users accounted for 55.0% of traffic, while 41.7% accessed the site via mobile or tablet. The Spanish language site had 14 users and 132 total views, with an average time of 2 minutes and 19 seconds per page. Desktop users made up 90.2% of traffic, while 9.8% used mobile or tablet devices.

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	55.0%	90.2%
Mobile/Tablet users	41.7 %	9.8%

Notifications

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

- GovDelivery email to update 227 subscribers.
- News release to area media outlets which resulted in six news stories.
- Postcard mailing to over 19,000 homes targeting areas with low or no internet access.
- Social media post on WSDOT Facebook with over 59,000 impressions

Please refer to the appendix for more information on each of the notification methods above.

Feedback/survey summary

Feedback questions were included at the end of the online open house, allowing participants to submit input and comments. The survey was designed to identify participants' main concerns for the study and assess how study findings align with public experiences. The online open house received 561 responses. A total of 455 comments were submitted in the free response prompt, including around 167 comments influenced by external campaigns or organizations. Of the comments that were free-response, only 24 had content useful to the study. The remainder were clearly related directly to the individual's preference to either keep or remove the dams and had no content that was related to transportation.

To the question “What are you most concerned about as WSDOT continues this study? Select one”

- 72% of respondents (n=405) chose option D “More trains transporting goods to market”
- 9% (n=52) of respondents chose option A “Additional traffic and congestion impacts on roads”
- 7% of respondents (n=41) chose option C “Need for maintenance on roads”
- 3% of respondents (n=17) chose option B “More dangerous conditions on roads”
- 8% of respondents (n=46) did not answer the question

To the question “Please list roadways in the study area where you experience consistent congestion (be as specific on locations as possible and tell us what times are usually congested)”

Roadways within the study area that were mentioned in general terms:

- SR 12
- I-90
- US-395
- I-82
- SR 26
- SR 261
- US-195
- SR 14

Some specific comments received were:

- Lewiston, ID Hwy 12 and Hwy 128 junction during harvest and fertilizer season.
- SR26 between Washtucna and Colfax. The passing lanes helped but the steep hills make trucks much slower. Traffic is greatest before and after WSU holiday breaks.
- Hiway 12 Walla Walla to Wallula Gap. Busy always and not in good repair.
- All of those are concerns. Especially congestion on HWY 124.
- SR 127 from Washtucna to SR 12 daily large grain trucks. SR 12 from Clarkston to the Columbia River grain and fuel truck traffic. SR 261 from SR 260 to SR 12 narrow roadway with large trucks and RV traffic.
- Our roads here in Starbuck are not ready for more traffic. They are in bad condition, Hwy 261 is not maintained AT ALL. There is no snow removal and the road is a goat trail. No trucks. No! We can't afford it here.
- You need to study the impacts to Idaho roads!! The Port of Lewiston will be greatly impacted. Shame on you for not studying the impacts on US-95 and US-12.
- I travel most of the roadways in the study area fairly regularly and seldom run into congestion outside of SR 26.
- US Highway 12 east of Walla Walla in Walla Walla and Columbia Counties would be congested all fall and winter as wheat was trucked to the Columbia River.

In response to the *railway* question “How do these current conditions (engage.wsdot.wa.gov/lower-snake-river-dams/barge-rail-and-roadway-findings#railway) match with your experience within the study area? Select one”

- 72% of respondents (n=406) chose option A “The findings align with my experience”
- 11% of respondents (n=64) did not answer the question
- 6% (n=36) of respondents chose option C “The findings do not align with my experience”

- 6% of respondents (n=35) chose option D “Other (please tell us more)”
- 3.5% of respondents (n=20) chose option B “There are minor discrepancies with my experience”

The feedback form was written to include two separate questions about users’ experience matching with the draft current conditions – one regarding rail, and one about roadways. Due to a back-end coding mistake, we were unable to collect responses to the roadway-specific question. However, the open-ended question about where people experienced congestion provided useful information about the current conditions of roadways in the study area.

At the end of the feedback form, we gave the option to submit a general message to the team. A total of 455 messages were submitted.

