

Visual Impact Assessment – Minor Level
Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project



Riverside County, California
[DISTRICT 8] –[RIV]
[Federal Project Number: BRLS-5956(231)]

April 2022



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VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project

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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

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Executive Summary

The proposed Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project (Project) is located in the community of Thermal, in Riverside County, California. The purpose of the proposed Project is to update the existing facility to meet seismic, scour, flood, and design standards.

The Project received a score of 15 on the Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Level (see Appendix A), which indicates a minor level VIA is appropriate to assess potential visual impacts and any necessary avoidance and minimization measures.

The proposed Project would result in moderate to moderately-low visual impacts to the area. Potential viewer groups are neighbors and motorists along Airport Boulevard, which have moderately-high visual sensitivity and low visual sensitivity, respectively. The resource change they would experience would also be low since the proposed Project will be aesthetically similar to the current bridge structure and view of the mountains in the background would be minimally affected. Based on Caltrans and FHWA visual impact assessment criteria, the visual impact would be moderate to moderately-low without any mitigation measures. With implementation of recommended Avoidance/Minimization Measures, no cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Minimization measures will consist of integrated aesthetics along the bridge to be more compatible with the natural environment, installing shielding lights on the bridge to avoid light pollution, minimizing dust from construction related activities, and restoring disturbed areas to pre-project contours and re-vegetating where applicable/appropriate.

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VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project

Purpose of Study and Assessment Method

The purpose of this Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) is to document potential visual impacts caused by the proposed Project and propose measures to lessen any detrimental impacts that are identified. Visual impacts are demonstrated by identifying visual resources in the Project area, measuring the amount of change that would occur as a result of the Project, and predicting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes. This Visual Impact Assessment follows the guidance outlined in the publication *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in March 1981 and in the updated *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* published in January 2015.

The Project received a score of 15 on the *Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment*. Based on these scores and the VIA Guide in Caltrans' Standard Environmental Reference (SER), Chapter 27, Visual and Aesthetics Review, the proposed Project requires a Minor Level VIA. The process for assessing visual impacts satisfies the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). A Minor Level VIA was selected based on the following factors outlined in the Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects:

- Limited political controversy
- Limited alteration of visual environment
- Moderate to low viewer sensitivity
- No substantial cumulative impacts
- No impacts to scenic resources
- No relocations of residences and/or businesses
- Limited change to existing visual environment

Project Description

The County of Riverside Transportation Department (County) in cooperation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and City of Coachella (City) proposes to replace the existing Airport Boulevard Bridge over the Whitewater River (Br. No. 56C-0020). The Airport Boulevard Bridge is located in the community of Thermal, in the County of Riverside, California.

The proposed bridge work is consistent with the 2012-2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) as published by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). The Project is anticipated to utilize federal funds through the federal Highway Bridge Program (HBP), as such it requires compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Caltrans is the lead agency under NEPA and the County is the lead agency under the California Environmental

Quality Act (CEQA). The City is a responsible agency under CEQA as the bridge is partially owned by the City as it is partially within City limits and City sphere of influence.

The existing Airport Boulevard Bridge is a two-lane road approximately 366 feet long and 34 feet wide with thirteen spans over the Whitewater River. This road along with the bridge is classified as a “collector street” by the County of Riverside. The bridge was originally built in 1951 and sustained damage in the 1969 flood. Partial reconstruction of the bridge occurred in 1970, when the bents were retrofitted by placing in-fill walls between the bent columns and pile cap with additional steel piles driven at the two ends of the in-filled wall bents. In 2017 the bridge was rehabilitated to include a 5-foot sidewalk on the south side. Furthermore, this bridge also has scour issues that have exposed a portion of the existing steel-encased piles and is now classified as a “Scour Critical Bridge” as of September 2019 based on Caltrans’ inspection in August 2019.

The bridge is listed in the Federal Eligible Bridge List (EBL) with a Sufficiency Rating (SR) of 60 according to the Bridge Inspection Report prepared by Caltrans Structure Maintenance and Investigations (SM&I). Since the bridge has a SR lower than 80, the bridge is eligible for major rehabilitation in accordance with the Highway Bridge Program (HBP) guidelines.

