Appendix A

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Coastal Rail Trail Rose Creek Alignment

December 2014

San Diego Association of Governments

San Diego County, Santa Fe St. Adjacent to Route I-5
PM R23.9 – PM R25.5

Prepared by:

KTU+A
Michael Singleton
California LLA 2386
Project Landscape Architect

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.

Prepared for:
San Diego Association of Governments
401 B Street, Suite 800
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 699-7319
Chris Carterette, AICP
Active Transportation
Coastal Rail Trail Project Manager

Prepared by:
KTU+A
3916 Normal Street
San Diego, CA 92103
(619) 294-4477
Michael Singleton
Landscape Architect
CA - LLA 2386

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
Coastal Rail Trail Rose Creek Alignment

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.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project represents Segment 9B of the Coastal Rail Trail (CRT), as identified in the Regional Bike Plan (RBP) and CRT Project Study Report (October 2000). The CRT is a 44-mile bicycle facility extending from the City of Oceanside's San Luis Rey River Bikeway to the Santa Fe Train Depot in the City of San Diego. The proposed bicycle facility would extend a distance of 2.1 miles from the northern terminus of Santa Fe Street, southward, to the west side of Mission Bay Drive, as it crosses over Rose Creek. **Figure 1** shows the regional location of the facility. **Figures 2a, 2b, and 2c** illustrate the southern, middle, and northern segments of the proposed project alignment. The alignment of the bikeway includes 1.3 miles of bi-directional, protected bike lanes within the right-of-way (ROW) of Santa Fe Street (referred to as the "on-road portion", and 0.8 miles of a multi-use path (Class I) along the eastern bank of Rose Creek (referred to as the "off-road portion").

On-road Improvements

Beginning at the northern terminus of Santa Fe Street, the bicycle facility would be a bi-directional set of protected bike lanes (sometimes referred to as a two-way cycle track) located within the existing paved area of Santa Fe Street to the bridge over Rose Creek, a distance of approximately 7,200 linear feet (LF). This stretch of the project would be located on the west side of the road, and accommodate both directions of bicycle travel. Each lane would be five feet in width for a total width of ten feet. The protected bike lanes would include a two-foot, raised concrete median between traffic and the bike lanes. The protected bicycle lanes would utilize the area used for informal on-street parking on the west side of Santa Fe Street. To obtain the width needed for the bicycle facility, Santa Fe Street would be widened to the east in sections by up to three feet, all within the existing ROW. The proposed widening would require a retaining wall along a section of Rose Creek up to six feet in height, relocation of various wet and dry utility features, including the relocation or undergrounding of an existing overhead power line and associated poles. Approximately 3,600 feet of new five-foot-wide sidewalk may be incorporated at the top of this retaining wall. The decision to construct this sidewalk will be made during final design of the project.

Off-road Improvements

The 0.8 mile portion of the bikeway would be a shared use path, also referred to as a "Class I" facility, consisting of a 10-foot wide concrete path with two-foot shoulders on each side. The off-road portion of the path would extend a distance of approximately 4,000 LF. The off-road portion would start just north of the Santa Fe Street Bridge over Rose Creek. At this point, the path would be located on a new bridge that would parallel the existing Santa Fe Street Bridge. The proposed bike pathway bridge would be similar in elevation to the existing Santa Fe Street Bridge, and would be slightly less wide, with a surface width of just under 16 feet, and supports extending approximately 2.5 feet wider on each side. The proposed bridge rails would be approximately 4.5 feet high, which would be slightly higher than the Santa Fe Street Bridge by at least one foot. Additionally, construction of the bridge would require the removal of several existing native and non-native trees, and small abutment walls on each end. The new bridge would be installed eight feet west of the existing utility crossing, which parallels the existing roadway bridge on the west side. The proposed bridge would include one central column in the creek for support.

Once across the creek, the path would be located along the eastern bank of Rose Creek on a bench behind existing businesses fronting Santa Fe Street. The bench would be created by a cut along the east edge with a three- to six-foot retaining wall located along the west side. The maximum width of the bench would be 14 feet.

The bicycle facility would cross under the I-5 freeway bridge over Rose Creek. Beneath the bridge, the facility would be constructed on a structure adjacent to the base of one of the bents supporting the I-5 Bridge. On the other side of the I-5 Bridge, the path would return to a bench cut into the top of the east bank of Rose Creek leading to a service road behind existing businesses. It would cross beneath the Mission Bay Drive Bridge over Rose Creek, on a structure similar to the one beneath the I-5 Bridge, and connect with an existing Class I bicycle path near the intersection of Mission Bay Drive and Damon Street.

Revegetation

No landscaping for design enhancement is proposed as part of this project. However, because of some vegetation removal in temporary impact areas, revegetation would occur as part of the project. . The revegetation locations would be decided during consultation with the resource agencies. Native vegetation would be used and watering would occur by truck or temporary irrigation, if needed.

Lighting

Lighting for the off-road portion of the project, if used, could include bollard lighting, rail lighting or short pole based lighting. The lights would be shielded to minimize illumination into the adjacent creek area. They would be placed on the west side of the path and focus their lighting distribution towards the trail and away from the creek. If part of final project design, lighting for the new on-road sidewalk on the east side of Santa Fe Street would be located on poles, and would also be shielded to minimize illumination in the creek area. This lighting would consist of standard roadway lighting and would only be used to illuminate the ends of the trails or at key locations based on City of San Diego lighting standards.

Construction

On-road Improvements

Construction of the on-road portion would consist of roadway excavation followed by asphalt and curb/berm installation for the separated bicycle facility and widening of the roadway.

Off-road Improvements

Construction for the off-road portion may be phased, and may be separate from the on-road portion. Grading for this project may involve the movement of approximately 13,500 cubic yards (cy) of earth, including an export of approximately 3,500 cy of unsuitable material and an import of approximately 10,000 cy of structural backfill. Construction access and staging would be located in disturbed or developed areas within and directly adjacent to Santa Fe Street, to the north and south of the existing bridge over Santa Fe Street.

Visually Prominent Elements of the Proposed Project

Visually prominent elements of the project include tree removal in riparian habitat along the Class I multi-use path adjacent to Rose Creek, the bridge (and tree removal) that would cross Rose Creek adjacent to the existing Santa Fe bridge, lighting along the Class I segment of the multi-use path, a raised barrier along the cycle track portion of the project, reflectorized and rubberized candlestick devices on the raised curb barrier, and a small retaining wall needed to support the extended sidewalk on the east side of the roadway.

The cycle track features would be flat, on-grade features with similar colors (mostly gray, with yellow and white striping), and the same smooth textures as exist on the road and in the visual environment currently surrounding Santa Fe Street. These elements would be visible from Santa Fe Street and in brief views from I-5. Many of the proposed highly visible project elements would be similar to the existing street and compatible with the existing visual setting.

Most of the proposed changes would not be visible from the freeway, but would be visible from Santa Fe Street, the railroad corridor as well as at higher elevations to the east. From these areas, the vegetation removal would not be highly noticeable. From Santa Fe Street, the proposed bridge railings may be the most noticeable feature since they are slightly taller than the existing bridge rails, as well as having finer detailing. The surface of the new bridge may be visible from the railroad corridor; the surface would be smaller than the existing bridge, and would be a similarly flat, paved, and smooth horizontal surface.

