

Standard Visual Impact Assessment Report

Annotated Outline

August 2023

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

[Insert Project Name (for Standard Level VIA)]

[Insert Date]

**California Department of Transportation**

[Insert District #, County Name, Route #]

[Insert Segment-PM to PM]

[Insert Project Number and EA]

**Prepared by:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

[Insert Name]

[Insert Company Name if appropriate]

[Insert License # if appropriate]

[Insert Project Landscape Architect or Project Landscape Associate for Caltrans documents]

**Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

[Insert Name]

[Insert License #]

Caltrans District Landscape Architect

[Insert Office or Branch]

[Insert District #]

*Statement of Compliance:* Produced in compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements, as appropriate, to meet the level of analysis and documentation that has been determined necessary for this project.

Per Exhibit D, Article XVIII, Section A. (1) of the contract: (c) 2020 California Department of Transportation. [Include for consultant prepared documents]

[Guidance for Standard Visual Impact Assessment Annotated Outline]

[This Standard Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Annotated Outline is organized to facilitate the preparation of reader-friendly and graphically informative VIAs for any level of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and or California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documentation, while reducing unnecessary detail. The formatting of this outline is aligned with the directions and examples included in the *California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) 2023 VIA Handbook* (hereinafter referred to as *Handbook*, available at: [hyperlink](https://design.onramp.dot.ca.gov/downloads/design/files/Design%20Updates/Landscape/VIA_Handbook.pdf).

The goal of this Standard VIA Annotated Outline is to simplify the documentation of visual impacts and effective environmental commitments for visual impacts of Caltrans transportation projects, inclusive of Caltrans’s diverse regions, landscapes, and communities. The details of the VIA should be depicted in tables and figures to the extent practical, with VIA text highlighting key findings pertaining to impacts and environmental commitments. The *Handbook* serves as a technical reference during the preparation and documentation of the visual analysis. The *Handbook* includes general sample maps, graphics, and tables for reference, and the Standard VIA Annotated Outline is used to closely document the project-specific VIA analysis process. This report should be appropriately comprehensive but concise, including only information that pertains to the project, and with only the necessary level of detail for defining the visual environment and analyzing the project’s potential visual impacts. In addition, consider the use of photographs with view orientation captions to support (but not to replace) the narrative.

The outline includes preparation tips, along with standardized text, tables, and graphic formats that are scalable and adaptable to the scope of individual projects. Standard VIAs will receive the standard level of review and are applicable for projects with moderate potential to adversely affect the visual quality of landscapes and viewers.]

[Information Regarding the Use of This Annotated Outline

1. This annotated outline contains three types of text:

Black text without brackets is boilerplate and should be used in the document but may be edited as necessary for the project.

[Blue text] in square brackets consists of instructions, guidance, or sample text that should be replaced with project specific information. Delete all unedited blue text once the document is finalized.

{Red text} in curly brackets indicates the options to select the correct word or phrase for completing a sentence.

1. A Scoping Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment Level (*Questionnaire*) (available at: [hyperlink](https://design.onramp.dot.ca.gov/downloads/design/files/lap/via/VIA%20_Questionnaire.docx)) should be used to establish which, if any, VIA outline is appropriate (Memorandum, Standard, or Advanced). Include the Scoping Questionnaire in Appendix A of this report.
2. If the project has a Preferred Alternative, disclose why it is preferred and specify the Preferred Alternative, as appropriate, throughout this outline. Also incorporate evaluations of Build Alternative(s), if appropriate.
3. Table and/or figure numbers provided in this outline may require revisions to adapt to the author’s presentation of materials.

It is optional to include a Table of Contents, based on the length of the Standard VIA report and amount of detail. If a Table of Contents is used, ensure that it includes each landscape unit identified in Section 2.3. Use the “Update Table” feature to ensure that subsections added are listed in the Table of Contents and page numbering is accurate.

Consider whether to include an optional executive summary, along with lists of Figures or Tables, based on the length of the VIA report and amount of detail. Lists shown below are for example only. Add additional figures or tables in the order they appear in the text, including appropriate page numbers.]

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[The List of Acronyms and Abbreviations shown below is for example only and should be used with project-specific updates. Add or remove additional acronyms or abbreviations as necessary for the clarity of the report. Arrange additional acronyms or abbreviations in alphabetic order.]

Acronyms and Abbreviations

{AVE area of visual effect

Caltrans California Department of Transportation

CEQA California Environmental Quality Act

*Handbook Caltrans 2023 VIA Handbook*

FHWA Federal Highway Administration

GIS geographic information system

LIDAR light detection and ranging

NEPA National Environmental Policy Act

PDT Project Development Team

VIA visual impact assessment}

# [(Optional) Executive Summary]

[Provide an executive summary, if necessary, to describe the process and finding of the standard report. Provide a summary of the VIA results. Identify the project location, the proposed improvements, and the project’s existing visual context. Briefly describe visual impacts by identifying changes to visual resources and the viewer response to those changes by alternative. Compare alternatives but avoid identifying a preferred alternative. If a preferred alternative has already been identified by the PDT, disclose why it is preferred. Identify any additional cumulative visual impacts. Conclude by describing and clearly distinguishing between standard project design features and environmental commitment measures that would offset specific visual impacts. This summary can be incorporated into the Executive Summary section of the Environmental Document.]

# Purpose of Report

The objectives of this visual impact assessment (VIA) report are to document potential visual impacts caused by the proposed project, and to propose measures to lessen any detrimental impacts that are identified. Visual impacts are demonstrated by identifying visual resources in the project area, measuring the degree of change that would occur because of the project, and predicting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes. This standard VIA follows the guidance outlined in the publication *Guidelines for the* *Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in January 2015. The formatting of this annotated outline is aligned with the directions and examples included in the *California Department of Transportation* (*Caltrans*) *2023 Via Handbook* (*Handbook*), available at: [insert website link]

# Establishment Phase

The Establishment Phase consisted {primarily} of a desk assessment of available data about the project and establishment of basic visual attributes of the project and its surroundings. {A brief reconnaissance site visit was conducted on \_\_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_\_ to better understand the project visual setting.} The Scoping Questionnaire was completed, and the level of VIA report determined; the Scoping Questionnaire is attached as Appendix A. Project visual character and quality were described. The AVE was established. Potential landscape units in the AVE were identified and described. Scenic and visual resources in the AVE were listed and described. Potential key views were identified in the AVE. Aesthetics related regulations, required permits, and the need for public review and feedback were also identified.

