

2.6 Visual/Aesthetics

2.6.1 Regulatory Setting

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, establishes that the federal government use all practicable means to ensure all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically (emphasis added) and culturally pleasing surroundings (42 United States Code [USC] 4331[b][2]). To further emphasize this point, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in its implementation of NEPA (23 USC 109[h]), 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.

2.6.2 Affected Environment

The information in this section is based on the *Visual Impact Assessment* (VIA) (May 2019). The study area for visual impacts is defined as the viewshed within a 1-mile (mi) radius of the project limits.

2.6.2.1 Visual Setting

The proposed project's location establishes the context for determining the impact of proposed changes to the existing visual setting. The regional landscape of the study area is characterized by coastal communities, rolling hills, and canyons. The City of San Juan Capistrano (City) is situated in a coastal valley (1 mi east of the Pacific Ocean) at the foothills of southern Orange County, near the southern tip of the Santa Ana Mountains and south of the San Joaquin Hills. The terrain is predominantly composed of gently to steeply rolling hills containing deep cut canyons and gullies. State Route 74 (SR-74) is a regional highway that traverses the City in a southwest/northeast direction and connects Orange and Riverside Counties. The study area is located along a canyon formed by San Juan Creek and ranges in elevation from approximately 135 to 175 feet (ft) above mean sea level. Within the study area, SR-74 passes through semi-rural land with very low-, medium-low, and medium-density residential uses, neighborhood parks, and open space uses.

The County of Orange General Plan has designated SR-74 as a landscape corridor, which traverses developed or developing areas and has been designated for special treatment to provide a pleasant driving environment as well as community enhancement. According to the San Juan Capistrano General Plan Community Design Element, the visual character of San Juan Capistrano is established by its location within a beautiful valley surrounded by natural hillside areas. This character is also

established through the architectural styles of buildings and the City's historic features. No other General Plan-designated scenic resources or corridors occur within the study area.

The California Scenic Highway Mapping System includes a list of highways that are either eligible for designation as a scenic highway or have been officially designated. These highways are identified in Section 263 of the California Streets and Highway Code. According to the California Scenic Highway Mapping System, there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways within the study area. However, SR-74 is identified as an eligible State Scenic Highway in Orange County.

The visual setting of the study area is discussed in terms of Visual Assessment Units, which divide a project corridor into "outdoor rooms". Each Visual Assessment Unit has its own visual character and visual quality. It is typically defined by the limits of a particular viewshed. One Visual Assessment Unit (i.e., VAU1) was determined to be sufficient for analyzing Build Alternative 2 because the study area has consistent development features (i.e., transportation uses along SR-74, surrounding residential uses, sidewalks, retaining walls, and ornamental landscaping).

2.6.2.2 Key Views

It is not feasible to analyze all the views in which the Build Alternative (Build Alternative 2) would be seen; therefore, it is necessary to select a number of key views associated with VAU1 that would most clearly demonstrate the change in the visual resources of Build Alternative 2. Key views also represent the viewer groups that have the highest potential to be affected by Build Alternative 2, considering visual exposure and visual sensitivity.

Overall, the visible form of SR-74 in the study area is a consistent width and follows a generally straight line with a slight increase in width and curvature at the City/County line. Within the western portion of the study area, edges are defined due to existing curb and gutter as well as pedestrian facilities along eastbound and westbound SR-74. Along the eastern portion of the study area, the edge of the highway is not defined along the westbound side of SR-74; however, the eastbound side of SR-74 is defined by existing curb and gutter as well as pedestrian facilities. Surrounding uses include residential, neighborhood park, and open space/recreation. Transportation uses include SR-74, a small portion of Interstate 5 (I-5 or the San Diego Freeway) and surrounding local roadways. Other hardscape features within the

study area include curvilinear and linear sidewalks, signage, retaining walls, barriers, fences, overhead power lines, and street lighting.

The most prominent visual resources in the study area include SR-74, meandering pedestrian sidewalks and an equestrian trail, and the surrounding hillsides, mature trees, and ornamental landscaping. Colors throughout the study area vary between the mature trees, ornamental landscaping, and the lighter appearance of the sidewalks, equestrian trail, roadway, and surrounding development. The scale of the features visible in the study area is relatively consistent, with most structures ranging one to two stories in height. Diversity within the study area is moderate to moderate-high based on the variety of visual patterns associated with the mature trees, ornamental landscaping, sidewalks, equestrian trail, and roadway. Continuity within the study area is moderate, with form, line, color, and texture interrupted by limited signage, retaining walls, barriers, fences, overhead power lines, and street lighting. The location and direction of each key view are shown on Figure 2.6-1. Descriptions of each key view are provided below and on Figures 2.6-2 through 2.6-6.