- 377 comments expressed sentiment towards the removal of the dams, with some comments also supporting the study of alternative transportation options.
 - For example: One respondent noted, “Thank you for this opportunity to provide public input and feedback on the transportation survey. We are excited and hopeful that the study results in an action plan that lays out the solutions needed to replace the current transportation services that the lower Snake River dams now provide with systems that meet the needs of the communities. Washington Conservation Action is the leading policy and political voice in Washington’s environmental community, mobilizing action for conservation and environmental justice. Our mission is to advocate for environmental progress and justice through actions that mobilize the public, elect champions for the environment, and hold our leaders accountable. A top priority for us and our members is the protection and restoration of the salmon and orca. Snake River barging has declined significantly for over two decades. Just 17% of the wheat exported at the Columbia River ports is barged on the lower Snake River and more than two-thirds of the wheat exported from these ocean ports arrives there by rail. The need for robust rail and road infrastructure is critical and a modernized transportation system can better support agricultural exports while preserving our iconic salmon runs and steelhead that are on the verge of extinction. Removing the lower Snake River dams is the next step in creating an efficient, forward-thinking transportation network. We appreciate WA DOT’s work on the Transportation study and engaging the public that is consistent with the Environmental Justice guidance of both the HEAL Act and the Environmental Justice Council.
- 38 comments expressed neutral sentiment, either citing general observations/questions about the project, or expressing recommendations for the study.
 - For example: Respondents suggested integrating previous data into the study and considering the impacts of other river activities, such as cruise boats. Some respondents suggested evaluating local road conditions, rail system classifications, cross-state transportation, and including short line railroads in the study area, in particular Solutionary Rail. Other neutral comments included questions regarding capacity for barges vs train, and overall study costs.
- 40 comments expressed sentiment, concerns, or opposition to removing the dams, with some expressing concern around transportation impacts.

- For example: Respondents expressed concerns with negative economic impacts. These included impacts to workforce, energy production and river access for recreational and agricultural uses. Respondents cited environmental concerns about compromising spawning habitats, fish passages and flood control. Respondents also noted other concerns such as deteriorating road and rail conditions, as well as concerns about potential traffic congestion if barges were not available, and allocation of funds and costs. Some respondents see the study as incomplete and not taking into account factors such as impacts on costs to farmers for alternative transportation methods and impacts on the environment due to fuel emissions.
- Of the 455 messages submitted, 167 comments had the same comments or content with slightly changed text, but identical themes. It was clear that these comments were either influenced by a campaign or the individuals were given a lead on how to answer the survey. These comments were from groups opposed to the dams or supporting short line rail.

Dam Related Comments

This study is focused on the transportation impacts if barges could no longer use the Snake River and WSDOT remains neutral regarding the removal of the dams. As such, comments supporting or opposing dam removal will not impact the outcomes of this study. Of the 454 free-text comments received, only 24 (5%) of these comments were not related to the dams. The 430 free-text comments that focused on the dams (either positive or negative) were not given consideration.

Examples of dam related comments:

“Removing the dams will allow for significant environment restoration and help endangered salmon populations recover”

“The dams are outdated and their removal will lead to better environmental and economic outcomes”

“The prospect of removing the Snake River dams is so ill-advised to be absurd. Not only would this be a disaster for transportation in our state, but it would also completely undermine our progress to adopt carbon-free energy technologies.”

“Stop removing the dams, they aren’t the issue.”

IP Address Check

The IP addresses were searched to determine what States the respondents were from. The total number of IPs scanned was 432. This is less than the total number of respondents due to some respondents coming from the same IP address. Two respondents were dropped from further analysis because they were from the UK and Vietnam. Of the 430 from the US and Canada, the percentage breakdown is as follows:

Of the Washington State respondents, 82% (232) were from addresses in Western Washington and 18% (52) from addresses in Eastern Washington. Of the 52 Eastern Washington respondents, 37 can be attributed to people living within the Snake River region that are likely to experience the change in transportation firsthand.

Although IP address origins can be a little misleading due to VPN logins, it is apparent that we are not being successful at getting input directly from the people who live in the area as only 37 people responded to the survey who could be directly correlated to the area around the Snake River. Of these 37, it was also clear that several were from the same internet service provider (e.g. Whitman College in Walla Walla). Therefore, we can conclude that we are not effectively reaching the individuals in the communities that will be affected by a change in transportation patterns.

Next steps

The project team will incorporate relevant input from Phase 1 into Phase 2 of the study, which is anticipated to begin in Spring 2025. During Phase 2, the study team will use the TLC model to calculate estimated impacts on safety, air quality, and greenhouse gas emissions resulting from changes in barge, rail, and truck traffic.

Appendix: Notification

Postcard mailing

The project team sent 21,352 postcards with information about the online open house to 19,762 residential homes and 1,590 businesses in the study area. The information on the postcard was provided in English and Spanish.

