

2.2.8 Visual/Aesthetics

2.2.8.1 Regulatory Setting

NEPA establishes that the federal government use all practicable means to ensure all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings (42 U.S. Code [USC] 4331(b)(2)). The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in its implementation of NEPA (23 USC 109(h)), also directs that final decisions on projects are to be made in the best overall public interest taking into account adverse environmental impacts, including among others, the destruction or disruption of aesthetic values.

CEQA establishes that it is the policy of the state to take all action necessary to provide the people of the state “with...enjoyment of aesthetic, natural, scenic and historic environmental qualities” (Public Resources Code Section 21001(b)).

California Streets and Highways Code Section 92.3 directs Caltrans to use drought resistant landscaping and recycled water when feasible and incorporate native wildflowers and native and climate-appropriate vegetation into the planting design when appropriate.

2.2.8.2 Affected Environment

This section was prepared based on findings from the *Supplemental Visual Impact Assessment for I-5/EI Toro Road Interchange* (SVIA) (Caltrans 2026). The SVIA evaluates potential visual impacts of the Project based on the guidance from FHWA in *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* (FHWA 1990). The following key terms describe the visual resources and general landscape in the Project corridor and are used in assessing visual impacts throughout this section.

- *Visual Character* includes attributes of form, line, color, and texture, and it is used to describe, not evaluate, visual resources.
- *Visual Quality* is evaluated based on the attributes of vividness (the extent to which the landscape is memorable), intactness (integrity of visual features in the landscape and extent of visual obstructions), and unity (combination of visual elements in a coherent pattern).
- *Resource Change* is one of two variables that determines visual impact. It is determined by evaluating the visual character and visual quality of the visual resources within the Project corridor before and after the construction of the Project.
- *Viewer Response* is the second variable that determines visual impact. It is a measure or prediction of how the viewer would react to changes in the visual environment.

- **Visual Impact:** Level of visual impact is evaluated based on combining resource change and viewer response.

Visual quality, resource change, viewer response, and visual impact are assigned a level of low, moderately low, moderate, moderately high, or high for the visual resource or landscape they are describing.

Additionally, the following terms are used throughout this section and are defined below to provide clarity:

- **Project limits:** Includes the physical extent of Project components.
- **Project corridor or corridor:** Includes the Project limits as well as the surrounding area that encompasses all landscape units discussed below.

Project Location and Setting

The Project limits on I-5 extend from approximately 0.2 mile south of the Los Alisos Boulevard Overcrossing (postmile [PM] 17.8) to approximately 0.2 mile south of the Lake Forest Drive Overcrossing (PM 19.7), a distance of approximately 1.9 miles. The Project is in 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.

According to the State Scenic Highways Mapping System, there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways within the Project vicinity (Caltrans 2025). Since the Project is not within an officially designated State Scenic Highway, a scenic highway evaluation was not prepared for the Project in the SVIA.

Types of Viewers

Viewers within the Project corridor include highway neighbors (views *to* the road) and highway travelers (views *from* the road). For this Project, the following highway neighbors were considered:

- Commercial/Retail
- Residential

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

- Commercial and civic users
- Residential users
- Recreational users
- I-5 motorists

- Local roadway users

Group Viewer Response

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.

Recreational neighbors are the most sensitive viewer group, while residential users, recreational travelers, and other local travelers are considered to have the highest viewer response, described in detail in the SVIA for each viewer group (Caltrans 2026). The viewer response along the Project corridor overall is expected to be low to high. Table 2.2.8-1 and Table 2.2.8-2 summarize the overall viewer response determinations for each viewer type.

Table 2.2.8-1. Neighbor Viewer Response Ratings

Viewer Type	Viewer Response
Residential users	High
Commercial users	Moderate

Table 2.2.8-2. Traveler Viewer Response Ratings

Viewer Type	Viewer Response
Residential users	High
Recreational users	Moderate high
Commercial and civic users	Low
I-5 motorists	Low
Local roadway uses	Moderate high

Visual Resources

Visual resources of the Project setting are defined and identified below by assessing visual character and visual quality of the Project corridor. The distance zone descriptions outlined below are used to describe the location of visual resources for the Project.