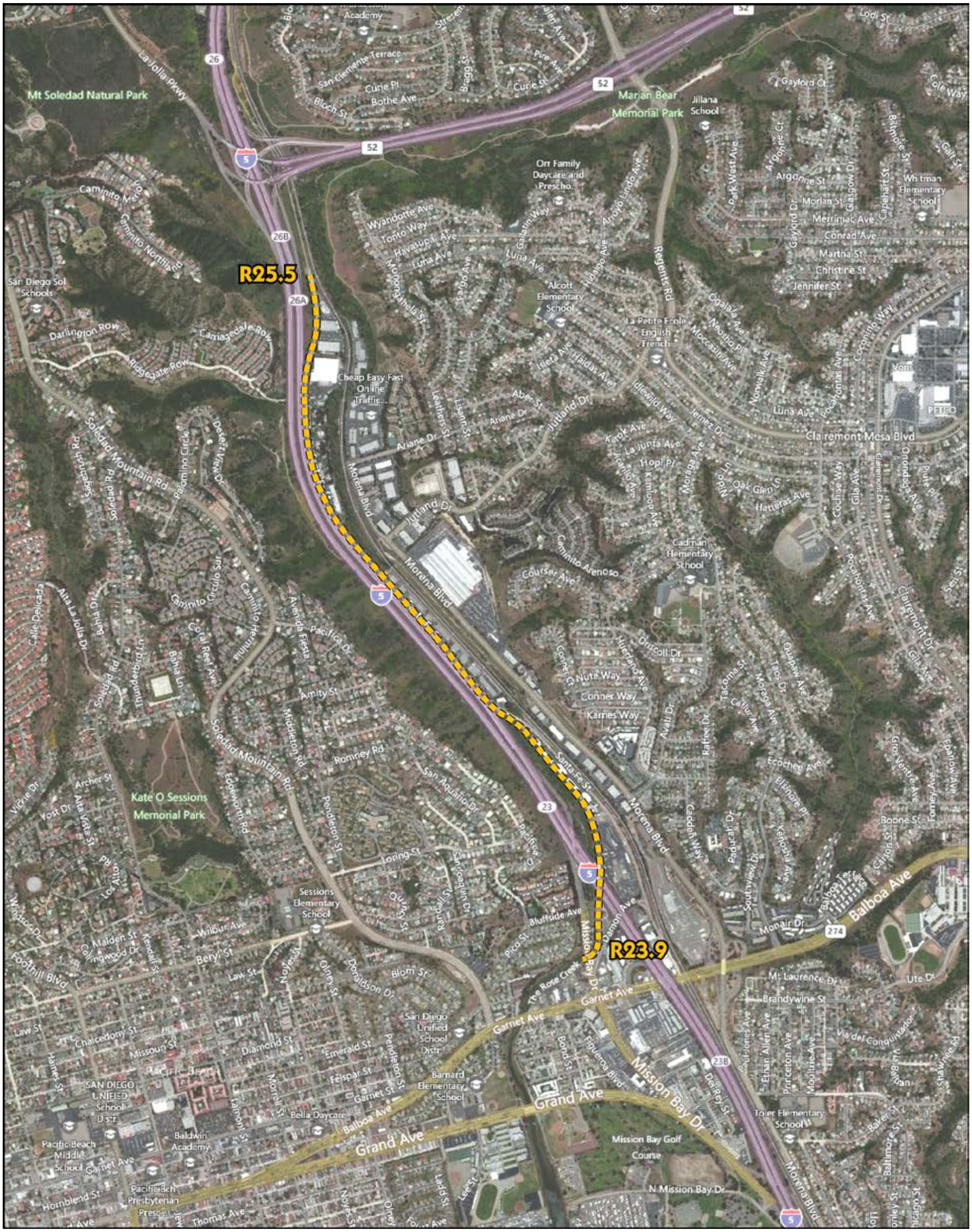

R25.5
R23.9
Mt Soledad Natural Park
Marian Bear Memorial Park
Kate O Sessions Memorial Park
Mission Bay Golf Course
Clairemont Mesa Blvd
Morena Blvd
Mission Bay Dr
Garnet Ave
Grand Ave
Balboa Ave
Santa Fe St
Soledad Mountain Rd
N Mission Bay Dr
Jutland Dr
Regents Rd
Sessions Elementary School
Alcott Elementary School
Cadman Elementary School
Barnard Elementary School
Toler Elementary School
Pacific Beach Middle School
Baldwin Academy

Figure 1

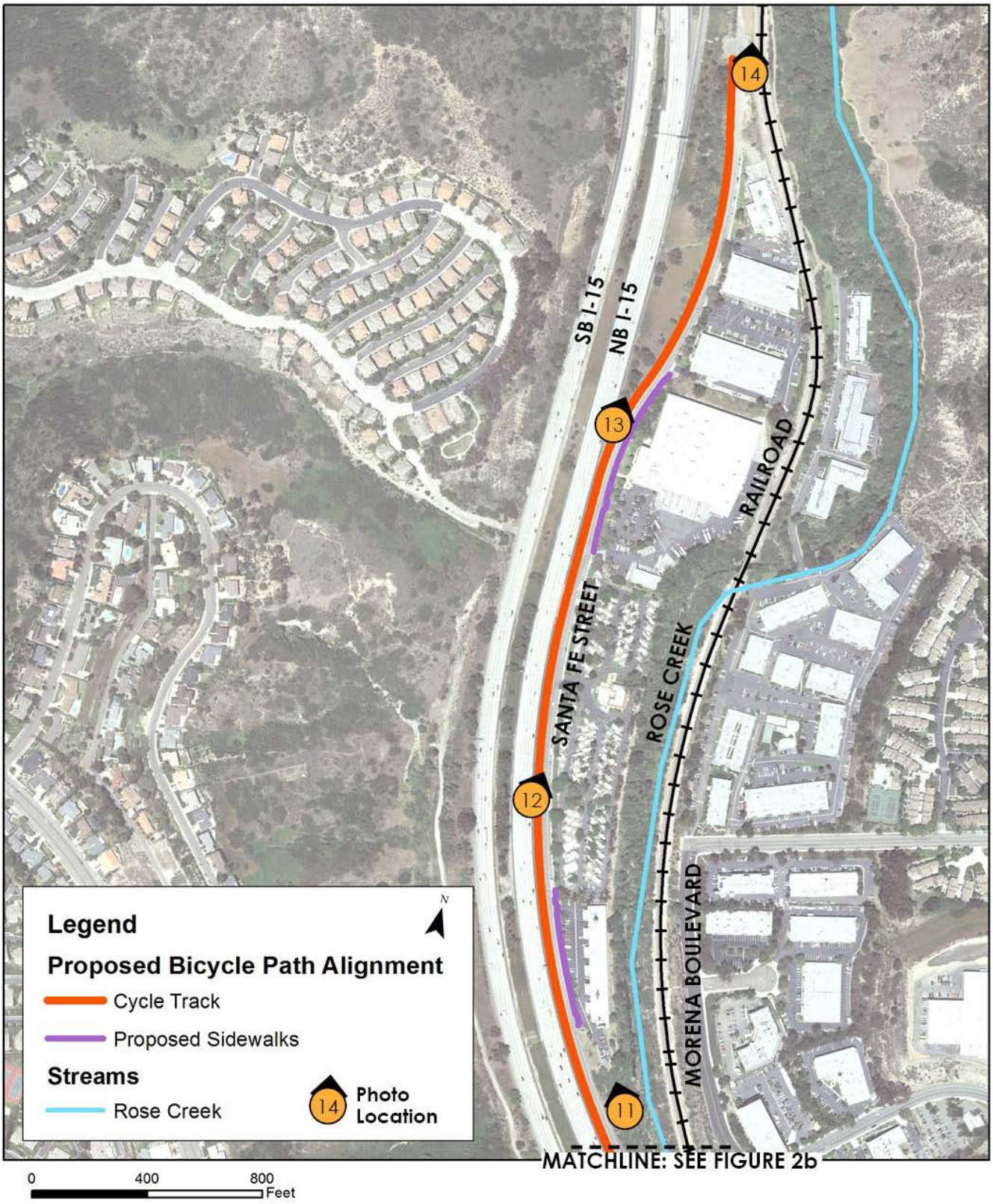

SB I-15
NB I-15
RAILROAD
SANTA FE STREET
ROSE CREEK
MORENA BOULEVARD
14
13
12
11
MATCHLINE: SEE FIGURE 2b
Legend
Proposed Bicycle Path Alignment
Cycle Track
Proposed Sidewalks
Streams
Rose Creek
14 Photo Location
N
0
400
800
Feet

Figure 2a

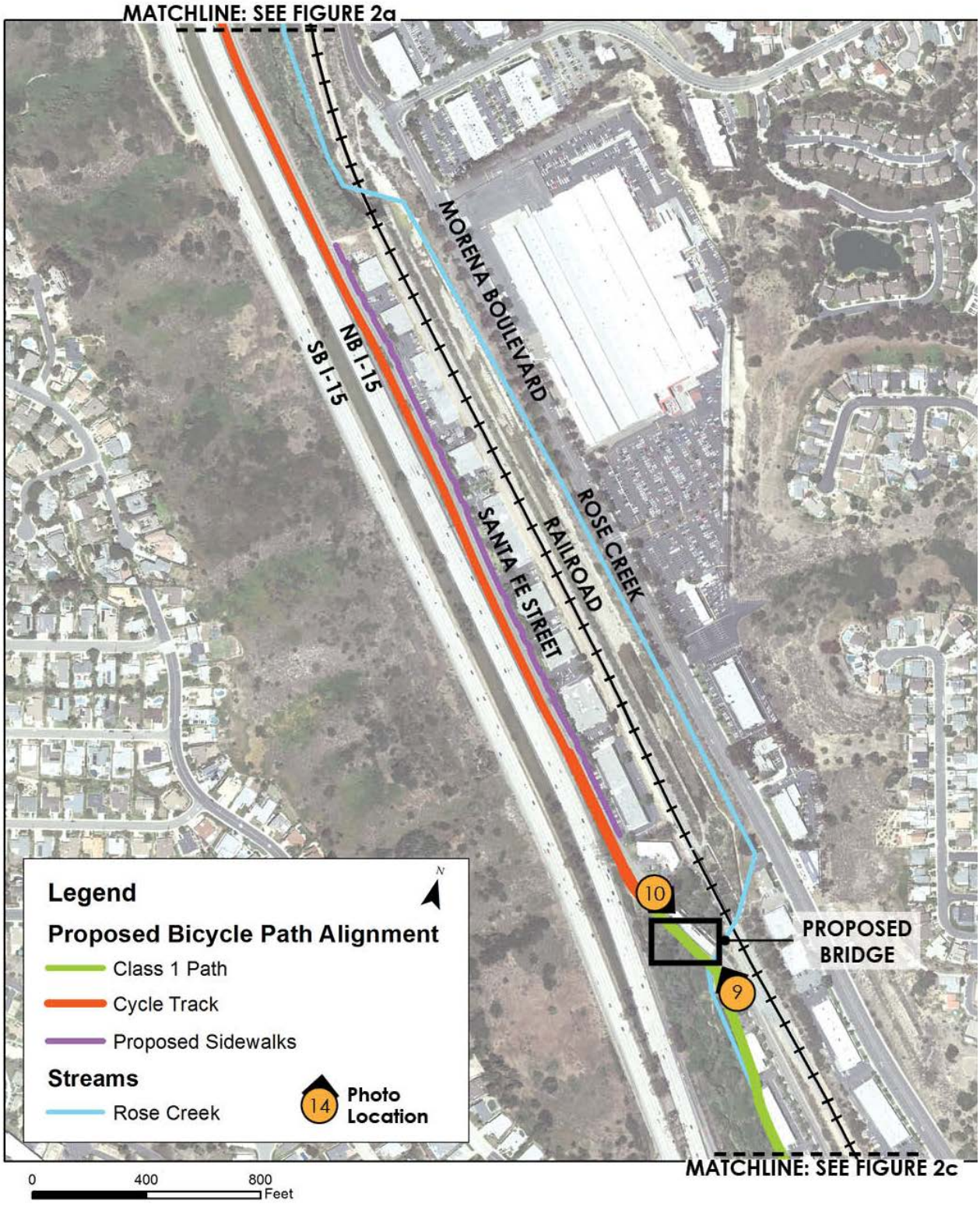

MATCHLINE: SEE FIGURE 2a
MORENA BOULEVARD
SB I-15
NB I-15
SANTA FE STREET
RAILROAD
ROSE CREEK
10
9
PROPOSED BRIDGE
MATCHLINE: SEE FIGURE 2c
Legend
Proposed Bicycle Path Alignment
Class 1 Path
Cycle Track
Proposed Sidewalks
Streams
Rose Creek
14
Photo Location
N
0
400
800
Feet

