FINAL
Visual Impact Assessment

Cross Valley Connector East Project
SANTA CLARITA, CALIFORNIA

Prepared for:

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As Lead Agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970

and

U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
c/o California Department of Transportation (Department)
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CIP	cast-in-place
CLWA	Castaic Lake Water Agency
FHWA	Federal Highways Administration
LOS	levels of service
MUDC	Santa Clarita Municipal and Unified Development Code
NLFC	Newhall Land and Farm Company
ROW	Right-of-Way

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope and Purpose of Study

This Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared for the proposed Cross Valley Connector East Project. The proposed action is a cooperative project between the City of Santa Clarita (City) and the California Department of Transportation (Department). Accordingly, this Visual Impact Assessment analysis was conducted using guidelines from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Department, and the goals and policies of the City.

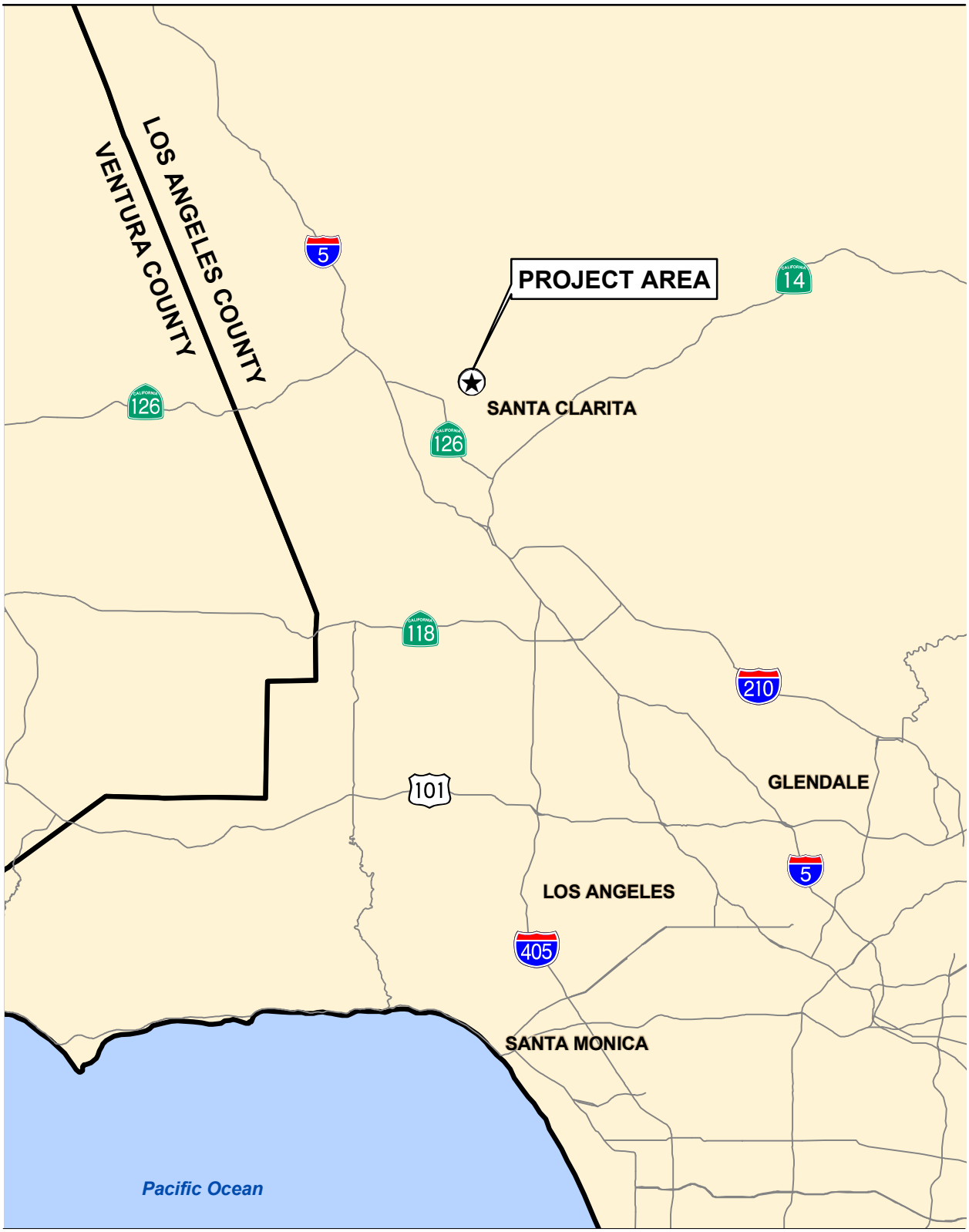
The purpose of this Visual Impact Assessment is to evaluate the potential impacts to visual resources resulting from the construction and operation of the proposed northern extension of Golden Valley Road, the eastern extension of Newhall Ranch Road, and the bridge over the Santa Clara River (Figure 1). This technical report addresses the three project alternatives (Figure 2). The analysis will discuss the existing visual environment, existing and future landscape units, applicable planning documents, viewer types and anticipated view response, and key observation points. Potential visual impacts are assessed based on the anticipated change to the visual environment as a result of project implementation and consistency with approved plans. Lastly, appropriate mitigation measures are recommended for identified visual impacts.