- *Foreground*: 0 to 0.25–0.5 mile.
- *Middle ground*: Extends from the foreground zone (0.25–0.5 mile) to 3–5 miles from the viewer in relation to the landscape.
- *Background*: Extends from the middle ground zone (3–5 miles) to infinity.

Visual resources of the Project setting are defined and identified below by assessing visual character and visual quality in the Project corridor.

Visual resources are those that do not fit the definition of a scenic resource—which are officially recognized by a government agency or non-governmental organization—but still enhance or contribute to the visual quality and character of the Project corridor.

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 (County of Orange 2005).

The *Laguna Hills General Plan* recognizes Aliso Creek and Veeh Reservoir as important open space and biological resources (City of Laguna Hills 2009). The *Lake Forest 2040 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 (City of Lake Forest 2020). The *City of Laguna Woods General Plan* does not identify scenic vistas or designated scenic resources within the city's sphere of influence (City of Laguna Woods 2015).

Visual Character and Visual Quality

Build Alternative 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 Build Alternative 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 Build Alternative 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 Build Alternative 1 are considered moderate.

Build Alternative 1a is a variation of Build 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 Build Alternative 1a are similar to those described for Build Alternative 1.

Landscape Units and Key Views

The Project corridor was divided into a series of “landscape units,” each with its own distinctive visual character (Figure 2.2.8-1). For this Project, the following 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.

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

Key views (KVs) 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 (see Figure 2.2.8-2 and Figure 2.2.8-3):

- Build Alternative 1, KV 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 would experience views of the ramp realignment and bridge structure, including the removal of existing mature trees. The existing visual quality at Build Alternative 1, KV 1 is low.
- Build Alternative 1, KV 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 would affect local residents, including the reduction of existing soundwalls and landscaping and new retaining wall/soundwalls that come into the existing parkway. The existing visual quality at Build Alternative 1, KV 2 is medium.
- Build Alternative 1, KV 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 would require removal of existing businesses on both sides of the roadway and widening of the existing frontage road. The existing visual quality at Build Alternative 1, KV 3 is low.
- Build Alternative 1, KV 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 would observe 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. The existing visual quality at Build Alternative 1, KV 4 is medium-low.

- Build Alternative 1a, KV 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 would result in the removal of existing businesses on both sides of the roadway and the addition of lanes along the frontage road. The existing visual quality at Build Alternative 1a, KV 1 is medium.