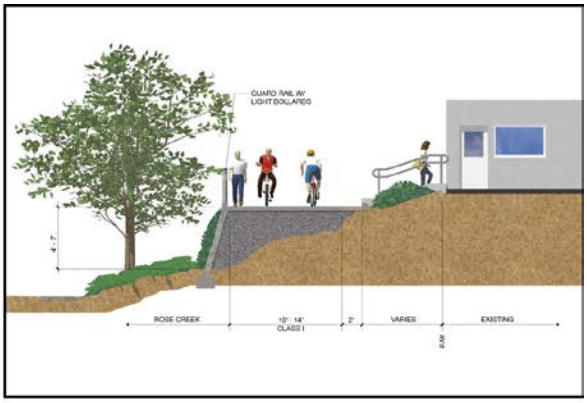
Figure 2b


MATCHLINE: SEE FIGURE 2b
MORENA BOULEVARD
SANTA FE STREET
RAILROAD
ROSE CREEK
SB I-15
NB I-15
MISSION BAY DRIVE
BLUFFSIDE AVENUE
DAMON AVENUE
PROPOSED UNDERCROSSING
PROPOSED UNDERCROSSING
Legend
Proposed Bicycle Path Alignment
Class 1 Path
Streams
Rose Creek
14 Photo Location
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
0
400
800
Feet

Figure 2c

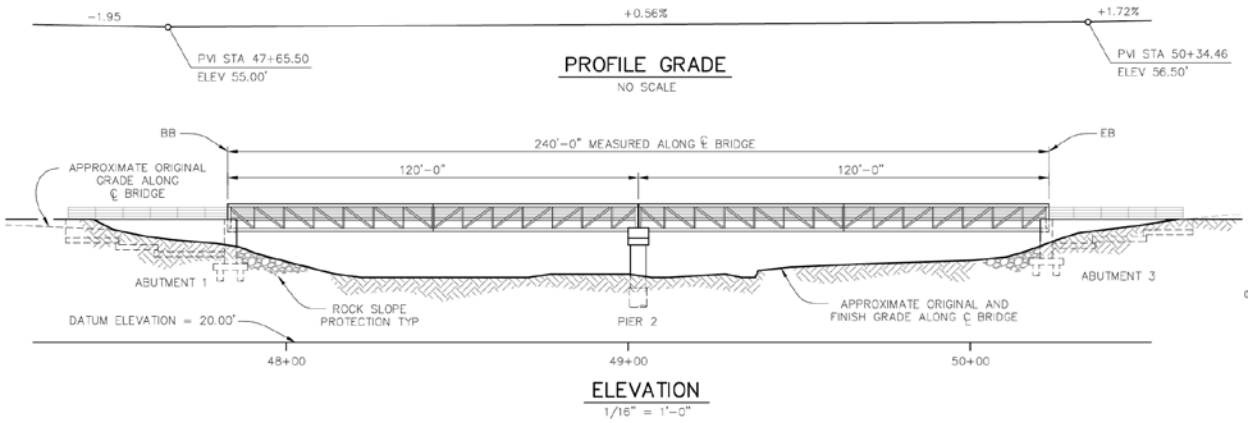
Refer to **Figure 3a** for a section and isometric view of the proposed multi-use path. Refer to **Figure 3b** for an elevation of the proposed bridge. Refer to **Figure 3c** for sections and isometric views of the proposed cycle track. These conceptual figures show existing vegetation along the creek. New plantings would be limited to erosion control and riparian tree replacement. Temporary impact areas would be revegetated with native species. These areas would be determined during consultation with the resource agencies.

Multi-use path: isometric



Multi-use path: section

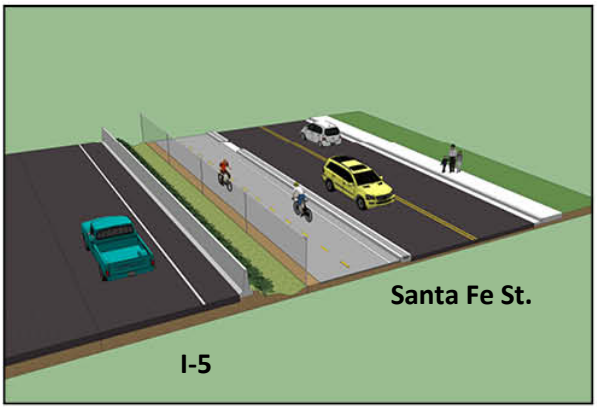
Figure 3a



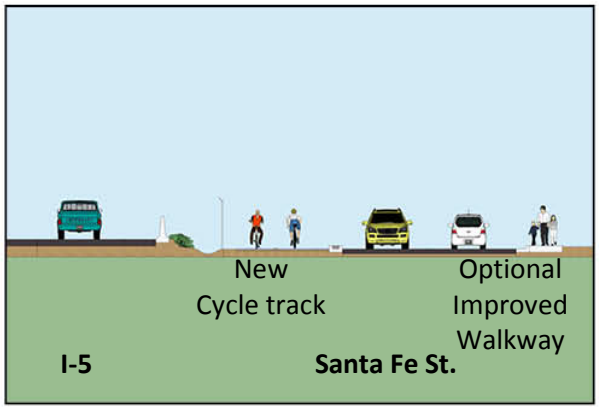
Bridge Elevation

Figure 3b

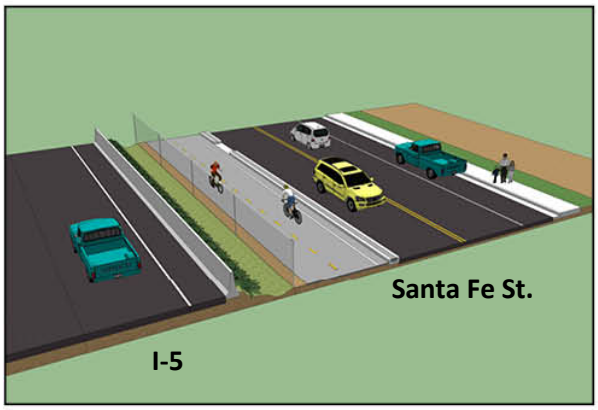
The proposed project would also potentially construct a new sidewalk along portions of the eastern side of Santa Fe Drive that currently have no sidewalks, and reconstruct existing driveways where the sidewalk would cross the walkway. The sidewalk improvements would necessitate the relocation or undergrounding of an existing overhead power line, and a new retaining wall along a portion of the western edge of Rose Creek. The project also would require minor grading, removal or relocation of some utilities (e.g. power poles), removal and replacement of short portions of a Caltrans fence, and minor modifications to existing storm drains.



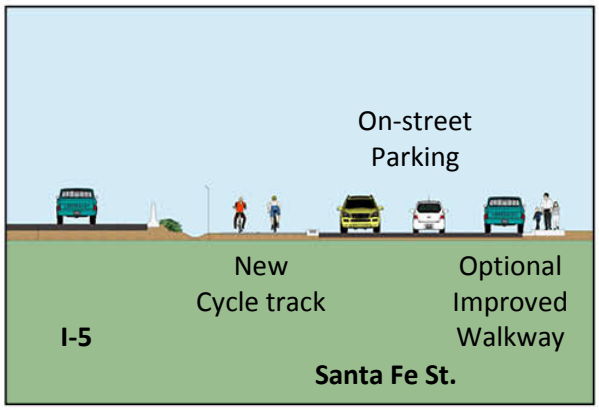
Cycle track at Sante Fe Street, configuration 1: isometric



Cycle track at Sante Fe Street configuration 1: section



Cycle track at Sante Fe Street, configuration 2: isometric



Cycle track at Sante Fe Street configuration 2: section

Figure 3c

PROJECT VISUAL SETTING

The project location and setting provides the needed context for determining the type of changes expected in the existing visual environment. The proposed project is located next to I-5 between the State Route 52 interchange and the Mission Bay Drive undercrossing in the City of San Diego. The project is part of the mid-coastal region of San Diego County, which is characterized by steep slopes rising up from the ocean, forming mesas and steep canyon to the east. The existing setting of the proposed project is a meeting point of urban, suburban and natural character, where commercial and residential development is interspersed with steep canyon slopes. The urban land uses are the most visible within the corridor and include residential development along the mesa edges and business park / industrial uses and big box retail establishments along the canyon bottom and sides. In addition to the commercial, industrial, and residential buildings, the developed areas include multiple streets and parking lots as well as I-5 infrastructure and a railroad transportation corridor. Native and naturalized vegetation on the undeveloped slopes and within the Rose Creek are visual counterparts to urban character of the area. The slopes of the canyons are characterized by a combination of native scrub vegetation, oak scrub and invasive species. The canyon bottoms include naturalized riparian corridors with willow, oak and sycamore mature tree species in some areas and concrete lined and soft bottom creek flood control structures in others. The project setting is defined as the area of land that is visible from, adjacent to, and outside the proposed project, and is determined by topography, vegetation, and viewing distance.