Additionally, the FEMA Flood Plain Report indicated significant inundation for the Airport Boulevard Bridge in a 100 year flood event. The Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) has proposed improvements of the channel at the bridge location, including lowering of the riverbed by 5 feet and installing concreting lining from bank to bank underneath the existing bridge. The purpose of the CVWD Project is to restore channel flow conditions to convey the 100-year flood, provide requisite freeboard and to remove the existing threat of flooding during a 100-year storm event to the parcels within the area of benefit. This Project is currently underway, to counter the impact of lowering the channel, four of the bents/support required temporary retrofit, strengthening of these bents/support is also a part of this Project.

It has been determined that a seismic structural retrofit would cost approximately \$1 million dollars more than replacement of the bridge, and with the significant hydraulic constraint cited above, the County proposes to replace Airport Boulevard Bridge with a new concrete structure. This Project proposes to replace the existing 2 lane Airport Boulevard Bridge over Whitewater River with a new, wider, 2 lane bridge and reconstruct the connecting approach roadways to meet current Caltrans seismic design codes. The new bridge would have foundations placed below the potential scour plane. The Project would raise the bridge profile by approximately 2-3 feet in order to maintain a minimum freeboard from the flood water. The reprofiling would extend into approximately 850 feet of approach roadway to the west that will also be reconstructed.

The Project may also include minor retaining walls and offsite improvements in order to maintain access to the existing mobile home community on the south side of Airport Boulevard. Roadway improvements also include transition pavement to the existing grade separation structure to the

west and improvement of the intersection at Orange Street and Airport Boulevard. The Project will also provide sidewalk improvements on the south side of the new bridge as well as accommodate future connectivity to the Coachella Valley Link Trail, which is anticipated to connect to Airport Boulevard along the unnamed local road in the northwestern quadrant of the Project.

Depending on the Project design, utility relocation may be required. Coordination with the following utilities to determine actions that may need to be taken once Project design is established include: Coachella Valley Water District, Imperial Irrigation, Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, Level 3 Communications/CenturyLink, MCI (Verizon Business), So Cal Gas (Distribution - Palm Desert division), and Utilquest for Frontier.

The new bridge will be constructed in two stages. Stage 1 is to construct the north half of the bridge along the north edge of the existing structure, while the traffic on Airport Boulevard would remain on the existing bridge in each direction, unless necessary to reduce traffic control to one-way traffic to temporarily accommodate construction vehicles. Once Stage 1 is constructed, two lanes of traffic will be shifted to the newly constructed bridge while the existing bridge is demolished in Stage 2. Upon completion of demolition, the remaining south half of the proposed bridge will be constructed and completed once joined to the north half of the bridge with a closure pour.

Sliver takes for right of way acquisition would be required, and the commercial land in the northeast quadrant adjacent to the Project area would potentially be considered as a staging area.