Learn about the Transportation Impacts of the Lower Snake River Dam Removal Study

The Lower Snake River contains four dams that help move freight and goods across Washington State. There has been much interest in removing these dams for the benefit of native fish species including salmon, steelhead and Pacific lamprey.

WSDOT is studying the transportation needs, options and impacts of shifting the movement of goods from barge to primarily truck and rail.

Visit the online open house to learn more about the study **November 15 through December 6**
bit.ly/LSRD

**Request a paper copy in the mail!
See back for more information.**

**Solicite una copia en papel por correo.
Más información al reverso.**




Infórmese sobre las repercusiones en el transporte a través del estudio sobre la eliminación de las presas en la parte baja del río Snake

En la parte baja del río Snake hay cuatro presas que ayudan a mover mercancías y bienes a través del estado de Washington. Ha habido mucho interés en eliminar estas presas por el bien de los peces autóctonos, como el salmón, la trucha arco iris y la lamprea del Pacífico.

WSDOT está realizando un estudio de las necesidades, las opciones y los impactos que supondría cambiar el transporte de las mercancías de barcas a principalmente camiones y ferrocarril.

Visite la página web interactiva para obtener más información sobre el estudio del **15 de noviembre al 6 de diciembre**
bit.ly/LSRD





Questions?

You can request a paper copy of the online open house by contacting:

¿Preguntas?

Para solicitar una copia impresa del contenido de la página web interactiva, contacte a:



Mail Stop 47329
310 Maple Park Ave SE
Olympia, WA 98501-2348

Jim.Mahugh@wsdot.wa.gov
360-705-7245
Mail Stop 47329
310 Maple Park Ave SE
Olympia, WA 98501-2348

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Social media

WSDOT also shared a Facebook post to advertise the online open house.

- Impressions (views): 59,500
- Reactions: 730 (514 likes/loves, 47 cry faces, 124 angry faces)
- Comments: 633
- Link Clicks: 194


The posts comments-to-link clicks ratio was noteworthy. While previous online open house posts have seen more link clicks than comments, this post had 633 comments and only 194 link clicks.


 **WSDOT** 
December 3 at 2:01 PM ·  ...




If barges can no longer use the lower Snake River, what might happen to the transportation network?

We are looking at how removing the dams could affect freight transportation in the region. Now through Friday (Dec. 6), learn more about the analysis and share your thoughts at our online open house.

Leave your feedback here: <https://engage.wsdot.wa.gov/lower-snake-river-dams/>



 470 444 comments 127 shares

 Like  Comment  Share

GovDelivery:

VSDOT - Lower Snake River Dam transportation study

message

Washington State Department of Transportation <wsdot@service.govdelivery.com>

Wed, Nov 20, 2024 at 4:19 PM



WSDOT is exploring the transportation effects of removing four dams on the Lower Snake River. We are seeking your input as we undertake this study.

Online Open House

We're hosting an [online open house](#) through December 6, 2024, to share our findings so far. The open house highlights existing conditions of barge, rail and road/highway in the lower Snake River area and will provide a description of the model used to evaluate these modes of transportation. The existing conditions information will help inform the potential impacts and mitigations strategies in Phase 2 and 3 of the study.

As part of our commitment to community engagement, we ask you to complete a short survey as part of the online open house to provide feedback about our findings so far. We invite you to make your voice heard and visit the online open house through December 6.

In future updates, we'll provide information about additional community engagement activities during Phase 1 and next steps as the study progresses.

Ongoing ways to stay informed

We have three ways to stay informed about the study as it progresses.

First is an email distribution list where you can subscribe to receive regular project updates. Emails will go out at least quarterly and when community engagement events are planned or draft/final reports shared. You may sign up to receive project updates by following [this link](#).

We will also be regularly updating our [project website](#).

Finally, if you are unable to access the electronic communication options or need translation services, please contact project lead Jim Mahugh.

Jim Mahugh, Project Lead
Lower Snake River Dam study
jim.mahugh@wsdot.wa.gov

News Release:

WSDOT sent a news release to XX local media outlets on the online open house release date.

Washington State Department of Transportation – NEWS (Arial 12/Normal bold)
Transportation Impacts of Lower Snake River Dam - Tri-Cities, WA – 509-577-1624

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 15, 2024

Contacts: [Jim Mahugh](#), project engineer, 360-705-7245

WSDOT hosts online open house for the Lower Snake River Dam Transportation Study

New online open house shares study background information, timeline, findings, and WSDOT's next steps.

TRI-CITIES – The Washington State Department of Transportation is conducting a study to understand the transportation impacts of removing four Lower Snake River Dams. People interested in learning more about the study can visit the online open house. The online open house will be available to the public Nov. 15 through Dec. 6.