The I-5 corridor, within the City of San Diego, is an eligible State Scenic Highway, and as such is part of the Scenic Highway System requiring preservation of its eligibility status. It should be noted that along the study area segments of the freeway, regionally significant views do not exist due to the topographically depressed nature of the highway and canyons where the project is proposed. Although the character of the overall corridor needs to be considered, potential scenic views from this segment of the freeway in the direction of unique viewing scenes are very limited. The project improvements would make changes to the visual assessment units of the canyon bottom, but these changes are likely to be small and not likely to affect the sub-regionally important viewing scenes to the north and south. Therefore, the proposed changes to viewing scenes do not require additional analysis.

South of the project study area, regionally significant views exist from the freeway and adjacent slopes, towards regionally significant viewing scenes that include Mission Bay Park and the Pacific Ocean. At the north end of the study area, views can be seen from the freeway looking east up San Clemente Canyon and Rose Canyon, that would be considered to be regionally important viewing corridors of regionally significant viewing scenes. However, these viewing corridors do not originate within any part of the study area and any possible negative effects to these regionally significant viewing scenes of San Clemente Canyon, Rose Canyon, Mission Bay or the Pacific Ocean would continue to exist.

It should be noted that the currently adopted Clairemont Mesa Community Plan indicates the desire to protect public views from the mesa tops and ridgelines to the east of the project area, back down into Rose and San Clemente Canyons. The proposed project would not affect the public viewing locations, nor would any element of the proposed project block the viewing corridors into this part of Rose Canyon. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the proposed changes would not appreciably change the visual character of the Rose Canyon area enough to be noticeable from this distance. Therefore, no further analysis of regionally important or sub-regionally important viewing corridor blockages, viewing scene changes or removal of public viewing locations is required.

The Class I multi-use path facility would begin where the existing Rose Creek Bike Path currently ends at Mission Bay Drive. The photographs in the following discussion are illustrated in **Figures 4a through 4c**; the location where each photograph was taken is shown on Figures 2a through 2c. The path in this location is lower than the parking lots on the southeast side, and abutted by native and ornamental vegetation on the northwest (creek) side, as shown in **Photograph 1.** The new undercrossing would be lower in elevation than Mission Bay Drive, and thus not visible from the roadway. The current location of the end of the path (at the point where the creek passes under Mission Bay Drive) is visible across the intersection of Mission Bay Drive and Damon Avenue as shown in **Photograph 2**. North and east of Mission Bay Drive, the proposed project would consist of formalizing an existing maintenance road/pedestrian walkway next to the creek, behind an existing commercial development. This existing path/maintenance road is visible in **Photographs 3 and 4**. The new pathway at this point may be glimpsed from Damon Avenue, and would be visible from an existing parking lot and restaurant drive through. It may also be visible from Mission Bay Drive at the intersection with Bluffside Avenue, and for a short length of Mission Bay Drive that becomes an I-5 entrance, looking east across the creek channel where Rose Creek has a concrete bottom and sparse vegetation, as shown in **Photograph 5**. A handful of residential buildings are located west of this intersection, and have eastward facing windows, as shown in **Photograph 6** (seen from the existing path/maintenance road). Views from these residences would be filtered by existing eucalyptus trees lining Mission Bay Drive, and would include the roadway and the creek, as well as small portions of the proposed path.

Photograph 1: Northward View of existing Rose Creek Trail at Mission Bay Drive

Photograph 2: Mission Bay Drive overcrossing over Rose Creek looking westward from Damon Street

Photograph 3: Southward view of existing path east of Mission Bay Drive

Photograph 4: Northward view of existing path and commercial development at Rose Creek east of Mission Bay Drive

Photograph 5: Eastward view east across Rose Creek from Mission Bay Drive at Bluffside Avenue

Photograph 6: Northwestward view of residential units near Mission Bay Drive and Bluffside Avenue

A portion of the proposed bike path undercrossing at I-5 may also be visible to freeway drivers on I-5, but the majority of the improvements would not be visible from the freeway because the project would be at a low elevation compounded by the fact that the freeway is lined with safety barriers that block views of the lower area of Santa Fe Street directly beside the freeway. Northeast of I-5, the proposed bike path alignment would pass an existing SDG&E service yard. The service yard is surrounded by 7-foot-high chain link fencing with landscape fabric attached, which blocks views of the creek (and thus the proposed path) from the yard and from Santa Fe Street, which extends along the eastern side of the service yard. **Photograph 7** illustrates the proposed path location on the north end of the service yard, taken from the adjacent commercial parking lot. **Photograph 8** illustrates the proposed location of the path north of the service yard, where it would extend behind existing business park/light industrial buildings and parking lots. In this location, the path may be visible from parking lots, but not from inside the buildings because few of the buildings have windows facing the creek. The buildings also would block the path in views from Santa Fe Street and the railroad corridor.

The proposed pathway would then span Rose Creek with a new, prefabricated bridge located just west of the existing Santa Fe Drive Bridge. **Photograph 9** and **Photograph 10** illustrate the existing bridge at this location. The proposed bridge would be located on the left side of Photograph 9 and the right side of Photograph 10. It would be visible from Santa Fe Street and the railroad corridor, but would not be visible from I-5 because of the dense trees growing within the creek. Most of these trees would remain after the proposed project is constructed, and would continue to shield views of the new and existing bridge from I-5.

North of the proposed bridge, the bicycle pathway would merge with the existing Santa Fe Street and continue as a cycle track separated from the street by a concrete curb. **Photograph 11** shows the existing Santa Fe Street; the proposed track would be located on the left side of the photograph, and would replace existing parking. The track may also be visible from the railroad corridor, and from some small segments of I-5. A relatively new K-rail barrier has been installed along the eastern side of I-5, which generally restricts views from northbound I-5 of the surface of Santa Fe Street. Glimpses of the surface of Santa Fe Street are only available from northbound I-5 where existing vegetation is thinner and where Santa Fe Street is higher in elevation than the freeway. **Photograph 12** and **Photograph 13** illustrate two points where a portion of Santa Fe Street is visible from northbound I-5. These view opportunities are short in duration given the high speed of vehicles traveling on the I-5. It also should be noted that new landscape shrubs have been planted along most of this stretch. When mature, the shrubs would serve to screen views of Santa Fe Street and the proposed cycle track.

The proposed cycle track would extend to the end of Santa Fe Street, and connect from there to the existing Rose Creek Bicycle Path. **Photograph 14** illustrates the end of Santa Fe Street and the beginning of the existing bicycle path.

Photograph 7: Southward view of Rose Creek at SDG&E Service Yard off Santa Fe Street

Photograph 8: Northward view of proposed path location behind commercial/light industrial buildings off Santa Fe Street

Photograph 9: Santa Fe Drive bridge over Rose Creek, looking northward

Photograph 10: Santa Fe Drive bridge over Rose Creek, looking southward

Photograph 11: Northward view along Santa Fe Drive north of Rose Creek

Photograph 12: View eastward from northbound I-5

Photograph 13: View eastward from northbound I-5

Photograph 14: Northward view at the end of Santa Fe Street/connection to existing Rose Creek Bike Path

VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual Assessment Units

To assess the proposed project, the corridor was divided into a series of "outdoor rooms" or *visual assessment units*. Each visual assessment unit has its own visual character and visual quality. The units are typically defined by the limits of a particular viewshed with perceivable boundaries. These boundaries are generally created by landforms, edges defined by vegetation, buildings, and fencing. They typically have similar form, scale, materials, and character and visual quality that help define these boundaries. The importance of identifying assessment units is to represent the context of where viewer groups may be found, while also assessing visual quality, character and sensitivity to change from the visually prominent elements of the proposed project.

For this project, 6 visual assessment units were identified, with three subsets of the Rose Creek unit. The visual quality and visual character for each visual assessment unit was evaluated to determine the proposed project's effect on the resource change. The 6 visual assessment units are shown on **Table 1**. The visual assessment unit locations have been delineated on **Figure 5:** Visual Assessment Unit Map. Photographs that are characteristic of the visual assessment units are referred to as candidate key views and are discussed later in this section. For projects where the complexity and prominence of the proposed elements are great or the sensitivity of the unit is high, visual simulations are generally recommended. However, as shown on **Table 2**, the project elements are either too low of a contrast to the visual setting of the roadway or have limited visibility by viewer groups to need visual simulations.

Table 1: Visual Assessment Units						
Unit #	**Visual Assessment Unit**	**Project Elements**	**Visual Character**	**Visual Quality**	**Sensitivity to Change**	**Viewer Groups**
1	Freeway Corridor	None	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Freeway drivers
2	Santa Fe Street	Lane pavements, markings, & barriers	Moderate-Low	Moderate-Low	Low	Arterial drivers, business customers, cyclists
3N	North Rose Creek (Natural)	None	High	High	High	Trail users, mountain bikers
3CM	Central Rose Creek (Man-Made)	Retaining Walls, walkway	Moderate-Low	Low	Moderate	None
3CN	Central Rose Creek (Natural)	Bike path, pavements, walls, lighting, tree removal, bridge	Moderate-High	Moderate	High	None
3S	South Rose Creek (Man-Made)	Bike path, pavements, walls, lighting	Moderate-Low	Low	Moderate	Retail business customers
4	Industrial / Business Parks	None	Moderate-Low	Low	Low	Employees
5	Natural Open Space Slopes	None	High	High	Moderate	Trail users
6	Railroad Corridor	None	Moderate	Low	Low	Train employees and transit users

Candidate Key Views

There are an almost infinite number of viewing locations, view corridors and viewing scenes within any outdoor setting. However, since it is not feasible to analyze all views within a viewshed, it is necessary to select a number of key views that would most clearly display the visual contrasts of the project. Key views should represent the primary viewer groups that would potentially be affected by the project and be taken from a direction and distance to clearly show the detail of the project. **Table 2** is a summary of the selected Key Views, the distance of the proposed project elements from the key view location and what features might be visible. Photographs of the key views follow, alongside the viewshed and indicated breadth of view of each.