Purpose and Need

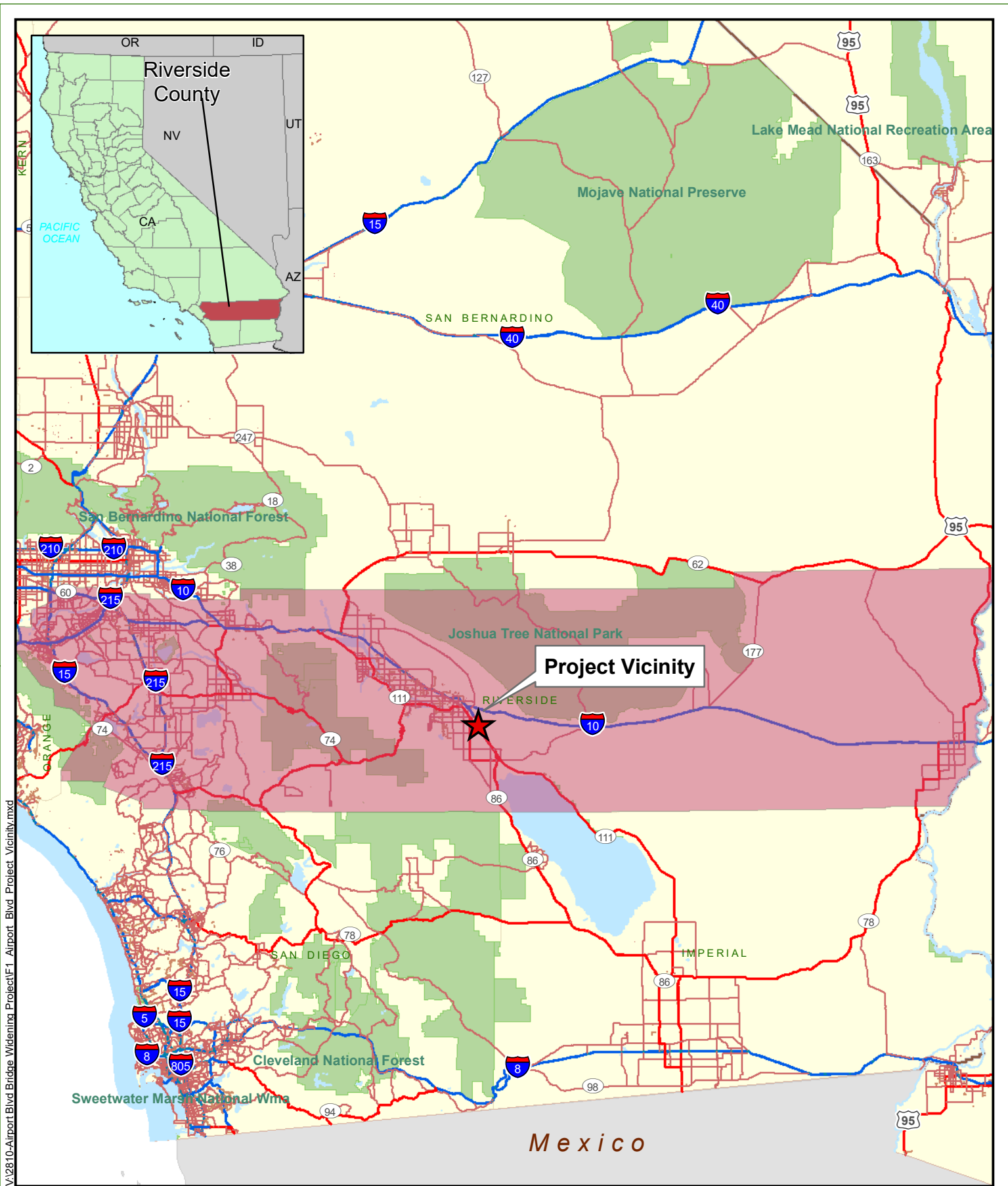
The purpose of the proposed Project is to update the existing facility to meet seismic, scour, flood, and design standards.

The need for the Project is outlined below:

- The existing bridge has reached its useful design life. The bridge has inadequate shoulder width, lane width and is found to be structurally inadequate to meet the basic required strength and resistance.
- The existing Airport Boulevard Bridge over Whitewater River needs to be replaced with a new bridge that will meet the current seismic, service load design standards, and provide an adequate facility for emergency response and general access across the Whitewater River.

No Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative would result in no modifications to the Airport Boulevard over Whitewater River Bridge. The existing bridge at Airport Boulevard over Whitewater River would remain functionally obsolete.



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Source: ESRI 2008; Dokken Engineering 5/18/2021; Created By: ahale