## Project Visual Character and Quality

### Project Location and Setting

The proposed project is on [insert route type and number] between [insert northern or western project termini] and [insert southern or eastern project termini] in the [insert name of municipality] in [insert name] County, California. The project is in [insert general biogeographical or ecological name of the region] of [northern, southern, central, or other commonly understood geographic location] California. The landscape is characterized by [insert general description of landform and land cover based on U.S. EPA’s Level IV Ecoregions (Griffith et al. 2016). Separate the urbanized from the nonurbanized areas, and natural from cultural landscapes (i.e., oak woodlands and vineyards may occur in the same ecozone.)]. The land use in the corridor is primarily [insert general description of human settlement pattern (such as wilderness, natural, semi-natural, agricultural, rural, exurban, suburban, or urban), coupled with a land use designation (such as residential, commercial, industrial, or agricultural)] but also includes areas of [in a similar manner, describe any exceptions to the general description].

[Include a brief description of the regional setting.]

[If it is necessary to clarify location, insert map of county (or counties) identifying the project area, including the project corridor and termini.] Figure 2‑1 presents a map identifying the project area.

[Insert figure]

Figure 2‑1 Project Area

The project area consists of [insert description of project area, for example, “a 9‑mile segment of California State Route 136 between Keeler and Mock, adjacent to Owens Lake in Inyo County”].

### Project Description

The project proposes to [add a succinct description of what will be built, emphasizing project features such as added or widened lanes, sidewalks, bicycle trails, or pathways; bridges removed, replaced, added, or widened; added or reconfigured intersections or interchanges; major grading; changes to access; and added or removed retaining walls, noise barriers, concrete barriers, signals, signs, lighting, drainage facilities, extent of ground disturbance/‌footprint, vegetation removal (specific area or acres), trees (specific numbers), etc.].

### Project Alternatives

This VIA examines [insert quantity] alternatives {including the no-build alternative}. The alternatives assessed in this study include the following:

[Insert a bulleted list with the name and a brief description of each alternative. Typically, alternatives are labeled with a name (Bypass Alternative), number (Alternative 2), letter (Alternative B), or some combination (Bypass Alternative 2B). The method of labeling alternatives should be consistent, not only in the VIA but also in other plans and documents being developed for the project. Many projects have only one build alternative proposed; in some of these cases, such as with CEs, it is not necessary to address the no-build.]

### Project Aesthetic Features

[Provide descriptions of aesthetic features or treatments planned for the project (and each alternative) that the Project Development Team (PDT) has agreed are appropriate for the project scope and budget, and/or serve as contextual elements that help retain the unique character of the community and will help generate public acceptance of a project. Emphasize that these project aesthetic features and elements constitute “good design” and are part of the project and not environmental commitments (for the project’s visual impact), which are discussed separately in this report. These aesthetic features could include items such as textured noise barriers, retaining walls, or paving; colored concrete or asphalt; “see-through” bridge rail; or highway planting. Typically, these would be standard aesthetic treatments that are included in Caltrans’ Highway Design Manual, Standard Plans, Standard Specifications and Standard Special Provisions. See the Mitigation under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidance (https://dot.ca.gov/‌programs/‌environmental-analysis/standard-environmental-reference-ser/other-guidance#ceqa) for additional information. This section should highlight the beneficial features of the project, as well as any measures to avoid or minimize visual impacts that were adopted early in the project development process.]

### Project Visual Character and Quality

This section provides a description of the visual character and visual quality of the project’s visual elements for each alternative. [Refer to *Handbook* Section 2.2, select the main visible project features of each alternative, and describe their visual elements (form, line, color, and texture), along with the relationships (dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity) among the project features. Consider potential seasonal conditions, as well as night and daytime conditions. Evaluate the vividness, intactness, and unity of the project features. Add additional feature attributes and relationship descriptions, if necessary. If there are noteworthy differences between alternatives, describe the visual character and visual quality of each alternative.]

## Area of Visual Effect

The AVE for the project was developed based on [describe basis, e.g. geographic information systems (GIS) visibility modeling and field observations; perspective views of the road and from the road; terrain, vegetation, and structures reducing visibility of the project; and coordination with the project historian regarding Section 106 Area of Potential Effect. Refer to *Handbook* Section 2.5, for more information and elaborate if appropriate for the project. The most straightforward definition of the AVE is the project’s viewshed or corridor—those areas from which the project may be visible. The extent of the viewshed away from the project is limited to the distance within which the project remains clearly apparent to viewers. The AVE may be composed of nonadjacent discrete areas, including discrete, distant, elevated viewpoints.]

[If GIS applications were used to define the AVE boundary, document data sources and the resolution of elevation data/‌contours, building footprints, light detection and ranging (LIDAR) data, and any 3D/viewshed modeling. Insert a map of the AVE, identifying the project area and landscape units, including the foreground, middle ground, and background viewing zones and scenic and visual resources.] Figure 2‑2 presents a map showing the AVE.

[Insert figure]

Figure 2‑2 Area of Visual Effect

## Landscape Units

[Describe the boundaries of potential landscape units and the information identified about them in online searches. Field determination of their visual character and quality will be described in Section 3. See *Handbook* Section 2.6, for additional information.]

The project AVE corridor was divided into a series of landscape units. Each landscape unit is an area of the AVE with its own distinctive visual character. [Although a landscape unit is typically defined by a particular AVE, alternative methods for defining a landscape unit are acceptable, such as defining it by an area of similar visual character. Change the previous sentence, as necessary, to conform to how landscape units were established for this study.] For this project, the following [insert quantity] landscape units and their associated key views have been identified:

[Briefly identify, as a bulleted list, the boundaries of each landscape unit.]

[Include a map to illustrate the landscape units traversed by the project. Each unit should be labeled directly on the map or in a legend.] Figure 2‑3 presents a map illustrating landscape units and key views for the project.

[Insert figure]

Figure 2‑3 Landscape Units

Figure 2‑3 delineates [insert quantity] landscape units that will be used to assess visual impacts that may be caused by the proposed project. Each landscape unit is differentiated from other units both by its dimensions and its visual resources.

