

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 29, 2024

Roger Millar
Secretary
Washington State Department of Transportation
310 Maple Park Avenue SE
P.O. Box 47300
Olympia, WA 98504-7300

Dear Secretary Millar,

We write to you today to follow up after your testimony on January 17th, 2024, to the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure's hearing entitled "The State of Transportation." We appreciate your testimony and availability to answer questions from Members of the Committee on important issues affecting transportation and our economy; however, we are deeply concerned with some of your answers related to the lower Snake River dams (LSRD).

As you know, the Columbia/Snake River System Operations (CRSO) is the federal system of locks and dams which serves as an important trade route for the Pacific Northwest economy. Barges and ships transport thousands of containers along its 2,321 miles of waterways annually. Additionally, the LSRD provide approximately 3,800 megawatts of carbon-free energy to electricity consumers all over the region.

In December 2023, the Biden Administration, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and six sovereign nations released a final package of commitments in the ongoing CRSO litigation and mediation. In this package, a myriad of provisions were included and the general consensus amongst many Pacific Northwest stakeholders is the agreement serves as a de-facto breaching of the LSRD. Despite some believing the only solution for salmon survivability in the region is to breach the dams, doing so would be a fatal blow to the Pacific Northwest economy, public power, recreationists, and river-dependent ports and communities. Moreover, it would negatively impact environmental quality along the LSRD, which provide immeasurable benefits to the region and nation.

During the Jan. 17 hearing, Congresswoman Chavez-DeRemer (OR-05) described the insurmountable burden this would place on the rail and trucking industries, indicating it would take 39,204 rail cars and 150,784 semi-trucks per year to move the cargo that is currently barged through the Columbia/Snake Rivers.¹ Congresswoman Chavez-DeRemer asked you specifically if you believed that Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) would still be able to meet its objectives after adding this substantial amount of rail cars and trucks to railroads and highways, to which you replied in the affirmative.

¹ <https://www.rivervalues.com/learn-more>

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2022 report, there were 37,250 heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers in Washington,² 22,690 in Oregon,³ and 14,030 in Idaho.⁴ That total would have to be tripled to meet the projected number of trucks needed consistently on the road to make up for lost barge transport.

Overall, 60 percent of all wheat exports are barged through the LSRD. A single four-barge tow carrying wheat moves the equivalent to 538 semi-trucks and is the lowest cost shipping option. Dam breaching will add 23.8 million miles in additional trucking activity annually, leading to increased fuel costs, highway maintenance costs, terminal facility maintenance cost, driver time, and vehicle maintenance costs by \$69 million per year.

Removing the dams will likely lead to higher rail costs as well and harmful CO2 emissions by over 1,251,000 tons annually. Highway, rail, grain elevators, and local infrastructure will need over \$1 billion in capital investments.⁵ In your testimony, you stated WSDOT works to maintain and improve local roads, railroads, and airports. We find it incredibly hard to believe WSDOT will continue to meet these broad objectives after breaching the dams, as capacity on highways and railroads will meet an all-time high. Combined with worker shortages in truck and rail networks, and the negative environmental impacts, we respectfully request answers to the following questions:

- Please expand on the stated objectives of WSDOT as a transportation agency.
- Please specifically detail how WSDOT will continue to meet these transportation objectives if the Lower Snake River Dams are breached, especially as it relates to impacts from increased traffic on highway and rail transportation networks.
- How will WSDOT maintain its objectives and provide viable alternatives to continue to help robustly grow the Pacific Northwest economy?
- If these objectives are maintained, why does WSDOT believe they still need additional DOT grants with respect to the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative?

We remain deeply concerned with the plan to breach the dams given the significant environmental and economic impacts. We appreciate your continued attention to this important issue and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Lori Chavez-DeRemer
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress

² https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_wa.htm#top

³ https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_or.htm

⁴ https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_id.htm

⁵ <https://www.feedandgrain.com/grain-supply-chain/news/15384900/columbia-grain-ceo-snake-river-dams-are-top-wheat-export-gateway>



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



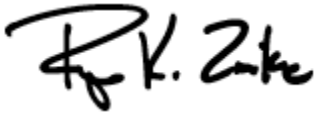
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