

SUPPLEMENTAL VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Interstate 5/El Toro Road Interchange

July 2026

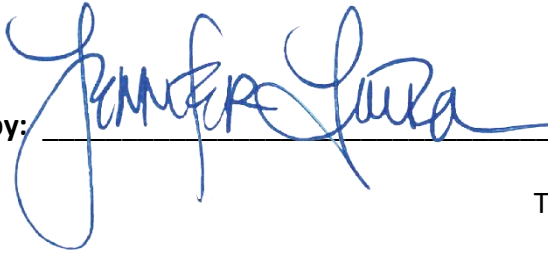
California Department of Transportation

District 12, Orange County, Interstate 5

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Prepared by:



Date: 07/09/2026

Jennifer Taira

Tatsumi and Partners, Inc.

License #4625

Approved by:



Date: 7/17/26

Eric Dickson

License #3914

Caltrans District Landscape Architect

District 12

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.

List of Appendices	5
List of Figures	5
List of Tables	5
Acronyms and Abbreviations	7
1. Purpose of Report.....	8
2. Establishment Phase	8
2.1 Project Visual Character and Quality	8
2.1.1 Project Location and Setting.....	8
2.1.2 Project Description	11
2.1.3 Project Alternatives	14
2.1.4 Project Aesthetic Features	17
2.1.5 Project Visual Character and Quality	18
2.2 Area of Visual Effect	18
2.3 Landscape Units.....	21
2.4 Scenic Resources and Visual Resources	23
2.5 Key Views.....	23
2.6 Regulatory Context.....	27
2.6.1 Applicable Regulations	27
2.6.2 Required Aesthetics and Visual Resource Related Permits	29
2.6.3 Expected Public Coordination and Feedback Needs	29
3. Inventory Phase	29
3.1 Key Views.....	29
3.1.2 Area of Visual Effect and Landscape Unit Boundaries Verification ...	30
3.1.2 Key Views toward and from the Project in each Landscape Unit	30
3.2 Landscape Visual Character	30
3.3 Landscape Visual Quality	31
3.4 Viewers.....	33
3.4.1 Neighbor Viewer Categories.....	33
3.4.2 Traveler Viewer Categories	34
4. Analysis Phase.....	37
4.1 Visual Impact Analysis Methodology	38
4.1.1 Photo Simulations	39
4.1.2 Visual Compatibility	39
4.1.3 Visual Contrast	40
4.1.4 Visual Change	40
4.1.5 Viewer Sensitivity	41
4.1.6 Viewpoint Sensitivity	41

4.1.7	Visual Sensitivity	41
4.1.8	Visual Impact.....	42
4.2	Alternative 1 Key View 1 Visual Impact Analysis	43
4.2.1	Visual Compatibility	44
4.2.2	Visual Contrast	44
4.2.3	Visual Change	45
4.2.4	Viewer Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1	45
4.2.5	Viewpoint Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1	45
4.2.6	Visual Sensitivity	45
4.2.7	Visual Impact.....	46
4.3	Alternative 1 Key View 2 Visual Impact Analysis	46
4.3.1	Visual Compatibility	47
4.3.2	Visual Contrast	48
4.3.3	Visual Change	48
4.3.4	Viewer Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2	48
4.3.5	Viewpoint Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2	49
4.3.6	Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2.....	49
4.3.7	Visual Impact.....	49
4.4	Alternative 1 Key View 3 Visual Impact Analysis (No simulation).....	50
4.4.1	Visual Compatibility	50
4.4.2	Visual Contrast	51
4.4.3	Visual Change	51
4.4.4	Viewer Sensitivity	51
4.4.5	Viewpoint Sensitivity.....	52
4.4.6	Visual Sensitivity	52
4.4.7	Visual Impact.....	52
4.5	Alternative 1 Key View 4 Visual Impact Analysis	52
4.5.1	Visual Compatibility	53
4.5.2	Visual Contrast	54
4.5.3	Visual Change	54
4.5.4	Viewer Sensitivity	54
4.5.5	Viewpoint Sensitivity.....	55
4.5.6	Visual Sensitivity	55
4.5.7	Visual Impact.....	55
4.6	Alternative 1a Key View 1 Visual Impact Analysis	55
4.6.1	Visual Compatibility	57
4.6.2	Visual Contrast	57
4.6.3	Visual Change	58

4.6.4	Viewer Sensitivity	58
4.6.5	Viewpoint Sensitivity.....	58
4.6.6	Visual Sensitivity	59
4.6.7	Visual Impact.....	59
4.7	Build Alternative 1 and its Design Variation (Build Alternative 1a) Visual Impact Summary	59
4.8	Summary of Visual Impacts.....	60
4.9	Temporary Construction Visual Impacts.....	62
4.10	Potential Cumulative Impacts	62
4.11	Mitigation Phase (Environmental Commitments).....	62
4.12	Adverse Visual Effects.....	63
5.	Recommendations for Environmental Commitment Measures	64
6.	Conclusion	64
7.	Reference.....	66

List of Appendices

Appendix A. Landscape Architecture Scoping Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment Level

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Project Vicinity.....	9
Figure 2:	Project Location	10
Figure 3:	Area of Visual Effect.....	20
Figure 4:	Landscape Units	22
Figure 5:	Key Views for Alternative 1	25
Figure 6:	Key Views for Alternative 1a	26
Figure 7:	Neighbor and Traveler Viewers.....	36
Figure 8:	The Relationship of the Visual Attributes that Are Evaluated to	38
Figure 9:	Key View 1– Existing Condition – Alternative 1	43
Figure 10:	Key View 1 – Proposed Condition – Alternative 1	44
Figure 11:	Key View 2– Existing Condition – Alternative 1	47
Figure 12:	Key View 2 – Proposed Condition – Alternative 1	47
Figure 13:	Key View 3 – Existing Condition – Alternative 1	50
Figure 14:	Key View 4– Existing Condition – Alternative 1	53
Figure 15:	Key View 4– Proposed Condition – Alternative 1	53
Figure 16:	Key View 1– Existing Condition – Alternative 1a.....	56
Figure 17:	Key View 1– Proposed Condition – Build Alternative 1a	57

List of Tables

Table 1:	Matrix of Neighbor Sensitivity to Visual Change.....	33
Table 2:	Matrix of Traveler Sensitivity to Visual Change	35
Table 3:	Descriptive Values for Visual Compatibility and Contrast.....	40
Table 4:	Descriptive Values of Visual Change	40
Table 5:	Descriptive Values for Viewer and Viewpoint Sensitivity	41
Table 6:	Descriptive Values of Visual Sensitivity.....	42
Table 7:	Calculation of Visual Impact.....	42
Table 8:	Visual Change for Key View 1 Alternative 1	45
Table 9:	Visual Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1	46
Table 10:	Visual Impact for Key View 1 Alternative 1	46
Table 11:	Visual Change for Key View 2 Alternative 1	48
Table 12:	Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2	49
Table 13:	Visual Impact for Alternative 1 Key View 2.....	49
Table 14:	Visual Change for Key View 3 Alternative 1	51
Table 15:	Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 3	52
Table 16:	Visual Impact for Alternative 1 Key View 3.....	52
Table 17:	Visual Change for Alternative 1 Key View 4.....	54
Table 18:	Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 4	55
Table 19:	Visual Impact for Alternative 1 Key View 4.....	55

Table 20:	Visual Change for Key View 1 Alternative 1a	58
Table 21:	Visual Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1a	59
Table 22:	Visual Impact for Key View 1 Alternative 1a.....	59
Table 23:	Calculation of Visual Impact Based on Visual Change and Visual.....	59
Table 24:	Alternative 1 and 1a Visual Change, Sensitivity, and Impact Summary by Key View	60
Table 25:	Environmental Commitments by Visual Impact.....	64

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
APN	assessor's parcel number
ATSPM	Automated Traffic Signal Performance Measure
AVE	area of visual effect
BMPs	best management practices
BT	Bluetooth
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CV	connected vehicle
DMS	dynamic message sign
EB	eastbound
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FSP	freight signal priority
<i>Handbook</i>	<i>Caltrans 2023 VIA Handbook</i>
I-5	Interstate 5
ICMS	Integrated Corridor Management System
KV	key view
NB	northbound
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
O-D	origin-destination
OBU	onboard unit
OCTA	Orange County Transportation Authority
PM	post mile
Project	I-5/El Toro Road Interchange Project
RSU	roadside unit
SB	southbound
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program
TCE	temporary construction easement
TDM	Transportation Demand Management
TIM	traveler information message
TSM	Transportation System Management
TSMO	Transportation Systems Management and Operation
TSP	transit signal priority
VIA	visual impact assessment
VIVDS	Video Imaging Vehicle Detection System
VRU	vulnerable road user

1. Purpose of Report

This supplemental visual impact assessment serves to update the approved Visual Impact Assessment (VIA), dated February 2019 for the proposed project. The objectives of this supplemental visual impact assessment (VIA) report are to document potential visual impacts caused by the proposed project, and to propose measures that lessen any identified detrimental impacts. Visual impacts are demonstrated by identifying visual resources in the project area, measuring the degree of change that occurs as a result of the project, and predicting how the affected public responds to or perceives 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 aligns with the directions and examples included in the *California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) 2023 Via Handbook (Handbook)*, available at: <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/design/documents/via-handbook--a11y.pdf>.

2. Establishment Phase

The Establishment Phase consists primarily of a desk assessment of available data about the Project and the establishment of basic visual attributes of the Project and its surroundings. A reconnaissance site visit was conducted on February 2, 2024, by Tatsumi and Partners, Inc. to better understand the Project's visual setting. The Scoping Questionnaire was completed, and the appropriate level of VIA report was determined; the Scoping Questionnaire is provided in Appendix A. Project visual character and quality are described. The area of visual effect (AVE) is established. Potential landscape units within the AVE are identified and described. Scenic and visual resources within the AVE are identified and documented. Potential key views within the AVE are identified, and applicable aesthetic-related regulations, required permits, and public review and coordination considerations are also identified.

2.1 Project Visual Character and Quality

2.1.1 Project Location and Setting

The Interstate 5 (I-5)/El Toro Road Interchange Project (Project) limits on I-5 extend from approximately 0.2 miles south of the Los Alisos Boulevard Overcrossing (postmile [PM] 17.8) to approximately 0.2 miles south of the Lake Forest Drive Overcrossing (PM 19.7), a distance of approximately 1.9 miles. The Project is located within the cities of Lake Forest, Laguna Woods, and Laguna Hills in Orange County, California. The surrounding landscape is characterized by distant coastal communities, rolling hills, and canyons. The Project area is situated within an alluvial plain that is semi-enclosed by the Santa Ana Mountains to the northeast and the San Joaquin Hills to the west, with elevations ranging approximately from 320 to 380 feet. Land uses within the corridor are primarily urban, including residential, commercial, and civic uses, as well as areas of community parks and open space. Figures 1 and 2 presents a map identifying the Project Vicinity and Project Location, respectively, and provide site context.

Figure 1: Project Vicinity

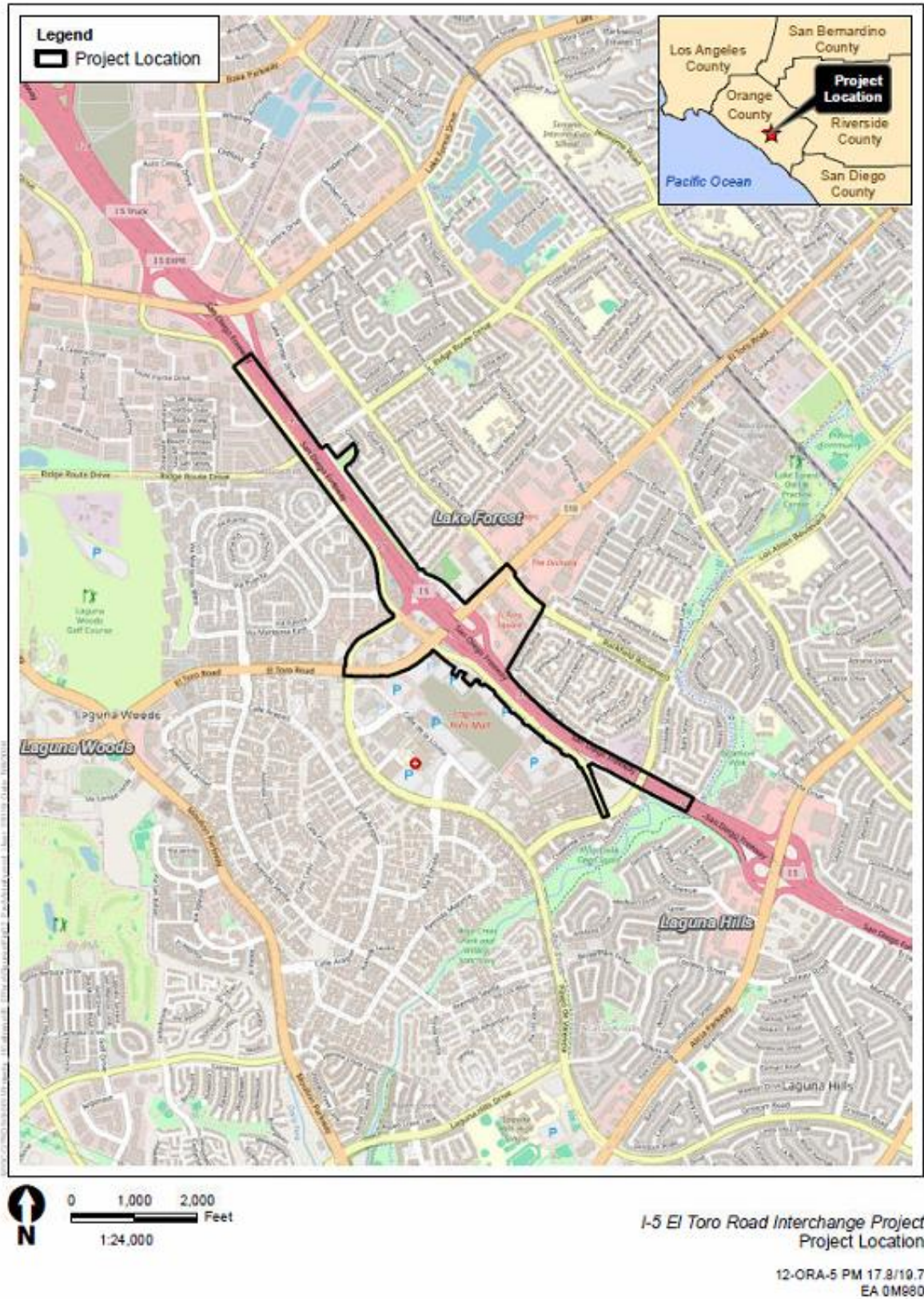


Figure 1

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Project Vicinity

12-ORA-5 PM 17.8/19.7
EA 0M980

Figure 2: Project Location



2.1.2 Project Description

The Project proposes to modify and improve the existing I-5/El Toro Road Interchange. Project improvements extend along I-5 from 0.2 mile south of the Los Alisos Boulevard Overcrossing to 0.2 mile south of the Lake Forest Drive Overcrossing. Additional Project improvements are proposed along El Toro Road, Paseo De Valencia, Avenida De La Carlota, and Bridger Road. The purpose of the Project is to improve traffic flow, optimize traffic signalization, improve traffic mobility at and through adjacent local street intersections, reduce freeway ramp queuing, and apply technology to help manage traffic demand.

Common Design Features of the Build Alternatives

This section discusses the common design features of the Build Alternatives. The I-5/El Toro Road Interchange Project area is complex and includes heavy traffic volumes, closely spaced intersections, and varied land uses; thus design solutions are challenging. As a result, the Build Alternatives that have been developed included numerous unique design features, and common design features are limited. The following common design features apply to all of the Build Alternatives.

Transportation System Management (TSM)/Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

TSM elements would be included in each of the Build Alternatives. The TSM/TDM technology improvements would include the deployment of technologies with focus on improving Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) at each of the intersections, along the I-5 and the critical arterials, as well as the region as a whole. Design and deployment of these technological improvements would require close coordination between local cities and Caltrans. The details of deployment will depend on local agency TSMO capabilities and preferences, the ability to operate and maintain devices and systems, regional and local ITS architecture, and systems integration and interoperability. The range of technologies and their associated applications for TSM/TDM are listed below and would apply to Build Alternatives 1 and 3:

- *Advanced Traffic Signal Systems and Intersection Safety* – Deploy technology to improve and optimize traffic operations at intersections and along the arterials while making it safer for both vehicles and vulnerable road users.
 - Signal system upgrade – Upgrade the existing cities' signal systems and deploy the adaptive strategy application.
 - Controller and cabinet upgrades – Upgrade the controller, firmware, and cabinet, as needed.
 - Video Imaging Vehicle Detection System (VIVDS) cameras – Deploy VIVDS at select intersections.
 - Video analytics application – Deploy video analytics solution over the VIVDS cameras to detect vulnerable road users (VRUs) and intersection safety events including Automated Traffic Signal Performance Measures (ATSPMs) for performance measures and general data collection to assess

traffic signal operations, identify potential safety improvements, improve mobility, and increase the efficiency of signalized intersections for all users.