## Scenic Resources and Visual Resources

Scenic resource and visual resource identification during the Establishment Phase was conducted based on a desktop search of available maps, regional and local plans, and other databases. In the context discussed in this report, “scenic resources” are those officially designated by federal, state, regional, tribal, or local authorities; “visual resources” are those that exist in the project AVE without being officially recognized. For further details on identifying scenic resources, refer to *Handbook* Appendix A.

[List or categorize all federally, state, regionally, tribally, and locally recognized scenic resources in the project AVE. Identify information sources. Provide representative photographs. Indicate whether any portion of the project is within an officially designated State Scenic Highway or a highway eligible for designation. List or categorize visual resources. Identify information sources.]

## Potential Key Views

[Review Section 2.7 of the *Handbook*. Identify potential key views and landscape unit context photos to document essential baseline conditions of each landscape unit to use later to compare with a project simulation and to assess the visual impact of the project. Place key views at points that are publicly accessible and where they provide the most significant and unobstructed image of the existing visual character and quality of the landscape unit that may be changed by the proposed project. This may be the view that the affected viewers consider most sensitive to change or it may be the view that is most representative of the landscape. Describe why each key view location was chosen. Input from the public to identify potential key views is helpful because it ensures that the VIA addresses the public’s concerns. In general, two key views of each landscape unit should be provided as a minimum: one of the road, as seen by a representative neighbor, and one from the road as seen by a representative traveler. Additional key views from sensitive scenic or visual resources may also be appropriate. Select key views also for their potential to provide images appropriate for simulations, which are optional.]

[Briefly identify each key view, as a bulleted list, locating and numbering or naming key views using landscape units, stationing, mile posts, cross streets, or other identifying landmarks. Explain why each key view was selected.]

[Include a map to illustrate the key views traversed by the project. Each key view should be labeled directly on the landscape unit map or in a legend. The map of landscape units and key views can be combined for smaller projects.] Figure 2‑4 presents a map identifying potential key views of and from the project.

[Insert figure]

Figure 2‑4 Key Views

Figure 2‑4 delineates [insert quantity] key views that will be used to assess visual impacts that may be caused by the proposed project.

## Regulatory Context

### Applicable Regulations

[List applicable local, state, and/or federal laws, ordinances, regulations, policies, or design standards that relate to aesthetics in the AVE (i.e., aesthetics-related design standards and regulations such as NEPA, CEQA, Section 4(f), and Section 106). Although Caltrans may not always be subject to local policies and ordinances, these regulations are valid indicators of viewer sensitivity. Provide an introduction explaining why the policies are included.]

### Required Aesthetics and Visual Resource Related Permits

[List any aesthetics/visual-resource-related permits required by outside regulatory agencies (i.e., federal, state, local or tribal).]

### Expected Public Coordination and Feedback Needs

[List any public review and feedback meetings either mandated (CEQA) or expected based on public or specific viewer group sensitivity or concerns.]

# Inventory Phase

The Inventory Phase consisted primarily of field documentation of key information about the existing landscape, and the potential sensitivity of viewers and scenic resources to visual change in the AVE. {Although the Inventory Phase continued to employ a desk assessment to some degree, much of} the work occurred in the field. The baseline documentation and photography of the project area were collected. The computer-generated AVE and proposed landscape units were field verified. Landscape visual character and quality were described for each landscape unit. Potential key views and scenic resources identified in the Establishment Phase were verified, documented for each landscape unit, and supplemented with additional field identified key views and scenic resources. Potential viewers were noted, identified, and documented. [Use the standard field forms in the *Handbook* Appendix B and attach as Appendix B to this VIA. Document each photograph of the project area, each landscape unit’s visual character and quality, each potential key view, each designated and potential other scenic resource, and all potential viewers. Include completed field forms and photographs in the corresponding appendices to this report. Provide a description of any additional activities that were conducted in the Inventory Phase.]

## Key Views

The AVE, key views, and scenic resources of this project were verified during a site visit on [date of field visit]. The landscape unit{(s)} determined in the Establishment Phase {were/was} confirmed, as well as the scenic resources. The following sections describe the characteristics of the AVE and landscape unit and summarize the key views that were confirmed in the field.

### AVE and Landscape Unit Boundaries Verification

The Establishment Phase AVE map was field verified, and the boundaries adjusted based on the expected visibility of the completed project from the adjacent areas. [Note any specific adjustments to the computer-generated AVE and the reasons these were made (view obstructed by terrain, large buildings, tall vegetation, other structures, etc.).]

The previously identified landscape unit boundaries were field verified and adjusted based on field observations. The landscape units listed in the following paragraphs were identified and documented in the field (Appendix B includes field forms and photographs). Their detailed visual character and quality descriptions are provided in the subsections below. [Provide a list of landscape units and a summary of the baseline documentation and (non-key-view) photography conducted for each. Include a standard form for each Landscape Unit in Appendix B.]

* Landscape Unit A
* Landscape Unit B
* Landscape Unit C

[Repeat to describe all landscape units.]

### Key Views toward and from the Project in each Landscape Unit

[List and describe all key views that were considered for each landscape unit, refer to key view inventory field forms and photographs in Appendix C. Describe key views recommended for the Analysis Phase and explain the reasons for these recommendations.]

* Landscape Unit A [summary of key views]
* Landscape Unit B [summary of key views]
* Landscape Unit C [summary of key views]

[Repeat to describe all landscape units.]

### Key Views toward and from the Project in Selected Scenic and Visual Resources [as Applicable]

[List and describe all key views that were considered for each scenic or visual resource, referring to key view inventory field forms and photographs in Appendix C. Describe key views recommended for the Analysis Phase and explain the reasons for these recommendations.]

* [Scenic or Visual] Resource A [summary of key views]
* [Scenic or Visual] Resource B [summary of key views]
* [Scenic or Visual] Resource C [summary of key views]

[Repeat to describe all scenic and visual resources.]

## Landscape Visual Character

[Identify the landscape features of the natural and cultural environments in each landscape unit. Describe their landscape character from each key view of each landscape unit (or describe the landscape character of each landscape unit, based on every inventoried location including aerial views, not just key views). Determine the landscape visual character of the landscape units based on the visual properties of their natural, cultural, and existing project environment visual features, and the relationships among these features. Begin with information regarding the landscape unit’s character type, which can be natural, agricultural, rural, suburban, urban, or industrial. Use the basic ecoregion information on landform and natural plant communities in the area to describe a natural landscape character type. Lastly, describe the relationships among the natural, cultural, and existing project environment visual features in terms of dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity. Consider how these relationships among visual features will change with distance. If the proposed project includes new sources of light or potential glare, describe existing sources of lighting and glare to establish background levels. List landscape units and briefly describe their visual character below. Include forms with detailed field descriptions of visual character and photographs of each landscape unit in Appendix D. (Refer to *Handbook* Section 3.2 for additional information).]

