

## **Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project Preliminary Study Update**

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The Port of Moses Lake and other local interests are proposing a set of major railroad improvements in the Moses Lake area. The proposed Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project has five separate segments, including new rail lines, improved sections of existing track, and rail re-alignments. The goal of the project is to promote economic development in the region. Washington State University and the Port of Moses Lake developed conceptual cost estimates for the entire project. The Port of Moses Lake's most recent cost estimate is \$28 million for right-of-way acquisition and construction, in 2005 dollars.

The 2005 Washington State Legislature provided the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) with \$2.0 million to perform preliminary engineering for design of a new and rehabilitated rail line between Wheeler and Soap Lake, Washington. At the request of local decision-makers, a portion of these funds are being used to produce a more detailed analysis of the proposed Northern Columbia Basin Rail Project, as envisioned by the Port of Moses Lake and other local interests. This brief describes the study and its status as of mid-September 2005.

### **What is the purpose of this preliminary study?**

The purpose of the Northern Columbia Basin Railroad Project Preliminary Study is to supply legislators and stakeholders with the appropriate information so that decisions can be made regarding project implementation, phasing, and funding. This study will:

- Identify which of the five proposed project segments are feasible;
- Provide cost estimates for each proposed project segment;
- Identify environmental fatal flaws and other potential roadblocks;
- Survey local businesses and others regarding current and future use of the rail lines; and
- Specify timelines and procedures to implement each segment.

### **When will the study be completed?**

The study is scheduled for completion in mid-December 2005.

## How much will the study cost?

The study budget is \$235,146. Of the \$2 million set aside by the state legislature for this project \$1,764,854 will still be available through June 30, 2007.

## What is the status of the study?

Much of the fieldwork on this study has been completed. The study team has:

- Reviewed and inspected each of the five proposed segments;
- Reviewed environmental conditions in the study area; and
- Completed most shipper surveys.

Work continues on cost estimates for each segment. These cost estimates will also be used in an economic analysis that will help determine which segments will provide the greatest public benefit. Work continues on ownership scenarios, as requested by the Port of Moses Lake, as well as research on the legal steps that must be taken and the permits that need to be obtained before building any of the proposed project segments.

## Are there any preliminary findings?

A few key findings have emerged from the work performed through mid-September. These are:

- The Columbia Basin Railroad (CBRR) has a very good reputation as a service provider for rail shippers in the Moses Lake area. Shippers have informed WSDOT of service reliability issues; however, shippers believe that they are caused off the CBRR line.
- Of the ten businesses that were surveyed who currently use the CBRR, rail car loadings are less than 1,000 cars per year.
- There are no environmental fatal flaws for any of the five segments of the proposed project.
- Not all of the local stakeholders are in agreement on the benefits of all five segments of the proposed project.
- The entire project cost is likely to exceed the \$28 million estimated by the Port of Moses Lake.