- Roadside units (RSU)/WiFi/Bluetooth (BT) – Deploy connected vehicles (CV) RSUs to communicate with cars equipped with onboard units (OBUs) and provide traveler information messages (TIMs) and safety warning messages. The RSUs also come equipped with WiFi and BT readers that will be used to calculate real-time travel times and origin- destination (O-D) information.
- CV applications – Deploy CV applications in support of providing travelers with essential information including safety alerts. Potential CV applications include:
 - Work zone warning
 - Pedestrians and bikes warning
 - Incident information
 - Mobility data (travel time and O-D)
 - Red light violation warning
 - Wrong way entry warning
- Pedestrian, bicyclist, and other micromobility safety enhancements – Deploy technology for pedestrian and bicycle safety including detection, automated signal actuation, touchless accessible pedestrian signal, and blank out signs with no right turn on red restrictions when they are present.
- Transit signal priority (TSP) and freight signal priority (FSP) – Deploy technology for the provision of TSP and FSP.
- Advanced Freeway/Regional Management Systems Enhancements – Expand, upgrade, and integrate the existing Caltrans regional management system.
 - VIVDS cameras – Deploy VIVDS cameras at the critical locations along I-5 for surveillance and integration with the video analytics solution.
 - Video analytics applications – Deploy video analytics solution over the I-5 VIVDS cameras to automate the process of detecting incidents, slowdown, end of queue, stalled vehicles, and others.
 - Digital corridor – Expand the existing Caltrans simulation and forecasting model to cover the arterials and intersections along the I-5 corridor in support of applying the existing Caltrans Integrated Corridor Management System (ICMS) to this project.
 - ICMS – Expand the existing Caltrans ICMS to arterials and intersections along the I-5 corridor to automate the process of incident management, response plans selection and deployment of appropriate strategies along the recommended diversion routes.

- RSU/WiFi/BT – Deploy RSUs along the I-5 corridor to communicate with cars equipped with OBUs and provide TIMs and safety warning messages. The RSUs also come equipped with WiFi and BT readers that will be used to calculate real- time travel times and O-D information.
- CV applications – Deploy CV applications in support of providing travelers with essential information including safety alerts. Proposed I-5 CV applications are:
 - End of queue warning
 - Work zone warning
 - Incident information
 - ICMS response plans
 - Mobility data (travel time and O-D)
 - Curve speed warning
 - Speed limit warning
 - Wrong way entry warning
- TSMO data hub/data exchange – Expand on the Caltrans regional TSMO data hub by interfacing with external and internal systems as well as third party data providers to collect and store data, provide ability to analyze, generate reports, and exchange data with authorized users.
- Work zone data exchange – Deploy an application that will interface with regional stakeholders planned and active construction and special events, integrate them with the TSMO data hub, and provide notifications as well as access to all authorized users.
- Advanced Traveler Information Systems – Provide travelers with real time traffic information and safety related warnings.
 - Dynamic message signs (DMS) – Deploy DMSs in appropriate locations to inform travelers enroute.
 - Dynamic route guidance message signs (trailblazer signs) – Deploy signs along the potential diversion routes to bypass incidents.
 - 511 traveler information – Provide 511 system with the access to regional TSMO data hub to keep travelers informed.
 - Connected Vehicles OBU – Communicate real time traveler information messages as well as safety warnings to vehicles OBUs using the RSUs.
 - TMCs, Communications, and Networking Upgrade – The improvements will include:
 - Systems at city and Caltrans Traffic Management Centers,

- Communications between centers and field equipment, and
- Related networking hardware and software, including the ability to share data and video feeds.

Lighting

All lighting that would be impacted within the Project limits would be replaced in accordance with Caltrans or City standard lighting.

Water Quality

Best Management Practices (BMPs) for water quality treatment would be provided.

2.1.3 Project Alternatives

The proposed alternatives for the I-5/El Toro Road Interchange Project are described below.

Build Alternative 1

Build Alternative 1 proposes the following improvements:

- Southbound (SB) I-5 El Toro Road Exit: The existing SB I-5 El Toro Road exit lane would be reconstructed to be a two-lane off-ramp that splits, with one lane assigned to the El Toro Road West, using the existing hook ramp connecting to the four-way intersection at Avenida De La Carlota and Paseo De Valencia, while one lane would be assigned to a new El Toro Road East off-ramp connecting to Avenida De La Carlota south of El Toro Road.
 - SB I-5 El Toro Road West Off-ramp: The existing SB I-5 El Toro Road West off-ramp would retain the same lane configuration but would be reconstructed and realigned.
 - SB I-5 El Toro Road East Off-ramp: A new bridge would be constructed to accommodate the new El Toro Road East off-ramp that would cross over the existing SB I-5 hook on-ramp and El Toro Road. The additional SB I-5 off-ramp serving eastbound (EB) El Toro Road motorists would terminate in a hook ramp configuration, creating a three-legged intersection at Avenida De La Carlota, south of El Toro Road.
- SB I-5 On-ramp from Avenida De La Carlota: The existing SB I-5 on-ramp from El Toro Road would be replaced with a new hook on-ramp from Avenida De La Carlota, adjacent to the new off-ramp described above and south of El Toro Road.
- Avenida De La Carlota: An approximately 0.25-mile segment of Avenida De La Carlota south of El Toro Road would be realigned approximately 80 feet southwest. From the southern end of the Project limits up to the new on/off-ramp intersection, Avenida De La Carlota would consist of two lanes in each direction. Approaching the El Toro Road intersection, northbound Avenida De La Carlota would consist of one dedicated left turn lane, one through lane and two dedicated right-turn lanes.

On southbound Avenida De La Carlota, approaching the new on-/off-ramp intersection, two dedicated left turn lanes and two through lanes are proposed.

- SB I-5 On-ramp Opposite Paseo De Valencia: No modifications would be made to the existing SB I-5 hook on-ramp opposite Paseo De Valencia.
- Northbound (NB) I-5 On-ramp from Westbound El Toro Road: The NB I-5 on-ramp from westbound El Toro Road is a two-lane on-ramp. The I-5/El Toro Road Interchange Project would lengthen this ramp, merging with the NB I-5 mainline approximately 0.15 mile north of the existing merge point.
- NB I-5 On-ramp from Eastbound El Toro Road: The NB I-5 loop on-ramp from eastbound El Toro Road would be maintained.
- Bridger Road: The existing terminus on Bridger Road cul-de-sac would be relocated approximately 100 feet east to accommodate the realigned NB I-5 on-ramp from westbound El Toro Road.
- El Toro Road: Along eastbound El Toro Road, approaching the intersection with Avenida De La Carlota, four through lanes and one dedicated right turn lane are proposed.
- SB I-5 On-ramp from Eastbound El Toro Road: The existing SB I-5 on-ramp from El Toro Road would be maintained.

Structures

Alternative 1 would not impact existing structures. Under Alternative 1, one new structure (e.g., bridge) is proposed along SB I-5 to accommodate the new El Toro Road East off-ramp that would cross over the existing SB I-5 hook on-ramp and El Toro Road.

Right-of-Way

A parcel is defined as assessor's parcel numbers (APNs) having the same ownership and the same use. In addition, the APNs are contiguous to each other. Temporary construction easements (TCEs), partial fee acquisitions, and full fee acquisitions along I-5 would be required to accommodate the proposed improvements. TCEs are expected to be required at nine parcels, totaling approximately 1.66 acres. Partial fee acquisitions are also anticipated at nine parcels, totaling approximately 2.65 acres. Full fee acquisitions are expected to be required at 2 parcels totaling approximately 1.51 acres.

Signage

Under Build Alternative 1, some existing signage would need to be replaced, and new signage would be installed along the I-5 mainline and city streets, within the Project limits.

Sound Walls

Under Build Alternative 1, existing soundwalls along the southbound I-5 off-ramp to El Toro Road west and the northbound I-5 on-ramp from westbound El Toro Road would be reconstructed at the new edge of shoulder. Modified soundwall heights for these existing walls would be analyzed in the Noise Study Report and Noise Abatement Decision Report.

New soundwalls would be constructed as part of the project based on the findings of the Noise Study Report, Noise Abatement Decision Report, and public polling.

Landscaping

Build Alternative 1 proposes replacement landscaping and irrigation within Caltrans right-of-way and city right-of-way at the southbound I-5/El Toro off-ramp, and along Avenida De La Carlota and southbound I-5 on-ramp. Hardscaping would be installed along the northbound I-5 on-ramp. Existing planting and irrigation systems removed during construction would be replaced in accordance with Caltrans or city design standards depending on the location.

Pedestrian Facilities

The following sidewalks would be reconstructed or modified under Build Alternative 1:

- Approximately 375 feet of sidewalk along eastbound El Toro Road, approaching Avenida De La Carlota would be reconstructed.
- Continuing along eastbound El Toro Road, the sidewalks between Avenida De La Carlota and Bridger Road would also be replaced.
- Approximately 1,200 feet of sidewalk along southbound Avenida De La Carlota would be reconstructed.
- The existing sidewalk along northbound Avenida De La Carlota, south of El Toro Road would be removed.
- Approximately 290 feet of sidewalk along the shifted cul-de-sac on Bridger Road would be reconstructed.
- The curb ramp on the northwest corner of Bridger Road and El Toro Road would be reconstructed to accommodate the NB I-5 on-ramp realignment.
- All reconstructed pedestrian facilities would be compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Design Variation: Build Alternative 1a

A design option is proposed for Build Alternative 1 that includes all features described above in addition to an approximately 90-foot public street entering the Village of Laguna Hills development at the new southbound I-5/Avenida De La Carlota ramp terminal intersection south of El Toro Road. The addition of this public street would create a four-way intersection at the new southbound I-5 and Avenida De La Carlota ramp.

Right-of-Way

A parcel is defined as APNs having the same ownership and the same use. In addition, the APNs are contiguous to each other. TCEs, partial fee acquisitions, and full fee acquisitions along I-5 would be required to accommodate the proposed improvements

proposed under Build Alternative 1a. TCEs are expected to be required at nine parcels, totaling approximately 1.71 acres. Partial fee acquisitions are also anticipated at nine parcels, totaling approximately 2.87 acres. Full fee acquisitions are expected to be required at 2 parcels totaling approximately 1.51 acres.

Build Alternative 3

Build Alternative 3 proposes standalone TSM/TDM improvements. TSM strategies increase the efficiency of existing facilities; they are actions that increase the number of vehicle trips a facility can carry without increasing the number of through lanes. TDM focuses on regional means of reducing the number of vehicle trips and vehicle miles traveled as well as increasing vehicle occupancy. All of the TSM/TDM improvements listed under Section 5.1, Common Features of the Build Alternatives would be implemented. A layout plan is not provided for Build Alternative 3 because it only includes technology improvements, and no physical or geometric improvements are proposed. No ground disturbance would be required under Alternative 3.

No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative proposes no action, where no construction or improvements would be made to the I-5/El Toro Road interchange apart from proposed projects that are under development or currently under construction. The No-Build Alternative would not address the issues and deficiencies within the Project limits. This alternative, however, does not preclude the construction of future improvements.

Alternatives Excluded from Analysis

This Visual Impact Assessment examines Build Alternative 1 and its design variation (Build Alternative 1a). Build Alternative 3 and the No-Build Alternative are excluded from detailed visual impact analysis as they would not result in any physical or geometric improvements, or ground disturbance.

2.1.4 Project Aesthetic Features

Build Alternative 1

Build Alternative 1 would incorporate aesthetic features intended to enhance the visual experience of the Project area. These features would include architectural treatment of bridge structures consistent with column types and aesthetic treatments on new soundwall structures. Landscaping that may be removed during construction is proposed to be replaced with ornamental plantings and tree coverage, consistent with Caltrans practices for classified landscape freeways, to minimize visual impacts and maintain the area's aesthetic character. These aesthetic features are intended to help integrate new infrastructure into the surrounding community while maintaining the region's overall visual character.

Design Variation: Build Alternative 1a

Build Alternative 1a is a proposed a design variation of Build Alternative 1 that , in addition to all features proposed under Build Alternative 1, would include an approximately 90-foot public street entering the Village of Laguna Hills at the new southbound I-5/Avenida De La

Carlota ramp terminal intersection south of El Toro Road. The addition of this public street would create a four-way intersection at the southbound I-5 and Avenida De La Carlota ramp terminal. Aesthetic features for Build Alternative 1a would be the same as those proposed for Build Alternative 1.

2.1.5 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.

Alternative Build 1

Alternative Build 1 consists of a linear form defined by proposed barriers and curving off-ramps at Avenida De La Carlota, Paseo De Valencia, and El Toro Road. The freeway mainline (I-5) and connecting roadways (El Toro Road, Cavanaugh Road, Gowdy Avenue, Bridger Road, Avenida De La Carlota, and Paseo De Valencia) are surrounded by commercial, residential, community, park/open space, civic, and transportation uses. The most prominent visual feature associated with Alternative Build 1 would be a new bridge off-ramp serving El Toro Road, which is a prominent visual element in near- and mid-range views as it traverses the skyline.

Existing ornamental landscaping and mature trees are present within the Project area. Distant views of the Santa Ana Mountains and the San Joaquin Hills are available to the northeast and west, respectively. Colors associated with Alternative Build 1 are predominantly shades of gray typical of freeway infrastructure; however, surrounding urban development includes whites, tans, browns, and reds. A variety of green tones are visible in association with ornamental landscaping and mature trees. The vividness and unity of the existing Project features are considered moderate due to the presence of mature trees and landscaping; however, vertical elements such as overhead powerlines detract from the visual pattern. The existing landscape along Gowdy Avenue is reduced to accommodate the widened northbound on-ramp, and an existing soundwall with vines are present at this location. Freeway signage and overhead utilities reduce overall intactness. Overall, the visual character and visual quality associated with Alternative Build 1 are considered moderate.

Alternative 1a

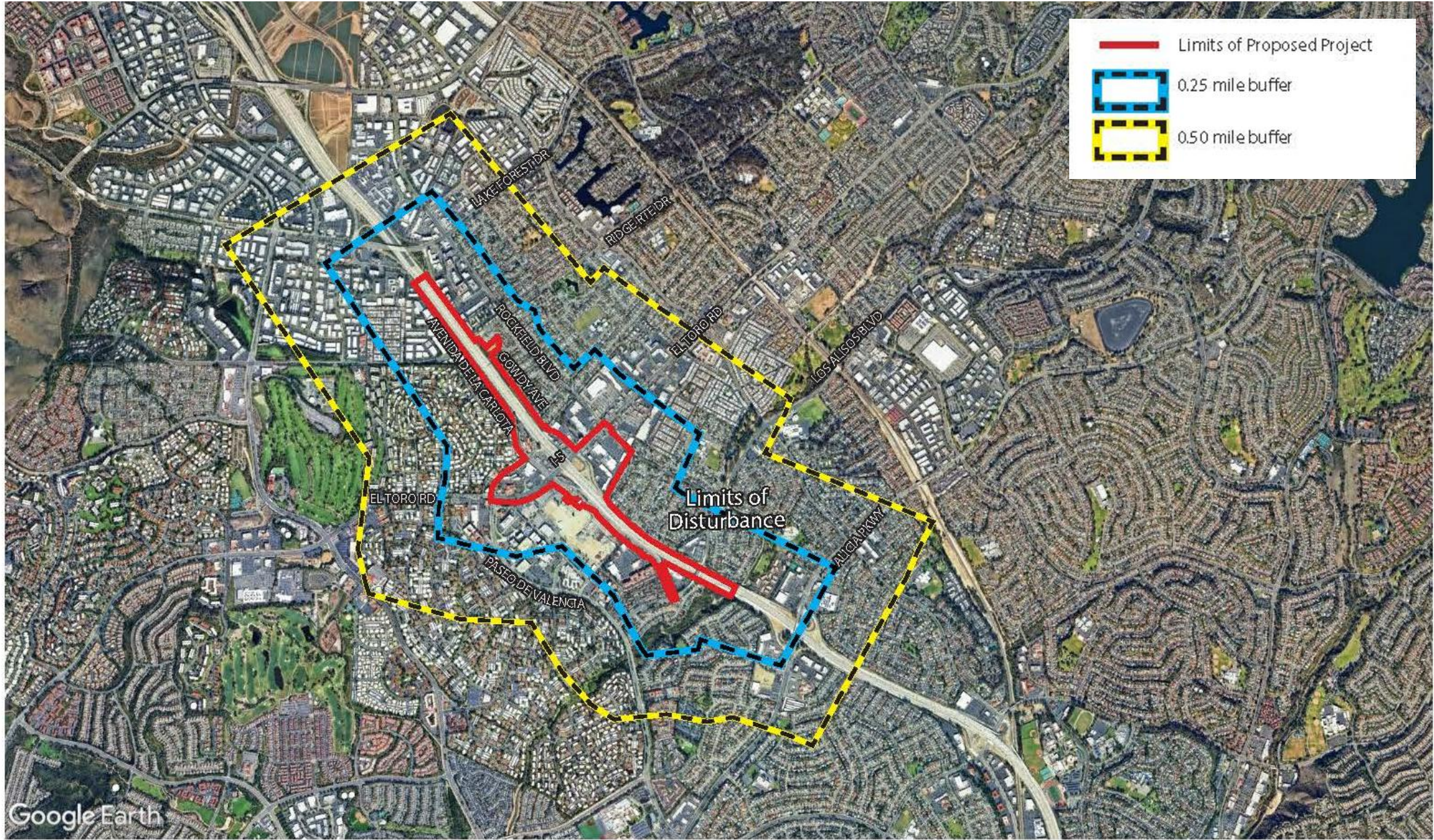
Alternative 1a is a variation of Alternative 1 that differs primarily along the Avenida De La Carlota parkway near the Laguna Hills Mall driveway. Surrounding urban development connects with the parkway landscape and contributes colors of green, tan, red, and gray to the visual environment. The parkway along Avenida De La Carlota provides continuity between adjacent commercial areas and local plazas. The overall visual character and visual quality of Alternative 1a are similar to those described for Alternative Build 1.