1.2 Project Overview and Regional Context

The proposed project is located in northern Los Angeles County, California. The proposed roadway extension site is located between Soledad Canyon Road to the south and Bouquet Canyon Road to the west. Most of the project site traverses a largely undeveloped area surrounding the Santa Clara River.

The principal transportation routes in Santa Clarita are Interstate 5 (I-5) and the Antelope Valley Freeway (State Route 14 [SR-14]), providing north-south access through the Santa Clarita Valley (see Figure 1). The primary east-west traffic corridor through Santa Clarita is Soledad Canyon Road (Figure 3). Due to severe congestion problems on Soledad Canyon Road, the City has recognized the need for an additional east-west transportation corridor through Santa Clarita. The City adopted a revised General Plan Circulation Element in 1997 that identified a cross-valley route along Newhall Ranch Road and Golden Valley Road. This route, referred to as the Cross Valley Connector, would connect I-5 with SR-14 through the center of the city. The proposed project would complete the eastern portion of this route, from Newhall Ranch Road in the west to Golden Valley Road in the east.

The proposed project would extend Newhall Ranch Road by approximately 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) from its current terminus at Bouquet Canyon Road eastwards. From here, Newhall Ranch Road would connect with Golden Valley Road, which would extend southwards to terminate approximately 610 meters (2,000 feet) north of Soledad Canyon Road (Figure 2). The future extension of Golden Valley Road is part of



Source: City of Santa Clara; ESRI

NORTH

75 0 75 Miles

Figure 1
Regional Location Map

Source: City of Santa Clarita, 2002

0 375 750 1,500 2,250 3,000 Feet

1 inch equals 0.25 miles

Figure 2
Vicinity Map

the larger Cross Valley Connector project, but not part of the proposed project evaluated in this Visual Impact Assessment.

The Golden Valley Road segment would include a new 300-meter-long (980 feet) bridge spanning the Santa Clara River. In addition, a 46-meter (150 feet) single span bridge would be constructed over a concrete pipeline which is part of the 360 kilometer-long (223 miles) Los Angeles Aqueduct (LADWP 2004). The proposed typical section of the alignment would include a six-lane roadway with a 4.3 meter (14 feet) median island and pedestrian and bicycle lanes. Generally, the total curb-to-curb width would be approximately 30 meters (98 feet) with a total right-of-way (ROW) width of approximately 37 meters (120 feet). Near the intersection of the Newhall Ranch Road and Golden Valley Road extensions, the roadway would cut through a secondary ridgeline.

Four alternatives are analyzed at an equal level of detail in this document. The No Action Alternative is required by CEQA and NEPA and is analyzed as Alternative 1. Three other action alternatives are analyzed in this Draft EIR/EA, all of which would extend Newhall Ranch Road to the east and Golden Valley Road to the north, and include a bridge over the Santa Clara River and the Los Angeles Aqueduct pipeline. Each of the three Action alternatives would also closely follow the existing, graded roadway for approximately 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) along the western portion of the alignment.

1.2.1 Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would maintain the current local and regional circulation system. The planned extensions of Newhall Ranch Road and Golden Valley Road would not be constructed; thus, the proposed alternate east-west route between Soledad Canyon Road and Bouquet Canyon Road would not be established. The No Action Alternative would not complete an essential portion of the Cross Valley Connector project, and hence, the ultimate completion of the Cross Valley Connector from SR 14 to I-5, across the central Santa Clarita Valley would not occur.