Build Alternative 2 Key Views

Key View 1

Key View 1 is located along an existing sidewalk at the intersection of SR-74 and Calle Entradero, looking east along SR-74 and toward existing residential uses along eastbound SR-74 and Calle Entradero. Key View 1 would depict the widening of SR-74, and new landscape enhancements and reconstruction of the meandering sidewalks to the north of SR-74, between Calle Entradero and Via Cordova.

Key View 2

Key View 2 is located along eastbound SR-74 just west of the existing SR-74/Via Cordova intersection. Key View 2 would depict the project's proposed four-way traffic control signal at the SR-74/Via Cordova intersection and relocation of the existing Hunt Club Community guard house, as well as a proposed 712 ft long noise barrier on the south side of SR-74 from Via Cordova to Via Cristal. New landscape enhancements and reconstruction of the existing sidewalk on the north side of SR-74 would also be depicted.

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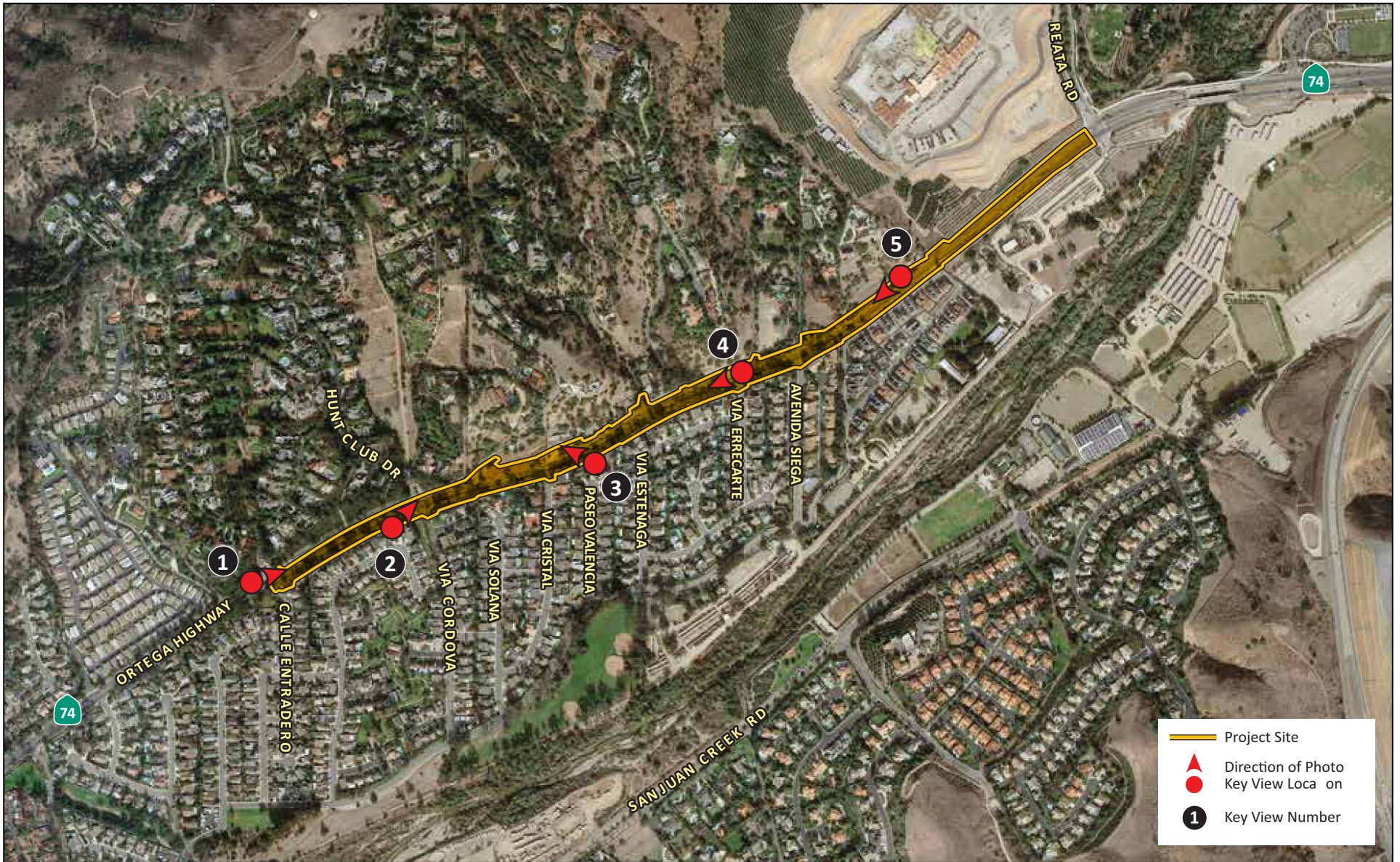