2.2 Area of Visual Effect

The area of visual effect (AVE) for the Project was developed based on review of aerial imagery, including Google Maps, and site visits conducted to observe existing landscaping, terrain, and structures that affect visibility of the Project. Existing topography within the AVE is relatively flat, and the surrounding area is characteristic of urban Orange

County. Land uses include multistory and single-story commercial buildings and expansive retail parking lots. City streets include ornamental landscaping and mature trees, with more developed streetscapes present along El Toro Road compared to Avenida De La Carlota and Paseo de Valencia. The freeway abuts both residential and commercial/retail properties. Based on these factors, the Project's viewshed consists of areas from which the Project was visible and apparent to viewers. Figure 3 presents a map depicting the AVE, the Project area, and associated landscape units.

Figure 3: Area of Visual Effect



Source: Google Earth

NOT TO SCALE NORTH
▲

AREA OF VISUAL EFFECT

SOURCE: TATSUMI AND PARTNERS, INC.

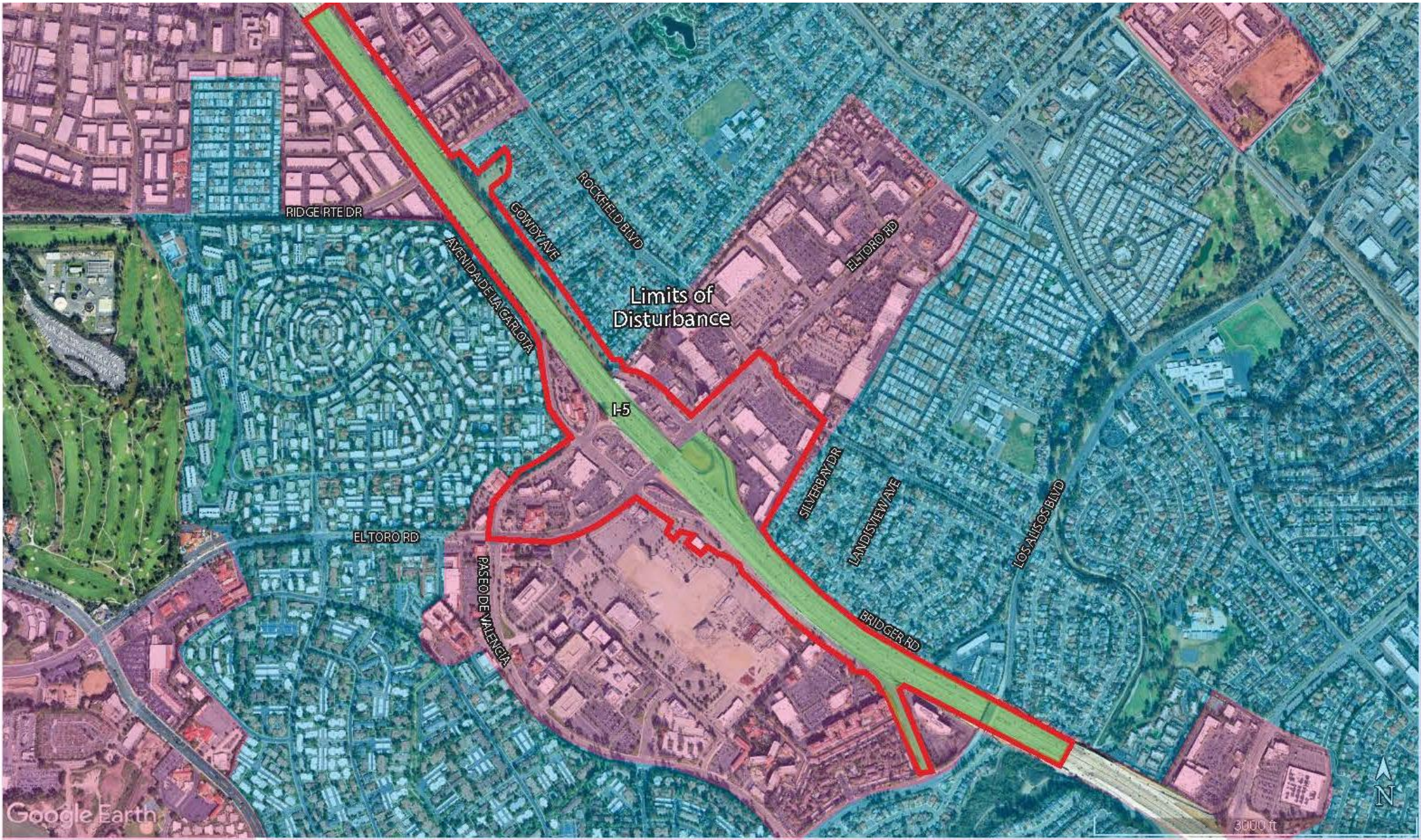
JUNE 2026

2.3 Landscape Units

The Project AVE corridor is divided into a series of landscape units. Each landscape unit is an area of the AVE with its own distinctive visual character. For this Project, the following two landscape units and their associated key views are used to assess visual impacts associated with the Project. Each landscape unit is differentiated from other units by both its spatial extent and its visual resources. Figure 3 presents a map illustrating the landscape units within the Project area.

- Landscape Unit A - Commercial/Retail
- Landscape Unit B – Residential
- Landscape Unit C – I-5 Motorists

Figure 4: Landscape Units



Source: Google Earth

- Limits of Disturbance
- Residential Areas
- Commercial Areas
- I-5 Motorist

NOT TO SCALE NORTH

LANDSCAPE UNITS

SOURCE: TATSUMI AND PARTNERS, INC.

JUNE 2026

2.4 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. For the purposes of this report, “scenic resources” are defined as resources officially designated by federal, state, regional, tribal, or local authorities, whereas “visual resources” are features that exist within the Project area of visual effect (AVE) without formal designation. Additional information regarding scenic resource identification is provided in the VIA Handbook, Appendix A.

According to the State Scenic Highways Mapping System, there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways within the Project vicinity. The County of Orange General Plan designates El Toro Road between State Route 73 and Santa Margarita Parkway as a Landscape Corridor under the Scenic Highway Plan. This Landscape Corridor consists of developed or developing areas designated for special treatment to create pleasant driving environments and enhance community character.

The Laguna Hills General Plan recognizes Aliso Creek and Veeh Reservoir as important open space and biological resources. The City of Lake Forest General Plan identifies the Santa Ana Mountains, trees, hillsides, and other open landscapes as visual features that contribute interest and landmarks within the urban environment and help establish a sense of place. The Laguna Woods General Plan does not identify scenic vistas or designated scenic resources within the city’s sphere of influence.

2.5 Key Views

Alternative 1, Key View 1: Northern view at the Paseo De Valencia off-ramp realignment and new off-ramp bridge to Avenida De La Carlota. This location is within a mixed commercial and residential landscape unit. This view was selected because it is a large intersection where both commercial and residential viewers experienced views of the ramp realignment and bridge structure, including the removal of existing mature trees. See Figure 4.

Alternative 1, Key View 2: Eastern view from Gowdy Avenue toward Bridger Road and the added lanes to the northbound on-ramp from El Toro Road. This location is within a residential landscape unit. This view was selected because the additional northbound on-ramp lane and revised street configuration at Bridger Road affected local residents, including the reduction of existing sound walls and landscaping and new retaining wall/soundwalls that come into the existing parkway. See Figure 4.

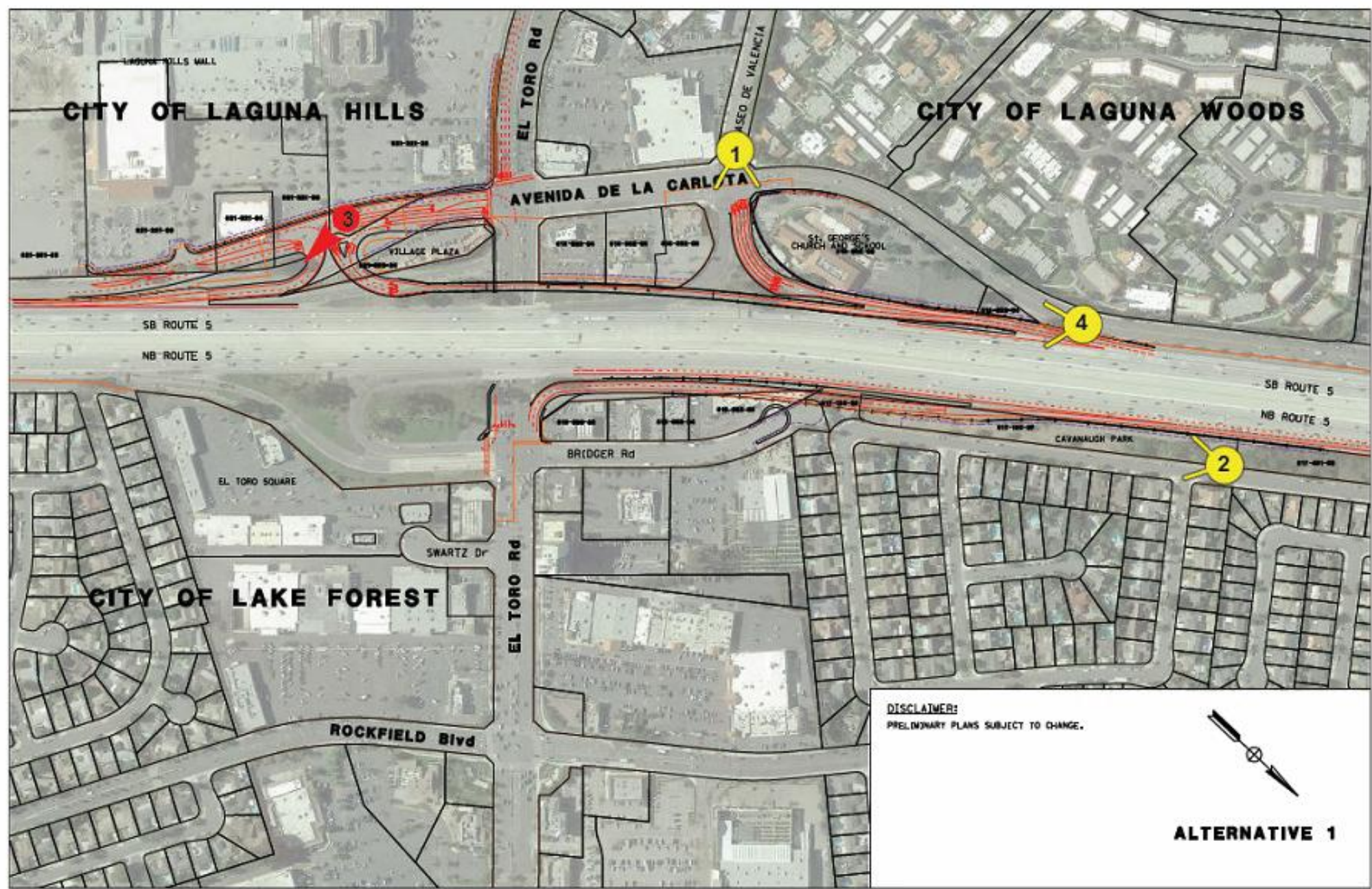
Alternative 1, Key View 3: Eastern view at Avenida De La Carlota toward the new on- and off-ramps. This location is within a commercial landscape unit. This view was selected because the new ramps required removal of existing businesses on both sides of the roadway and widening of the existing frontage road. See Figure 4.

Alternative 1, Key View 4: Eastern view from the southbound I-5 mainline toward the Paseo De Valencia offramp. This view represents freeway motorists traveling southbound on I-5. This view was selected because motorists exiting at Paseo De Valencia or continuing southbound observed the removal of existing trees and landscaping resulting

from the off-ramp realignment and the addition of the offramp structure and new retaining walls leading toward Avenida De La Carlota. See Figure 4.

Alternative 1a, Key View 1: Western view along Avenida De La Carlota toward the new on- and off-ramps. This location is within a commercial landscape unit. This view was selected because the new ramps resulted in removal of existing businesses on both sides of the roadway and the addition of lanes along the frontage road. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Key Views for Alternative 1



INTERSTATE 5 (I-5) EL TORO ROAD INTERCHANGE VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
BUILD ALTERNATIVE 1
PRELIMINARY KEY VIEW LOCATIONS

LEGEND:

#

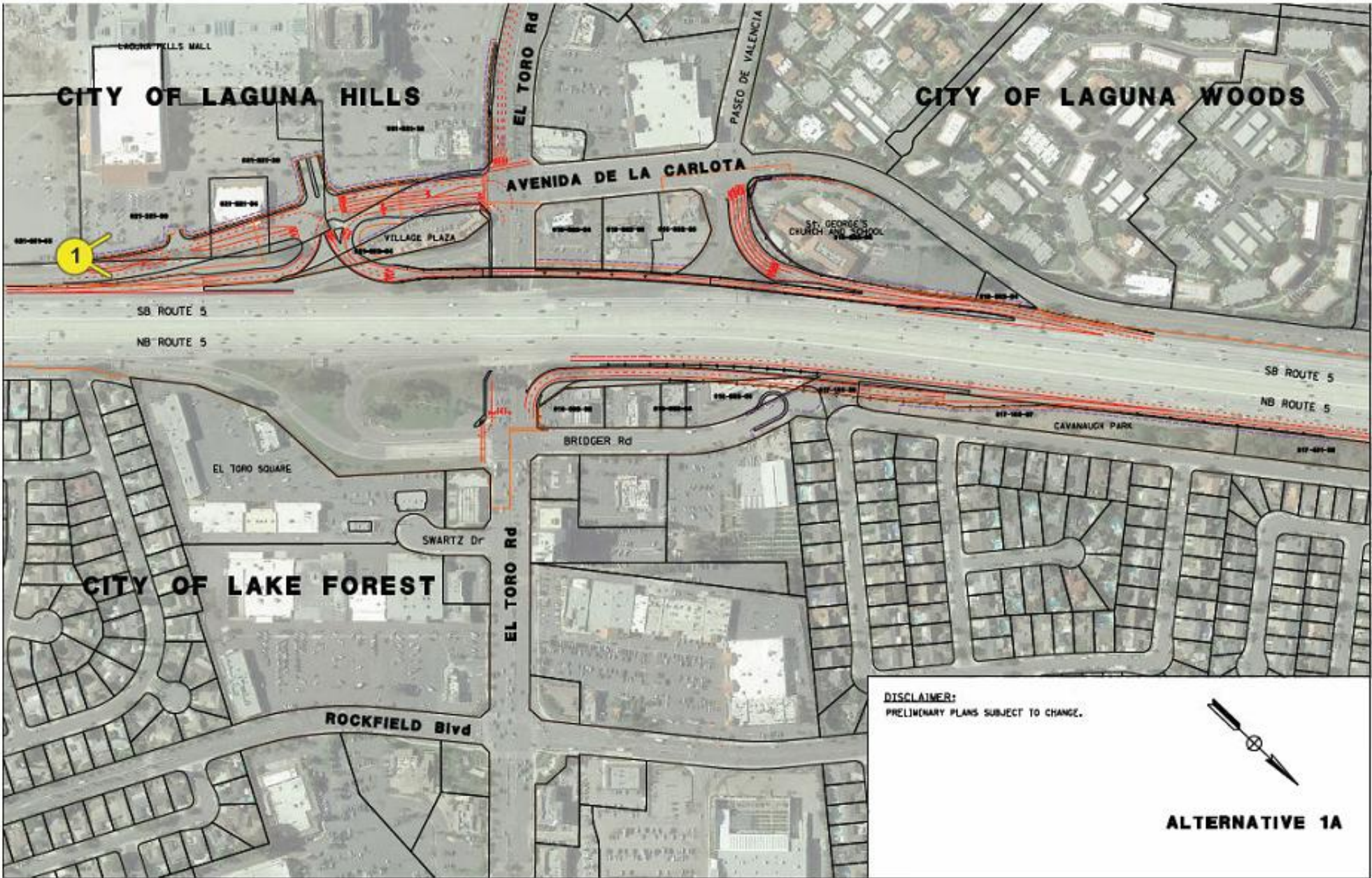
Key View + Photo Simulation

- Existing conditions
- Before and after simulation
- Description write up in VIA Report

Key View

- Existing conditions
- No after simulation
- Description write up in VIA Report

Figure 6: Key Views for Alternative 1a



INTERSTATE 5 (I-5) EL TORO ROAD INTERCHANGE VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
BUILD ALTERNATIVE 1a
PRELIMINARY KEY VIEW LOCATIONS

- LEGEND:
- Key View + Photo Simulation
 - Existing conditions
 - Before and after simulation
 - Description write up in VIA Report

2.6 Regulatory Context

2.6.1 Applicable Regulations

The Project corridor is located within the City of Lake Forest along northbound I-5 and within the cities of Laguna Hills and Laguna Woods along southbound I-5. Interstate 5 at the Project site is not identified as a California State Scenic Highway. However, El Toro Road within the Project area is designated as a Landscape Corridor under the County of Orange General Plan Scenic Highway Plan. The County of Orange General Plan defines a Landscape Corridor as a route that traverses developed or developing areas and is designated for special treatment to provide a pleasant driving environment and enhance community character. Development within the corridor is intended to complement the Landscape Corridor and be consistent with the County of Orange General Plan. The following summarizes relevant visual resource policies of the County of Orange and affected cities.