Figure 2.2.8-1

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Landscape Units

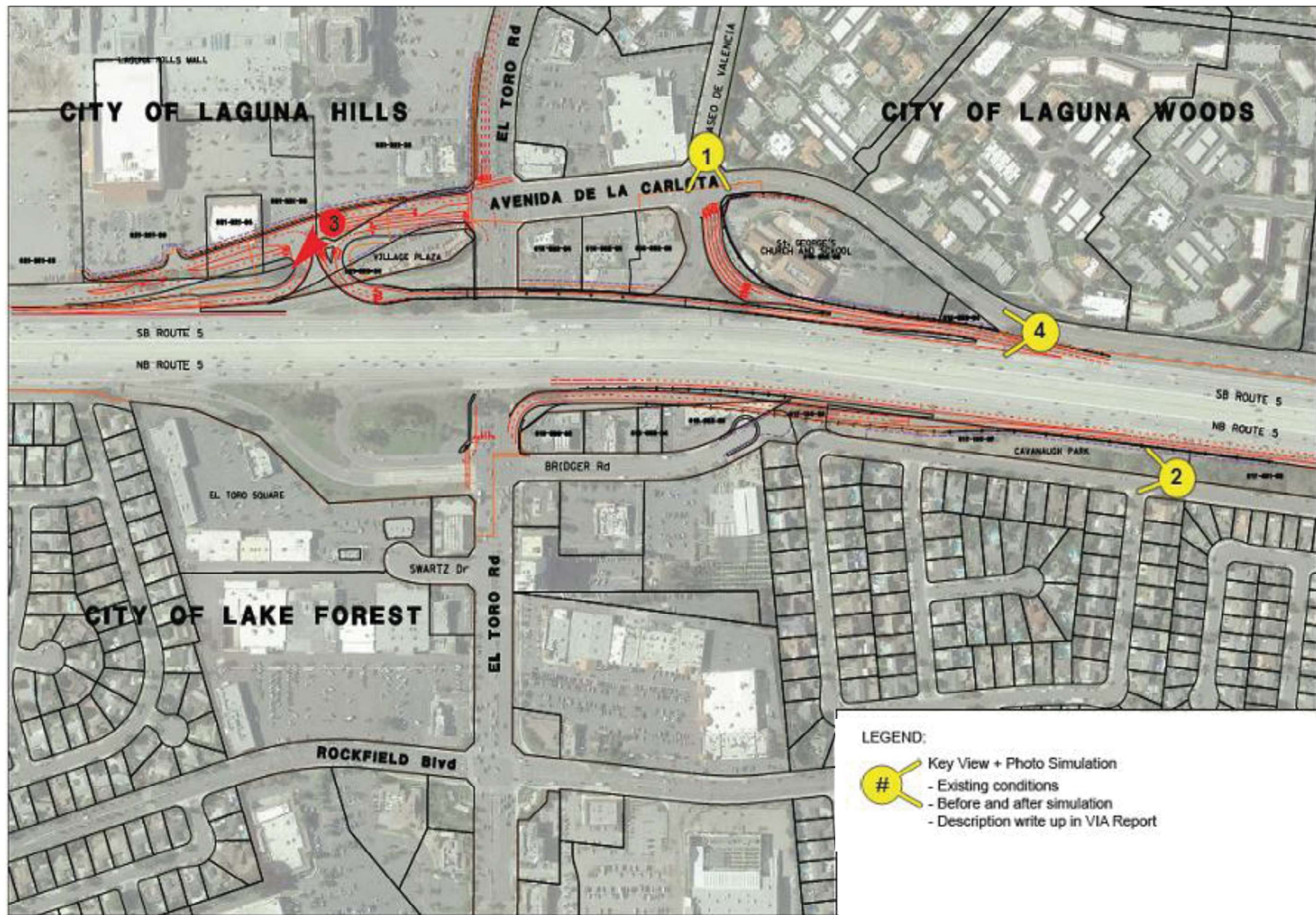


Figure 2.2.8-2

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Key Views for Alternative 1

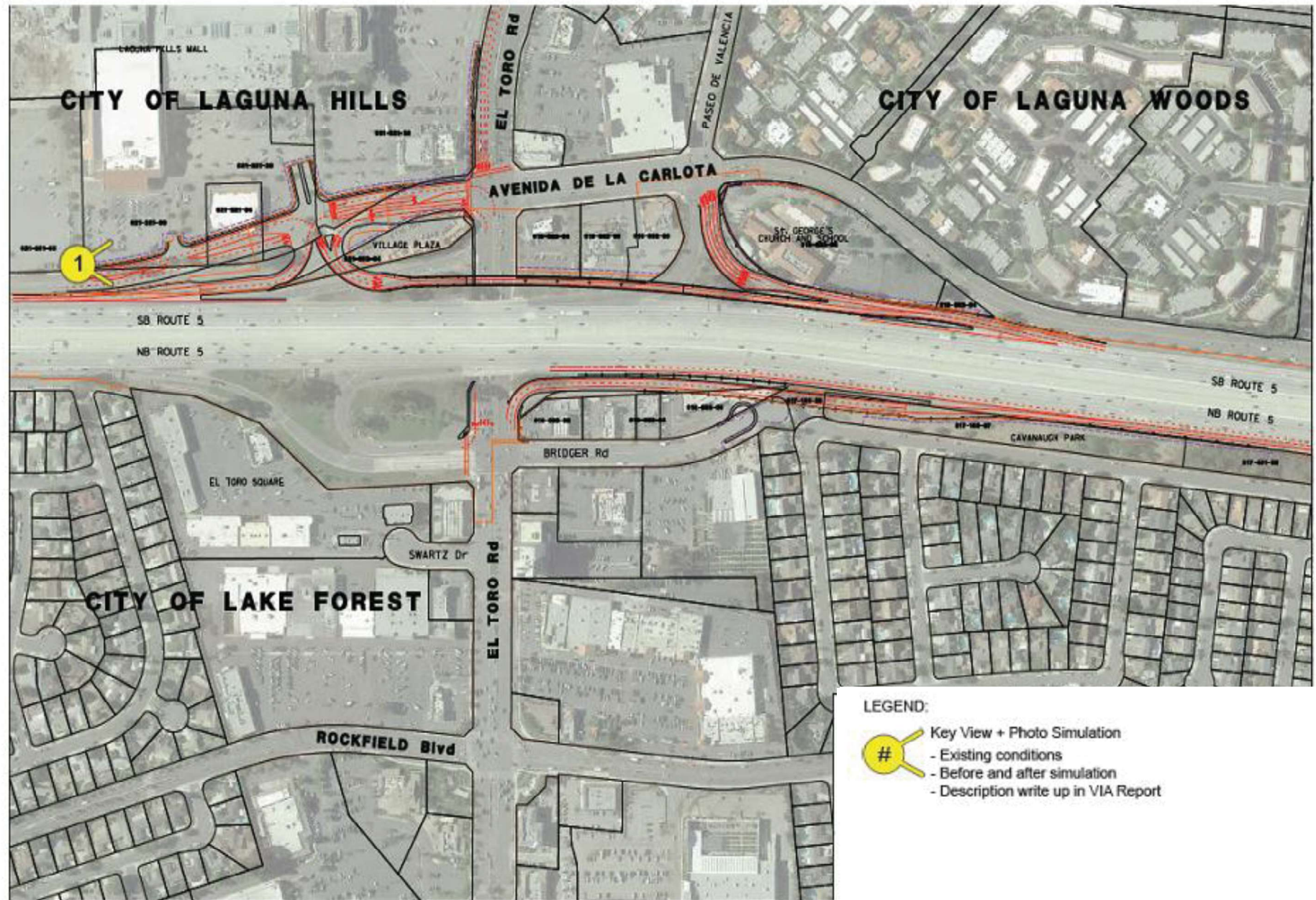


Figure 2.2.8-3

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Key Views for Alternative 1a

2.2.8.3 Environmental Consequences

Build Alternative

Temporary 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 to 3 years. Night lighting, dust, temporary structures, hauling of materials, contractor staging areas, tree removals, and detours are anticipated during construction.

Temporary lane closures implemented during construction would have the potential to decrease speeds and increase the duration that motorists view the surrounding landscape, which would increase viewer sensitivity and the overall visual impact of construction. The visual impact would be greatest immediately following completion of Build Alternative 1 and its design variation (Build Alternative 1a), when some areas would appear bare, new concrete features would be visually prominent, and certain views would be partially impaired by structures, barriers, and walls. These impacts would diminish over time as avoidance, minimization and/or enhancement components become established.

The impacts disclosed above from construction of the Build Alternative 1 and its design variation (Build Alternative 1a) would be temporary and relatively short in duration. Avoidance and minimization measures are proposed in Section 2.2.8.4, Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures, and are expected to reduce or avoid temporary visual impacts.

Permanent Impacts

A visual assessment for each Project KV location within its landscape unit was conducted to consider permanent visual impacts under Build Alternative 1. The assessment is included in the SVIA and is summarized below.

Build Alternative 1 KV 1 Visual Impact Analysis