FIGURE 2.6-1



NOT TO SCALE

SOURCE: MBI/Google Earth (Oct 2018)

I:\CDT1609.41\G\View Simulation\View_Sim_Key-View_Locations.cdr (5/21/2019)

SR-74 Lower Ortega Highway Widening Project

Key View Locations Map

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Key View 1 - Existing Condition



Key View 1 - Proposed Condition

FIGURE 2.6-2

SR-74 Lower Ortega Highway Widening Project
Key View 1 - Existing & Proposed Condition

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Key View 2 - Existing Condition



Key View 2 - Proposed Condition

FIGURE 2.6-3

SR-74 Lower Ortega Highway Widening Project
Key View 2 - Existing & Proposed Condition

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Key View 3 - Existing Condition



Key View 3 - Proposed Condition

FIGURE 2.6-4

SR-74 Lower Ortega Highway Widening Project
Key View 3 - Existing & Proposed Condition

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Key View 4 - Existing Condition



Key View 4 - Proposed Condition

FIGURE 2.6-5

SR-74 Lower Ortega Highway Widening Project
Key View 4 - Existing & Proposed Condition

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Key View 5 - Existing Condition



Key View 5 - Proposed Condition

FIGURE 2.6-6

SR-74 Lower Ortega Highway Widening Project
Key View 5 - Existing & Proposed Condition

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Key View 4

Key View 4 is located within the westbound travel lane of SR-74, at Via Errecarte. This view looks west along the proposed project. Key View 4 represents a typical view for westbound SR-74 travelers and offers views to mature ornamental landscaping, slope vegetation, a two-lane highway, and sidewalk to the south of SR-74. Key View 4 would depict the project's proposed widening of SR-74 from two to four lanes, curb and gutter, and views to a proposed 1,215 ft long noise barrier on the south side of SR-74, from Via Cristal to Via Errecarte.

Key View 5

Key View 5 is located along westbound SR-74, between Avenida Siega and the City/County municipal boundary. This view looks west along the proposed project. Key View 5 represents a typical view for westbound SR-74 travelers and offers views to mature ornamental landscaping, slope vegetation, a two-lane highway, and overhead power lines. Key View 5 would depict Build Alternative 2's proposed widening of SR-74 from two to four lanes, curb and gutter, and new sidewalk along eastbound SR-74.

2.6.2.3 Visual Character

Visual character includes attributes such as form, line, color, and texture, and is used to describe rather than evaluate (i.e., these attributes are neither considered good nor bad). However, a change in visual character can be evaluated when it is compared with the viewer response to that change. Changes in visual character can be identified by how visually compatible a proposed project would be with the existing condition by using visual character attributes as an indicator. For this project, the following attributes were considered:

- **Form:** Visual mass or shape
- **Line:** Edges or linear definition
- **Color:** Reflective brightness (light, dark) and hue (red, green)
- **Texture:** Surface coarseness
- **Dominance:** Position, size, or contrast
- **Scale:** Apparent size as it relates to the surroundings
- **Diversity:** A variety of visual patterns
- **Continuity:** Uninterrupted flow of form, line, color, or textural pattern

2.6.2.4 Visual Quality

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness, and unity present in the study area. Public attitudes validate the assessed level of quality and predict how changes to the study area can affect these attitudes. This process helps identify specific methods for addressing each visual impact that may occur as a result of the project. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality are defined below:

- **Vividness** is the extent to which the landscape is memorable and is associated with distinctive, contrasting, and diverse visual elements.
- **Intactness** is the integrity of visual features in the landscape and the extent to which the existing landscape is free from non-typical visual intrusions.
- **Unity** is the extent to which all visual elements combine to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern.