Figure 6 is an aerial with the Candidate Key View locations marked. The views are illustrated in **Figures 7a through 7f**. Each view is followed by a map showing the focus area of the key view (in blue), and the possible viewshed as that could be seen from that point (in green), if no vegetation or structures block or screen the view.

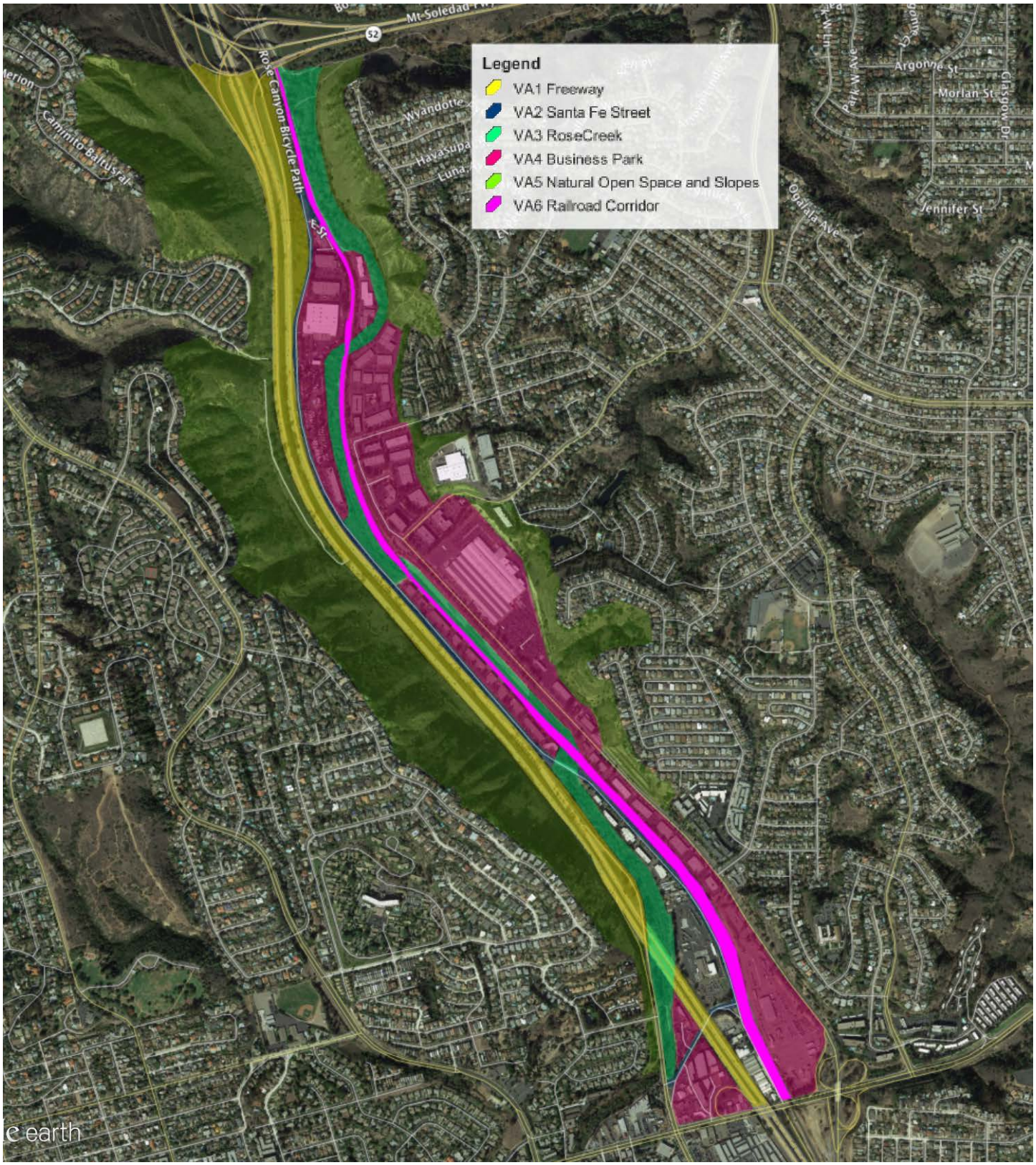


Figure 5: Visual Assessment Units

Table 2 Candidate Key Views					
Key View	**Key View**	**Dominant Viewer Group**	**Distance**	**Project Elements Seen**	**Recommend Simulation**
1	NB Mission Bay	Arterial Driver	Foreground	Tree removal only	Not needed: minor visual resource change / minor visibility
2	NB Mission Bay Drive	Arterial / Freeway Driver	Middleground	Paving, new fencing & pedestrian level lighting	Not needed: minor visual resource change / moderate visibility
3	NB Mission Bay Drive	Arterial / Freeway Driver	Middleground	Tree removal, paving, new fencing & pedestrian level lighting	Not needed: minor visual resource change / moderate visibility
4	SB Mission Bay Drive	Arterial / Freeway Driver	Middleground	Tree removal, paving, new fencing & pedestrian level lighting.	Not needed: minor visual resource change / moderate visibility
5	NB I-5	Freeway Driver	Middleground	Tree removal & refabricated bridge	Not needed: moderate visual resource change / moderate visibility
6	NB I-5	Freeway Driver	Middleground	New colored pavement, raised barriers & candlestick lane dividers	Not needed: minor visual resource change / minor visibility
7	NB I-5	Freeway Driver	Middleground	New colored pavement, raised barriers & candlestick lane dividers	Not needed: minor visual resource change / minor visibility
8	SB I-5	Freeway Driver	Middleground	New colored pavement, raised barriers & candlestick lane dividers	Not needed: moderate visual resource change / minor visibility
9	SB I-5	Freeway Driver	Middleground	Tree removal & refabricated bridge	Not needed: moderate visual resource change / minor visibility
10	NB Santa Fe Drive	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Customers & RV Park Reside	Foreground	Tree removal, trail surfaces & refabricated bridge	Not needed: minor visual resource change / moderate visibility
11	NB Santa Fe Drive	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Local Customers & RV Park Residents	Foreground	New colored pavement, raised barriers & candlestick lane dividers	Not needed: minor visual resource change / moderate visibility
12	SB Santa Fe Drive	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Local Customers & RV Park Residents	Foreground	New colored pavement, tree removal, bridge raised barriers & candlestick dividers	Not needed: moderate visual resource change / moderate visibility
13	SB Santa Fe Drive	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Local Customers & RV Park Residents	Foreground	New colored pavement, raised barriers & candlestick lane dividers	Not needed: minor visual resource change / moderate visibility
14	NB Morena Boulevard	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Local Customers & Local Residents	Middleground	Santa Fe Eastside retaining walls for walkway	Not needed: moderate visual resource change / minor visibility
15	NB Morena Boulevard	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Local Customers & Local Residents	Background	Santa Fe Eastside retaining walls for walkway	Not needed: moderate visual resource change / minor visibility
16	Mt. Soledad/ Via Capri	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Tourists & Local Residents	Background	Painted lane markings may barely be discernable	Not needed: minor visual resource change / minor visibility
17	Monongahela St.	Arterial Drivers, Cyclists, Local Customers & Local Residents	Background	Painted lane markings may barely be discernable	Not needed: minor visual resource change / minor visibility