County of Orange

The County of Orange General Plan includes the following objectives and policies pertaining to visual resources:

- Offer of Dedication: Where necessary to preserve unique or special visual features, impose conditions on development within a scenic highway corridor to require dedication of scenic easements consistent with the adopted corridor plan (Transportation Element, Policy 1.2)
- View Design: Where feasible, through the design process and alignment studies, develop the scenic highway in a manner which considers the cone of vision of the motorist. Consider both the short and long-range views available along the way while enhancing them with foreground framing (Transportation Element, Policy 1.5)
- Highway Design: Design the roadway to have a visual quality and riding comfort resulting from its horizontal and vertical design. Introduce curves where feasible to take advantage of natural and man-made features (Transportation Element, Policy 1.6)

Lake Forest

The City of Lake Forest General Plan includes the following goals and policies pertaining to visual resources:

- Enhance the physical attributes of Lake Forest to create an identifiable and distinct community within Orange County (Land Use Element, Goal 2.0, Policy 2.1).
- Promote high quality in the design of all public and private development projects (Land Use Element, Goal 2.0, Policy 2.2).
- Ensure that new development fits within the existing setting and is compatible with the physical characteristics of available land, surrounding land uses, and public infrastructure availability (Land Use Element, Goal 3.0, Policy 3.1).

- Preserve and enhance the quality of Lake Forest residential neighborhoods by avoiding or abating the intrusion of disruptive, non-conforming buildings and uses (Land Use Element, Goal 3.0, Policy 3.2).

The City of Lake Forest also enforces a tree preservation ordinance to regulate the removal of eucalyptus trees and prevent the spread of eucalyptus longhorn borer; refer to Lake Forest Municipal Code Section 6.20.025, Regulations Pertaining to Conversion, Maintenance, and Removal of Eucalyptus Trees.

Laguna Hills

The Laguna Hills General Plan includes the following goals and policies pertaining to visual resources:

- Improve connections with surrounding uses by enhancing landscaping, providing pedestrian connections, incorporating green areas, and planting street trees (Land Use Element, Goal LU- 2, Policy LU-2.2).
- Create distinctive gateway architecture, landscaping, and signs at major entries to the community and in community activity centers (Land Uses Element, Goal LU-4, Policy LU-4.1).
- Create street frontages with architectural and landscape interest to provide visual appeal to the street and enhance the pedestrian experience in new development and redevelopment (Land Use Element, Goal LU-4, Policy LU-4.2).
- Continue to plant and maintain attractive drought tolerant and native landscaping that enhances the character of Laguna Hills (Land Use Element, Goal LU-4, Policy LU-4.5).
- Ensure site design respects natural topography and takes advantage of views of scenic resources such as natural open spaces, creeks, and the hillsides (Land Use Element, Goal LU- 4, Policy LU-4.6).
- Encourage developers to create unique project identities that enhance the overall character of the City (Land Use Element, Goal LU-4, Policy LU-4.8).
- Enhance major entryways, arterials, and the median islands adjacent to activity centers through the use of gateway features, signs, wayfinding markers, lighting, and landscaping (Mobility Element, Goal M-4, Policy M-4.1).would be interesting, attractive, and improve water quality (Mobility Element, Goal M-4, Policy M-4.2).
- Preserve designated scenic vistas and views of natural and man-made landmarks as viewed from the City's arterials (Mobility Element, Goal M-4, Policy M-4.3).

The City of Laguna Hills enforces a City Tree Ordinance to regulate the planting, maintenance, protection, and removal of city-owned trees and shrubs in city rights-of-way and in city parks and open space; refer to Laguna Hills Municipal Code Chapter 8-08, Trees and Shrubs in Public Places.

Laguna Woods

The Laguna Woods General Plan includes the following objective, policy, and implementation measure pertaining to visual resources:

- Continue to implement the scenic highway provisions of the Zoning Ordinance (Land Use Element, Objective II, Policy II.A., Implementation Measure II.A.3).

The City of Laguna Woods enforces a City Tree Ordinance to regulate the planting, maintenance, protection, and removal of trees on public streets, parks, other city-owned property and in the public rights-of-way, and trees on nonresidential properties to the extent that the Municipal Code is effective; refer to Laguna Woods Municipal Code Chapter 4.26, Tree Maintenance and Removal Standards. The City of Laguna Woods also maintains a “significant tree inventory” to protect all trees and shrubs located within public rights-of-way and/or on City property, all trees on nonresidential property subject to landscape/building permit, conditional use permit, environmental mitigation measures, or zoning ordinance requirement, and any trees identified in the City’s significant tree inventory adopted by resolution of the Laguna Woods City Council.

2.6.2 Required Aesthetics and Visual Resource Related Permits

There currently are no required aesthetics or visual resource related permits for the Project.

2.6.3 Expected Public Coordination and Feedback Needs

There is an opportunity for public review and feedback on this document.

3. 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 within the area of visual effect (AVE). Although the Inventory Phase continued to employ desk-based assessment to some extent, much of the work was conducted in the field. 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 visual quality were described for each landscape unit. Potential key views and scenic resources identified during 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.

3.1 Key Views

The AVE and key views for the Project were identified and agreed upon by Caltrans and the Cities in 2024. Photographs were taken during a site visit on April 28, 2025. The following sections describe the characteristics of the AVE and landscape units and summarize the key views that were confirmed in the field.

3.1.2 Area of Visual Effect and Landscape Unit Boundaries Verification

The Establishment Phase AVE map was field verified, and the boundaries were adjusted based on the expected visibility of the completed Project from adjacent areas

The previously identified landscape unit boundaries were field verified and adjusted based on field observations. The landscape units discussed in the following paragraphs were identified and documented in the field. Their detailed visual character and visual quality descriptions are provided in the subsections below:

- Landscape Unit A – Commercial/Retail
- Landscape Unit B – Residential
- Landscape Unit C – I-5 Motorist

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

Key views considered for each landscape unit were based on Project alternatives that evolved during the planning process. The key views were determined in coordination with Caltrans and the adjacent cities.

- Landscape Unit A – Commercial/Retail
- Landscape Unit B – Residential
- Landscape Unit C – I-5 Motorists

3.2 Landscape Visual Character

Landscape visual character is created by the way the physical features of the landscape come together and can be defined as “a distinct, recognizable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another”. The landscape character descriptions should include some visual specificity related to scale, diversity, continuity and dominance.

- KV 1: Northern view at Paseo De Valencia offramp. Alternative 1 mix commercial/residential landscape units. The existing Project environment's visual features the urban commercial intersection in the foreground. Existing mature Eucalyptus trees can be seen as well and in the distance the mountains can be visible on a clear day. There is a mixture of diversity and continuity as commercial buildings of similar color are seen on both sides of the intersection. Mix-used commercial buildings consist of one story to six stories. Ornamental landscaping and palm trees are seen but more on the west side than the east. The freeway is in the background but is barely visible. There is an existing residential community (single family) adjacent to this location and use Paseo De Valencia to get to the freeway or the commercial businesses nearby.
- KV 2: Eastern view from Gowdy Avenue toward Bridger Road. Alternative 1 is a residential landscape unit. The view is mainly of the freeway from the residential community adjacent to Cavanaugh Park with an existing soundwall. The dominant and continuity feature is the existing greenbelt with existing trees, vines on the wall

and turf. Utility poles and overhead freeway signs break up the continuity of the view and disrupts the scale of the views.

- KV 3: Eastern view at Avenida De La Carlota. Alternative 1 is a commercial landscape unit. The view is dominated mainly of the freeway adjacent to a retail parking lot. Limited ornamental landscape exists in the distant view which is consistent with an urban freeway environment surrounded by retail. Avenida De La Carlota is not a major thoroughfare road, so the views are mainly of the freeway and are typical of an urban retail streetscape. Scattered trees are visible in the middle ground. There are existing lighting structures in the parking lot and lighting on top of barrier facing the freeway that impedes upon the views and disrupts the continuity and scale.
- KV 4: Southern view from I-5 southbound mainline. Alternative 1 is a motorist landscape unit. The viewer on I-5 who either exists at Paseo De Valencia or continues south on the freeway sees existing mature trees in the foreground. There is very little diversity in the viewshed as the expansive freeway views are straight with scattered commercial buildings and tall palm trees dot the skyline in the foreground extending out into the distance. On a clear day the mountain range could be seen in the far distance.
- KV 1: Western view on Avenida De La Carlota. Alternative 1a is a commercial landscape unit. The view from Avenida De La Carlota to I-5, next to the commercial retail area, has a parkway landscape of trees and turf lining one side of the road; however, the dominant feature is the asphalt road and asphalt parking lot next to the parkway landscape. In the far distance palm trees are seen along with the two-story commercial business building with its orange tile roof. Yet the tile roof compliments the orange-colored building in the foreground.

3.3 Landscape Visual Quality

Visual quality is the viewers' overall aesthetic impression of a view or landscape. Items to consider when describing landscape visual quality include intactness, unity and vividness of natural, cultural and existing visible project environments. None of these attributes is itself equivalent to visual quality. All three must be high to indicate high visual quality. Intactness describes the sense of place or landscape character. Unity deconstructs the spatial composition of the view's landscape features and notes whether they exhibit a consistent and pleasing arrangement of parts. Finally, vividness divides the view into its visual elements of line, form, color and texture. The dominant visual elements are a primary determinant of what holds the viewer's attention or its memorability.

- KV1: Northern view at Paseo De Valencia offramp. Alternative 1 mix commercial/residential landscape units. The existing Project environment's visual quality is of low intactness as it contains distracting features and intrusive built features that do not enhance the existing character. Unity of this view is low due to a highly built environment that is consistent with an urban city streetscape. Vividness is also low because design features are plain and unmemorable or lack any enhancements to the distant views of the mountains. The existing visual quality

at KV1 is **low**. Intactness is low because urban development and roadway infrastructure dominate the view and diminish the natural landscape character. Unity is low due to the fragmented mix of commercial, residential, and transportation features, with little architectural consistency or coordinated site design to create a cohesive visual character. Vividness is also low because the scene contains few distinctive visual elements, limited landscaping, and only minor visual interest from distant mountain views. Overall, the lack of architectural uniformity, cohesive design, and memorable landscape features results in a visually ordinary urban corridor with low visual quality.

- KV 2: Eastern view from Gowdy Avenue toward Bridger Road. Alternative 1 and 2 is residential landscape units. The visual quality in this view is rated medium for intactness, unity and vividness as it does not contain extraneous features, landscape features compliment road's function and legibility and does not have distractions. The existing utility lines do provide some distraction to the views but do not dominate the quality. The existing visual quality at KV2 is **medium**. Intactness is rated medium because the residential streetscape is generally well maintained with only minor visual distractions from overhead utility lines and roadway infrastructure. Unity is medium due to the cohesive arrangement of homes, street trees, and landscaping, despite some variation in architectural styles. Vividness is also medium because mature vegetation and surrounding topography provide moderate visual interest, although the view lacks distinctive or memorable features.
- KV 3: Eastern view at Avenida De La Carlota. Alternative 1 is a commercial landscape unit. The visual quality in this view is low for intactness, unity and vividness at this location because design features are plain and unmemorable, they do not enhance the view, and design features are all built and paved with varying types of trees within a short distance. The existing visual quality at KV3 is **low**. Intactness is low because the view is dominated by commercial development, pavement, and transportation infrastructure with little natural character. Unity is low due to the varied building styles, inconsistent landscaping, and lack of a cohesive architectural or landscape theme. Vividness is also low because the scene contains few distinctive visual features, with scattered tree species providing limited visual interest.
- KV 4: Southern view from I-5 southbound mainline. Alternative 1 is a motorist landscape unit. The visual quality of this view is medium-low for intactness, unity and vividness. The terrain and view is flat and open and has limited distractions, but the design features are plain and unmemorable. The freeway is expanse within this urban corridor with scattered lines of trees. The existing visual quality at KV4 is **medium-low**. Intactness is rated medium-low because the view is dominated by the wide freeway corridor and surrounding urban development, with limited natural character. Unity is medium-low due to the repetitive roadway features and scattered tree plantings that provide only modest visual cohesion. Vividness is also medium-low because the flat terrain, expansive pavement, and lack of distinctive landscape or architectural features create a visually ordinary and unmemorable scene.

- KV 1: Western view on Avenida De La Carlota. Alternative 1a is a commercial landscape unit. The visual quality of this view is medium for intactness, unity and vividness. The view is from the local road adjacent to the freeway with little vegetation in the foreground, open parking lot on the opposite side of the freeway has tall lighting that disturbs the visual features of the rolling hills and tall green trees in the distance. The existing visual quality at KV1 is **medium**. Intactness is rated medium because the surrounding commercial development and parking areas are balanced by views of rolling hills and mature trees in the distance. Unity is medium due to the orderly arrangement of roadway and commercial features, although tall parking lot lighting and limited foreground vegetation reduce visual cohesion. Vividness is also medium because the distant natural backdrop provides moderate visual interest, but the foreground lacks distinctive landscape features.

3.4 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 and viewer awareness resulting in distinct and predictable visual concerns for each viewer group and category. This helps in predicting their sensitivity to visual change.

3.4.1 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:

A. Commercial/Retail includes general office, regional shopping, retail stores and commercial services.

B. Residential includes single family residential, multi-family residential and other residential.

Table 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	
Commercial	Alt 1; 1, 3, 4 Alt 1a; 1 1, 3, 4	A	Adjacent	Many users impacted High	Short duration for shoppers, long duration for	Shoppers, workers and residents who utilize the commercial zone views	There are no specific iconic focal point, views are general for an urban	There are no scenic resources within the project site Low	Moderate

					workers Moderate	are routine High	environment Low		
Residential	Alt 1; 2 Alt 1a; 2	B	Adjacent	Community impacted High	Long duration for residents High	Resident's views in the corridor are routine High	There are no specific focal point, views are general for an urban environment Low	There are no scenic resources within the project site Low	High

3.4.2 Traveler Viewer Categories

Highway travelers are individuals who have views from the roadway. The term “travelers” refers only to viewers traveling on the highway Project evaluated in this VIA. Bicyclists, pedestrians, hikers, motorists, and other travelers outside the highway Project limits are classified as neighbor viewers. The traveler group may be subdivided into viewer categories based on mode of travel or reason for travel. For example, categorization by mode of travel includes pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, passenger vehicle occupants, and truck drivers. Categorization by reason for travel includes commuters, tourists, and haulers. In some cases, viewer categories may combine both mode and reason for travel (e.g., bicycling tourists or carpooling commuters).

For this Project, the following highway traveler viewer groups are considered:

- Commercial and Civic Users – Because the cities do not identify commercial and civic uses as sensitive viewers and most commercial and civic users are not actively engaged with the surrounding outdoor environment, the overall viewer response for this group is considered low.
- Residential Users – Residential viewers, particularly those located along northbound I-5, are highly aware of visual changes associated with the Project due to the duration and proximity of their views. As a result, the overall viewer response for this group is considered high.
- Recreational Users – This group included users of Cavanaugh Mini Park and open space areas along Gowdy Avenue. These viewers are visually engaged with their surroundings during passive recreational activities but have more limited focus during active recreational activities. Overall viewer response for this group is considered moderate-high.
- I-5 Motorists – Motorists traveling along northbound and southbound I-5 experienced relatively short viewing durations while traveling through an urban freeway environment. Many are commuters or haulers focused on reaching their destinations. The overall viewer response for this group is considered low.
- Local Roadway Users – Local roadway travelers have views of distant features such as the Santa Ana Mountains and the San Joaquin Hills, as well as mature trees and ornamental landscaping in the foreground. The overall viewer response for this group is considered moderate-high.

Table 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	Rating
Commercial and Civic Users	Alt 1: KV 1, 3; Alt 1a: KV 1; KV 1, 3	Commercial	Adjacent	Many users impacted	Short duration for shoppers, long duration for workers	Shoppers, workers and residents who utilize the commercial zone views are routine	There are no specific iconic focal points, views are general for an urban environment	There are no scenic resources within the project site	Low
Residential Users	Alt 1: KV2; Alt 3: KV 2, 5	Residential	Adjacent	Community impacted	Long duration for residents	Resident's views in the corridor are routine	There are no specific iconic focal points, views are general for an urban environment	There are no scenic resources within the project site	High
Recreational Users	Alt 1: KV 2; KV 2, 5	Residential	Adjacent	Community impacted	Moderate duration for users	Resident's views in the corridor are routine	There are no specific iconic focal points, views are general for an urban environment	There are no scenic resources within the project site	Moderate-High
I-5 Motorists	Alt 1: KV 4; KV 4	Freeway	Within	Many users impacted	Short duration for motorists	Motorist views in the corridor are routine	There are no specific iconic focal points, views are general for an urban environment	There are no scenic resources within the project site	Low
Local Roadway Users	Alt 1: KV 1, 3; Alt 1a: KV 1; KV 1, 3	Commercial	Adjacent	Many users impacted	Short duration for shoppers, long duration for workers	Shoppers, workers and residents who utilize the commercial zone views are routine	There are no specific iconic focal points, views are general for an urban environment	There are no scenic resources within the project site	Moderate-High

Figure 7: Neighbor and Traveler Viewers

Figure 7 identifies five viewer categories that are used to assess visual sensitivity to the proposed Project.