The average visual quality within the study area is considered moderate-high. Within the study area, motorists and pedestrians on the SR-74 eastbound and westbound travel lanes have views of transportation-related uses (i.e., SR-74 and local residential streets), pedestrian and equestrian trails, adjacent residential development, and mature trees and ornamental landscaping. These visual elements are unified within the western portion of the study area and are not unified within the eastern portion of the study area. Limited signage, retaining walls, barriers, fences, overhead power lines, and street lighting reduce the overall intactness of the study area. Visual unity within the study area is increased with the meandering pedestrian sidewalks and equestrian trail along westbound SR-74 as well as mature trees and ornamental landscaping associated with surrounding residential development.

2.6.2.5 Viewer Groups

There are two major types of viewer groups for highway projects: highway neighbors and highway users. Each viewer group has their own particular level of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity, resulting in distinct and predictable visual concerns for each group that help to predict their responses to visual changes.

The primary viewer groups in the study area include motorists traveling along SR-74. Other viewers likely to be affected by visual changes associated with Build Alternative 2 include local roadway travelers, residential community residents, and visitors to the nearby recreational uses.

2.6.2.6 Viewer Response

Viewer response is a measure or prediction of the viewer's reaction to changes in the visual environment and, as previously mentioned, has two dimensions: viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity.

Viewer Exposure

Viewer exposure is a measure of the viewer's ability to see a particular object. High viewer exposure helps predict that viewers will have a response to a visual change. Viewer exposure has three attributes: location, quality, and duration.

- **Location** relates to the position of the viewer in relationship to the object being viewed. The closer the viewer is to the object, the more exposure.
- **Quantity** refers to how many people see the object. The more people who can see an object or the greater frequency an object is seen, the more the exposure affects the viewer.
- **Duration** refers to how long a viewer is able to keep an object in view. The longer it is kept in view the more the exposure affects the viewer.

Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is a measure of the viewer's recognition of a particular object. High viewer sensitivity helps predict that viewers will have a high concern for any visual change. It has three attributes: activity, awareness, and local values.

- **Activity** relates to the preoccupation of viewers—are they preoccupied, thinking of something else, or are they truly engaged in observing their surroundings? The more they are actually observing their surroundings, the more sensitive viewers will be to changes to visual resources.
- **Awareness** relates to the focus of view—the focus is wide and the view general, or the focus is narrow and the view specific. The more specific the awareness, the more sensitive a viewer is to change.
- **Local values and attitudes** also affect viewer sensitivity. If the viewer group values aesthetics in general or if a specific visual resource has been protected by local, state, or national designation, it is likely that viewers will be more sensitive to visible changes.

Overall Viewer Response

The narrative descriptions of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity for each viewer group were merged to establish the overall viewer response of each group. Table 2.6.1 summarizes the overall viewer response for each group.

Table 2.6.1: Viewer Response Summary

Viewer Group	Viewer Sensitivity	Viewer Exposure	Viewer Response
Residential Uses	High	Moderate-High	High
SR-74 Travelers	High	Moderate-High	High
Local Roadway Travelers	Moderate-Low	Moderate-Low	Moderate-Low

Source: Visual Impact Assessment (Michael Baker International 2019).

- Residential Uses:** Overall viewer exposure is considered moderate-high and viewer sensitivity for residential uses within the study area is considered high. Since the City has many homeowner associations, community groups, and business groups that represent important resources for accomplishing long-term community goals, and several residential viewers would be highly aware of the change, overall viewer response for this group is considered high.
- SR-74 Travelers:** Overall viewer exposure for SR-74 travelers is considered moderate-high, while the overall viewer sensitivity for the study area is considered high. As noted, SR-74 is identified as a Landscape Corridor by the County of Orange General Plan. In addition, the City recognizes that major vehicular travel ways provide the public with a visual image of the quality of life envisioned by the community and enforces design criteria in order to ensure that scenic corridors are developed with a sense of care to aesthetic values. Thus, the overall viewer response for this viewer group is considered high.
- Local Roadway Travelers:** The overall viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity for local roadway travelers (motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians) is considered moderate-low. The City does not specifically identify local roadway travelers as sensitive viewers. Thus, the overall viewer response for this group is considered moderate-low.