Build Alternative 1, KV 1 is a mixed commercial/residential landscape unit and includes the 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, KV 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 a portion of the skyline as it descends toward El Toro Road, where the new off-ramp meets finished grade at Avenida de la Carlota.

Viewer Response. Build Alternative 1, KV 1 represents the perspective of both commercial and residential viewers experiencing the northern view at the Paseo de Valencia off-ramp realignment and new off-ramp bridge to Avenida de la Carlota. The Project environment consists of a new bridge structure that ramps upward and downward toward Paseo de la Carlota. The proposed bridge is generally consistent in character with the existing Project environment; however, it would disrupt the existing visual focal point. The structure would temporarily disrupt views toward the background of existing mature trees and the Santa Ana Mountains. Removal of mature trees would create a more open, unplanted area within the existing built environment, which would increase visibility of the new bridge structure. 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 would not be obstructed by the Project features. Overall viewer response is considered moderate.

Resource Change. As shown on Figure 2.2.8-4, the visual changes would include the addition of a new bridge structure and the removal of mature trees on the southbound side of the freeway. Removal of mature trees would create a more open view of freeway traffic and would increase visibility toward the Santa Monica Mountains; however, the introduction of the bridge structure would interrupt these background views. The overall resource change at Build Alternative 1, KV 1 would be slightly adverse.

Visual Impact. A moderate viewer response in combination with low resource change would result in an overall visual impact that is considered low adverse.