Source: Google Earth

TRAVELER VIEWER CATEGORY

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Residential Users | I-5 Motorists | Local Roadway Users |
| Commercial Users | Recreational Users | |

NOT TO SCALE NORTH

VIEWER GROUPS

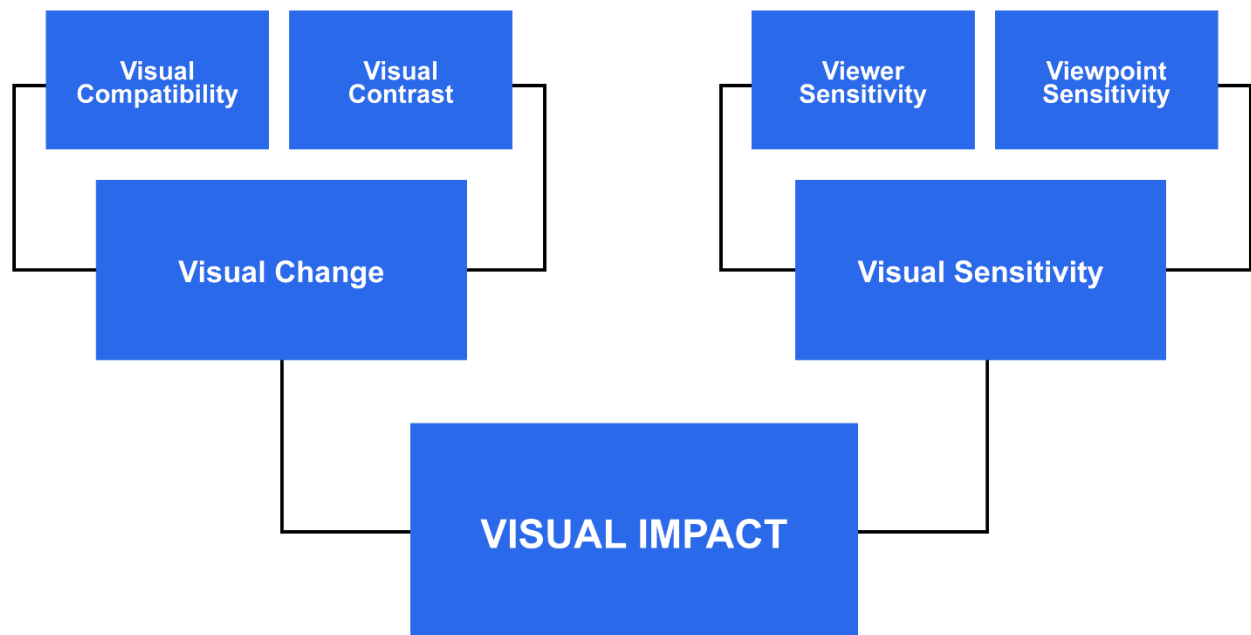
SOURCE: TATSUMI AND PARTNERS, INC.

JUNE 2026

4. Analysis Phase

The purpose of the Analysis Phase is to determine whether visual change, when 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 8**Error! Reference source not found..**

Figure 8: The Relationship of the Visual Attributes that Are Evaluated to Determine the Visual Impact of a Project during the Analysis Phase



4.1 Visual Impact Analysis Methodology

Because it is not feasible to analyze all views in which the proposed Project would be seen, it is necessary to select several key views associated with each landscape unit that would most clearly demonstrate visual change. Key views are also selected to represent viewer groups with the highest potential to be affected by the Project based on viewer exposure and visual sensitivity. These key views are analyzed for each Project alternative, including the No Build Alternative. Evaluation of the key views is conducted by comparing photographs of existing conditions with simulated views of proposed conditions at each representative viewpoint. Each alternative's key views are evaluated for visual compatibility, visual contrast, viewer sensitivity, viewpoint sensitivity, visual change, and overall visual sensitivity, as described in the following sections. Because all key views and landscape units were of similar importance, overall visual impact is determined based on average scores and the application of professional judgment. Overall visual impact was determined by evaluating the relationship between visual change and visual sensitivity. Visual change reflects the degree to which the project would alter the existing visual character, while visual sensitivity reflects the importance of the view and the likelihood that viewers will notice those changes. Higher impact ratings indicate substantial and readily noticeable visual changes in sensitive viewing environments, while lower ratings indicate minor changes, greater visual compatibility, or reduced viewer sensitivity. The resulting impact ratings provide a clear measure of the severity of visual effects anticipated at each key view.

4.1.1 Photo Simulations

Photo simulations were developed using a combination of Rhino 3D, Lumion, Photoshop, and Illustrator. The final key views for which simulations were prepared were selected from a broader set of key views identified during the Inventory Phase. Selection of the key views was based on professional judgment and the following criteria:

- Northern view at the Paseo De Valencia off-ramp realignment and new off-ramp bridge to Avenida De La Carlota (Alternative 1, Key View 1), located within mixed commercial and residential landscape units. This view was selected because it represents a large intersection where both commercial and residential viewers experienced views of the ramp realignment and bridge structure, including removal of existing mature trees.
- Eastern view from Gowdy Avenue toward Bridger Road and the added lanes to the northbound on-ramp from El Toro Road (Alternative 1, Key View 2), located within a residential landscape unit. This view was selected because the additional northbound on-ramp lane and revised street configuration at Bridger Road affected local residents and resulted in removal and replacement to existing soundwalls and landscaping.
- Eastern view at Avenida De La Carlota toward the new on- and off-ramps (Alternative 1, Key View 3), located within a commercial landscape unit. This view was selected because construction of the new ramps and its affect to the viewers driving along the street as the existing commercial plaza will be removed. No photo simulation was prepared for this view; instead, visual change was evaluated through written description and analysis.
- Southern view from the southbound I-5 mainline toward the Paseo De Valencia off-ramp (Alternative 1, Key View 4), representing a motorist landscape unit. This view was selected because motorists exiting at Paseo De Valencia or continuing southbound along I-5 observed the removal of existing trees and landscaping due to the off-ramp realignment and addition of the off-ramp structure extending toward Avenida De La Carlota.
- Western view along Avenida De La Carlota toward the new on- and off-ramps (Build Alternative 1a, Key View 1), located within a commercial landscape unit. This view was selected because the new ramps resulted in removal of existing businesses on both sides of the roadway and additional roadway widening along the frontage road, and it complements the analysis conducted for Build Alternative 1, Key View 3.

4.1.2 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 (including grading, constructed features, vegetation cover, and ancillary visual elements), and assesses the degree to which these components are compatible with the visual character, intactness, lighting, and glare of the natural environment (e.g., land, water, vegetation, wildlife, and atmospheric

conditions), the cultural environment (e.g., buildings, infrastructure, other structures, and art or artifacts), and the existing Project environment. The compatibility of each proposed Project visual attribute with corresponding attributes of the natural, cultural, and existing Project environments is evaluated for each key view and briefly described. Based on the comparison of these visual attributes and the application of professional judgment, the overall visual compatibility of each key view is described in accordance with Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Values for Visual Compatibility and Contrast

Highly Adverse (-3)	Moderately Adverse (-2)	Slightly Adverse (-1)	No Effect (0)	Slightly Beneficial (+1)	Moderately Beneficial (+2)	Highly Beneficial (+3)
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4.1.3 Visual Contrast

Analysis of the Project's visual contrast considers the proposed Project environment's visual qualities of vividness and unity and assesses the degree to which these qualities contrast with the vividness and unity of the natural, cultural, and existing Project environments. The contrast of the proposed Project's vividness and unity and those of the natural, cultural, and existing Project environments is evaluated for each key view and then briefly described. Based on these comparisons and the application of professional judgment, the overall visual contrast of each key view is described in accordance with Table 3.

4.1.4 Visual Change

After analysis of visual compatibility and visual contrast for each key view of an alternative, visual change is determined for each key view based on visual compatibility and visual contrast descriptions, in accordance with Table 4. The overall visual change is determined by combining two factors: Visual Contrast (the degree of visual difference) and Visual Compatibility (whether the change is visually beneficial, neutral, or adverse). The matrix translates these combined ratings into an overall visual change category ranging from None to Highly. Visual change is greatest when visual contrast is high and compatibility is strongly beneficial or strongly adverse, resulting in a Highly rated change. Moderate levels of contrast and compatibility generally produce Moderately rated changes, while lower levels result in Slightly rated changes. Where visual contrast is minimal and compatibility is neutral, the overall visual change is rated as None. The methodology recognizes that both positive and negative changes can produce substantial visual change if they are visually prominent, while changes with limited contrast or visual significance result in lower overall ratings.

Table 4: Descriptive Values of Visual Change

Visual Contrast		Visual Compatibility						
		Beneficial		None		Adverse		
		Highly (+3)	Moderately (+2)	Slightly (+1)	No Effect (0)	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (-2)	Highly (-3)
	Highly (+3)	Highly (3)	Highly (3)	Moderately (2)	Moderately (2)	Slightly (1)	Slightly (-1)	None (0)

Visual Contrast		Visual Compatibility						
		Beneficial		None		Adverse		
		Highly (+3)	Moderately (+2)	Slightly (+1)	No Effect (0)	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (-2)	Highly (-3)
Beneficial	Moderately (+2)	Highly (3)	Moderately (2)	Moderately (2)	Slightly (1)	Slightly (1)	None (0)	Slightly (-1)
	Slightly (+1)	Moderately (2)	Moderately (2)	Slightly (1)	Slightly (1)	None (0)	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (-2)
None	No Effect (0)	Moderately (2)	Slightly (1)	Slightly (1)	None (0)	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (-2)	Highly (-3)
Adverse	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (2)	Slightly (1)	None (0)	Slightly (-1)	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (-2)	Highly (-3)
	Moderately (-2)	Slightly (1)	None (0)	Slightly (-1)	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (-2)	Moderately (-2)	Highly (-3)
	Highly (-3)	None (0)	Slightly (1)	Slightly (-1)	Moderately (-2)	Moderately (-2)	Highly (-3)	Highly (-3)

4.1.5 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is determined based on the VIA preparer's judgment of viewer exposure, viewer awareness, and visual quality preferences, which result in distinct and predictable visual concerns for each viewer group and category. These factors are used to predict viewer sensitivity to visual change. Viewer sensitivity to visual change is described for each key view in accordance with Table 2.

Table 5: Descriptive Values for Viewer and Viewpoint Sensitivity

None (0)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	High (3)
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4.1.6 Viewpoint Sensitivity

Viewpoint sensitivity is determined based on the VIA preparer's judgment of the scenic importance of a viewpoint and whether the viewpoint is part of an identified scenic resource. Sensitive viewpoints may include scenic or visual resources, vistas, landscapes, or ocean views that are important to adjacent neighbors or drivers. Viewpoint sensitivity was described in accordance with Table 4-3.

4.1.7 Visual Sensitivity

After analysis of viewer sensitivity and viewpoint sensitivity for each key view, visual sensitivity is determined for each key view based on their viewer sensitivity and viewpoint sensitivity descriptions in accordance with Table 6. Visual sensitivity for each key view was determined by evaluating both viewer sensitivity and viewpoint sensitivity and applying the rating matrix shown in Table 6. Viewer sensitivity reflects the likelihood that viewers will notice and care about changes to the visual environment, while viewpoint sensitivity reflects the importance and quality of the view. Higher visual sensitivity ratings were

assigned where viewers are more attentive to visual conditions and/or where views are prominent or valued. Lower ratings were assigned where viewers are less likely to notice visual changes or where views are limited in importance. The resulting visual sensitivity ratings indicate the relative potential for visual changes to be perceived and considered important at each key view.

Table 6: Descriptive Values of Visual Sensitivity

VISUAL SENSITIVITY	Viewer Sensitivity			
	None (0)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	High (3)
Viewpoint Sensitivity				
High (3)	Moderate (2)	Moderate (2)	High (3)	High (3)
Moderate (2)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	Moderate (2)	High (3)
Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	Moderate (2)
None (0)	None (0)	Low (1)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)

4.1.8 Visual Impact

Following 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 7. Overall visual impact was determined by combining visual change and visual sensitivity. Higher impact ratings indicate substantial visual changes that are readily noticeable to viewers in sensitive locations, while lower ratings indicate minor changes or changes occurring in less sensitive viewing environments. Impact ratings also consider the extent of the affected area, recognizing whether a key view represents an isolated worst-case condition or visual changes that are representative of a broader portion of the study area. As a result, the final impact ratings reflect both the severity of visual change and the extent to which those changes influence the overall viewer experience.

Table 7: Calculation of Visual Impact

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity			
	None (0)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	High (3)
Highly Beneficial (+3)	None(0)	Low Beneficial(1)	Moderately High Beneficial(2)	Extremely High Beneficial(3)
Moderately Beneficial (+2)	None(0)	Very Low Beneficial(1)	Moderately Low Beneficial(2)	Moderately High Beneficial(3)
Slightly Beneficial (+1)	None(0)	Extremely Low Beneficial(1)	Very Low Beneficial(1)	Low Beneficial(1)
No Effect (0)	None(0)	None(0)	None(0)	None(0)
Slightly Adverse (-1)	None(0)	Extremely Low Adverse(1)	Very Low Adverse(1)	Low Adverse(1)

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity			
	None (0)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)	High (3)
Moderately Adverse (-2)	None(0)	Very Low Adverse(1)	Moderately Low Adverse(1)	Moderately High Adverse(-2)
Highly Adverse (-3)	None(0)	Low Adverse(1)	Moderately High Adverse(-2)	Extremely High Adverse(-3)

4.2 Alternative 1 Key View 1 Visual Impact Analysis

Build Alternative 1, Key View 1, proposes an additional I-5 southbound off-ramp to independently serve El Toro Road to the east and west. This would be accomplished with a new two-lane southbound I-5 off-ramp to El Toro Road, which would be split, with one lane assigned to El Toro Road west and one lane assigned to El Toro Road east. El Toro Road west would utilize the existing hook off-ramp alignment. A new bridge would be constructed to accommodate the new El Toro Road east off-ramp. The new El Toro Road east off-ramp bridge would cross over the existing southbound I-5 hook on-ramp and El Toro Road and connect to Avenida De La Carlota south of El Toro Road. The view from Build Alternative 1, Key View 1 is looking north on Paseo de Valencia toward the southbound I-5 freeway at the new off-ramp alignment and bridge structure that divides portion of the skyline as it descends toward El Toro Road, where the new off-ramp meets finished grade at Avenida De La Carlota.

Figure 9: Key View 1– Existing Condition – Alternative 1



Figure 10: Key View 1 – Proposed Condition – Alternative 1



4.2.1 Visual Compatibility

The proposed Project features consist of a new bridge structure that ramps upward and downward toward Paseo De La Carlota. The structure's curvilinear lines provide a contrast to the straight alignment of the freeway and alter the existing balanced view. The proposed bridge is generally consistent in character with the existing Project environment; however, it disrupts the existing visual focal point. The structure temporarily disrupts views toward the background of existing mature trees and the Santa Ana Mountains. The additional structure does not introduce additional glare affecting motorists or nearby businesses. Removal of mature trees creates a more open, unplanted area within the existing built environment, which increases visibility of the new bridge structure. Overall, the visual compatibility of the proposed Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments from this key view is considered slightly adverse (-1).

4.2.2 Visual Contrast

In Key View 1, the proposed Project environment consists of a new bridge structure and the removal of mature trees on the southbound side of the freeway. Removal of mature trees creates a more open view of freeway traffic and increases visibility toward the Santa Monica Mountains; however, the introduction of the bridge structure interrupts these open views. Overall, this change results in a slightly adverse effect on visual compatibility due to the presence of the new structure, although the increased openness contributes positively to landscape character and intactness. The visual contrast of the proposed Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments from this key view is considered slightly adverse (-1).

4.2.3 Visual Change

For Key View 1, the proposed Project's visual compatibility and visual contrast are slightly adverse relative to the existing environments. For this key view, visual compatibility and visual contrast are considered to be of equal importance and result in slightly adverse visual change. Using Table 4 as a guideline for determining visual change when visual compatibility and visual contrast are of equal importance, Table 8 summarizes this visual change.

Table 8: Visual Change for Key View 1 Alternative 1

Visual Compatibility	Visual Contrast	Visual Change
Slightly Adverse (-1)	Slightly Adverse (-1)	Slightly Adverse (-1)

The overall visual change in the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments created by the Project, as seen from this key view, is slightly adverse (-1).

4.2.4 Viewer Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1

Viewer exposure, awareness, and visual quality preferences for each viewer category are described in Section 3.4 of this report. These factors indicate likely levels of awareness and visual quality preferences for viewer categories associated with this key view, which exhibits moderate viewer sensitivity due to the addition of the bridge structure and the removal of mature trees. Recreational drivers and commuters exhibit low sensitivity to visual changes because they generally lack long-term emotional attachment to their surroundings. Residential motorists and local business viewers demonstrate moderate levels of sensitivity, as their familiarity with the area results in moderate awareness and visual quality preferences. Overall, viewer sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as viewed from this key view, is determined to be moderate (2).

4.2.5 Viewpoint Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1

The key view includes views of the Santa Ana Mountains in the background on clear days. Although this resource is visually prominent, it is located at a distance and is not obstructed by the Project environment or Project features.

Viewpoint sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is determined to be low (1).

4.2.6 Visual Sensitivity

Viewer Sensitivity (Moderate): Viewers are reasonably likely to notice visual changes and have some interest in the visual quality of the area.

Viewpoint Sensitivity (Low): The viewpoint is not a prominent or highly valued viewing location, and visual changes would have a limited effect on the overall viewing experience.

Overall Visual Sensitivity (Moderate): Although the viewpoint itself has low sensitivity, the moderate level of viewer awareness results in an overall moderate visual sensitivity rating.

Table 9: Visual Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1

Viewer Sensitivity	Viewpoint Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
Moderate (2)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)

The overall visual sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is moderate (2).