2.6.3 Environmental Consequences

2.6.3.1 Temporary Impacts

Build Alternative 2

Construction of Build Alternative 2 would expose motorist traveling along SR-74 and local roadways and local residents to views of construction-related vehicle access and staging of construction materials within California Department of Transportation

(Caltrans) right-of-way and disturbed or developed areas within the study area. Construction of Build Alternative 2 would expose surfaces, construction debris, equipment, and truck traffic to nearby sensitive viewers. These visual impacts would be short term and would cease upon project completion. Adherence to Caltrans Standard Specifications for Construction would minimize visual impacts using opaque temporary construction fencing that would be situated around construction staging areas. Furthermore, Minimization Measure LU-1 (Restoration of Land Used Temporarily) would require restoration of all land temporarily disturbed by construction activities to be restored to a condition equal to pre-construction conditions. Therefore, temporary impacts to land with temporary construction easements (TCEs) that are required for construction access and staging would be addressed, and no adverse effects would occur.

As described in Chapter 1, in accordance with the Settlement Agreement, nighttime construction activities would be prohibited for the proposed project, with the exception of emergency situations. Nighttime construction lighting in emergency situations could potentially result in light impacts to nearby residents and motorists traveling on SR-74 or adjacent local roadways. Necessary lighting for safety and construction purposes would be directed away from adjacent land uses, and would be contained and directed toward the specific area of construction. In accordance with Minimization Measure VIS-1, necessary lighting for safety and construction purposes will be directed away from land uses outside the project limits and contained and directed toward the specific area of construction. With implementation of Minimization Measure VIS-1, construction lighting types, plans, and placement will be reviewed at the discretion of the Project Engineer in order to minimize light and glare impacts on surrounding sensitive uses.

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not include the construction of any of the improvements included as part of Build Alternative 2 and, therefore, would not result in changes in views to/from the study area. Therefore, the No Build Alternative would not result in short-term visual impacts.

2.6.3.2 Permanent Impacts

Build Alternative 2

The visual character and quality of VAU1 would be slightly reduced as compared to existing conditions. Build Alternative 2 would modify SR-74 by widening the highway from two to four lanes, and other modifications such as the construction of

new retaining walls, proposed noise barriers, drainage improvements, and tree removal activities. Build Alternative 2 would also result in the partial right-of-way acquisition of five parcels adjacent to SR-74, relocation of the Hunt Club Community existing guard house and construction of a four-way traffic signal at the SR-74/Via Cordova intersection, and relocation of several existing access driveways to the north of SR-74. A total of three noise barriers may be constructed at various locations throughout the project corridor, and seven retaining walls would be introduced where changes in elevation cannot be accommodated by grading. These changes, among others, would introduce additional hardscape surfaces within VAU1. The residence that would be accommodated by the proposed noise barrier (NB No. 6) is not included in the key views. Due to the location, elevation, and existing landscaping, only a small portion of this proposed noise barrier would be visible from SR-74 and this would not constitute a substantial visual change at this residence or within VAU1. Terraced retaining walls were considered as a potential aesthetic treatment for the seven retaining walls. However, this design is considered infeasible based on the cost of obtaining the additional right-of-way necessary for implementation of this treatment. The wall types and aesthetic design will receive guidance from the aesthetic committee, which consists of the Hunt Club, the City, and Caltrans (refer to Minimization Measure VIS-5). The resource changes that would occur in each key view are described below.

Key View 1

Implementation of Build Alternative 2 would result in the removal of existing trees to accommodate realignment of the westbound SR-74 sidewalk to the north as shown on Figure 2.6-2. The colors and textures in Key View 1 would remain similar to existing conditions, although a decrease in green color and tree foliage would occur from tree removal and the realignment of the westbound SR-74 sidewalk to the north and the widening of the SR-74 highway would increase the visible hardscape in this key view. The removal of several mature trees would also result in a slight decrease in vividness and diversity in Key View 1 compared to existing conditions. Further, the meandering form of the westbound SR-74 sidewalk would appear slightly more linear, and a street light has been relocated to the north. However, the landscaping improvements to the north of SR-74 (i.e., in the Landscape Enhancement Area) increases the visual diversity in this key view with a variety of colors and ornamental landscaping as shown at the Calle Entradero/Hunt Club Community entrance. In addition, background views of hillsides looking east along SR-74 have expanded as a result of tree removal. As such, the overall resource change for Key View 1 is considered moderate-low.