Alternative 1, KV 1 – Existing Condition



Alternative 1, KV 1 – Proposed Condition

Build Alternative 1 KV 2 Visual Impact Analysis

Build Alternative 1, KV 2 is located within a residential landscape unit and 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 would extend 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 soundwalls and retaining walls.

Viewer Response. Build Alternative 1, KV 2 represents the perspective of residential viewers experiencing the view of the realigned northbound I-5 on-ramp from El Toro Road, which would reduce the width of Cavanaugh Park to accommodate the ramp and introduce a new soundwall that would replace an existing soundwall with established vines. The existing 14-foot soundwall would shift away from the freeway toward the neighborhood about 10 feet inward. Although the new soundwall would replace the existing structure, vine coverage would require time to re-establish. The new ramp structure would not be visible from this location because the new soundwall would screen 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 would remain visible from the adjacent parkway and residential community. No prominent distant views are present from this location. Overall viewer response is moderate.

Resource Change. As shown on Figure 2.2.8-5, the visual changes include the introduction of a soundwall and reduction of 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. Existing utility poles and overhead lines would continue to traverse the viewshed and cause a slight visual disturbance for viewers. The overall resource change at Build Alternative 1, KV 2 is slightly adverse.

Visual Impact. A moderate viewer response in combination with slightly adverse resource change would result in an overall visual impact that is considered slightly adverse.



Alternative 1, KV 2 – Existing Condition



Alternative 1, KV 2 – Proposed Condition

Figure 2.2.8-5

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Build Alternative 1, Key View 2

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Build Alternative 1 KV 3 Visual Impact Analysis (No Simulation)

As shown on Figure 2.2.8-6, Build Alternative 1, KV 3 is a mixed commercial landscape unit and is the eastern view at Avenida de la Carlota toward the new on- and off-ramps. This view includes the new ramps, which would require removal of existing businesses on both sides of the roadway and widening of the existing frontage road. The additional I-5 southbound off-ramp to would independently serve El Toro Road to the east and west, where the existing condition has a barrier wall with chain-link fencing and a retail building (Village Plaza), with no direct access to I-5. A new bridge is proposed to accommodate the southbound El Toro Road east off-ramp; it 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. 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 would be maintained.

No photo simulation was prepared for this view in the SVIA; instead, visual change was evaluated through written description and analysis.

Viewer Response. Build Alternative 1, KV 3 represents the perspective of commercial viewers experiencing the new southbound freeway on- and off-ramp bridge that would require the removal of existing buildings. The 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 would be removed, allowing additional landscaped areas in place of existing buildings to be introduced. There are no prominent distant views. This key view is adjacent to an existing shopping center and parking lot. Recreational drivers and commuters exhibit low sensitivity to visual change because they generally lack long-term emotional attachment to their surroundings. Overall viewer response is considered moderate.

Resource Change. The visual changes include new southbound freeway on- and off-ramp bridge, which requires removal of existing buildings. Existing palm trees at the corner of El Toro Road and Avenida de la Carlota would be affected; however, no other continuous streetscape elements are present along the frontage road in the westbound direction. 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, would improve visual character and the visual change associated with the Project. The overall resource change at Build Alternative 1, KV 3 is moderately beneficial.

Visual Impact. A moderate viewer response in combination with moderately beneficial resource change would result in an overall visual impact that is considered slightly beneficial.



Alternative 1, KV 3 – Existing Condition

Figure 2.2.8-6

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Build Alternative 1, Key View 3 (No Simulation)

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Build Alternative 1 KV 4 Visual Impact Analysis

Build Alternative 1, KV 4 is located within a motorist landscape unit and represents the southern view from the southbound I-5 mainline toward the Paseo de Valencia off-ramp.

Build Alternative 1, KV 4 includes the proposed 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 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. 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, and it includes the removal of existing trees and landscaping.

Viewer Response. Build Alternative 1, KV 4 represents the perspective of freeway motorists traveling southbound on I-5. This key view primarily represents the perspective of freeway users exiting at Paseo de Valencia or continuing southbound. In KV 4, the 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. The key view does not include any prominent distant views. Overall viewer response is low.