The first of four phases, of the [Lower Snake River Dam Transportation Study](#) began in April 2024. During this phase of the study, WSDOT is gathering and analyzing information about the movement of goods on barges, trucks and trains. Community members can review data, read the interim report and provide input on the online open house.

Online open house information:

When: Friday, Nov. 15 – Friday, Dec. 6

Where: [engage.wsdot.wa.gov](#)[TBD]

Details: The online open house is available in both English and Spanish. Visitors will have an opportunity to submit comments and questions to the project team.

Free WiFi access:

Free, temporary internet access is available to those who do not have broadband service in locations throughout the state. To find the nearest Drive-In WiFi Hotspot visit: www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-state-drive-in-wifi-hotspots-location-finder/

Hyperlinks within the release:

- Online open house: [engage.wsdot.wa.gov](#)[TBD]
- Study website: <https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/search-studies/lower-snake-river-dams-transportation-study>

###

WSDOT keeps people, businesses and the economy moving by operating and improving the state's transportation systems. To learn more about what we're doing, go to www.wsdot.wa.gov/news for pictures, videos, news and blogs. Real time traffic information is available at wsdot.com/traffic.

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News articles:

Six news outlets published articles advertising the online open house.


1. KEPR: keprtv.com/news/local/wsdot-begins-3-week-study-on-lower-snake-river-dams


WSDOT begins 3-week study on Lower Snake River Dams

by Allen Leister | Fri, November 15th 2024 at 4:44 PM
Updated Wed, November 20th 2024 at 11:33 AM




KEPR Action News

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COLUMBIA BASIN, WA. - The Washington State Department of Transportation is conducting a study of road and rail transportation impacts and needs if the lower Snake River dams were removed and barges could no longer be used. People interested in learning more about the study can visit the [online open house](#). The online open house will be available to the public from Friday, Nov. 15 through Friday, Dec. 6.



WASH STATE NEWS
VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE ON LOWER SNAKE RIVER DAMS
KIMA
11:13 PM

2. Elkhorn Media Group:elkhornmediagroup.com/wsdot-hosts-online-open-house-for-lower-snake-river-dams-transportation-study/



WSDOT hosts online open house for lower Snake River dams transportation study

By Dan Thesman on Tuesday, November 19th, 2024 in [Columbia Basin News](#) [More Top Stories](#)



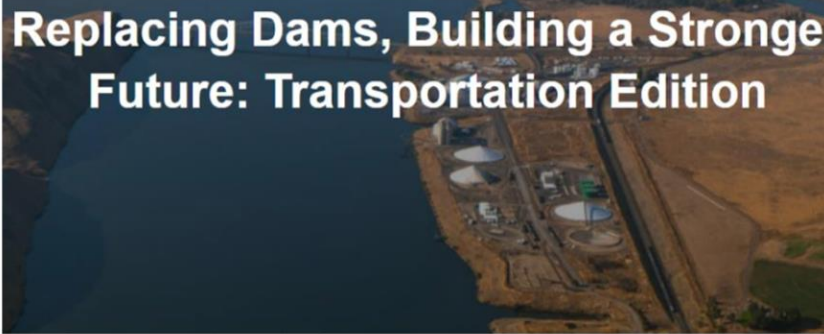
OLYMPIA – The Washington State Department of Transportation is conducting a study of road and rail transportation impacts and needs if the lower Snake River dams were removed and barges could no longer be used. People interested in learning more about the study can visit the online open house. The online open house will be available now through Dec. 6.

Visitors to the online open house have the opportunity to submit comments and questions to the project team.


The first of four phases of the Lower Snake River Dam Transportation Study began in April 2024. During this first phase of the study, WSDOT is gathering and analyzing information about the movement of goods on barges, trucks, and trains. Community members can get background on the study and see how barges, trains, and trucks currently move products into and out of southeast Washington.

Visit <https://engage.wsdot.wa.gov/lower-snake-river-dams/> for the online open house.

3. Idaho Conservation League: idahoconservation.org/blog/replacing-dams-building-a-stronger-future/



[← BACK TO BLOG](#)

 **Mitch Cutter**
Published on December 4, 20

Federal and state agencies, Tribal governments, and stakeholders are working together to plan how to replace the services of the four lower Snake River dams. These planning efforts came about as a result of both the Washington state legislature and the [Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement](#).

This blog dives deeper into the transportation sector and provides you with a way to take action!