4.2.7 Visual Impact

Visual change for Key View 1 was rated Slightly Adverse (-1), indicating that the proposed project would introduce noticeable changes that are somewhat incompatible with the existing visual character but would not substantially alter the overall appearance of the view. Visual sensitivity was rated Moderately Low (-1), reflecting a location where viewers may notice visual changes but the viewpoint itself is of relatively limited importance. Considering the minor degree of visual change and the moderately low sensitivity of the viewing environment, the resulting visual impact is Low Adverse (-1). The adverse visual effects would be perceptible to viewers but would remain limited in magnitude and extent, resulting in a minor degradation of visual quality without fundamentally changing the overall viewer experience.

Table 10: Visual Impact for Key View 1 Alternative 1

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity	Visual Impact
Slightly Adverse (-1)	Moderate (2)	Low Adverse (-1)

The overall visual impact of the proposed Project on the existing natural, cultural and Project environments as seen from this key view is low adverse (-1).

4.3 Alternative 1 Key View 2 Visual Impact Analysis

Build Alternative 1, Key View 2, involves reconstruction of the northbound I-5 on-ramp from westbound El Toro Road from a one-lane on-ramp to a two-lane on-ramp as part of the I-5 South County Improvement Project. The I-5/El Toro Road Improvement Project extends this ramp, merging with the northbound I-5 mainline approximately 0.15 mile north of the existing merge point. The key view looks west along Gowdy Avenue within a residential community adjacent to the freeway toward the realigned northbound I-5 on-ramp and newly constructed sound walls and retaining walls.

Figure 11: Key View 2– Existing Condition – Alternative 1



Figure 12: Key View 2 – Proposed Condition – Alternative 1



4.3.1 Visual Compatibility

The proposed Project features consist of a realigned northbound I-5 on-ramp from El Toro Road, which reduces the width of Cavanaugh Park to accommodate the ramp and introduces a new sound wall that replaces an existing sound wall with established vines. The existing 14-foot sound wall would shift away from the freeway towards the

neighborhood about ten feet inward. Although the new sound wall replaces the existing structure, vine coverage requires time to re-establish. The new ramp structure is not visible from this location because the new sound wall screens views of the freeway. Existing utility poles and overhead lines cross the area in north–south and east–west directions, and an existing freeway overhead sign remains visible from the adjacent parkway and residential community. No prominent distant views are present from this location, and no new nighttime lighting or glare is introduced. Overall, the visual compatibility of the Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is slightly adverse (-1).

4.3.2 Visual Contrast

In Key View 2, the proposed Project environment consists of a realigned northbound freeway on-ramp that includes a sound wall and reduces the existing parkway closer to the adjacent residential community. This change results in a slightly adverse effect on overall visual compatibility due to the introduction of the new structure; however, additional landscaping in the parkway, including trees and shrubs, partially offsets these effects and contributes positively to visual character and intactness. Existing utility poles and overhead lines continue to traverse the viewshed and cause a slight visual disturbance for viewers. The visual contrast of the Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is considered slightly adverse (-1).

4.3.3 Visual Change

For Key View 2, the proposed Project’s visual compatibility and visual contrast are slightly adverse relative to the existing environments. For this key view, visual compatibility and visual contrast are considered to be of equal importance and result in slightly adverse visual change.

Table 11: Visual Change for Key View 2 Alternative 1

Visual Compatibility	Visual Contrast	Visual Change
Slightly Adverse (-1)	Slightly Adverse (-1)	Slightly Adverse (-1)

The overall visual change in the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments created by the Project, as seen from this key view, is slightly adverse (-1).

4.3.4 Viewer Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2

Viewer exposure, awareness, and visual quality preferences for each viewer category are described in Section 3.4 of this report. These factors indicate likely levels of awareness and visual quality preferences for viewer categories associated with this key view, which exhibits moderate viewer sensitivity due to the added bridge structure and removal of mature trees. Recreational drivers and commuters exhibit low sensitivity to visual change because they generally lack long-term emotional attachment to their surroundings. Views from the freeway are not significant, as the existing sound wall is replaced with a new sound wall that screens views of the additional lanes, and the urban freeway context is already wide and heavily developed. Residential motorists demonstrate moderate levels of attentiveness due to their familiarity with the area, resulting in higher awareness and visual quality preferences.

Overall, viewer sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as viewed from this key view, is determined to be moderate (2).

4.3.5 Viewpoint Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2

The key view does not include any prominent distant views. Viewpoint sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is low (1).

4.3.6 Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2

Due to the presence of residents, pedestrians, and local motorists who regularly experience the area and are sensitive to changes in neighborhood character.

Table 12: Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 2

Viewer Sensitivity	Viewpoint Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
Moderate (2)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)

The overall visual sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is moderate (2).

4.3.7 Visual Impact

Build Alternative 1, Key View 2 would introduce a sound wall and reduce some existing landscape along Gowdy Avenue while maintaining compatibility with the surrounding residential setting and established landscape character. The design emphasizes visual continuity by integrating landscape features with the surrounding parkway and open space areas, while maintaining an orderly and well-maintained appearance that is compatible with adjacent residential land uses.

Table 13: Visual Impact for Alternative 1 Key View 2

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity	Visual Impact
Slightly Adverse (-1)	Moderate (2)	Slightly Adverse (-1)

The overall visual impact of the Project on the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is slightly adverse (1).

Figure 13: Key View 3 – Existing Condition – Alternative 1



4.4 Alternative 1 Key View 3 Visual Impact Analysis (No simulation)

Build Alternative 1 proposed an additional I-5 southbound off-ramp to independently serve El Toro Road to the east and west, where the existing condition has a barrier wall with chainlink and retail building (Village Plaza) and no direct access to I-5. This alternative included a new two-lane southbound I-5 off-ramp to El Toro Road that was split, with one lane assigned to El Toro Road west and one lane assigned to El Toro Road east. El Toro Road west utilized the existing hook off-ramp alignment. A new bridge was proposed to accommodate the southbound El Toro Road east off-ramp. The new bridge crossed over the existing southbound I-5 hook on-ramp and El Toro Road and connected to Avenida De La Carlota south of El Toro Road. A new southbound I-5 hook on-ramp was proposed along the realigned Avenida De La Carlota south of El Toro Road. The existing southbound direct on-ramp from El Toro Road was proposed to be eliminated, while existing access provided by the southbound ramps opposite Paseo De Valencia was maintained. The key view looked west along Avenida De La Carlota toward the proposed southbound on- and off-ramps. A photo simulation was not prepared for this key view.

4.4.1 Visual Compatibility

The proposed Project features consist of a new northbound on- and off-ramp from El Toro Road, widening of the existing frontage road, and removal of an existing business building to accommodate the wider roadway in the westbound direction. The existing southbound ramp is removed, allowing additional landscaped areas in place of existing buildings to be introduced, improving the relationship between built and natural landscape elements and

increasing overall landscape intactness. There are no prominent distant views. No new nighttime glare or lighting is introduced.

The visual compatibility of the proposed Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments from this key view is moderately beneficial (+2) due to the removal of the existing two-story building at the corner of El Toro Road and Avenida De La Carlota, as well as the existing one-story building along Avenida De La Carlota, and their replacement with landscaped areas within the on- and off-ramps and along the street. However, the bridge structure traversing the freeway from the mainline across both Paseo De Valencia and El Toro Road, along with its support system, results in a slightly adverse effect for road users, local businesses, and residents within the Project area.

4.4.2 Visual Contrast

In Key View 3, the proposed Project environment consists of a new southbound freeway on- and off-ramp bridge that requires removal of existing buildings. This Project alternative alters the existing Project environment but does not substantially affect vividness or unity, either positively or negatively. No prominent distant views are present from this key view. Existing palm trees at the corner of El Toro Road and Avenida De La Carlota are impacted; however, no other continuous streetscape elements are present along the frontage road in the westbound direction. The visual contrast of the Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is considered slightly beneficial (+1).

4.4.3 Visual Change

For Key View 3, the proposed Project's visual compatibility and visual contrast are slightly beneficial relative to the existing environments. For this key view, visual compatibility and visual contrast are considered to be of equal importance and result in slightly beneficial visual change. Replacement of the existing two-story building with landscaped areas containing trees and groundcover, along with the addition of street trees along Avenida De La Carlota, improves visual character and the visual change associated with the Project.

Table 14: Visual Change for Key View 3 Alternative 1

Visual Compatibility	Visual Contrast	Visual Change
Moderately Beneficial (+2)	Slightly Beneficial (+1)	Moderately Beneficial (+2)

The overall visual change in the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments created by the Project, as seen from this key view, is moderately beneficial (+2).

4.4.4 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer exposure, awareness, and visual quality preferences for each viewer category are described in Section 3.4 of this report. These factors indicate likely levels of awareness and visual quality preferences for viewer categories associated with this key view, which exhibits moderate viewer sensitivity due to the addition of the bridge ramp structure and the new southbound on-ramp. Recreational drivers and commuters exhibit low sensitivity to visual change because they generally lack long-term emotional attachment to their surroundings. Residential motorists demonstrate moderate levels of attentiveness due to

their familiarity with the area, resulting in moderate awareness and visual quality preferences. However, this key view is located adjacent to an existing shopping center and parking lot rather than a residential neighborhood.

Overall, viewer sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as viewed from this key view, is determined to be moderate (2).

4.4.5 Viewpoint Sensitivity

The key view does not include any prominent distant views. Viewpoint sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is low (1).

4.4.6 Visual Sensitivity

Table 15: Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 3

Viewer Sensitivity	Viewpoint Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
Moderate (2)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)

The overall visual sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is moderate (2).

4.4.7 Visual Impact

Table 16: Visual Impact for Alternative 1 Key View 3

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity	Visual Impact
Moderately Beneficial (+2)	Moderate (2)	Slightly Beneficial (+1)

The overall visual impact of the Project on the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is slightly beneficial (+1).

4.5 Alternative 1 Key View 4 Visual Impact Analysis

Build Alternative 1 proposes an additional I-5 southbound off-ramp to independently serve El Toro Road to the east and west. This alternative includes a new two-lane southbound I-5 off-ramp to El Toro Road that is split, with one lane assigned to El Toro Road west and one lane assigned to El Toro Road east. El Toro Road west utilizes the existing hook off-ramp alignment. A new bridge is proposed to accommodate the southbound El Toro Road east off-ramp. The new bridge crosses over the existing southbound I-5 hook on-ramp and El Toro Road and connects to Avenida De La Carlota south of El Toro Road. A new southbound I-5 hook on-ramp is proposed along the realigned Avenida De La Carlota south of El Toro Road. The existing southbound direct on-ramp from El Toro Road is proposed to be eliminated, while existing access provided by the southbound ramps opposite Paseo De Valencia is maintained. The key view looks west from the southbound I-5 mainline, prior to the Paseo De Valencia off-ramp, toward the new bridge structure.

Figure 14: Key View 4– Existing Condition – Alternative 1



Figure 15: Key View 4– Proposed Condition – Alternative 1



4.5.1 Visual Compatibility

The proposed Project feature consists of a new two-lane bridge structure connecting southbound I-5 to the new exit at Avenida De La Carlota. The new structure reduces overall environmental intactness by adding visual complexity to the existing built

environment. No prominent distant views toward the west are present, and no additional nighttime lighting or glare is introduced. Existing mature eucalyptus trees are removed, which reduces landscaped areas while increasing visibility of the freeway. Overall, the visual compatibility of the Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is considered slightly adverse (-1).

4.5.2 Visual Contrast

In Key View 4, the proposed Project environment consists of a new two-lane bridge ramp exiting southbound I-5 toward Avenida De La Carlota, as well as realignment of the Paseo de Valencia southbound off-ramp. This Project alternative alters the existing Project environment but does not substantially affect overall vividness or unity, either positively or negatively. No prominent distant views are present from this location. Existing mature eucalyptus trees near Paseo de Valencia are removed, resulting in a loss of landscape within an area that already contains limited vegetation. The bridge structure, as viewed from local streets, creates a greater visual contrast than views experienced by freeway motorists because it spans existing commercial areas and requires removal of an existing commercial building. The visual contrast of the Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is considered slightly adverse (-1).

4.5.3 Visual Change

For Key View 4, the proposed Project's visual compatibility and visual contrast are slightly adverse relative to the existing environments. For this key view, visual compatibility and visual contrast are considered to be of equal importance and result in slightly adverse visual change. Viewers traveling along the freeway perceive the new ramp as another component of the already overbuilt freeway system, where it remains generally compatible with the freeway context. In contrast, viewers on local streets experience the new bridge structure as less compatible with the existing environment due to its prominence and contrast with surrounding land uses.

Table 17: Visual Change for Alternative 1 Key View 4

Visual Compatibility	Visual Contrast	Visual Change
Slightly adverse (-1)	Slightly adverse (-1)	Slightly adverse (-1)

The overall visual change in the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments created by the Project, as seen from this key view, is slightly adverse (-1).

4.5.4 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer exposure, awareness, and visual quality preferences for each viewer category are described in Section 3.4 of this report. These factors indicate likely levels of awareness and visual quality preferences for viewer categories associated with this key view, which exhibits low viewer sensitivity due to the added bridge ramp structure and the new southbound on-ramp. Recreational drivers and commuters exhibit low sensitivity to visual change because they generally lack long-term emotional attachment to their surroundings. Residential motorists demonstrate moderate levels of attentiveness due to their familiarity with the area, resulting in higher awareness and visual quality preferences. However, this key view primarily represents the perspective of freeway users rather than adjacent

residential viewers. Overall, viewer sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as viewed from this key view, is determined to be low (1).

4.5.5 Viewpoint Sensitivity

The key view did not include any prominent distant views. Viewpoint sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is low (1).

4.5.6 Visual Sensitivity

Build Alternative 1, Key View 4 would introduce a new elevated direct connector ramp within the interchange corridor, resulting in a noticeable visual change and becoming a prominent feature in the view. However, this key view is mainly visible on the freeway user and not from the residential viewpoint. The design incorporates coordinated concrete finishes, streamlined structural elements, and consistent roadway aesthetics to create a cohesive appearance. Architectural treatments and landscape enhancements would help soften the visual presence of the infrastructure and improve integration with the surrounding freeway environment.

Table 18: Visual Sensitivity for Alternative 1 Key View 4

Viewer Sensitivity	Viewpoint Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
Low (1)	Low (1)	Low (1)

The overall visual sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is low (1).

4.5.7 Visual Impact

The proposed elevated connector ramp would create a substantial visual change by introducing a prominent new structure within the interchange corridor. However, because the view is located within an existing transportation setting characterized by roadway infrastructure and vehicular activity, the overall visual impact is moderated by the existing visual context.

Table 19: Visual Impact for Alternative 1 Key View 4

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity	Visual Impact
Slightly adverse (-1)	Low (1)	Slightly Adverse (-1)

The overall visual impact of the Project on the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is slightly adverse (-1).

4.6 Alternative 1a Key View 1 Visual Impact Analysis

Alternative 1A includes all features described for Alternative 1, in addition to an approximately 90-foot public street entering the Laguna Hills Mall at the new southbound

I-5/Avenida De La Carlota ramp terminal intersection south of El Toro Road. The addition of this public street creates a four-way intersection at the southbound I-5 and Avenida De La Carlota ramp terminal. The key view looks east along Avenida De La Carlota.

Figure 16: Key View 1– Existing Condition – Alternative 1a



Figure 17: Key View 1– Proposed Condition – Build Alternative 1a



4.6.1 Visual Compatibility

The proposed Project features include new southbound on- and off-ramps from El Toro Road, which widen the existing frontage road and require removal of an existing business building to accommodate a wider westbound roadway and a new public street providing access to the existing shopping center. The existing southbound ramp is removed. Existing street landscaping is removed where additional lanes are added along Avenida De La Carlota, and existing landscaping is also affected along El Toro Road and on I-5 northbound.

No prominent distant views are present from this key view. Overall, the visual compatibility of the Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is considered moderately beneficial (+2) due to removal of the existing two-story building at the corner of El Toro Road and Avenida De La Carlota and a one-story building along Avenida De La Carlota. Landscape along the frontage road as well as streetlights would add to the visual quality of the site. The addition of the public street serving the existing commercial area does not result in a noticeable effect on visual compatibility.

4.6.2 Visual Contrast

In Alternative 1A, Key View 1, the proposed Project environment consists of a new southbound freeway on- and off-ramp bridge that requires removal of an existing building

and includes an additional public street connection to the existing commercial area. This Project alternative alters the existing Project environment; however, additional landscaping of the streetscape along Avenida De La Carlota positively influence visual quality by improving vividness and unity. No prominent distant views are present from this key view.

The visual contrast of the Project with the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is considered moderately beneficial (+2). Higher levels of visual contrast could have occurred with additional landscaping and architectural treatment of built structures; however, such measures are not necessary to support the impact determination.

4.6.3 Visual Change

For Alternative 1A, Key View 1, the proposed Project's visual compatibility and visual contrast are slightly beneficial relative to the existing environments. For this key view, visual compatibility and visual contrast are considered to be of equal importance and result in slightly beneficial visual change.

Table 20: Visual Change for Key View 1 Alternative 1a

Visual Compatibility	Visual Contrast	Visual Change
Moderately Beneficial (+2)	Moderately Beneficial (+2)	Moderately Beneficial (+2)

The overall visual change in the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments created by the Project, as seen from this key view, is moderately beneficial (+2).

4.6.4 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer exposure, awareness, and visual quality preferences for each viewer category are described in Section 3.4 of this report. These factors indicate likely levels of awareness and visual quality preferences for viewer categories associated with this key view, which exhibits moderate viewer sensitivity (2) due to the added southbound on-ramp. Recreational drivers and commuters exhibit low sensitivity to visual change because they generally lack long-term emotional attachment to their surroundings. Residential motorists demonstrate moderate levels of attentiveness due to their familiarity with the area, resulting in higher awareness and visual quality preferences. The added travel lanes along Avenida De La Carlota alter the views experienced by roadway users. Overall, viewer sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as viewed from this key view, is determined to be moderate (2).