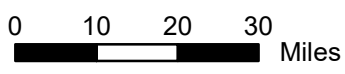
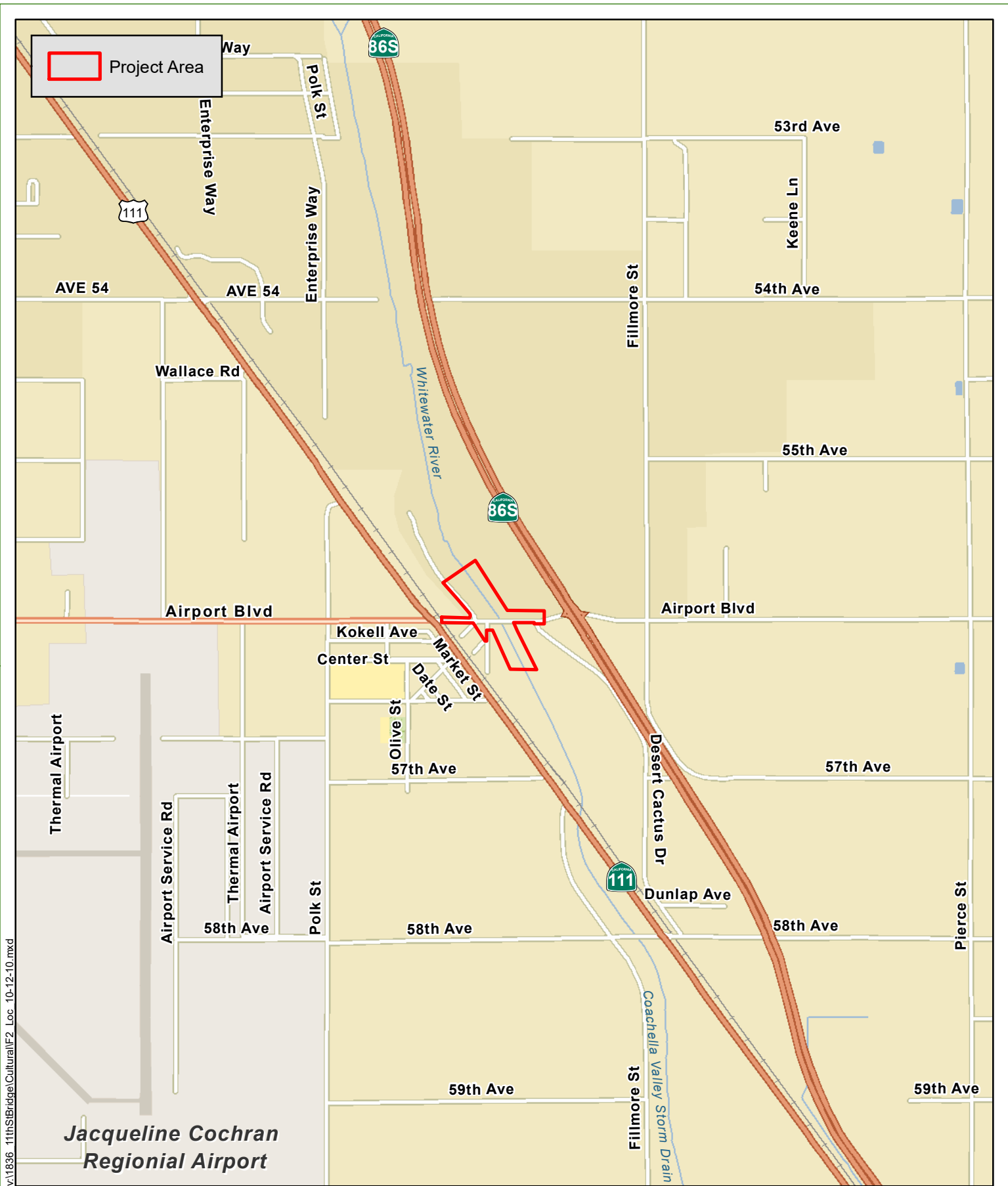


FIGURE 1
Project Vicinity

BRLS-5956(231)
Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project
Thermal, Riverside County, California



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Source: ESRI World Street Maps Online; Dokken Engineering 2/3/2022; Created By: ahale

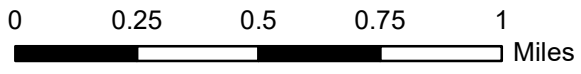


FIGURE 2
Project Location

BRLS-5956(231)
Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project
Thermal, Riverside County, California

- Project Area
- Existing CVWD Concrete Channel Lining
- Pavement Edges
- Metal Beam Guardrail
- Median Striping
- Lane Striping
- Retaining Wall
- Bridge Piers (0.01 acres)
- Parcels



V:\2810-Airport Blvd Bridge Widening Project\F3_Airport Blvd_Project Features.mxd

