



WSDOT NEWS

[Back to WSDOT News](#)

MOST REQUESTED

- » [Highway Cameras](#)
- » [Puget Sound Traffic Cameras](#)
- » [Washington State Ferries](#)
- » [Amtrak Cascades](#)
- » [Employment](#)
- » [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- » [Driver & Vehicle Licensing](#)

ABOUT WSDOT

- [Transportation Commission](#)
- [Agency Organization](#)
- [Our Environmental Commitment](#)

Sunken Vessels Not Obstacles, WSDOT Report Finds

Date: January 9th, 2004

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SEATTLE - The SR 520 Bridge Replacement and HOV project team received a final archaeologist report concerning the historical and environmental significance of three sunken vessels in Lake Washington. Two of them are barges and one of them is schooner-shaped. The report found that none of the vessels possess any historical or environmental implications.

The findings also indicate, contrary to previous assumptions, that the schooner-shaped object is not the Fresno, a three-masted schooner that burned in Bellevue's Meydenbauer Bay back in 1923. The schooner-shaped vessel has been identified as a wooden steamer, but no specific identification could be made due to its poor condition. The project team is working with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for final concurrence on the archaeologist report findings.

The vessels were discovered in July 2003 with side-scan sonar imaging during an examination of the lakebed to prepare for design of the proposed new SR 520 bridge. Equipped with helmet cameras, divers took a closer look at each vessel last October to find possible clues that might help in their identification.

Roughly one-half mile off the Kirkland waterfront and 1000 feet north of the current SR 520 Floating Bridge, the three objects are in about 200 feet of water. While they wouldn't have impacted the actual bridge once in place, they may have affected the construction of the anchor cables for the bridge.

The Washington State Department of Transportation is currently exploring three options to replace the existing SR 520 Floating Bridge. They include a four-lane structure with shoulders, wider lanes and a pedestrian/bicycle lane, a six-lane option that also adds a high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in each direction, and an eight-lane option that adds the elements of the six-lane and a general purpose lane in each direction. The draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be issued by Spring 2005.

[Back to WSDOT News](#)