* Landscape Unit A [summary of visual character description]
* Landscape Unit B [summary of visual character description]
* Landscape Unit C [summary of visual character description]

[Repeat to describe all landscape units.]

## Landscape Visual Quality

[Describe the natural, cultural, and existing project environment visual features’ vividness (i.e., visual elements of form, line, color, and texture) and unity (i.e., spatial composition) from each key view of each landscape unit. Neither is itself equivalent to visual quality; both must be high to indicate high visual quality. List landscape units and briefly describe the visual quality of their natural and cultural environments based on selected key views below. Include forms with detailed field descriptions of visual quality and photographs of each landscape unit in Appendix E. Refer to *Handbook* Section 3.4 for additional information.]

* Landscape Unit A [summary of visual quality description]
* Landscape Unit B [summary of visual quality description]
* Landscape Unit C [summary of visual quality description]

[Repeat to describe all landscape units.]

## Viewers

There are two major types of viewer groups for highway projects: neighbors and travelers. Each viewer group can be subdivided into smaller categories of viewers based on land use (for neighbors) and mode of and reason for travel (for travelers). Each category has its own particular level of viewer exposure [refer to *Handbook* Section 4.5.1] and viewer awareness [refer to *Handbook* Section 4.5.2], resulting in distinct and predictable visual concerns for each viewer group and category. This helps in predicting their sensitivity to visual change.

### Neighbor Viewer Categories

Highway neighbors are people who have views to the highway project. They can be subdivided into different viewer categories by land use. For example, residential, commercial, industrial, retail, institutional, civic, educational, recreational, and agricultural land uses may generate highway neighbors or viewer groups with distinct reasons for being in the corridor and therefore having distinct responses to changes in visual resources. Some viewers can fit into multiple categories (a neighbor can be a traveler and can be farming near the highway). For this project, the following highway neighbors were considered:

[Identify and describe neighbor viewer categories in each landscape unit and distance zone by the land use. Consider developing composite groups (e.g., residential – agricultural) that are representative of similar exposure and awareness where applicable. Categories must be easily recognizable by the affected population during public review. For each category of viewers, describe the distance from the project; the viewers’ number and density; the duration of viewing of the scene; the viewers’ expected attention; the presence of focal visual features and scenic resources; and the viewer’s expected visual quality preferences for natural harmony, cultural order, and project cohesiveness (and reasons for these preferences). This information will be used to estimate their sensitivity to visual changes in the Analysis Phase.]

[Complete Table 3‑1 by quantifying each attribute as low, medium, high; or none, some, many; or foreground, middle ground, and background for distance zones.]

Table 3‑1 Matrix of Neighbor Sensitivity to Visual Change

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject Information** | | | **Viewer Exposure** | | | **Viewer Awareness** | | | **Overall Viewer Sensitivity** |
| Neighbor Viewer Category: | Key View | Landscape Unit | Proximity | Extent | Duration | Attention | Focal Features | Scenic Resources |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

### Traveler Viewer Categories

Highway travelers are people who have views from the road. “Travelers” refers only to viewers traveling on the highway project subject to this VIA. Bicyclists, pedestrians, hikers, motorists, and other travelers outside of the highway project belong to the neighbor viewer group. The traveler group can be subdivided into different viewer categories in two different ways: by mode of travel or by reason for travel. For example, subdividing travelers by mode of travel may yield pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, car drivers and passengers, and truck drivers. Dividing the traveler viewer group into categories by reason for travel creates categories like tourists, commuters, and haulers. It is also possible to create a category using both mode and reason for travel simultaneously—for example, *bicycling tourists, carpooling commuters*. For this project, the following highway users were considered:

[Identify and describe traveler viewer categories in each landscape unit and distance zone by the mode of travel or reason of travel. Where applicable, consider using both mode and reason (e.g., bicycling tourists, carpooling commuters) or other compound categories that are representative of similar exposure and awareness. Categories must be easily recognizable by the affected population during public review. For each category of viewers, describe the distance to natural and cultural environment; the viewers’ number and density, the duration of viewing of the scene; the viewers’ expected attention; the presence of focal visual features and scenic resources; and the viewer’s expected visual quality preferences for natural harmony, cultural order, and project cohesiveness (and reasons for these preferences). This information will be used to estimate their sensitivity to visual changes in the Analysis Phase.]

[Complete Table 3‑2 by quantifying each attribute as low, medium, high; or none, some, many; or foreground, middle ground, and background for distance zones.]

Table 3‑2 Matrix of Traveler Sensitivity to Visual Change

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject Information** | | | **Viewer Exposure** | | | **Viewer Awareness** | | | **Overall Viewer Sensitivity** |
| Traveler Viewer Category: | Key View | Landscape Unit | Proximity | Extent | Duration | Attention | Focal Features | Scenic Resources |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

[Use the map of the AVE and associated landscape units produced for the Establishment Phase to illustrate and document the location and visual preferences of the affected population; provide a narrative legend with brief descriptions of each viewer category’s visual preferences, based on the viewers’ self-interests. Document the inventory of the location and interests of neighbors and travelers to the level necessary to determine their sensitivity to changes in the visual character of the AVE. Acknowledge the different categories of neighbors and travelers to provide a better understanding of visual sensitivity.]

Figure 3‑1 presents a map illustrating viewer groups and categories and their visual quality preferences.

[Insert figure]

Figure 3‑1 Neighbor and Traveler Viewers

Figure 3‑1 identifies [insert quantity] viewer categories that will be used to assess visual sensitivity to the proposed project.

# Analysis Phase

The purpose of the Analysis Phase is to determine whether the visual change, combined with visual sensitivity, will result in beneficial, adverse, or neutral visual impact, and to what degree. The VIA analysis determined the project’s visual impact by evaluating visual change (as determined by visual compatibility and visual contrast) and combining it with visual sensitivity (as determined by viewer and viewpoint sensitivity) for each landscape unit and each alternative, as represented by key views. This relationship is shown in Figure 4‑1. [Optional:] In addition, the impact visualizations were developed [provide pages or appendix number]. Finally, this VIA report was assembled.