Source: ESRI Maps Online; Dokken Engineering 3/16/2022; Created By: zachl

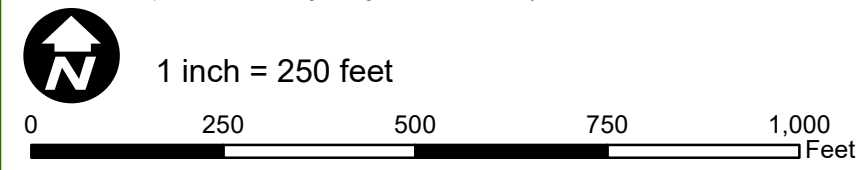


FIGURE 3
Project Features

BRLS-5956(231)
Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project
Thermal, Riverside County, California

Project Location and Setting

The Project location and setting provides the context for determining the type of changes to the existing visual environment. The Airport Boulevard roadway work will begin approximately at the SR-86 offramp/Desert Cactus Drive, and will extend west, 450 feet past Orange Street. The proposed replacement bridge will be approximately 380 feet long, 71 feet wide, and striped for two lanes (See Appendix B for Representative Photos). The Project area is located at the Airport Boulevard crossing of the Whitewater River in the community of Thermal in Riverside County, California, within the *Indio, California 7.5-minute* series U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The Project area is located west of State Route 86; it is within the California Coastal Range Open Woodland-Shrub-Coniferous Forest-Meadow Province and Southern California Mountains and Valleys Section, ecological subsection M262B (Hickman 1993, USDA 2005 and USDA 2007). The landscape is moderate-elevation narrow ranges and broad fault blocks. Granitic formations are beneath the uplands with areas of marine and nonmarine sedimentary rocks elsewhere (NRCS 2017). The landscape is characterized by General Commercial (CG) and Light Industrial (IL) in the 2013 City of Coachella General Plan (City of Coachella, 2013).

The Project corridor is defined as the area of land that is visible from, adjacent to, and outside the highway right-of-way, and is determined by topography, vegetation, and viewing distance. No scenic resource has been identified within the Project corridor, nor is any portion of the Project within a designated State Scenic Highway.

Visual Resources and Resource Change

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

VISUAL CHARACTER

Visual character includes attributes such as form, line, color, and texture, and is used to describe, not evaluate; that is these attributes are neither considered good nor bad. 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.

The visual character of the proposed Project will be compatible with the existing visual character of the corridor. 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.

The existing visual character of the Project area is a blend of open landscape and constructed elements. The open areas outside of the Project area includes surrounding mountains; Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains are located to the west. Existing linear features will be retained with this Project. The existing dominant features in the Project area are residential housing and industrial complexes, located to the west. To the north of the Project area, are industrial complexes. Diversely, the Whitewater River runs directly through the Project area, suspending the areas of development with a natural setting. This landscape variance alters the texture within the visual resources from a man-made texture of an urbanscape to a rough, grainy riverine environment. The constructed elements within the area generally have straight lines and edges, grey coloring of roadways, and lighter stucco coloring for buildings, and fine to smooth, homogenous textures. The natural vegetation within Whitewater River is rough, granular and creates sporadic edges in comparison to the uniform lines the ornamental vegetation planted near man-made structures generate. The vegetation within the area, both the natural and ornamental vegetation, produces a low lining canopy, creating a uniformed open light effect throughout the area. The color in the Project area varies by the season, from dark greens to light browns. The current elements would not be significantly altered by the proposed Project and potential changes in visual character would be minimal (see Appendix B: Representative Photos).

VISUAL QUALITY

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness, and unity present in the Project corridor. Public attitudes validate the assessed level of quality and predict how changes to the Project corridor 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 visual quality of the existing corridor will not be substantially altered by the proposed Project. Existing visual quality of the Project area is low due to the uniformed, low vividness throughout most of the site. The vividness of the Project area is low as the Project area consists largely of

flat developed lands within medium-density residential development to the west of the existing bridge and lacks distinctive or memorable features. The Whitewater River disrupts the unity and intactness between the disturbed lands on either end of the Project area. The proposed Project will not alter any of these features; therefore, the changes in visual quality are anticipated to be low.