Key View 2

The most notable visual changes in Key View 2 from Build Alternative 2 would be the construction of a new signalized intersection at SR-74/Via Cordova and the proposed 16 ft high, 712 ft long noise barrier on the south side of SR-74 from Via Cordova to Via Cristal. The four-way traffic signal and proposed noise barrier would decrease the intactness of views for travelers along eastbound SR-74. Namely, the traffic signals and noise barrier would encroach onto views of the surrounding mature vegetation, and the noise barrier would increase the hardscape, tan colors, and rough textures in Key View 2. Other noticeable changes would include a new eastbound SR-74 travel lane, the relocation of the existing Hunt Club Community guard house, and the removal of mature trees in the middleground and background views. Also noted in this key view is the reconstructed meandering sidewalk along westbound SR-74, east of the Hunt Club Community entrance. An increase in hardscape and gray colors has resulted from the new eastbound SR-74 travel lane and new background driveways/retaining walls, and a decrease in green colors and tree foliage has occurred due to tree and vegetation removal to the north and south of SR-74. However, as shown on Figure 2.6-3, the landscaping improvements to the north of SR-74 (i.e., in the Landscape Enhancement Area) increase the visual diversity with a variety of colors and ornamental landscaping in this key view. Overall, the visual continuity at Key View 2 has been moderately affected by Build Alternative 2 compared to existing conditions. As such, the overall resource change for Key View 2 is considered moderate.

Key View 3

The most noticeable visual change in Key View 3 from implementation of Build Alternative 2 would be the proposed slope grading, two new retaining walls, and the removal of mature trees/vegetation to the north of SR-74 (see Figure 2.6-4). The new retaining walls and slope grading would require the removal of large mature trees and vegetation near the residences, and the relocation of a residential access driveway to the north of SR-74. These new features would result in an increase in hardscape and a decrease in the diversity of visual features (i.e., from mature tree removal) in this key view. In addition, the widening of SR-74 would result in an increase in hardscape surfaces.

The colors and textures in Key View 3 would remain similar to existing conditions with implementation of Build Alternative 2, although a slight decrease in green color and tree foliage (from tree removal) would occur, and the new retaining walls would increase the gray colors and rough textures in this key view. The retaining walls

would also result in a slight decrease in vividness and intactness compared to existing conditions because the walls would introduce new non-typical vertical features that impinge on the existing visual landscape, and the resultant tree removal would reduce the existing natural features in Key View 3. As such, the overall resource change for Key View 3 is considered moderate-high.

Key View 4

The most visible changes in Key View 4 as a result of Build Alternative 2 would be the removal of vegetation, the construction of a new retaining wall to the north of SR-74, and a proposed 16 ft high, 1,215 ft long noise barrier on the south side of SR-74 from Via Cristal to Via Errecarte. The new retaining wall and noise barrier would increase the hardscape features and gray and tan colors in Key View 4, and reduce the brown colors and rough dirt texture along the small hillside area north of SR-74. In addition, the new 16 ft high noise barrier would reduce the intactness and visual diversity in Key View 4 due to tree removal and obstruction of existing mature trees in the middleground view along westbound SR-74. Vegetation removal to the north of SR-74 would also slightly reduce the green colors and foliage in this key view, although new trees and landscaping is shown to the north of SR-74. The widened SR-74 highway would result in an increase in gray colors and smooth pavement compared to existing conditions. The curvilinear alignment of SR-74 in the middleground views would remain, and other visual intrusions (e.g., new signage, street lighting, and power lines) would not occur in Key View 4 from the implementation of Build Alternative 2. Therefore, the visual continuity, diversity, vividness, intactness, and unity would be mostly similar to existing conditions, although to a lesser extent. As such, the overall resource change for Key View 4 is considered moderate.

Key View 5

Implementation of Build Alternative 2 would result in an increase in hardscape surfaces from SR-74 widening, a new retaining wall north of SR-74 in Key View 5, and a new sidewalk along eastbound SR-74. The widening of SR-74 and retaining wall construction would require the removal of several mature trees to the north of SR-74 in this key view. An increase in light and dark gray colors and smooth surfaces from SR-74 widening, the new sidewalk along eastbound SR-74, the retaining wall to the north of SR-74, a decrease in green colors, tree foliage, and visual diversity from mature tree removal are noted. SR-74 appears more dominant and expansive in Key View 5, and the curvilinear edges of the roadway are more visible in background views. The visual form and diversity in Key View 5 have been slightly altered

compared to existing conditions as a result of the widened SR-74, new retaining wall and sidewalk, and tree removal north of SR-74. However, the visual unity and continuity have increased in this key view as a result of Build Alternative 2. As such, the overall resource change for Key View 5 is considered moderate.