## Visual Impact Analysis Methodology

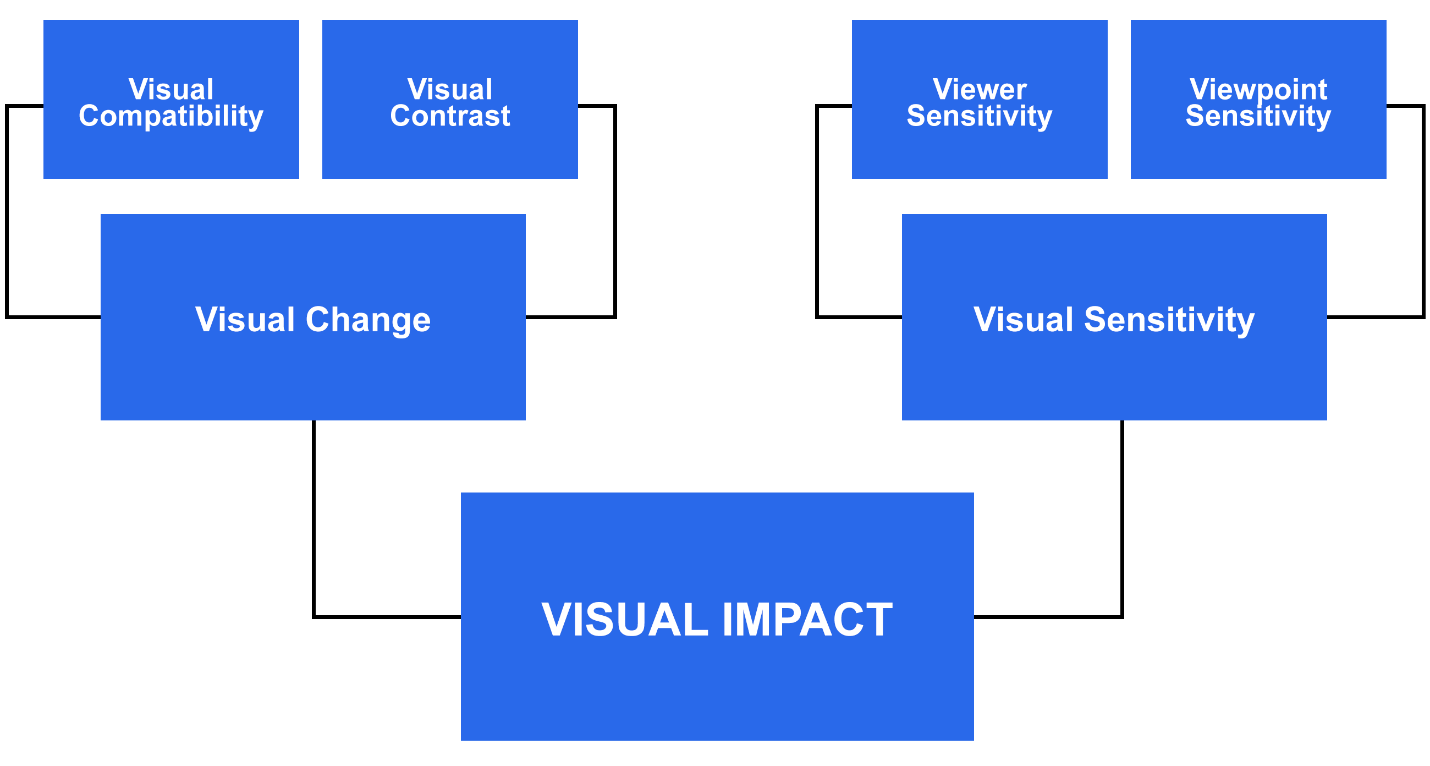


Figure 4‑1 The Relationship of the Visual Attributes that Are Evaluated to Determine the Visual Impact of a Project during the Analysis Phase

Because it is not feasible to analyze all the views in which the proposed project would be seen, it is necessary to select several key views associated with {the landscape unit/each landscape unit} that would most clearly demonstrate the visual change. Key views were also selected to represent the viewer groups that have the highest potential to be affected by the project, considering exposure and sensitivity. These key views were analyzed for each proposed alternative, including the No-Build Alternative. The evaluation was done by comparing the photograph of the existing conditions with the {visualization/elevation/perspective of} proposed conditions at each key viewpoint chosen to represent each landscape unit in the study area. Each alternative’s key views were analyzed for their visual compatibility, visual contrast, viewer sensitivity, and viewpoint sensitivity, visual change, and visual sensitivity as shown in Figure 4‑1**.** and described in the following sections. Because all key views and landscape units {were/were not} of similar importance the overall visual impact was determined {by describing the average score/by using professional judgement}. [Provide a narrative describing the reasoning behind determining the overall impact. Be forthright and clear when describing impacts, using detail and specifics, so that the severity of impacts is clear. Impacts should not be downplayed or described ambiguously. Descriptions and conclusions should clearly interpret the numbers resulting from the methodology, which may be confusing to readers.]

### [Optional] Photo Simulations

Photo simulations were developed with [describe the simulation software used (e.g., MicroStation)]. The final key views for which simulations were developed were selected from a number of other key views gathered during the Inventory Phase. The selection of the key views was based on professional judgement and the following criteria:

[Select the criteria that were used for the selection of key views:

* The view of the project was relatively unobstructed and represented the full extent of the project’s visual effect to the surrounding area.
* The viewpoint was publicly accessible and preferably was used by relatively more sensitive viewers, compared to other possible viewpoints.
* The viewpoint was in an area where scenery is valued (e.g., near a recognized scenic or visual resource).
* The view of the scenic or visual resource from the project would be blocked by project elements.
* The view of the scenic or visual resource impacted by the project was within the traveler viewer group cone of vision (in both directions of travel).
* Describe other criteria used]

[Photo simulations must accurately depict the impacts caused by the project features and be consistent with the supporting written assessment. A future “after project” simulation should show an accurate and realistic level of growth of screening plants after a certain number of years, which should be disclosed in the text.]