RESOURCE CHANGE

Resource change is assessed by evaluating the visual character and the visual quality of the visual resources that comprise the Project corridor before and after the construction of the proposed Project. This proposed Project anticipates having a low impact on Resource Change within the Project area. The overall visual resource change as a result of the proposed Project is expected to be low, due to changes in visual character and quality anticipated to be minimally altered from the current existing conditions. All of the attributes that comprise the visual character and quality would not substantially be changed as a result of the proposed alternative. The pavement width would be wider, and aesthetically treated. The change in visual character and quality would be low, as this Project is not considered an adverse resource change as the Project type is consistent with the existing visual character and quality of the area in its current state.

Viewers and Viewer Response

Neighbors (people with views of the road), and travelers (people with views from the road), would be affected by the proposed Project.

Existing residences are located to the west and east of the existing bridge structure. Industrial uses are to the north and west of the bridge. The local residential viewer exposure is moderately-high due to the group's long-term duration and constant presence within the Project area. The residential view's predominate feature in the landscape is the current bridge structure, which is approximately 1000 feet from a medium-dense residential area. Though a high rating of sensitivity is given to the group, there would be a low degree of change to views due to the proposed replacement bridge structure being similar in appearance, length, height and position as the current bridge. It is anticipated that the average response of all viewer groups will be moderately-low. The current Project area lacks aesthetic treatments and is currently a very disturbed area; however, aesthetics of the Project area would likely be valued by the neighbors should the bridge be improved.

For roadway travelers approaching from the east and west side of the bridge, viewer exposure is moderately-high due to the high numbers of travelers utilizing the roadway. The number of travelers along this section of the road would be moderately-high as the use by neighbors and commuters is anticipated to increase with or without the bridge replacement. The duration of these viewers would be low, due to the rate of speed that the new bridge would operate at, and the small length of the Project segment. The viewer group travelers have low sensitivity due to the

short time span spent along the proposed Project. The travelers' activity level within the Project area is high as they are traveling on the roadway and not able to be engaged in observing their surroundings. The awareness of travelers is low as it is focused on the roadway and not the surrounding environment. The aesthetics of the Project area is unlikely to be valued by the travelers considering the lack of aesthetics of the existing bridge and level of disturbance in the area.

Visual Impact

Visual impacts are determined by assessing changes to the visual resources and predicting viewer response to those changes. Two viewpoint locations were assessed, the viewpoint locations can be seen on Figure 4 below. The proposed Project would be visible from the existing neighbors in the Project's vicinity (see Viewpoint 1), and travelers along the widened roadway and adjacent local roadways (see Viewpoint 2). Vehicles are anticipated to travel this portion of Airport Boulevard each day. The viewer exposure duration for neighbors is considered to be long, but neighbors would have a low response to the surrounding visual environment, as visual character and visual quality would have minimal changes. Currently, these neighbors have a partially limited view of the existing bridge due to vegetation and barriers like property fencing. The proposed bridge would not result in a major change to the existing visual character of the structure. The viewer exposure duration for travelers is low, as the views would be brief and fleeting, and these travelers would not give notice to the minimal change.

Overall visual impacts as a result of the proposed Project would be moderately-low, as the viewer response for neighbors and travelers would be low.

- Project Area
- CVWD Concrete Channel Lining
- Parcels



V:\2810-Airport Blvd Bridge Widening Project\Visual\F4_Airport_Bld_Viewpoint_Locations.mxd

Source: ESRI Maps Online; Dokken Engineering 1/12/2022; Created By: zachl



1 inch = 250 feet

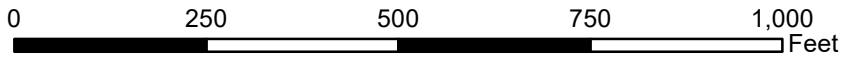


FIGURE 4
Viewpoint Locations
 BRLS-5956(231)
 Airport Boulevard Bridge Replacement Project
 Thermal, Riverside County, California



Viewpoint 1: View of neighbors and pedestrians along Airport Boulevard facing west. Image taken March 2021.



Viewpoint 2: View of motorists traveling eastbound on Airport Boulevard. Image taken March 2021.