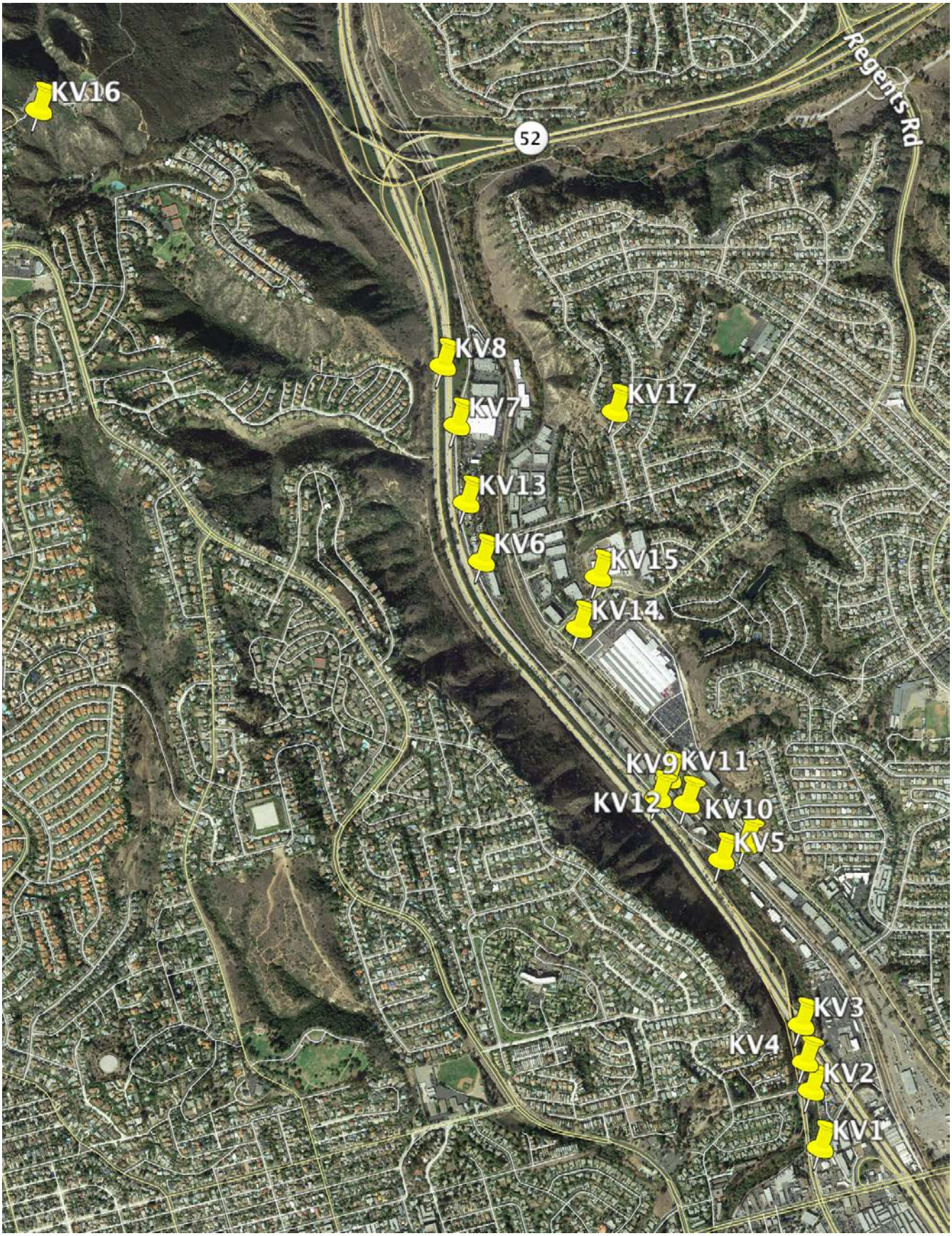


Figure 6: Candidate Key View photo locations

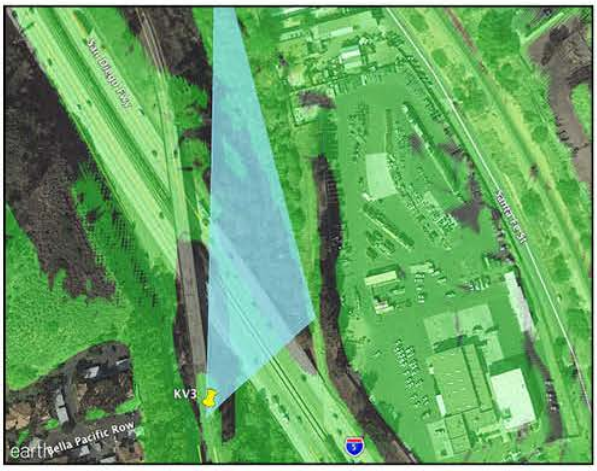
Candidate Key View 1:
Northbound Mission Bay Drive

Candidate Key View 1:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 2:
Northbound Mission Bay Drive

Candidate Key View 2:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 3:
Northbound Mission Bay Drive



Candidate Key View 3:
Viewshed analysis

Focus Area of Key View

Possible Viewshed as seen from Key View (can be blocked by buildings or vegetation)

Figure 7a: Candidate Key Views

Candidate Key View 4:
Southbound Mission Bay Drive

Candidate Key View 4:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 5:
Northbound Interstate 5

Candidate Key View 5:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 6:
Northbound Interstate 5

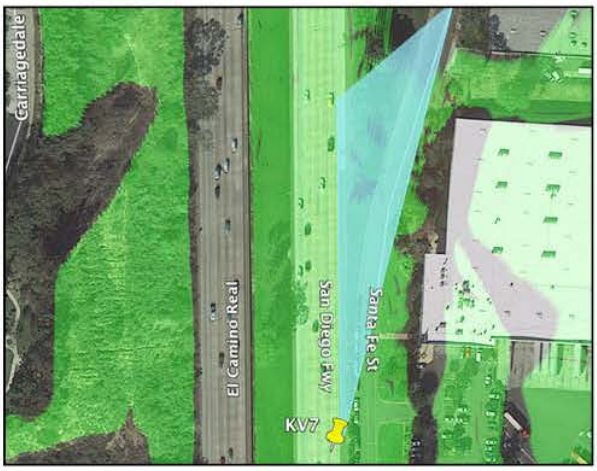
Candidate Key View 6:
Viewshed analysis

Focus Area of Key View

Possible Viewshed as seen from Key View (can be blocked by buildings or vegetation)

Figure 7b: Candidate Key Views

Candidate Key View 7:
Northbound Interstate 5

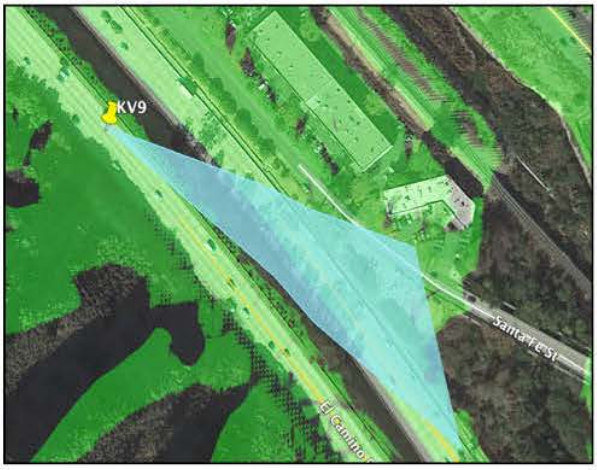


Candidate Key View 7:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 8:
Southbound Interstate 5

Candidate Key View 8:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 9:
Southbound Interstate 5



Candidate Key View 9:
Viewshed analysis

Focus Area of Key View

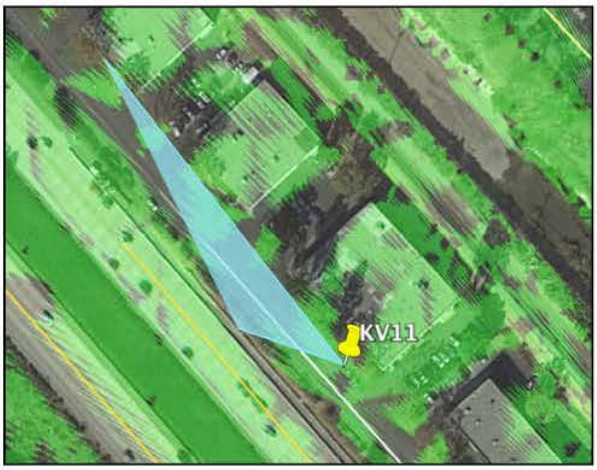
Possible Viewshed as seen from Key View (can be blocked by buildings or vegetation)

Figure 7c: Candidate Key Views

Candidate Key View 10:
Northbound Santa Fe Drive

Candidate Key View 10:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 11:
Northbound Santa Fe Drive



Candidate Key View 11:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 12:
Southbound Santa Fe Drive

Candidate Key View 12:
Viewshed analysis

Focus Area of Key View

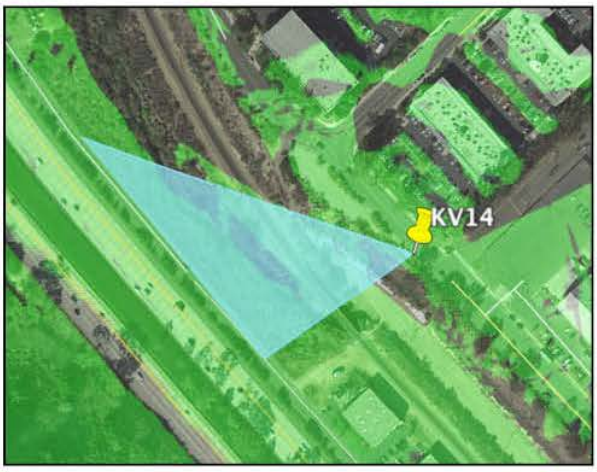
Possible Viewshed as seen from Key View (can be blocked by buildings or vegetation)

Figure 7d: Candidate Key Views

Candidate Key View 13:
Southbound Santa Fe Drive

Candidate Key View 13:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 14:
Northbound Morena Boulevard



Candidate Key View 14:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 15:
Northbound Morena Boulevard

Candidate Key View 15:
Viewshed analysis

Focus Area of Key View

Possible Viewshed as seen from Key View (can be blocked by buildings or vegetation)

Figure 7e: Candidate Key Views

Candidate Key View 16:
Mt. Soledad / Via Capri

Candidate Key View 16:
Viewshed analysis

Candidate Key View 17:
Monongahela St.

Candidate Key View 17:
Viewshed analysis

Focus Area of Key View

Possible Viewshed as seen from Key View (can be blocked by buildings or vegetation)

Figure 7f: Candidate Key Views

VISUAL RESOURCE ANALYSIS AND RESOURCE CHANGE

Visual resources of the project setting are defined and identified below by assessing *visual character* and *visual quality* in the project corridor (refer to **Table 1**). *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.

Visual character includes attributes such as form, line, color, and texture all used to describe the visual composition of the key view. They are not intended to evaluate if these physical elements represent a positive aesthetic of the overall composition of these attributes. However, a change in visual character can be evaluated when it is analyzed from the perspective of the viewer group perceiving these changes. Changes in visual character can be identified by how visually compatible proposed project elements are with the existing visual setting.