### Visual Compatibility

Analysis of the project’s visual compatibility considered the proposed project environment’s (e.g., grading, constructed features, vegetation cover, and ancillary visual elements) visual character, intactness, lighting, and glare, and assessed how much these components were compatible with the visual character, intactness, lighting, and glare of the natural environment (e.g., land, water, vegetation, animals, and atmospheric conditions), the cultural environment (e.g., buildings, infrastructure, other structures, and art or artifacts), and the existing project environment [Refer to *Handbook* Section 4.2]. The compatibility of each proposed project visual attribute with corresponding attributes of the natural, cultural, and existing project environments was considered for each key view and then briefly described. Based on the comparison of these visual attributes, and using professional judgement, the overall visual compatibility of each key view was described according to Table 4‑1.

Table 4‑1 Descriptive Values for Visual Compatibility and Contrast

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Highly Adverse | Moderately Adverse | Slightly Adverse | No Effect | Slightly Beneficial | Moderately Beneficial | Highly Beneficial |

### Visual Contrast

Analysis of the project’s visual contrast considered the proposed project environment’s visual qualities of vividness and unity; and assessed how much they contrast with the vividness and unity of the natural, cultural, and existing project environments [Refer to *Handbook* Section 4.3]. The contrast of the proposed project’s vividness and unity with the vividness and unity of the natural, cultural, and existing project environments was considered for each key view and then briefly described. Based on these comparisons, and using professional judgement, the overall visual contrast of each key view was described according to Table 4‑1.

### Visual Change

After analysis of visual compatibility and visual contrast for each key view of an alternative, visual change was determined for each key view based on visual compatibility and visual contrast descriptions, in accordance with Table 4‑2. [Provide a narrative describing the reasoning behind determining the overall visual change. Be forthright and clear when describing changes, using detail and specifics, so that the severity of visual changes is clear. Visual changes should not be downplayed or described ambiguously. Descriptions and conclusions should clearly interpret the numbers resulting from the methodology, which may be confusing to readers.]

Table 4‑2 Descriptive Values of Visual Change

|  | |  |  |  | Visual Compatibility |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | |  | Beneficial |  | None |  | Adverse |  |
| Visual Contrast | | Highly | Moderately | Slightly | No Effect | Slightly | Moderately | Highly |
|  | Highly | Highly | Highly | Moderately | Moderately | Slightly | Slightly | None |
| Beneficial | **Moderately** | Highly | Moderately | Moderately | Slightly | Slightly | None | Slightly |
|  | **Slightly** | Moderately | Moderately | Slightly | Slightly | None | Slightly | Slightly |
| None | **No Effect** | Moderately | Slightly | Slightly | None | Slightly | Slightly | Moderately |
|  | **Slightly** | Slightly | Slightly | None | Slightly | Slightly | Moderately | Moderately |
| Adverse | **Moderately** | Slightly | None | Slightly | Slightly | Moderately | Moderately | Highly |
|  | **Highly** | None | Slightly | Slightly | Moderately | Moderately | Highly | Highly |

### Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is determined by a VIA preparer’s judgment of levels of viewer exposure, viewer awareness, and visual quality preferences, resulting in distinct and predictable visual concerns for each viewer group and category; these factors helped to predict viewers’ sensitivity to visual change [Refer to *Handbook* Section 4.5]. Viewer sensitivity to visual change was described in accordance with Table 4‑3 for each key view.

Table 4‑3 Descriptive Values for Viewer and Viewpoint Sensitivity

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| None | Low | Moderate | High |

### Viewpoint Sensitivity

Viewpoint sensitivity is determined by a VIA preparer’s judgment of the scenic importance of a viewpoint and whether the viewpoint is part of an identified scenic resource. Sensitive viewpoints can be scenic or visual resources, vistas, landscapes, or ocean views important to neighbors or drivers. [Refer to *Handbook* Section 4.6]. Viewpoint sensitivity was described in accordance with Table 4‑3.

### Visual Sensitivity

After analysis of viewer sensitivity and viewpoint sensitivity for each key view, visual sensitivity was determined for each key view based on their viewer sensitivity and viewpoint sensitivity descriptions, in accordance with Table 4‑4. [Provide a narrative describing the reasoning behind determining the overall visual sensitivity. Be forthright and clear when describing visual sensitivity, using detail and specifics, so that the degree of visual sensitivity is clear. Visual sensitivity should not be downplayed or described ambiguously.]

Table 4‑4 Descriptive Values of Visual Sensitivity

| VISUAL SENSITIVITY | Viewer Sensitivity | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Viewpoint Sensitivity | None | Low | Moderate | High |
| **High** | Moderate | Moderate | High | High |
| **Moderate** | Low | Moderate | Moderate | High |
| **Low** | Low | Low | Moderate | Moderate |
| **None** | None | Low | Low | Moderate |

### Visual Impact

After analysis of visual change and visual sensitivity for each key view, the visual impact was determined for each key view based on their visual change and visual sensitivity descriptions, in accordance with Table 4‑5. [Provide a narrative describing the reasoning behind determining the overall visual impact. For instance, describe whether the adverse change at a key view is representative of a larger area or is it the very worst view and it is limited to a small area. Be forthright and clear when describing impacts, using detail and specifics, so that the severity of impacts is clear. Impacts should not be downplayed or described ambiguously. Refer to Section 4.8 of the VIA Handbook for additional information.]

Table 4‑5 Calculation of Visual Impact Based on Visual Change and Visual Sensitivity

|  | Visual Sensitivity | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Visual Change | None | Low | Moderate | High |
| **Highly Beneficial** | None | Low Beneficial | Moderately High Beneficial | Extremely High Beneficial |
| **Moderately Beneficial** | None | Very Low Beneficial | Moderately Low Beneficial | Moderately High Beneficial |
| **Slightly Beneficial** | None | Extremely Low Beneficial | Very Low Beneficial | Low Beneficial |
| **No Effect** | None | None | None | None |
| **Slightly Adverse** | None | Extremely Low Adverse | Very Low Adverse | Low Adverse |
| **Moderately Adverse** | None | Very Low Adverse | Moderately Low Adverse | Moderately High Adverse |
| **Highly Adverse** | None | Low Adverse | Moderately High Adverse | Extremely High Adverse |

## Alternative [Insert # or name] Key View [Insert # or name] Visual Impact Analysis

[Introduce this alternative and describe the proposed design and project aesthetic features in this key view.]

### [Optional] Photo Simulations

[If applicable, insert (or, if in an Appendix, refer to) pre-project photographs and project photo simulations of the proposed alternative, as seen from each key view selected for the alternative. Include the simulations on an 11” x 17” foldout with existing condition photographs above the simulations for comparison. Photo simulations provided below are examples only; insert appropriate photographs and descriptions as applicable.]