Transportation

Background:

Dams on the lower Snake River create a navigational waterway from the confluence of the Snake and Columbia River in Washington to Lewiston, Idaho. Removing the dams would make this waterway inoperable for barges.

The transportation study was first approved by the Washington Legislature in 2023, which funded the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to analyze how transportation of goods from southeast Washington could continue if the lower Snake River dams were removed. As a result of the Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement, the US Army Corps of Engineers will assist WSDOT in its efforts by including transportation from Idaho and Oregon.

Currently, approximately 2.9 million tons of goods are transported via barge through the lower Snake River dams each year. About 87% of this shipping is wheat being transported to ocean ports near Portland, from which most is shipped overseas. Barging on the lower Snake has declined by almost 30% since 1999 as shippers began to use railroads to transport their goods. Other factors, such as the loss of container shipping to Lewiston, have played a role too. Many other commodities that were once shipped via barge—such as lentils, garbanzo beans, paper products, and many wood products—are now transported via train or truck.

Update and a Way to Take Action!

In November 2024, WSDOT opened an online open house for the project, which provides basic information on their task and general scope of work. This webpage is a good general resource to understand the basics of transportation.

4. Whitman County Gazette: www.wcgazette.com/story/2024/11/21/news/lower-snake-river-dam-removal-study/42634.html

Lower Snake River Dam removal study

WSDOT hosts open house study of dam removal effects

Teresa Simpson, The Whitman County Gazette | Nov 21, 2024 0



OLYMPIA — The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) started an online open house Friday, Nov. 15 through Friday, Dec. 6, for the Lower Snake River Dams Transportation Study.

The online study is of road and rail transportation impacts and needs if the Lower Snake River dams were removed and if barges could no longer be used.

The first of four phases of the Lower Snake River Dam Transportation Study began in April 2024 in which WSDOT started gathering and analyzing information about the movement of goods on barges, trucks and trains.

The first study also includes the development of a Total Logistics Cost (TLC) model to estimate how much freight traffic might shift from current barge operations to other modes of transportation, and will conclude in December 2024.

The study shows a summary of the existing conditions of barge, rail and road activity in the Lower Snake River area, referring to the seven-county area including Whitman, Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield and Walla Walla.


According to the study, the inland waterway infrastructure shows the movement of goods along the river are helped by a series of locks and dams; multi-modal facilities that move freight between trucks, trains and barges; barge terminals; and grain elevators located along the river.




The four locks and dams from east to west moving downstream in the study area include the Lower Granite Dam,

5. NBC Tri-Cities and Yakima: www.nbcrightnow.com/news/wsdot-studying-how-removal-of-snake-river-dams-would-affect-transportation/article_2ff4c084-ae79-11ef-bec2-535cc816c84d.html

WSDOT studying how removal of Snake River dams would affect transportation

Michael LeCompte, NonStop Local Digital Journalist Nov 29, 2024 Updated Jan 1, 2025



Local Weather
Currently in Kennewick
39° 
3 PM 39° 4 PM 38°
 


[f](#) [x](#) [e](#) [p](#) [u](#) [b](#)

OLYMPIA, Wash.-The Washington Department of Transportation is now studying how the proposed removal of dams on the Snake River could impact transportation.

WSDOT is holding an [online open house](#) about the study to provide information about the timeline, initial findings and next steps of the study that will be accessible from Nov. 15 through Dec. 6.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the [Bureau of Reclamation](#), the [Bonneville Power Administration](#) and NOAA have all studied the benefits and drawbacks of proposed dam removals, including the benefits to native fish species.

7-Day Radar Alerts

The 2024 Subaru Solterra.  SUBARU [Learn More](#)

6. EinPresswire: www.einpresswire.com/article/761079276/wsdot-hosts-online-open-house-for-the-lower-snake-river-dams-transportation-study

WSDOT hosts online open house for the Lower Snake River Dams Transportation Study

NEWS PROVIDED BY
Washington State Department of Transportation
November 16, 2024, 00:01 GMT

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OLYMPIA – The Washington State Department of Transportation is conducting a study of road and rail transportation impacts and needs if the lower Snake River dams were removed and barges could no longer be used. People interested in learning more about the study can visit the [online open house](#). The online open house will be available to the public Nov. 15 through Dec. 6.

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Free WiFi access

Free, temporary internet access is available to those who do not have broadband service in locations throughout the state. To find the nearest Drive-In WiFi

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YouTube

KIMA Action News posted their news segment promoting the online open house on their YouTube channel and received 230 views.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2O4ky4pdyzw