4.6.5 Viewpoint Sensitivity

The key view did not include any prominent distant views. Viewpoint sensitivity to the Project within the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is low (1).

4.6.6 Visual Sensitivity

The overall visual sensitivity to the proposed Project in the existing natural, cultural and Project environments as seen from this key view is moderate (2).

Table 21: Visual Sensitivity for Key View 1 Alternative 1a

Viewer Sensitivity	Viewpoint Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
Moderate (2)	Low (1)	Moderate (2)

4.6.7 Visual Impact

Table 22: Visual Impact for Key View 1 Alternative 1a

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity	Visual Impact
Moderately Beneficial (+2)	Moderate (2)	Slightly Beneficial (+1)

The overall visual impact of the Project on the existing natural, cultural, and Project environments, as seen from this key view, is slightly beneficial (+1).

4.7 Build Alternative 1 and its Design Variation (Build Alternative 1a) Visual Impact Summary

The primary objective of the Analysis Phase is to determine the visual impact of the proposed Project. This objective is achieved by assessing visual change and visual sensitivity, which are then combined to describe visual impact. Temporary impacts associated with construction operations and cumulative impacts are also considered.

Analysis of key views for Build Alternative 1 and its design variation (Build Alternative 1a) indicates that the Project results in a slightly adverse visual change and very low adverse visual sensitivity. This determination is based on results presented in Tables 4 and 5 and a weighted average of visual impact ratings across all key views, applying professional judgment where key views and/or landscape units are not of equal importance.

Table 23: Calculation of Visual Impact Based on Visual Change and Visual Sensitivity

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity			
	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

Visual Change	Visual Sensitivity			
	None	Low	Moderate	High
Moderately Adverse	None	Very Low Adverse	Moderately Low Adverse	Moderately High Adverse
Highly Adverse	None	Low Adverse	Moderately High Adverse	Extremely High Adverse

4.8 Summary of Visual Impacts

The primary objective of the Analysis Phase was to determine the visual impact of the proposed Project. This objective was achieved by assessing visual change and visual sensitivity, which were then combined to describe visual impact. Temporary impacts associated with construction operations and cumulative impacts were also considered.

Analysis of key views for Project Alternatives 1 and 1a indicates that the Project would result in a slightly adverse visual change and very low adverse visual sensitivity. This determination is based on results presented in Tables 4 and 5 and a weighted average of visual impact ratings across all key views, applying professional judgment where key views and/or landscape units are not of equal importance.

Table 24: Alternative 1 and 1a 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
Alternative 1 KV 1	-1	-1	-1	2	1	2	-1
Alternative 1 KV 2	-1	-1	-1	2	1	2	-1
Alternative 1 KV 3	+2	+1	+2	2	1	2	+1
Alternative 1 KV 4	-1	-1	-1	1	1	1	-1
Alternative 1 Subtotal:	-1	-2	-1	2	1	2	-1
Alternative 1a KV 1	+2	+2	+2	1	1	2	+1
Alternative 1a Subtotal:	+2	+2	+2	1	1	2	+1
Alternative Total:	+1	0	+1	2	1	2	0

For Alternative 1, Key View 1, the primary visual distraction is the new flyover structure and the removal of mature eucalyptus trees at the on- and off-ramps. Background views generally remain intact; however, for short durations while traveling through the area, the new flyover structure disrupts the integrity of mountain views on clear days. This condition results in a slightly adverse (-1) visual change. Visual changes would be most noticeable from city streets, where motorists would experience views of the freeway and flyover structure. Although the flyover structure would be visible from Avenida De La Carlota below, vehicle occupants typically observe only brief glimpses due to limited exposure time. Motorists traveling on the freeway experience slightly affected views; however, viewing duration is short as they pass through the area within an existing urban freeway

environment. Visual sensitivity for this key view is determined to be moderate (2). Overall, the visual impact is slightly adverse (-1).

For Alternative 1, Key View 2, the primary visual impacts are experienced by residents and park users. Realignment and widening of the northbound on-ramp require the existing sound wall to be relocated closer to the park, and a new sound wall would be installed. Removal of mature vegetation alters the viewshed within this area. Overall landscape intactness decreases due to removal of mature trees and the replacement of an established sound wall with a new wall lacking vine coverage during the initial period following construction, resulting in reduced color and texture. This condition results in a slightly adverse (-1) visual change until replacement vegetation becomes established. Local residents and park visitors are evaluated to assess potential changes to views. Their familiarity with and attachment to existing conditions increases sensitivity to visual changes, even when those changes are relatively minor. Visual sensitivity for this key view is determined to be moderate (2), and the overall visual impact is slightly adverse (-1).

For Alternative 1, Key View 3, the primary visual impact results from the addition of a new southbound on- and off-ramp at Avenida De La Carlota. Viewers for this key view consist primarily of motorists traveling to the freeway or along the frontage road. The addition of travel lanes results in a moderate level of viewer sensitivity (2) due to increased vehicular activity relative to existing conditions. However, removal of the existing business building and associated parking lot provides opportunities for enhanced landscaping, including trees and groundcover that were previously absent. Additional landscaping opportunities are also present at the new southbound on-ramp, allowing street trees to extend from El Toro Road along Avenida De La Carlota and create a more continuous streetscape environment. Replacement of the previously built, concrete environment with landscaped elements results in a moderately beneficial visual change (+2), while the overall visual impact is slightly beneficial (+1), based on the evaluation of viewpoint and visual sensitivities.

For Alternative 1, Key View 4, the visual impact results from the addition of the southbound I-5 flyover off-ramp. Viewers are primarily freeway users, whose sensitivity is low (1) due to their exposure to an expansive freeway system within an urban environment. Introduction of the man-made structure, along with removal of dense, mature eucalyptus trees to accommodate the flyover, encroaches on the visual setting and results in a slightly adverse (-1) visual change. Overall, the visual impact is slightly adverse (-1) within the existing urban freeway context.

For Alternative 1A, Key View 1, the visual impact results from the new on- and off-ramps at Avenida De La Carlota and the widened roadway adjacent to the existing shopping center. Viewers are primarily motorists traveling northbound along Avenida De La Carlota. The additional lanes on the I-5 mainline result in low viewer sensitivity (1), reflecting the presence of increased vehicular activity relative to existing conditions. However, removal of the existing business building and parking lot provides an opportunity for additional landscaping, including trees and groundcover that did not previously exist. Additional landscaping opportunities are also present at the new southbound on-ramp, allowing street trees to extend from El Toro Road along Avenida De La Carlota and create a more continuous streetscape environment. The replacement of the built, concrete environment

with landscaped elements results in a moderately beneficial (+2) visual change, while the overall visual impact is slightly beneficial (+1), based on the evaluation of viewpoint and visual sensitivities.

4.9 Temporary Construction Visual Impacts

The scale of construction for Build Alternative 1 and its design variation (Build Alternative 1a) would result in visual disruptions along I-5 and in adjacent areas for approximately 2.5-3 years and includes night lighting, dust, temporary structures, hauling of materials, contractor staging areas, tree removals, and detours. Temporary lane closures implemented during construction have the potential to decrease speeds and increase the duration that motorists view the surrounding landscape, which increases viewer sensitivity and the overall visual impact of construction. The visual impact is greatest immediately following Project completion, when some areas appear bare, new concrete features are visually prominent, and certain views are partially impaired by structures, barriers, and walls. These impacts diminish over time as Project Features, avoidance, minimization and/or enhancement components become established.

4.10 Potential Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are defined as the effects resulting from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions combined with the visual impacts of the Project. The study area for cumulative visual impact analysis consists of the general area in the immediate vicinity of the Project right-of-way, as well as areas from which the Project can be viewed or that have views toward the Project. The Village at Laguna Hills project located at the south-west quadrant consists of mix-use (public spaces, commercial, and residential) development scheduled for City approval on July 2026 and other development and transportation projects in the area include several smaller projects proposed in the immediate vicinity of I-5; however, these projects do not have the potential to result in cumulatively considerable adverse effects on the Project viewshed. Because the Project does not result in a substantial deterioration of visual resources and the resource study area is dominated by similar urban and transportation infrastructure, the Project, when considered together with other proposed projects in the area, does not result in a cumulative impact on visual resources. This project can be a positive impact to the growing community and the future development of the Village of Laguna Hills project.

4.11 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 necessary to lessen or compensate for a loss in visual quality. The inclusion of aesthetic features and the provision of planting, such as trees, shrubs, and groundcover where feasible, help improve public acceptance of the Project.

4.12 Adverse Visual Effects

The following measures will be implemented to avoid, minimize, or reduce adverse visual impacts associated with the proposed Project.

VIS-1 Preservation and Protection of Existing Vegetation

Damage to existing vegetation, especially mature, established trees, within the Project limits or in close proximity to the Project limits shall be minimized to the extent practicable, consistent with safety, design standards, and construction requirements. Vegetation designated for preservation shall be protected during construction through the installation of temporary high-visibility fencing prior to the start of ground-disturbing activities. Tree trimming or pruning, where required, shall be conducted under the direction of a qualified arborist.

VIS-2 Replacement Landscape and Irrigation in Areas Impacted by Construction.

To maintain the context of the Project area (color, form, and texture) landscaping shall be installed that is compatible with the existing landscape along I-5 in the Project vicinity and surrounding area. Where feasible, landscaping shall include specimen sized trees and/or shrub/groundcover mass planting, and landscape treatment along walls to soften the hardscape features and reduce glare and radiant heat from the walls. In areas where soundwalls are visible from adjacent residential land uses, vines and landscaping shall be utilized to screen views to the wall where feasible. The landscape concept, plan, and plant palette shall be determined in consultation with, and approved by, the District Landscape Architect in consultation with the cities of Lake Forest, Laguna Hills, and Laguna Woods during the Plans, Specifications, and Estimate (PS&E) phase. All vine and landscape proposed shall conform with the planting policy requirements of Caltrans and the applicable goals and policies of the City of Lake Forest General Plan, Laguna Hills General Plan, and Laguna Woods General Plan, as well as the tree preservation policies identified in the Lake Forest Municipal Code, Laguna Hills Municipal Code, and Laguna Woods Municipal Code. The planting plan shall be reviewed and approved by the Caltrans Biologist to be in accordance with Executive Orders 13751, Safeguarding the Nation from the Impacts of Invasive Species (2016), and 13112, Invasive Species (1999).

VIS-3 Urban Streetscape Coordination

Where roadway modifications occur along local streets, streetscape treatments would be coordinated with the affected cities, as feasible, to maintain visual continuity with existing roadway character, where applicable.

VIS-4 Retaining Walls and Structural Elements

Retaining walls and other exposed concrete surfaces would be designed to minimize visual contrast through the use of texture, color, or architectural treatment, consistent with Caltrans standards and engineering requirements.

VIS-5 Construction Staging and Temporary Visual Effects

Prior to the start of construction, construction staging areas and material laydown zones would be established to minimize visual disruption to surrounding areas and to avoid unnecessary disturbance beyond the Project limits.

5. Recommendations for Environmental Commitment Measures

Table 25 identifies the numbered environmental commitments for each visual impact.

Table 25: Environmental Commitments by Visual Impact

Visual Impact	Description of Environmental Commitments
A. Visual Contrast from New Project Features	Utilize colors, textures, and materials that are compatible with the surrounding landscape and existing transportation corridor to reduce visual contrast and improve visual compatibility.
B. Visual Inconsistency Within the Corridor	Maintain consistent aesthetic treatments throughout the corridor, including coordinated colors, architectural features, barrier treatments, and other design elements to promote visual cohesion and reduce localized visual impacts.
C. Visibility of Project Features	Incorporate landscaping and screening vegetation, where feasible, to soften views of project features, improve visual integration with the surrounding environment, and reduce the prominence of project elements over time.

6. Conclusion

The recommended environmental commitments and Project features would reduce the Project's visual impact on surrounding communities and/or commuters. Avoidance and minimization measures reduce the visual impacts associated with the Project. Aesthetic treatments applied to sound walls, retaining walls, bridge structures, and revegetation would reduce visual impacts resulting from the addition of these new highway features.

Even with implementation of these measures, some visual impacts remain. However, the environmental commitments lessen adverse visual change within the corridor. Visual impacts can be reduced through the use of consistent corridor-wide design treatments, including color palettes, aesthetic elements, and materials that improve visual compatibility with the surrounding environment.

Overall, the visual effects of the Project are slightly adverse to the urban character of the I-5 corridor within the Project area. Views from the freeway are diminished in quality due to the added bridge structure (i.e., height and new elements in the landscape) and views toward the I-5 would also be affected.

Visual impacts would be greatest immediately following Project completion, when some areas appear bare, new concrete structures are visually prominent, and certain views are partially impaired by structures, barriers, and walls. These impacts would diminish over

time as the planting materials become established and the selection of architectural structures, colors, aesthetics choices that are consistent with the corridor of this project site.

7. Reference

Caltrans, *Standard Environmental Reference (SER) 2025*. Available online at: Standard Environmental Reference (SER) | Caltrans

Caltrans, *Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Level 2005*. Available online at: Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Level | Caltrans

Caltrans, *Visual Impact Assessment (VIA for Projects on State Highway System 2025*. Available online at: Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for Projects on State Highway System | Caltrans

Caltrans, *VIA Handbook 2023*. Available online at: Visual Impact Assessment Handbook

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). 1981/1990. (U.S. Department of Transportation), *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects*. (Publication No. HEV-22/3-81 (650), FHWA-RE-90-007).

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). 2015. (U.S. Department of Transportation). *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*. (Publication No. FHWA-HEP-15-029). Washington, DC: USDOT FHWA. Available online at: https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx.

Appendix A



Landscape Architecture
Scoping Questionnaire
to Determine
Visual Impact Assessment Level

Introduction

This questionnaire assists the qualified visual impact assessment (VIA) preparer (i.e., California Licensed Landscape Architect) in determining whether a VIA report is needed, in estimating the potential visual impacts of a proposed project on the environment, and in understanding the degree and breadth of the possible visual impact issues. The goal is to develop VIA documentation that is appropriate to the scale of the project and is thorough, concise, and defensible.

Enter basic information about the project and its visual context, visual resource regulatory context, and the expected visual change and sensitivity in the Baseline Information Form and then consider each of the 12 questions below. The resulting score would serve as a guide to help determine the appropriate level of VIA documentation for the project. For some projects with no or minimal visual impact, this questionnaire is all that is necessary. Both capital and maintenance projects should be reviewed. Select the response that most closely applies to the proposed project. The score is automatically computed at the bottom of the questionnaire. The total score should be matched to one of the four groups of scores at the end of the questionnaire that include recommended levels of VIA documentation (i.e., this completed questionnaire, VIA memorandum, standard VIA report, and advanced VIA report) and reference to associated annotated outlines for these documents.

Use the scoring system as a preliminary guide rather than a substitute for professional analysis on the part of the preparer. Although the total score may recommend a lower level of VIA document, circumstances associated with any one of the 12 questions may indicate the need to elevate the VIA to a greater level of detail. For projects on the State Highway System, the District Landscape Architect should be consulted when scoping the VIA level and provide concurrence on the findings of this questionnaire.

Preparer Qualifications

The Standard Environmental Reference, Volume I: Chapter 27-Visual & Aesthetics Review ([website link](#)) lists preparer qualifications for conducting the visual impact assessment process:

“Scenic Resource Evaluations and VIA’s are performed under the direction of licensed Landscape Architects. Landscape Architects receive formal training in the area of visual resource management with a curriculum that emphasizes environmental design, human factors, and context sensitive solutions. When recommending specific visual mitigation measures, Landscape Architects can appropriately weigh the benefits of these different measures and consider construction feasibility and maintainability.”

This questionnaire shall be prepared by, or under the direct supervision of a California Licensed Landscape Architect. It shall be signed and stamped by that Landscape Architect, and written concurrence shall be provided by the District Landscape Architect (for projects on State Highway System).

Project and Visual Context Baseline Information

Project and visual context baseline information is gathered early in the Establishment Phase of the VIA process to identify key information and issues applicable to the preparation of the VIA Scoping Questionnaire. Should the baseline information change in the course of the project, the questionnaire should be updated accordingly.

Gathering of the baseline information may be accomplished through desktop research, field reconnaissance, coordination with the Caltrans environmental and project development teams, and consultation with key stakeholders. The Caltrans VIA Handbook ([website link](#)) includes further information about the Establishment Phase.