Figure 4‑2 Key View [insert #] – Existing Condition – Alternative [insert #]



Figure 4‑3 Key View [insert #] – Proposed Condition – Alternative [insert #]

### Visual Compatibility

[Describe the compatibility of the proposed project environment’s visual attributes—visual character, intactness, lighting, and glare—with the same attributes of the natural, cultural, and existing project environments for this key view. Provide a description of whether and to what degree night lighting and glare may be an issue in this project (i.e., reflection off a retaining wall or road surface, or placement of street lighting). A night lighting and glare analysis should be included to understand the level of impact. Analyzing nighttime/‌glare impacts may require input or assistance from a lighting specialist or engineer. Enter only a brief description of each important attribute’s compatibility in the report and using professional judgement, describe the overall visual compatibility for each key view according to Table 4‑1.]

The visual compatibility of the proposed project with the existing natural, cultural and project environments from this key view will {be highly beneficial, be moderately beneficial, be slightly beneficial, have no effect, be slightly adverse, be moderately adverse, be highly adverse}.

### Visual Contrast

[Describe in detail the contrast of the proposed project environment’s visual qualities, vividness and unity with the same qualities of the natural, cultural, and existing project environments for this key view. Enter only the brief description of each important visual quality contrast in the report, and using professional judgement, describe the overall visual contrast for each key view according to Table 4‑1.]

The visual contrast of the proposed project with the existing natural, cultural and project environments from this key view will {be highly beneficial, be moderately beneficial, be slightly beneficial, have no effect, be slightly adverse, be moderately adverse, be highly adverse}.

### Visual Change

[Summarize the project’s visual compatibility and contrast for this key view and fill out Table 4‑6. Use Table 4‑2 as a guideline to determine the description of visual change where visual compatibility and visual contrast are of the same importance. Use weighted averaging and professional judgement on projects where visual compatibility and visual contrast may be of unequal importance].

Table 4‑6 Visual Change for Key View [# or Name]

| Visual Compatibility | Visual Contrast | Visual Change |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [enter result] | [enter result] | [enter result] |

The overall visual change in the existing natural, cultural and project environments created by the proposed project as seen from this key view will {be highly beneficial, be moderately beneficial, be slightly beneficial, have no effect, be slightly adverse, be moderately adverse, be highly adverse}.

### Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer exposure, awareness, and visual quality preference for each viewer category was described in Section 3.4 of this report.

[Summarize the neighbor and traveler viewer categories identified in Section 3.4 and describe how the sensitivity of each category was determined based on its viewer exposure, awareness, and visual quality preference. Enter only a description of each neighbor and traveler viewer category, exposure, awareness and visual quality preference in the report and using professional judgement, describe the overall viewer sensitivity for each key view according to Table 4‑3]

The overall viewer sensitivity to the proposed project in the existing natural, cultural and project environments from this key view will be {none, low, moderate, high}.

### Viewpoint Sensitivity

[Describe the scenic importance of this key view and whether it contains any scenic and/or visual resources. Enter only a brief description of each scenic and visual resource, and their sensitivities in the report, and using professional judgement, describe the overall viewpoint sensitivity for each key view according to Table 4‑3}

The viewpoint sensitivity to the proposed project in the existing natural, cultural and project environments from this key view will be {none, low, moderate, high}.

### Visual Sensitivity

[Summarize viewer sensitivity and viewpoint sensitivity for this key view and fill out Table 4‑7. Determine the descriptive score for visual sensitivity in accordance with Table 4‑4.]

Table 4‑7 Visual Sensitivity for Key View [# or Name]

| Viewer Sensitivity | Viewpoint Sensitivity | Visual Sensitivity |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [enter result] | [enter result] | [enter result] |

The overall visual sensitivity to the proposed project in the existing natural, cultural and project environments as seen from this key view will be {none, low, moderate, high}.

### Visual Impact

[Summarize visual change and visual sensitivity for this key view, as analyzed in previous sections, and fill out Table 4‑8 . Use Table 4‑5 as a guideline to determine the descriptive score for visual impact where visual change and visual sensitivity are of the same importance. Use weighted averaging and professional judgement on projects where visual change and visual sensitivity may be of unequal importance.]

Table 4‑8 Visual Impact for Key View [# or Name]

| Visual Change | Visual Sensitivity | Visual Impact |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [enter result] | [enter result] | [enter result] |

The overall visual impact of the proposed project on the existing natural, cultural and project environments as seen from this key view will be {use result based on Table 4-5}.

## [Alternative (Insert # or name) Key View (Insert # or name) Visual Impact Analysis]

[Repeat Section 4.2 for all key views of this project alternative. After analyzing all key views for one alternative, fill out Section 4.4 to summarize the visual impact for that alternative.]

## Alternative [Insert # or name] Visual Impact Summary

The primary objective of the Analysis Phase was to determine the visual impact of the proposed project. This was achieved by assessing visual change and visual sensitivity, which were then combined to describe the visual impact. Temporary impacts due to the contractor’s operations and cumulative impacts were also considered.

Analysis of project alternative [insert # or name]’s visual impact at key views [insert #s or names] indicates that the visual impact will be {use result based on Table 4-5 }. [use the average of the visual impacts of all key views for this alternative where the key views and/or landscape units are of similar importance; use the weighted average of the visual impacts of all key views and professional judgement where the key views and/or landscape units are not of similar importance. Refer to Sections 4.8 and 4.9 of the VIA Handbook for additional information.]

### Summary of Visual Impacts

Table 4‑9 [list additional tables where more than 1 project alternative are proposed] provides a summary of the alternatives’ visual change, visual sensitivity, and visual impact by key view and by landscape unit.

Table 4‑9 Alternative [name] Visual Change, Sensitivity, and Impact Summary by Key View

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Key View | Visual Compatibility | Visual Contrast | Visual Change | Viewer Sensitivity | Viewpoint Sensitivity | Visual Sensitivity | Visual Impact |
| [Insert # or name] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Insert # or name] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Insert # or name] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Landscape Unit 1 Subtotal:** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Insert # or name] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Insert # or name] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Insert # or name] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Landscape Unit 2 Subtotal:** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Alternative Total:** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

[Provide a thorough but concise narrative summary of the primary visual impacts. This section should briefly restate the analysis for each of the previously described landscape units and, based on supporting analysis, characterize the overall visual impact of this alternative on the existing natural, cultural and project environments based on the descriptive average (professional judgement) where the individual key views and landscape units are (not) of similar importance. If necessary, organize the section by alternative sub-headings, visual issue sub-headings, or both. This summary can be also used to inform the executive summary at the beginning of this report.]

