

Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Level

Use the following questions and subsequent score as a guide to help determine the appropriate level of VIA documentation. This questionnaire assists the VIA preparer (i.e. Landscape Architect) in estimating the probable visual impacts of a proposed project on the environment and in understanding the degree and breadth of the possible visual issues. The goal is to develop a suitable document strategy that is thorough, concise and defensible.

Enter the project name and consider each of the twelve questions below. Select the response that most closely applies to the proposed project and corresponding number on the right side of the table. Points are automatically computed at the bottom of the table and 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 study and associated annotated outlines (i.e., memo, standard, advanced).

This scoring system should be used as a preliminary guide and should not be used as a substitute for objective analysis on the part of the preparer. Although the total score may recommend a certain level of VIA document, circumstances associated with any one of the ten question-areas may indicate the need to elevate the VIA to a greater level of detail. For projects done by others on the State Highway System, the District Landscape Architect should be consulted when scoping the VIA level and provide concurrence on the level of analysis used.

[The Standard Environmental Reference, Environmental Handbook, Volume I: Chapter 27-Visual & Aesthetics Review](#)

lists preparer qualifications for conducting the visual impact assessment process. Landscape Architects receive formal training in the area of visual resource management and can appropriately determine which VIA level is appropriate.

Preparer Qualifications:

"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."

Calculate VIA Level Score

Project Information

Project Name

Route 74 MAP

Project Identification #

12-0R990 / 1219000072

Project Location (Dist-Co-Rte-PM)

12-Ora-74-0.0/11.5

Preparer Name and CA LA License Number

Jared Godett LA 6096

Caltrans District Landscape Architect (DLA)

For projects on State Highway System Only, Name of Caltrans District Landscape Architect (DLA) providing VIA Questionnaire Score Concurrence - if different than above.

Eric Dickson

Visual Features of Project and its Alternative(s)

Project proposes Pavement and Drainage rehabilitation along with sign a

Additional Visual Context Remarks

Enter Additional Visual Context

Regulatory Framework

Potential Agencies that may have to be Involved

☒ Federal ☒ State ☐ Local ☐ Tribal ☐ Other

Visual Change and Sensitivity

Landscape Observations

☐ Water ☒ Visually dominant landforms ☒ Natural vegetation
☐ Visually Appealing Structures ☐ Other features of interest

Impact of Project on Natural, Cultural, and Existing Project Environments

- ☒ **Highly compatible** ☐ **Moderately compatible** ☐ **Not compatible**
- ☐ **Other**

Landscape Context and Development Patterns

- ☒ **Natural/Undeveloped** ☒ **Rural** ☒ **Suburban** ☐ **Urban**

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**

Expected Agency Involvement

US Forest Service

Expected Public Feedback

- ☐ **Scenic resources identified as important** ☐ **Not important**
- ☐ **No public feedback**

Change to Visual Environment

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

1.

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.

High Consistency (2 point) ▼

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

2.

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.

Yes, either federal, or state, or federal and local, or state and local (3 poin

Will the project character be compatible with the visual character of the existing landscape?

3.

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?

High Compatibility (1 points) ▼

Will 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?

No Contrast (1 points) ▼

Will 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.

Project will not result in cumulative impacts (1 point)

Will the project produce a new source of substantial light or glare, which will 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.

No potential for adverse effects (1 point) ▼

What is the potential that the project proposal will be controversial within the community?

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.

No Potential that project will be controversial (1 point) ▼

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..

Moderate Sensitivity (3 points) ▼

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.

Low Level of Concern (2 points) ▼

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.

No identifiable scenic resources (1 point)

Will 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.

No Benefit (1 point) ▼

Will 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.

No design changes (1 point) ▼

Assumptions/Issues

Project proposes to rahabilitat existing facilities causing little change to the visual environment.

Calculate Total

It is recommended that you print a copy of these calculations for the project file.

Project Score: 18

Select An Outline Based Upon Project Score

The total score will 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.

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.

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).

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 will likely receive public review. Go to the Directions for using and accessing the Standard VIA Annotated Outline (website link).

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 will receive close public review. Go to the Directions for using and accessing the Advanced VIA Annotated Outline (website link coming soon).

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