Summary for Visual Assessment Unit 1

Although visual changes would be noticeable within the study area as a result of the proposed improvements, Build Alternative 2 would not involve a change in use that would substantially degrade the visual character/quality at Key Views 1 through 5. Table 2.6.2 below summarizes and compares the narrative ratings for visual resource change, viewer response, and visual impacts between alternatives for each key view.

Table 2.6.2: Summary of Key View Narrative Ratings

Visual Assessment Unit	Key View	Proposed Project		
		Resource Change	Viewer Response	Visual Impact
1	1	M	H	MH
	2	M	H	MH
	3	MH	H	H
	4	M	H	MH
	5	M	H	MH

Source: *Visual Impact Assessment* (Michael Baker International 2019).
H = High
M = Moderate
MH = Moderate-High

Residents, motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, and equestrians would continue to be afforded views of trees (existing mature trees and new replacement trees) and vegetation and the surrounding hillsides, although to a lesser extent in some areas compared to existing conditions. The proposed roadway widening, sidewalk improvements, drainage improvements, retaining walls, and proposed noise barriers would require removal of existing trees and landscaping. However, implementation of Minimization Measure VIS-2 landscape improvements would be provided within the Landscape Enhancement Area. In addition, as separate from the proposed landscape enhancements, all trees removed as a result of Build Alternative 2 would be replaced at a ratio of three replacement trees for each removed tree (3:1) to minimize visual impacts from Build Alternative 2 (Minimization Measure VIS-3). As described in Chapter 1, transparent material will be used on the upper 5 ft of all proposed noise barriers to reduce views of hardscape for residential viewers. Furthermore, Minimization Measure VIS-4 will be implemented to ensure the Landscape Plan and

plant palette are compatible with the existing landscape, and Minimization Measure VIS-5 will soften the appearance of new wall features (i.e., retaining walls and proposed noise barriers) by requiring aesthetics treatment to these features. Minimization Measure VIS-6 will require replacing appurtenances, fencing, and other similar features removed from private property to be replaced in kind and Minimization Measure VIS-7 will require the Caltrans Landscape Architect to determine erosion control seed species used for landscaping within the bioswales. Minimization Measure VIS-8 also requires the establishment of an Aesthetics and Landscape Plan Committee to provide guidance on the aesthetic design of retaining walls and sound walls as well as the Landscape Plan, to further ensure that the visual character of the study area is not degraded with implementation of Build Alternative 2.

As Build Alternative 2 would introduce new large-scale objects (e.g., retaining walls, traffic signals, proposed noise barriers), increase the hardscape, and alter the existing natural landscape within the project corridor, the overall visual impact would be moderate-high. However, with implementation of Minimization Measures VIS-2 through VIS-8, long-term visual impacts from permanent improvements would be minimized and Build Alternative 2 would blend into the existing landscape, thereby reducing any potential visual impacts to viewer groups for the project.

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not include the construction of any of the improvements for Build Alternative 2 and, therefore, would not result in changes in views to/from the study area. Therefore, the No Build Alternative would not result in long-term visual impacts.

2.6.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

With implementation of the following avoidance and minimization measures, impacts to visual and aesthetics resources would not be adverse.

VIS-1 Construction Lighting. Construction lighting types, plans, and placement will be reviewed at the discretion of the Project Engineer in order to minimize light and glare impacts on surrounding sensitive uses. At a minimum, the construction contractor will minimize project-related light and glare to the maximum extent feasible, given safety considerations. Portable lights will be operated at the lowest allowable wattage and height and will be raised to a height no greater than

20 feet. All lights will be screened and directed downward toward work activities and away from the night sky and nearby residents to the maximum extent possible. The number of nighttime lights used will be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