Temporary Impacts

Construction is anticipated to last approximately 24 months. During construction of the Build Alternative, temporary activities such as grading, asphalt laying, truck movement and truck shipments and other routine construction activities within the Project vicinity will be visible by motorists traveling along Airport Boulevard and the adjacent roadways, and from adjacent residential and industrial properties that operate within Project vicinity. Construction-related materials, such as road-building material, staging areas, stockpiles, temporary traffic barriers, and construction equipment will be visible to these viewer groups. Areas may also be lighted during construction. Motorists and other viewer groups would experience a change in their physical view of the Airport Boulevard Bridge, however, the change is temporary and construction would be subject to local ordinances regarding construction time periods of lighting.

Visible short-term fugitive dust associated with construction would be reduced through the implementation of dust suppression measures outlined within South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) Rules and Regulations, Rule 403 Fugitive Dust (SCAQMD 1976), as well as implementation of Caltrans Standard Specifications for Construction, such as Section 10 and 18 (Dust Control). Adhering to Caltrans Standard Specifications for Construction would also minimize visual impacts through the use of opaque temporary construction fencing that would be situated around construction staging areas.

The construction area would be kept neat and orderly with regards to trash. Standard special provisions regarding site maintenance will be implemented. Temporary impacts due to Project construction will be short-term and would cease upon the completion of the proposed Project.

Cumulative impacts

Cumulative impacts are those resulting from past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, combined with the potential visual impacts of this Project. While the Build Alternative would replace the existing bridge structure with a new structure crossing on Airport Boulevard, the cumulative visual impact is anticipated to be moderate to moderately-low since it would be constructed near a medium residential area that is relatively more populated and developed than other segments of Airport Boulevard. With implementation of recommended Avoidance / Minimization Measures, no cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures

Avoidance or minimization measures have been identified and can lessen visual impacts caused by the Project. Also, the inclusion of aesthetic features in the Project design previously discussed can help generate public acceptance of a Project. This section describes additional avoidance

and/or minimization measures to address specific visual impacts. These will be designed and implemented with concurrence of the District Landscape Architect.

The following measures to avoid or minimize visual impacts will be incorporated into the Project:

VIS-1. Lighting will be appropriately shielded. The Project's lighting design must be consistent with the City of Coachella and Riverside County lighting guidelines and standards.

VIS-2. All disturbed areas including staging of vehicles and equipment will be restored to pre-construction contours and if applicable/appropriate, revegetated, either through hydroseeding or other means, with native species.

VIS-3. Concrete surfaces associated with the bridge will be heavily textured to discourage graffiti and minimize recurring maintenance activities associated with graffiti removal. Additionally, concrete surfaces will be aesthetically treated or stained natural colors to be more compatible with the surrounding environment.

VIS-4. As feasible the barrier/bridge rail fence shall be powder or vinyl color coated to meet aesthetic needs and to minimize glare.

VIS-5. Implement dust suppression measures as applicable from South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) Rules and Regulations, Rule 403 Fugitive Dust and Caltrans Standard Specifications for Construction, Sections 10 and 18 (Dust Control).

Conclusions

As stated above, the proposed Project would result in a low visual impact due to the proposed additional hardscape along the existing roadway (i.e., widened roadway and reconstructed connecting approach roadways). Additionally, the Project footprint will be similar to the existing roadway and bridge structure, resulting in little change in visual character or quality. Although visual change may be noticeable to viewers, the recommended Avoidance/Minimization Measures VIS-1 through VIS-5, allow the proposed Project to blend into the existing landscape and reduce any potential visual impacts to surrounding residential and industrial neighbors or highway motorists. With implementation of the recommended avoidance/minimization measures, the overall visual impact of the proposed Project is considered to be low with no significant changes.

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Appendix A VIA Level Score

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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 ten 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 five groups of scores at the end of the questionnaire that include recommended levels of VIA study and associated annotated outlines (i.e., minor, moderate, advanced/complex).

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**Project Identification #****Preparer Name****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.

For Projects on State Highway System Only, Enter DLA Name

Change to Visual Environment

Will the project result in a noticeable change in the physical characteristics of the existing environment?

Consider all project components and construction impacts - both permanent and temporary, including landform changes, structures, noise barriers, vegetation removal, railing, signage, and contractor activities.