Visual Quality is defined by individual elements that relate to the quality of the viewing scene. Visual quality is determined by the relative value of three topic areas: vividness, intactness, and unity.

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

The visual quality of the existing corridor would be altered slightly by the proposed project. The *intactness* of the corridor is currently low and highly disturbed. The proposed project would not change the level of *intactness*, with the minor exception of the upland / lowland vegetation south of the trailer park that would be disturbed by the addition of the walkway and retaining walls. The *vividness* of the visual environment would not change in any manner except for where streamside trees are to be removed. The *unity* would be slightly improved by the cleaning up of the riverbank edge for the Multi-use trail and for the edge of Santa Fe Street that will receive the facility and limit the number of overnight parked commercial and recreational vehicles. However, this change would be minor. Overall, the current visual quality of the area is moderately low, with only small portions of Rose Creek that are naturally intact having a high visual quality. The existing street surfaces over which the cycle track would be placed, and the creek bank—supported in some areas by concrete embankment walls—where the path would be located, all have low or moderate visual quality based on vividness, intactness and unity. This area has low intactness, with bridges, embankments, and developed commercial areas encroaching into the creek corridor, and highly contrasting with the natural appearance of the canyon slopes.

The proposed project's elements would be similar in appearance to the existing structures along the creek corridor, resulting in only a minor change of vividness. Although the trail hard surfaces and walls will contrast with the vegetation of the creek banks and bottoms, in some locations, the project proposes native revegetation in temporary impact areas where existing vegetation would be removed as a result of the project. The new project elements would not substantially encroach into the more intact portions of the site, but would be in areas already disturbed. The proposed pathway may slightly increase the unity of the area by removing dumped rubbish and creating a uniform path along the top of the

creek banks, both near existing concrete embankment walls and along the graded 2:1 slopes currently without embankment walls.

Similarly, the proposed bridge would also slightly alter the vividness of the corridor. The bridge would require the removal of a few existing trees, but the change would not be noticeable because other existing trees would remain. The bridge would be similar enough in appearance to the existing bridge that it would not visually encroach on the area, or reduce the intactness. The new bridge would be visually coherent with the existing bridge, and would not decrease the unity of the area. The new bridge would help to hide the less aesthetically pleasing exposed utility pipes that are visually dominant along the south edge of the existing bridge.

The proposed cycle track portion of the project also would slightly change the visual environment along Santa Fe Street, but the elements introduced would be similar in appearance to the existing visual environment along Santa Fe Street. Therefore, the cycle track would not be highly memorable or vivid, and would not change the vividness of the area. It would be visually similar to existing paved street and its immediately surrounding area and would not visually encroach on the street, or disrupt the intactness of the area. Development of the proposed cycle track along the length of the western edge of Santa Fe Street from Rose Creek to the end of the street would increase the unity of the area by eliminating street side parking, which currently is allowed piecemeal along the length of the street. Commercial vehicles are commonly parked in this stretch of street, attempting to obtain freeway side advertising, or recreational vehicles either occupied or being stored along the street edge. Additionally, the project's proposed new sidewalk segments along the eastern side of the street would connect existing sidewalk segments, creating more unity along the street edge.

Overall, the change to visual resources as represented by visual quality changes (intactness, unity and vividness) caused by the proposed project would be low. This is also supported by the fact that the individual elements of character (form, line, color, texture, etc.) that make up the visual environment are similar to the proposed project elements. The projects contrast with visual character of the setting would be low**. In summary, the proposed project would be visually compatible with the visual character of the area, and would only slightly alter the visual resource through changes in the visual quality and contrasts with visual character.**

VIEWERS AND VIEWER RESPONSE

Viewer response can be gauged through a review of community concerns about visual resources found in local adopted community plans, designations and special study areas. The following discussion includes a quick review of known state and local visual goals that should serve as a foundation for determining viewer response.

State Scenic Highways

> The State Scenic Highway Program lists highways that are either eligible for designation as a scenic highway or are already designated as a scenic highway. Designation as a scenic highway depends on how much of the natural landscape travelers can see, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on the traveler's enjoyment of the view (Caltrans, 2010). **There are no officially designated scenic highways along the study area although I-5 is considered to be an eligible freeway for future designation.**

California Coastal Act of 1976 (Section 30251-Scenic and visual qualities)

The coastal zone does not incorporate any portion of the proposed study area.

City of San Diego General Plan

The *City of San Diego General Plan* (City of San Diego, 2008) includes policies to create multi-modal solutions, create vibrant public spaces, provide public art, promote sustainable development, prevent pollution, and support infrastructure development. In addition, the general plan features strategies for providing urban parks, implementing mobility strategies, and preserving San Diego's historical and cultural resources. Many of these policies focus on the visual character, significant landmarks, important viewing scenes and corridors within each community area. The general plan draws upon the character and strengths of San Diego's natural environment, distinctive neighborhoods, and activity centers that together form the city as a whole. Policies and objectives from the *City of San Diego General Plan* (or its elements) that are relevant to this VIA include:

Conservation Element-B.1. Protect and conserve the landforms and open spaces that: define the city's urban form; provide public views/vistas; serve as core biological areas and wildlife linkages; are wetlands habitats; provide buffers within and between communities, or provide outdoor recreational opportunities.

- Protect community urban canyons and other important open spaces that have been designated in community plans for the many conservation benefits they offer locally, and regionally as part of a collective citywide open space system.
- Encourage the removal of invasive plant species and the planting of native plants near open space preserves.

Urban Design Element-A.1*.* Preserve and protect natural landforms and features

- Protect the integrity of community plan designated open spaces. Preserve and enhance remaining naturally occurring features such as wetlands, riparian zones, canyons, and ridgelines.

Urban Design Element-A.2. Use open space and landscape to define and link communities.

- Recognize that open spaces sometimes prevent transportation corridors and inhibit mobility between communities. Where conflicts exist between mobility and open space, site-specific solutions may be addressed in community plans.

Urban Design Element-A.3. Design development adjacent to natural features in a sensitive manner to highlight and complement the natural.

- Minimize grading to maintain the natural topography, while contouring any landform alterations to blend into the natural terrain.
- Screen development adjacent to natural features as appropriate so that development does not appear visually intrusive, or interfere with the experience within the open space system. The provision of enhanced landscaping adjacent to natural features could be used to soften the appearance of development from the natural features.
- Use building and landscape materials that blend with and do not create visual or other conflicts with the natural environment in instances where new buildings abut natural areas.

- Ensure that the visibility of new development from natural features and open space areas is minimized to preserve the landforms and ridgelines that provide a natural backdrop to the open space systems.
- Protect views from public roadways and parklands to natural canyons, resource areas, and scenic vistas.
- Provide special consideration to the sensitive environmental design of roadways that traverse natural open space systems to ensure an integrated aesthetic design that respects open space resources. This could include the use of alternative materials such as "quiet pavement" in noise sensitive locations, and bridge or roadway designs that respect the natural environment.

Urban Design Element-A.5. Design buildings that contribute to a positive neighborhood character and relate to neighborhood and community context.

- Encourage designs that are sensitive to the scale, form, rhythm, proportions, and materials proximate to commercial areas and residential neighborhoods that have a well-established, distinctive character
- Encourage the use of materials and finishes that reinforce a sense of quality and permanence
- Provide architectural interest to discourage the appearance of blank walls for development. This would include not only building walls, but also fencing bordering the pedestrian network, where some form of architectural variation should be provided to add interest to the streetscape and enhance the pedestrian experience. For example, walls could protrude, recess, or change in color, height or texture to provide visual interest.

City of San Diego Community Plans

In support of the general plan, the City of San Diego has divided its land into community planning areas (CPA). The community plans are part of the *City of San Diego General Plan* and provide specific proposals and policies relating to visual quality of each community. The following section provides an overview of the adopted goals and policies contained in the community plans of the communities located along the study area.

Clairemont Mesa Community Plan

The *Clairemont Mesa Community Plan* (City of San Diego, 1989) includes goals and policies relating to the visual environment. The plan recognizes the visual assets of Marian Bear Memorial Park, Tecolote Canyon Natural Park, Stevenson Canyon, and the finger canyons within the community. It calls for the preservation and enhancement of these unique open spaces, recognizing that these resources contribute to the community identity and create a sense of place unique to other San Diego communities. Height restrictions have been put into place to assure that new development does not block existing public views originating from the mesa tops to the east, with views into and across the Rose Creek area to the west. The plan also indicates the need to have the visual character of the single-family neighborhoods preserved requiring the scale, form, and texture of all new development be in the same visual character of the existing visual environment. Policies require new development to be in visual harmony with existing buildings. In addition, parking lots should be screened with landscape to provide a visual buffer and any walls along roadways should include landscaping and berms to reduce the visual impact of walls.

Pacific Beach Community Plan

While the Rose Creek Bike Path does not travel through Pacific Beach, the *Pacific Beach Community Plan and Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan* (City of San Diego, 1993) includes polices for visual enhancements that are directly adjacent to the study area. Undergrounding utilities, improved signage, reducing clutter, and improving streetscape are all ways to enhance the visual quality of the neighborhood and promote harmony in visual relationships. The plan also calls to preserve significant environmental resource areas, such as Kate Sessions Park, Rose Creek, Coastal Bluffs, and the Northern Wildlife Preserve, in their natural state and as scenic and visual amenities.