Resource Change. As shown on Figure 2.2.8-7, the visual changes include 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. Existing mature eucalyptus trees near Paseo de Valencia would be removed, resulting in a loss of landscape within an area that already contains limited vegetation. Viewers traveling along the freeway would perceive the new ramp as another component of the already overbuilt freeway system, where it would remain generally compatible with the freeway context. In contrast, viewers on local streets would experience the new bridge structure as less compatible with the existing environment due to its prominence and contrast with surrounding land uses. The overall resource change at Build Alternative 1, KV 4 is slightly adverse.

Visual Impact. A low viewer response in combination with slightly adverse resource change would result in an overall visual impact that is considered slightly adverse.



Alternative 1, KV 4 – Existing Condition



Alternative 1, KV 4 – Proposed Condition

Figure 2.2.8-7

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Build Alternative 1, Key View 4

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Build Alternative 1a KV 1 Visual Impact Analysis

Build Alternative 1a, KV 1 is located within a commercial landscape unit and represents the western view along Avenida de la Carlota toward the new on- and off-ramps.

Build Alternative 1a includes all features described for Build Alternative 1, in addition to a new 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 would create 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.

Viewer Response. Build Alternative 1a, KV 1 represents the perspective of commercial viewers from Avenida de la Carlota to I-5, next to the Laguna Hills Mall. This key view represents the perspective of motorists with a western view along Avenida de la Carlota toward the new on- and off-ramps. In Build Alternative 1a, KV 1, the Project environment would include all features described for Build Alternative 1, in addition to a new 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 would create 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. No prominent distant views are present from this key view. Overall viewer response is moderate.

Resource Change. As shown on Figure 2.2.8-8, visual changes would include a new southbound freeway on- and off-ramp bridge, removal of an existing building, and an additional public street connection to the existing commercial area. The existing southbound ramp would be removed. Existing street landscaping would be removed where additional lanes would be added along Avenida de la Carlota, and existing landscaping would also be affected along El Toro Road and northbound I-5. The overall resource change at Build Alternative 1a, KV 1 is moderately beneficial.

Visual Impact. A moderate viewer response in combination with moderately beneficial resource change would result in an overall visual impact that is considered slightly beneficial.



Alternative 1a, KV 1– Existing Condition



Alternative 1a, KV 1 – Proposed Condition

Figure 2.2.8-8

I-5 El Toro Road Interchange Project
Build Alternative 1a, Key View 1

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Summary of Key View Narrative Ratings

Table 2.2.8-3 summarizes and compares the narrative ratings for visual resource change, viewer response, and resulting visual impacts of Build Alternative 1 and its design variation (Build Alternative 1a) for each key view.

Table 2.2.8-3. Summary of Key View Narrative Ratings

Key View	Resource Change	Viewer Sensitivity	Visual Impact
Build Alternative 1 KV 1	Slightly adverse (-1)	Moderate	Low adverse (-1)
Build Alternative 1 KV 2	Slightly adverse (-1)	Moderate	Slightly adverse (-1)
Build Alternative 1 KV 3	Moderately beneficial (+2)	Moderate	Slightly beneficial (+1)
Build Alternative 1 KV 4	Slightly adverse (-1)	Low	Slightly adverse (-1)
Build Alternative 1a KV 1	Moderately beneficial (+2)	Moderate	Slightly beneficial (+1)

Context-Sensitive Solutions

Build Alternative 1 and its design variation (Build Alternative 1a) 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.

Aesthetic features and plantings, such as trees, shrubs, and groundcover where feasible, would help improve public acceptance of the Project. Minimization measure **VIS-1** would minimize damage to existing vegetation, and **VIS-2** would maintain the Project area's visual context—including color, form, and texture—by installing landscaping compatible with the existing setting. Minimization measures **VIS-3** through **VIS-5** would require coordination with affected cities to maintain streetscape continuity, use retaining wall and structural element designs that reduce visual contrast, and locate construction staging areas and material laydown zones to minimize visual disruption and avoid unnecessary disturbance beyond the Project limits.

No-Build Alternative

Under the No-Build Alternative, the Project would not be implemented. Therefore, there would be no temporary or permanent visual impacts on the existing visual character, visual quality, or affected viewer groups within the Project corridor. However, visual impacts could still occur on I-5 from other planned projects located along the Project corridor.

2.2.8.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following measures would be implemented to avoid, minimize, or reduce adverse visual impacts associated with the Project. No mitigation is required.

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 vines 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.

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