Moderate Level of Change (2 points) ▼

Will the project complement or contrast with the visual character desired by the community?

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? Do you anticipate that the change will be viewed by the public as positive or negative? Research planning documents, or talk with local planners and community representatives to understand the type of visual environment local residents envision for their community.

High Compatibility (1 point) ▼

What level of local concern is there for the types of 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.

Moderate Concern (2 points) ▼

Will the project require redesign or realignment to minimize adverse change or will mitigation, such as landscape or architectural treatment, likely be necessary?

Consider the type of changes caused by the project, i.e., can undesirable views be screened or will desirable views be permanently obscured so a redesign should be considered?

Mitigation Likely (1 point) ▼

Will this project, when seen collectively with other projects, result in an aggregate adverse change (cumulative impacts) in overall visual quality or character?

Identify any projects (both Caltrans and local) in the area that have been constructed in recent years and those 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 perception.

Cumulative Impacts Unlikely to Occur (1 point) ▼

Viewer Sensitivity

What is the potential that the project proposal will be controversial within the community, or opposed by any organized group?

This can be researched initially by talking with Caltrans and local agency management and staff familiar with the affected community's sentiments as evidenced by past projects and/or current information.

Low Potential (1 point) ▼

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

Consider among other factors 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 representatives familiar with the affected community's sentiments and demonstrated concerns.

Moderate Sensitivity (2 points) ▼

**To what degree does the project's aesthetic approach appear to be
consistent with applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, policies or
3. standards?**

Although the State is not always required to comply with local planning ordinances, these documents are critical in understanding the importance that communities place on aesthetic issues. 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. Also, many local and state planning documents can be found online at the California Land Use Planning Network.

High Compatibility (1 point) ▼

**Are permits going to be required by outside regulatory agencies (i.e.,
4. Federal, State, or local)?**

Permit requirements can have an unintended consequence on the visual environment. Anticipated permits, as well as specific permit requirements - which are defined by the permitted, 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 (3 points) ▼

**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
5. potential visual impacts?**

Consider the proposed project features, possible visual impacts, and probable mitigation recommendations.

No (1 point) ▼

Calculate Total

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

Project Score: 15

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 ten questions-areas that would justify elevating the VIA level, also consider any other project factors that would have an effect on level selection.

Score 6-9

No noticeable visual changes to the environment are proposed and no further analysis is required. Print out a copy of this completed questionnaire for your project file or Preliminary Environmental Study (PES).

Score 10-14

Negligible visual changes to the environment are proposed. A [brief Memorandum\(see sample\)](#)addressing visual issues providing a rationale why a technical study is not required.

Score 15-19

Noticeable visual changes to the environment are proposed. An abbreviated VIA is appropriate in this case. The assessment would briefly describe project features, impacts and any avoidance and minimization measures. Visual simulations would be optional. Go to the [Directions for using and accessing the Minor VIA Annotated Outline](#).

Score 20-24

Noticeable visual changes to the environment are proposed. A fully developed VIA is appropriate. This technical study will likely receive public review.Go to the [Directions for using and accessing the Moderate VIA Annotated Outline](#).

Score 25-30

Noticeable visual changes to the environment are proposed. A fully developed VIA is appropriate that includes photo simulations. 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.Go to the [Directions for using and accessing the Advanced/Complex VIA Annotated Outline](#).

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Appendix B Representative Photographs



Photo 1: Looking east on Airport Boulevard 400 feet west of the intersection of Airport Boulevard and Orange Street in the Thermal Area. This view is representative to motorists along Airport Boulevard. Image taken November 2018.



Photo 2: Looking east on Airport Boulevard at the intersection of Airport Boulevard and Orange Street in the Thermal Area. This view is representative to motorists along Airport Boulevard. Image taken November 2018.



Photo 3: Looking west on Airport Boulevard from the Highway 86 overpass in the Thermal Area. This view is representative to motorists along Airport Boulevard. Image taken November 2018.



Photo 4: Looking west on Airport Boulevard near the intersection of Airport Boulevard and Desert Cactus Dr in the Thermal Area. This view is representative to motorists along Airport Boulevard. Image taken November 2018.