Complete the following Baseline Information Form to document the baseline project and visual resource information that was available at the time of preparation of the questionnaire:

Project and Visual Context Baseline Information Form

Project Name:	Interstate 5 (I-5) El Toro Road Interchange Between Los Alisos Boulevard Overcrossing and Ridge Route Drive
EA or EFIS Number	EA 12-0M980 / EFIS 1213000084
Project Location (Dist-Co-Rte-PM):	12-ORA-5 (PM 17.8-19.7)
Questionnaire Preparer Name and CA LA License Number:	Jennifer Taira, #4625
District Landscape Architect (DLA) Providing Concurrence, CA LA Lic. #:	Eric Dickson, #3914
Visual Features of Project and its Alternative(s).	The project is located in the cities of Laguna Hills, Laguna Woods and Lake Forest in Orange County, CA on Route I-5. The segment of freeway is elevated, and the topography is relatively flat. The elevated freeway is 6 lanes in the northbound direction and 8 lanes in the southbound direction. The area is urban and surrounded mainly by commercial and business buildings with local residents nearby. In the far distance are the Santa Ana Mountains and San Joaquin Hills are available to the northeast and west, respectively
Additional Visual Context Remarks:	NA

3 Regulatory Framework

Potential Agencies that may have to be Involved:	☒ Federal ☒ State ☒ Local ☐ Tribal ☐ Other Notes: OC Go (Measure M2), State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and Federal
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4 Visual Change and Sensitivity

Landscape Observations:	☐ Water ☐ Visually dominant landforms ☐ Natural vegetation ☐ Visually Appealing Structures ☒ Other features of interest Notes: No visual dominant landform features as the project site is urban. In the far distance are the Santa Ana Mountains and San Joaquin Hills are available to the northeast and west, respectively.
Impact of Project on Natural, Cultural, and Existing Project Environments:	☐ Highly compatible ☒ Moderately compatible ☐ Not compatible ☐ Other Notes: There are no impacts on natural, cultural and existing project environments.
Landscape Context and Development Patterns:	☐ Natural/Undeveloped ☐ Rural ☐ Suburban ☒ Urban Notes: Project is in an urban space adjacent to commercial businesses and residences nearby.
Scenic, Visual and Historic Resource(s) within the Area of Visual Effect:	☐ Officially designated State Scenic Highway ☐ Eligible Scenic Highway ☐ Visual resources ☐ Federally (or otherwise) designated historic, scenic resource Notes: Not on an eligible or officially designated State Scenic Highway.
Expected Agency Involvement:	OCTA, Caltrans
Expected Public Feedback:	☐ Scenic resources identified as important ☐ Not important ☐ No public feedback Notes: Potentially public feedback to the alternatives and the possible visual impacts to the residents.

□

Regulatory Context

1. Does the project's aesthetic approach appear to be consistent with applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, policies, or standards?

Although the State is not required to comply with regional and local planning ordinances and other regulations, these documents are critical in understanding the importance that communities place on visual resources. The Caltrans Environmental Planning branch may have copies of the planning documents that pertain to the project. If not, this information can be obtained by contacting the local planning department.

Select a Response (Score)

- Low Consistency (4 Points)
- Moderate Consistency (3 Points)
- High Consistency (2 Points)
- Not Applicable (1 Point)

3

- **Assumptions/Issues:**

- County of Orange General Plan

- Preserve established Scenic Highways in order to protect the existing scenic qualities of these corridors (Transportation Element, Objective 1.4)

- Develop the roadway portion of the scenic corridors in a manner that recognizes the natural scenic resources of the corridor and is sensitive to them to the maximum extent feasible (Transportation Element, Objective 1.5)

- Offer of Dedication: Where necessary to preserve unique or special visual features, impose conditions on development within a scenic highway corridor to require dedication of scenic easements consistent with the adopted corridor plan (Transportation Element, Policy 1.2)

- View Design: Where feasible, through the design process and alignment studies, develop the scenic highway in a manner which considers the cone of vision of the motorist. Consider both the short and long-range views available along the way while enhancing them with foreground framing (Transportation Element, Policy 1.5)

- Highway Design: Design the roadway to have a visual quality and riding comfort resulting from its horizontal and vertical design. Introduce curves where feasible to take advantage of natural and man-made features (Transportation Element, Policy 1.6)

- City of Laguna Hills General Plan

- Improve connections with surrounding uses by enhancing landscaping, providing pedestrian connections, incorporating green areas, and planting street trees (Land Use Element, Goal LU-2, Policy LU-2.2).
- Create distinctive gateway architecture, landscaping, and signs at major entries to the community and in community activity centers (Land Uses Element, Goal LU-4, Policy LU-4.1).
- Create street frontages with architectural and landscape interest to provide visual appeal to the street and enhance the pedestrian experience in new development and redevelopment (Land Use Element, Goal LU-4, Policy LU-4.2).
- Continue to plant and maintain attractive drought tolerant and native landscaping that enhances the character of Laguna Hills (Land Use Element, Goal LU-4, Policy LU-4.5).

The City of Laguna Hills enforces a City Tree Ordinance to regulate the planting, maintenance, protection, and removal of city-owned trees and shrubs in city rights-of-way and in city parks and open space; refer to Laguna Hills Municipal Code Chapter 8-08, Trees and Shrubs in Public Places.

- City of Laguna Woods General Plan

- Continue to implement the scenic highway provisions of the Zoning Ordinance (Land Use Element, Objective II, Policy II.A., Implementation Measure II.A.3). \

The City of Laguna Woods enforces a City Tree Ordinance to regulate the planting, maintenance, protection, and removal of trees on public streets, parks, other city-owned property and in the public rights-of-way, and trees on nonresidential properties to the extent that the Municipal Code is effective; refer to Laguna Woods Municipal Code Chapter 4.26, Tree Maintenance and Removal Standards.

The City of Laguna Woods also maintains a “significant tree inventory” to protect all trees and shrubs located within public rights-of-way and/or on City property, all trees on nonresidential property subject to landscape/building permit, conditional use permit, environmental mitigation measures, or zoning ordinance requirement, and any trees identified in the City’s significant tree inventory adopted by resolution of the Laguna Woods City Council.

- City of Lake Forest General Plan

- Enhance the physical attributes of Lake Forest to create an identifiable and distinct community within Orange County (Land Use Element, Goal 2.0, Policy 2.1).
- Promote high quality in the design of all public and private development projects (Land Use Element, Goal 2.0, Policy 2.2).

- Ensure that new development fits within the existing setting and is compatible with the physical characteristics of available land, surrounding land uses, and public infrastructure availability (Land Use Element, Goal 3.0, Policy 3.1).
- Preserve and enhance the quality of Lake Forest residential neighborhoods by avoiding or abating the intrusion of disruptive, non-conforming buildings and uses (Land Use Element, Goal 3.0, Policy 3.2).

The City of Lake Forest also enforces a tree preservation ordinance to regulate the removal of eucalyptus trees and prevent the spread of eucalyptus longhorn borer; refer to Lake Forest Municipal Code Section 6.20.025, Regulations Pertaining to Conversion, Maintenance, and Removal of Eucalyptus Trees.

2. Would permits be required by outside regulatory agencies (i.e., federal, state, or local)?

Permit requirements can have an unintended consequence on the visual environment. Anticipated permits, as well as specific permit requirements may be determined by talking with the project Environmental Planner and Project Engineer. Note: coordinate with the Caltrans representative responsible for obtaining the permit prior to communicating directly with any permitting agency.

Select a Response (Score)

- Yes, both federal and state, or multiple permits required (4 Points) 1
- Yes, either federal, or state, or federal and local, or state and local (3 Points)
- Yes, local or multiple local only (2 Points)
- No (1 Point)

5 Visual Change

3. Would the project character be compatible with the visual character of the existing landscape?

Consider the types of adverse changes to the scenic integrity of the landscape caused by the project. Evaluate the scale and extent of the project features compared to the surrounding scale of the community. Is the project likely to give an urban appearance to an existing rural or suburban community?

Select a Response (Score)

- No Compatibility (4 Points) 2
- Low Compatibility (3 Points)
- Moderate Compatibility (2 Points)
- High Compatibility (1 Point)

- Assumptions/issues:

The Project follows the visual character of existing landscape, with surrounding commercial and residential land uses. The scale is compatible with environment which primarily consists of urban development not generating adverse changes to the scenic integrity of the landscape.

4. Would the project contrast adversely with the memorability (vividness), natural harmony and/or cultural order (unity) of the existing landscape?

Evaluate the scale and extent of the project features compared to the scale of the visual elements within the surroundings. Is the project likely to change the appearance in a way that is contrasting with the line, color, form, and texture of the existing landscape visual character?

Select a Response (Score)

- High Adverse Contrast (4 Points)
- Moderate Adverse Contrast (3 Points)
- Low Adverse Contrast (2 Points)
- No Contrast (1 Point)

3

- **Assumptions/issues:**

The Project would have moderate adverse impact on the memorability of the landscape. The addition of a flyover and a roundabout in the design alternatives would alter the line and form of the existing landscape. However, when viewed as a whole, these improvements would be cohesive and harmonious with the current environment. The visual impacts would affect the residents or businesses the most as their views would be longer in duration than motorists using the freeway.

5. Would the project, when viewed together with other past or foreseeable projects, result in a cumulative adverse change in the visual quality or character of the existing landscape?

Identify any projects in the area (both Caltrans' and others') that have been recently constructed and/or are reasonably foreseeable and/or currently planned for future construction. The window of time and the extent of area applicable to possible cumulative impacts should be based on a reasonable anticipation of the viewing public's awareness of cumulative change.

Select a Response (Score)

- Project may result in substantial adverse cumulative visual impacts (4 Points) 2
- Project would result in noticeable adverse cumulative visual impacts (3 Points)
- Project is unlikely to result in noticeable adverse cumulative visual impacts (2 Points)
- Project would not result in cumulative impacts (1 Point)

- **Assumptions/issues:**

As the Project area is highly developed, the majority of proposed projects within the surrounding area consists of urban in-fill projects.

6. Would the project produce a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views within the area?

Identify new sources of lighting and glare and how day- and nighttime visual conditions may change.

Select a Response (Score)

- High potential for adverse effects (4 Points) 3
- Moderate potential for adverse effects (3 Points)
- Low potential for adverse effects (2 Points)
- No potential for adverse effects (1 Point)

- **Assumptions/issues:**

- Implementation of the Build Alternatives may relocate existing lighting sources and traffic signals and/or introduce additional safety lighting sources or traffic signals to the project area. However, based on the highly built-out nature of the project corridor, sensitive viewer groups (i.e., residential uses) in the Project vicinity would generally experience similar sources of lighting as compared to existing conditions. In addition, the new sound wall features

could result in additional sources of glare from increased hardscape surfaces, particularly in areas along I-5 where existing landscaped sound walls would be removed and replaced.

6 Visual Sensitivity

7. What is the potential that the project proposal would be controversial within the community?

8. Assess the level of public concern by talking with local agency management and staff familiar with the affected community's sentiments as evidenced by past projects and/or current information.

9. Select a Response (Score)

- High Potential that project would be controversial (4 Points)
- Moderate Potential that project would be controversial (3 Points)
- Low Potential that project would be controversial (2 Points)
- No Potential that project would be controversial (1 Point)

3

- Assumptions/issues:

- The Project is likely to be moderately controversial, as all viewer groups would be affected in some way. Residential users are expected to have moderate to high level of concern regarding the Project proposal due to their direct and long-duration views of the Project, particularly those located along northbound I-5. Commercial, recreational, and civic users, while less exposed, would still experience moderate impacts. Drivers on the I-5 and local ones would also be affected, with a moderate degree of concern based on their viewing duration and exposure.

However, Caltrans and the local cities worked collaboratively to develop the proposed Build Alternatives, which is expected to reduce potential controversy.

10. How sensitive are potential viewer groups likely to be regarding visible changes proposed by the project?

Consider among other factors who the viewer groups represent, the number of viewers within the group, probable viewer expectations, activities, viewing duration, and orientation. The expected viewer sensitivity level may be scoped by applying professional judgment, and by soliciting information from other Caltrans staff, local agencies and community stakeholders familiar with the affected community's sentiments and demonstrated concerns.

Select a Response (Score)

- High Sensitivity (4 Points)
- Moderate Sensitivity (3 Points)
- Low Sensitivity (2 Points)
- No Sensitivity (1 Point)

3

- **Assumptions/issues:**

Residential groups, particularly those along northbound I-5, would have direct and prolonged views of the Project. In contrast, commercial and civic users, who are mostly indoors, and drivers along the I-5 and those local drivers would have a lower sensitivity as they are focused on the road and have limited interaction with the visual changes.

11. What level of local concern is there for the types of specific project features (e.g., bridge structures, large excavations, sound barriers, or median planting removal) and construction impacts that are proposed?

Certain project improvements can be of special interest to local citizens, causing a heightened level of public concern, and requiring a more focused visual analysis.

Select a Response (Score)

- High Level of Concern (4 Points)
- Moderate Level of Concern (3 Points)
- Low Level of Concern (2 Points)
- No Concern (1 Point)

3

- **Assumptions/issues:**

There is a moderate to heightened level of local concern regarding specific Project features and construction impacts associated with the Build Alternatives. These concerns primarily arise from the exposure of sensitive uses to views of the Project site during construction as well as some of the Project features. Vehicle access and staging of construction materials within Caltrans and City right-of-way, as well as in disturbed or developed areas along the Project, would be visible to local residents, motorists, and nearby commercial, civic, and recreational users. The visual impact of construction-related debris, equipment, and increased truck traffic is a key issue for local citizens. Although these impacts would be short-term, ending once construction is complete.

12. Are there federally, state, locally designated scenic or historic resources, or other visual resources within the project area of visual effect (i.e., viewshed)?

For example: protected viewsheds, visually sensitive public use areas, national historic/scenic trails, historic sites or structures, scenic designated viewpoints, wild and scenic rivers, state scenic highways or federal scenic byways, or potential visual resources such as stands of trees, rock outcroppings, etc.

Select a Response (Score)

- Multiple designated scenic resources (4 Points)
- Multiple potential visual resources or a single designated scenic resource (3 Points)
- One potential visual resource (2 Points)
- No identifiable scenic resources (1 Point)

2

- **Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions, issues, list known scenic/visual resources in AVE>**

There are no officially designated State Scenic Highways within the Project vicinity. However, the County of Orange General Plan designates El Toro Road, between Santa Margarita Parkway and Live Oak Canyon Road, as a County Scenic Highway. This section is classified as a Landscape Corridor, designated for special treatment to enhance the driving experience and the surrounding community. The overall obstruction of visual resources from the Project corridor would be minimal.

7 Design Process Considerations

13. Would the project sponsor or public benefit from a more detailed visual analysis in order to help reach consensus on a course of action to address potential visual impacts?

Consider the proposed project features, possible visual impacts, and probable environmental commitments.

Select a Response (Score)

- High Benefit (4 Points)
- Moderate Benefit (3 Points)
- Low Benefit (2 Points)
- No Benefit (1 Point)

4

- Assumptions/issues:

The Project would benefit from a more detailed visual analysis due to the public interest and the involvement of three distinct cities: Laguna Hills, Lake Forest, and Laguna Woods. Each city has its own environmental policies that need to be considered. Additionally, the area falls under the County of Orange General Plan. A comprehensive visual analysis could help address potential visual impacts while also ensuring compliance with environmental commitments.

14. Would the project likely require design changes to reduce the extent of visual resource impacts?

Consider design changes and enhancements such as realignment, additional alignment alternatives, vertical profile adjustments, extensive landscaping, architectural treatment, color and texture treatments and/or lighting of aboveground structures.

Select a Response (Score)

- Extensive changes and/or redesign (4 Points)
- Some redesign or minimization measures (3 Points)
- Minimal design changes (2 Points)
- No design changes (1 Point)

2

- Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>

Yes, the Project would require some minimization measures to reduce visual resource impacts. The proposed design changes, such as the addition of a southbound off-ramp and the inclusion of a flyover off-ramp, involve realignment of roadways. These adjustments would impact visual resources, and additional enhancements would be necessary to ensure that the changes blend with the surrounding environment, minimizing visual impacts effectively.

Highlight the number below and press FN+F9 to calculate the final project score.

Project Score: 30

[Store a copy of this completed questionnaire in the Project file.](#)
[Attach a copy of this completed questionnaire to the VIA report.](#)

8 Project Score

8.1 Select an Outline Based on Project Score

The total score would indicate the recommended VIA level for the project. In addition to considering circumstances relating to any one of the 12 questions that would justify elevating the VIA level, also consider any other project factors that would influence level selection.

2.6.3 Score 12-18 – VIA Questionnaire

No visual resource related regulatory requirements. No or negligible visual changes to the environment are proposed. None or minimal public concern has been identified.

This **Questionnaire** with rationale for selected responses to questions in the available spaces after each question along with a statement of no visual resource impact is appropriate and provides a sufficient rationale why a technical study is not required.

2.6.3 Score 19-28 –VIA Memorandum

Very limited visual resource related regulatory requirements. Minor visual changes to the environment are proposed. Minor public concern from the public may be expected.

A **VIA Memorandum** is appropriate in this case. The VIA Memorandum should briefly describe project features, impacts and any environmental commitment measures.

Visual simulations are not necessary. Go to the Directions for using and accessing VIA Memorandum Annotated Outline ([website link](#)).

2.6.3 Score 29-38 – Standard VIA Report

Several visual resource related regulatory requirements. Moderately noticeable visual changes to the environment are proposed. Moderate public concern may be expected.

A fully developed **Standard VIA Report** is appropriate. The report should describe in detail the project's visual attributes, its visual impact and potential environmental commitment measures. Visual simulations are recommended. This report would likely receive public review. Go to the Directions for using and accessing the Standard VIA Annotated Outline ([website link](#)).

2.6.3 Score 39-48 – Advanced VIA Report

Extensive visual resource related regulatory requirements and clearly noticeable changes to the environment are proposed. Moderate to high public concern may be expected. A fully developed **Advanced VIA Report** is appropriate. The report should describe in detail and numerically score the project's visual change and sensitivity, its visual impact and any environmental commitments proposed. Visual simulations are required. It is appropriate to alert the Project Development Team to the potential for highly adverse impacts and to consider project alternatives to avoid those impacts. This technical study would receive close public review. Go to the Directions for using and accessing the Advanced VIA Annotated Outline ([website link](#)).