Viewer Group Analysis

The proposed project's neighbors include drivers on Santa Fe Street, Morena Boulevard, Mission Bay Drive, and the I-5; railroad passengers; workers and visitors at commercial establishments; and a small number of residents along the mesa edges to the east. Residents to the east, although they represent private views that are not protected under CEQA, are likely to be highly concerned about view changes in Rose Canyon. Other viewer groups include project users such as bicycle riders, who currently use Santa Fe Street, and the occasional walker, hiker, and/or runner. A broad range of cyclists, runners, hikers and walkers are expected in the future resulting from improved facilities associated with this project.

A viewer's exposure can be estimated by the size of the viewer group, the proximity of the viewer in relation to the proposed project location, and the duration of views available of the project site. Viewer sensitivity to change in the visual environment can be estimated through a combination of their level of activity (allowing them to focus on the views), their awareness (which can limit their focus), their engagement in local interests and the value they place on local views.

A viewer's expected response to changes that would be caused by the proposed project can be predicted through a combination of their exposure and sensitivity. Each viewer group's response is summarized in the following table:

Table 3: Viewer Group Response to Project Elements

Viewer Group	Exposure	Sensitivity	Response
Roadway Driver	**Moderate/ Moderate-Low**	**Moderate**	**Moderate**
Freeway Driver	**Moderate-Low**	**Moderate-Low**	**Moderate-Low**
Railroad Passenger	**Low**	**Moderate**	**Moderate-Low**
Commercial/Office/ Industrial worker and Customer	**Moderate-Low**	**Moderate-Low**	**Moderate-Low**
Residents	**Moderate**	**Moderate-High**	**Moderate**
Cyclist/Pedestrian	**Moderate-low**	**Moderate**	**Moderate**

Roadway drivers on Santa Fe Street would have the highest exposure, due to their presence in moderate numbers, their close proximity to the proposed project location, and their relatively prolonged view of the project site where it parallels approximately one mile of Santa Fe Street. Their exposure would be moderate. Their sensitivity also would be moderate based on the activities that they are engaged in, as well as having a narrow field of focus, and their low engagement in local issues.

Roadway drivers on Mission Bay Drive number more than on Santa Fe Street, but fewer than I-5. They would have, if the traffic lights allow, some moderately stationary views. The proposed project location, however, would be in middleground views for these drivers. Their exposure would be moderately low. These drivers would have a similarly moderate sensitivity. Freeway drivers are the largest viewer group in terms of numbers, although northbound drivers have the most potential to see the proposed project features. Some portions of the proposed project would be close or moderately close to freeway drivers, but their view duration would be extremely brief due to view-blocking vegetation and barriers, which provide only short opportunities to see the project location. Their exposure would be moderate-low. Freeway drivers' sensitivity is moderate-low, due to their attention engaged in driving rather than looking at views, their narrow focus on the roadway, and their low connection to local issues.

Railroad passengers are few in number, and traveling at high speed, which limits their opportunity to notice the proposed project location. Additionally, only those passengers looking out the west-facing windows would be able to see the proposed features. Their exposure would be low. Railroad passengers' sensitivity is moderate (they would be mindful of views through the windows), and their attention would not be focused on driving. They would likely have low engagement in local issues.

Workers and visitors to the commercial establishments near the proposed project would be able to see the proposed project location from some lots and from the drive-through at In-And-Out. Most of the buildings in the area, however, do not have windows facing the creek and views would not be visible from inside the buildings. Where views are available, they would be relatively stationary, and thus their view duration would be long. The number of workers and customers would approximately be the same as the number of drivers along Santa Fe Street, which is moderate. The limited viewing opportunities lower their exposure to moderately low. Workers and visitors to commercial areas would have a moderate-low sensitivity, because they would be engaged in activities other than studying a view, and would be focusing on areas inside the business sites. They would have a moderate engagement in local issues.

A few residential units have views available of small portions of the proposed pathway location. Their eastward views would also include Mission Bay Drive, Rose Creek, and the commercial establishments. Existing trees along Mission Bay Drive also would be prominent views. These trees would not be changed or removed by the proposed project. The number of residential units with eastward views is low, since the leading developed edge of the mesa top tends to block the majority of other residents further to the east. The proposed project would be in the middle to background of these residential views. Residential views have the potential to be of long duration. Residents would have moderate exposure. Their sensitivity would be moderate-high. Residents would be mindful of the views available from their homes, and focused on their surroundings, with the opportunity to study the views available. Their interest in local issues and value placed on local views is presumed to be moderate to high.

Bicyclists, the current and future project users, are a small group of viewers, but would have the longest and most direct exposure to the project as they travel along it. Their exposure would be moderate. Their sensitivity is moderate as well. Their attention would be engaged mostly in navigating their route, with a narrow to moderate focus on views—more than drivers but less than a stationary viewer or pedestrian. They also would have moderate engagement in local issues.

It is anticipated that the average response of all viewer groups would be moderate-low.

VISUAL IMPACTS

Visual impacts are determined by assessing changes to the visual resources and predicting viewer response to those changes. The proposed project would create minimal changes to the visual environment near Rose Creek. Some areas of grading, retaining walls and trail fill would occur on the east edge of the natural and semi-natural areas of the creek. These changes would create both a slight positive (clean up, removal of invasives and replanting) and a negative change to the visual quality (tree removals and retaining walls) of the Rose Creek vegetated areas. The primary contrasts to the vividness, intactness and unity of the area would come from the proposed bridge structure at Santa Fe Street and Rose Creek, the removal of some streamside trees along Rose Creek, as well as the retaining walls associated with the east side of Santa Fe Street needed to accommodate the widened roadway and proposed walkway (if constructed). These elements would contrast at a moderate level with the current visual setting. Since the minimization measures listed following this section are to be implemented as part of the project, the visual resource changes would be a low contrast resulting in **a low adverse impact.**

New lighting would not be very noticeable along Santa Fe Street given the existing typical roadway lighting found in the study area and the fact that new lighting is only replacing old lighting that exists on utility poles that need to be relocated, if any. The pedestrian level lighting along Rose Creek, south of the new proposed bridge connection over the creek, would not be seen by viewers other than the multi-use trail users, and would not be considered a contrast to the visual setting. Lighting of the trail, as seen by residential viewers to the east, would not be that visible because of the number of large buildings found east of the multi-use path that would block the visibility of the path lighting. The lighting illumination into vegetated areas is of concern along this portion of the creek, but the minimization measures of the plan listed in the following section, would result in only a **low adverse lighting impact,.** No glare from any portion of the proposed project is expected and therefore no adversity due to glare impacts is expected at all.

The positive improvements to visual quality result from cleaning up the edge of Rose Creek where invasives currently exist in abundance and the revegetation of temporary impact areas in riparian habitat for the southern segments of the project. Another positive visual improvement to the northern segment would result from removing the large number of commercial and recreational vehicles often left parked along the west side of Santa Fe Street.

As a result of the offsetting positive and negative changes to visual quality and the minimization measures listed in the following section, **it is anticipated that viewers would have a moderate-low response to the project changes, and the overall impact to visual resources would be moderate-low.**

Temporary Impacts

Temporary impacts are generally associated with the construction period of the project. Construction of the proposed project would be noticeable, but would not highly disrupt the visual environment of the area, which currently is discontinuous with low visual harmony. The pathway would require some concrete pouring, placing the bridge (a pre-fabricated unit) with large equipment, and minor grading, with no large stockpile(s) of soil. Most of the cycle track portion of the project would be on-grade improvements with minor grading required. Construction of new sidewalks and the driveways they would cross would require concrete trucks and minor grading. No stockpiling would be expected and all construction laydown areas would be screened with fencing. **The visual impacts of construction of the proposed project would be minor. Viewer response would be moderately low. The overall visual impact of the proposed project construction period would be low.**

No Project Alternative

If the project were not built, bicyclists would continue to ride on Santa Fe Street and Damon Street, crossing with traffic lights at Mission Bay Drive to reach the Rose Creek Trail. The "no-build alternative" would not result in any construction or have a visual impact. Parking would remain a discontinuous element along the western edge of Santa Fe Street, and the upper edge of the creek bank would likely continue to have rubbish dumped on it. Commercial and recreation vehicles would likely continue to park along the route, unless increased enforcement was to occur. The minor unifying visual change created by the proposed project would not occur.

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:

1) The proposed bridge structure along Santa Fe Drive over Rose Creek would potentially be a moderate-low contrast to the visual character and quality of the visual setting. This would result from vegetation (i.e., tree) removal and a new structure being added to the visual environment that is mostly undeveloped in its current character. Normally, the impact to visual resources resulting from these changes would be moderate-low. But with revegetation of the riparian habitat, it would be reduced to a low contrast.
2) If implemented, the proposed walkway extension along the east side of Santa Fe Street would normally result in a moderate-low impact, but would be lowered to a low contrast through the preparation of a revegetation plan. The roadway expansion and the walkway would require a retaining wall of up to 6' in height. Though not highly visible to most of the viewers in the corridor, it can be seen from higher elevations to the east, including along Morena Boulevard and from transit users on trains. Planting of native species (where appropriate and determined through consultation with the resource agencies) should occur along this edge in order to lower the form, texture and color contrast of the proposed wall.

3) Pedestrian level lighting, if implemented into final design, along the Class I multi-use portions of the project has the potential to spill over into vegetated areas or may highlight a linear feature along the edge of the trail that may be seen from the freeway and Mission Bay Drive. The use of cut-off lighting to decrease spillover lighting would be included. This would be accomplished through proper placement of the lighting (on the west side with light focused to the east) and through the use of shielding. Visual impacts that may occur, associated with lighting, will be addressed through specification of context-appropriate lighting.