VIS-2 Landscape Enhancements. Landscape enhancements will be installed on the north side of SR-74 between Hunt Club Drive/Via Cordova to just west of Calle Entradero (referred to as the “Landscape Enhancement Area”). The project shall include additional landscaping and additional trees, where feasible, than the landscaping and trees described as project features or project mitigation in the project CEQA Clearance (collectively, the “Landscape Enhancements”) per the following requirements:

- Landscape Enhancements shall be installed on the north side of the intersection adjacent to the entrance into the Hunt Club community as well as on the north side of Ortega Highway from the intersection to the west side of the Calle Entradero entrance off of Ortega Highway, in the City (the “Landscape Enhancement Area”).
- Prior to the installation of the Landscape Enhancements, Caltrans shall prepare a Landscaping Plan depicting the Landscape Enhancements proposed to be installed in accordance with the Settlement Agreement. Caltrans shall provide a copy of that plan prior to awarding the construction contract to the Hunt Club for its review, and shall meet and confer with the Hunt Club’s representatives and consider in good faith any recommendations or suggestions made by the Hunt Club’s representatives.
- The parties anticipate that the value of the Landscape Enhancements shall be approximately Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000); provided, however, that the entity constructing the Project shall have no obligation to expend in excess of Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000) for the Landscape Enhancements.
- The Landscape Enhancements shall be substantially completed prior to the recordation of a Notice of Completion pursuant to California Civil Code Section 3093.

VIS-3 Tree Replacement. Separate from the proposed landscape enhancements, all trees that are removed as a result of Build Alternative 2 will be replaced at a minimum ratio of three replacement trees for each removed tree (3:1). Replacement trees will be planted on the slopes or within the existing landscaped portion of the Landscape Enhancement Area. Where speeds are posted greater than 35 miles per hour, large trees (trees with trunks over 4 inches in diameter when mature) shall be placed outside the clear recovery zone (30 feet from the travel lane). Small trees (trees with trunks 4 inches in diameter or less when mature) shall be used to replace the trees within the clear recovery zone. Tree spacing for small trees can be adjusted to account for the removal of existing mature trees. The Project Engineer or designated representative will be responsible for identifying and inventorying plant material anticipated for removal.

VIS-4 Landscaping Plan. To maintain the context of the study area (color, form, and texture), the project shall install landscaping that is compatible with the existing landscape along SR-74 and adjoining hillsides in the project vicinity and surrounding area. Where feasible, landscaping shall include trees, shrub/groundcover mass planting, and landscape treatment along walls to soften the hardscape features and glare and radiant heat from the walls. All selected species within Caltrans District 12 right-of-way shall share similar water requirements. In areas where noise barriers are visible from adjacent residential land use, landscaping shall be utilized to screen views to the wall where feasible. The Landscape Plan and plant palette shall be determined in consultation with, and approved by, the Caltrans District 12 Landscape Architect during the Plans, Specifications, and Estimate (PS&E) phase.

VIS-5 Aesthetic Enhancements. To minimize the visual impacts caused by the proposed retaining walls and noise barriers, wall aesthetic enhancement shall be developed as a theme treatment (i.e., color treatment, textural treatment, varying materials, etc.) for all new retaining walls and noise barriers within the proposed project. Structural themes (i.e., noise barriers, walls, new sidewalks, and sidewalk replacement areas) shall be compatible with the existing architectural character of the surrounding area and shall be determined

in consultation with the Caltrans District 12 Landscape Architect during the PS&E phase of the project. Terraced retaining walls were considered; however, the cost of acquiring the additional right-of-way that would be required to build the terraced walls is not feasible for the proposed project.

- VIS-6 Landscaping and Appurtenance Replacement.** Where appropriate and to the degree possible, landscaping and related appurtenances, fencing, and other similar features removed from private property by construction must be replaced or restored in kind to mitigate for visual impacts resulting from the loss of such features.
- VIS-7 Erosion Control Seed Species.** Erosion control seed species for bioswales shall be determined by the Caltrans District 12 Landscape Architect to ensure that the mix and application strategy is appropriate for the specific soil composition of the area.
- VIS-8 Aesthetics and Landscape Plan Committee.** An Aesthetics and Landscape Plan Committee shall be established to provide guidance on the aesthetic design of retaining walls and sound walls included in the project, and the Landscape Plan for the project. Representatives from the City and the Hunt Club shall be included in the Aesthetics and Landscape Plan Committee. The City Council and Hunt Club Board shall each appoint two members to the Committee and each shall notify Caltrans in writing of the appointees.

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