### Temporary Construction Visual Impacts

[Describe any temporary or permanent visual impacts (by alternative if different) caused by the contractor’s operations, such as night lighting, dust, temporary structures, hauling materials, contractor yards, tree removals, or detours. Include the expected duration of impacts and construction.]

### Potential Cumulative Impacts

[Identify past, proposed, and foreseeable future projects in the project area and its vicinity.]

Cumulative impacts are those resulting from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, combined with the potential visual impacts of this project. For this project, it has been determined that the following cumulative visual impacts may occur. [Describe the cumulative impacts, detailing whether they will affect visual resources or viewers; whether the visual impacts are beneficial or detrimental; and when the impacts would likely occur. Explain whether the cumulative impacts would occur under all or just some of the alternatives, or state whether no cumulative visual impacts would occur. The Project Landscape Architect should work closely with the Environmental Planner and PDT to determine whether the project will result in cumulative impacts. For more information on Cumulative Impact Analyses, please see the SER Other Guidance page at: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/environmental-analysis/standard-environmental-reference-ser/other-guidance#cumulative>.]

[Repeat Sections 4.2 through 4.4 for all key views for each alternative.]

## [No-Build Alternative Visual Impact Analysis]

[If applicable, consider what visual change would be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project is not constructed; e.g., not replacing the existing discordant soundwall with a new complimentarily designed soundwall would leave this segment of highway lacking unity and context sensitivity. Identify which key view(s) and landscape unit(s) could be impacted by no action.]

# Mitigation Phase (Environmental Commitments)

Caltrans and the FHWA require that a qualitative/aesthetic approach should be taken to address visual quality loss in the project area. This approach meets FHWA requirements because it addresses the actual loss of visual quality due to a project. This approach also facilitates avoidance, minimization, compensation, and/or enhancement measures that can lessen or compensate for a loss in visual quality. The inclusion of aesthetic features in the project design, discussed in Section 2 of this report, can help generate public acceptance of a project.

[Describe avoidance, minimization, compensation, and enhancement measures in Section 5.2 to address specific visual impacts. It is recommended that these be described as “Environmental Commitments” or grouped as “Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures.” Do not separate out mitigation measures; this term has specific meaning under CEQA. See *Handbook* Section 5 for additional information. These will be designed and implemented with the concurrence of the District Landscape Architect. Measures should be clearly written and not vague, so that they can be easily implemented (constructible and biddable). Measures should be justifiable, relate to specific impacts identified, and numbered (e.g., V‑1, V‑2), so that they can be tracked throughout project development and in construction, as well as in the project’s Environmental Commitments Record (ECR) to ensure compliance. See *Handbook* Section 5.2 for additional information on the ECR. Measures should provide specifics and not be generalized. For example, specify exactly what “shall/will be done,” such as the number of trees to be planted or a ratio, rather than vague promises using terms such as “this may or should be done,” “if,” etc. Environmental commitments should be determined in collaboration with the PDT to ensure that measures take into consideration design constraints (such as the clear recovery zone), other environmental resources, and can be realistically implemented. The timeframe for performance of the measure should be specified, so that it will not be deferred (unless intentionally deferred); e.g., “planting will commence prior to the end of the project’s construction phase,” or “planting will take place with a separate contract following construction.”]

[The term “significant” should not be used in the VIA due to its different meanings under NEPA and CEQA—significance determinations are addressed in the environmental document for the project.]

## Adverse Visual Effects

[Describe each instance of adverse visual impact and propose how it should be addressed (refer to *Handbook* Section 5.1). The VIA must state clearly what environmental commitments are proposed to reduce these impacts.]

[If environmental commitments for adverse impacts are proposed, the VIA must state clearly what measures are required to reduce these impacts and conduct an analysis of the visual impact of the proposed project with the environmental commitments and proposed measures to document the reduction of the proposed project’s visual impact. Environmental commitments must be clearly distinguished from standard aesthetic treatment features that are based on the Highway Design Manual, Standard Plans, Standard Specifications, or Standard Special Provisions.]

## Recommendations for Environmental Commitment Measures

[In Table 5‑1, list the environmental commitments for each visual impact identified in Table 4‑8. Measures can also be listed out in a bullet format if desired. Describe the type of environmental commitment and what the commitment would entail.] Table 5‑1 identifies the numbered environmental commitments for each visual impact.

Table 5‑1 Environmental Commitments by Visual Impact

| Visual Impact | Description of Environmental Commitments |
| --- | --- |
| A. |  |
| B. |  |
| C. |  |

# Conclusions

[Make a definitive statement regarding residual visual impacts. The following text is provided as an example only; do not copy verbatim.]

[The recommended measures would reduce the project’s visual impact as seen from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and the surrounding communities. The intent of the above-listed measures would be to reduce the effect of the project caused primarily by the additional highway lanes, reduction of highway landscaping, and the construction of noise barriers, and to provide design treatments that would reduce or enhance the aesthetic condition of the project.

Even with implementation of the measures listed above, some visual impacts would remain, regardless of the project alternative. The above-listed measures, combined with proposed project features such as erosion control and aesthetic treatments to walls, would lessen the negative visual change to the corridor. However, some of the detrimental visual impacts would remain because of the inherent alteration of scale, increased hard surface, and loss of vegetative character.]

[Add any concluding remarks if applicable.]

# References

[List references used. See the Handbook for a list and add others as applicable.]

Appendix A: Scoping Questionnaire

[Attach completed Scoping Questionnaire.]

Appendix B: Standard Field Forms

[Refer to *Handbook* Appendix B for appropriate field forms.]

Appendix C: Potential Key Views Photographs

Appendix D: Scenic and Visual Resources Photographs

Appendix E: Visualizations and/or Photo Simulations

Appendix F: Visual Change Rating Forms

Appendix G: Visual Contrast Rating Forms

Appendix H: CEQA Checklist

[Provide a discussion of the project impacts related to each CEQA Checklist question, but do not determine significance for those impacts.]

Would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

c) In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

Appendix I: Report Authors and Evaluators and Their Qualifications