1.2.2 Alternative 2: Alignment No. 1

Alternative 2 entails construction of a 3.9-kilometer (2.4-mile) roadway alignment including the northward extension of Golden Valley Road and the eastward extension of Newhall Ranch Road. Golden Valley Road would intersect Newhall Ranch Road north of the Santa Clara River. This alternative would include construction of a 150-meter-long (492 feet) portion of Golden Valley Road north of its intersection with Soledad Canyon Road. The proposed action would be a crucial segment of the larger Cross Valley Connector project. The proposed action would include the following components:

- construction of a new 35-meter-wide (116 feet), 6-lane roadway, including pedestrian sidewalks and bike paths;
- construction of a new 300-meter (980 feet) cast-in-place (CIP) or precast, 4 lane bridge spanning the Santa Clara River;
- construction of a new 46-meter (150 feet) single-span bridge over the Los Angeles Aqueduct, and;

- acquisition of approximately 17.2 hectares (42.6 acres) of ROW belonging to Newhall Land and Farm Company (NLFC) and Castaic Lake Water Agency (CLWA).

1.2.3 Alternative 3: Alignment No. 2

The project components under this alternative would be similar to those identified above for Alternative 2, apart from the location of the 580-meter (1,900 feet) radius curve and river crossing. As a result, the intersection of Newhall Ranch Road and Golden Valley Road would occur over the Santa Clara River. This alternative would require a 315-meter-long (1033 feet) bridge along Newhall Ranch Road over Santa Clara River. The extension of Newhall Ranch Road east of the project site would meet Golden Valley Road while the roadway is over the Santa Clara River. As a result, a second bridge would be required. This alternative lies entirely within property owned by NLFC and CLWA. Approximately 17.2 hectares (42.6 acres) of ROW would be required.

1.2.4 Alternative 4: Alignment No. 3

The project components under this alternative would be similar to those identified above for Alternative 2; however, the eastern extension of Newhall Ranch Road in Alternative 4 would extend farther east before intersecting with Golden Valley Road, resulting in a "T" intersection. The north-bound bridge that carries the 35-meter-wide (116 feet) Golden Valley Road across the Santa Clara River would commence at the same point on the south side of the river as that of Alternatives 2 and 3; however, the bridge would veer westward into a right 580-meter-radius (1900 feet) horizontal curve as it traverses the river. This alternative also requires the intersection of Golden Valley Road and Newhall Ranch Road to occur over the Santa Clara River, and similar to Alternative 3, a second bridge would meet the Golden Valley Road bridge, connecting to Newhall Ranch Road at the "T" intersection. This alternative lies entirely within property owned by NLFC and CLWA. Approximately 17.2 hectares (42.6 acres) of ROW would be required.

1.3 Statutory Setting

The following briefly discusses relevant City ordinances, policies, and guidance documents that influence or direct the design and aesthetics of the proposed project.

City of Santa Clarita General Plan

The City of Santa Clarita General Plan (General Plan), adopted on June 26, 1991, provides the framework for development in the city. The Land Use Element provides the City's policy regarding long-range and immediate considerations regarding future development, while the Circulation Element Amendment (City of Santa Clarita, 1997) provides the statutory basis for the overall Cross Valley Connector project, including the proposed extensions of Newhall Ranch Road and Golden Valley Road. The recommendations of the Circulation Element Amendment were analyzed at a program level in the City's Circulation Element Amendment EIR.

Cross Valley Connector Aesthetics Guidelines

The Cross Valley Connector Aesthetics Guidelines (Aesthetics Guidelines), prepared by RRM Design Group for the City (City, 2004), provides direction regarding hardscape and softscape features to be used to enhance roadway design, including lighting, signage, slopes, utility lines, transit shelters, bicycle facilities, and selection of tree species. The Aesthetics Guidelines represent the most specific set of requirements for the Cross Valley Connector project.

Santa Clarita Municipal and Unified Development Code

The Santa Clarita Municipal and Unified Development Code (MUDC) includes an Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance and Ridgeline Preservation and Hillside Development Ordinance, both of which influence the proposed project.

The Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance (MUDC, Section 17.17.090) is designed to protect and preserve oak trees throughout the sity, on the basis that indigenous oak trees provide significant historic, aesthetic, and environmental value. Under the ordinance, all healthy oak trees are required to be preserved unless compelling reasons justify their removal. Furthermore, homeowners are required to maintain existing oak trees in good health.

The Ridgeline Preservation and Hillside Development Ordinance (MUDC, Section 17.80 et seq.) provides the regulatory basis for the identification and protection of significant ridgelines within the city. Certain hillsides have been identified by the City as significant due to important landform, vegetation, wildlife, hydrologic, and scenic qualities. This ordinance permits reasonable development while regulating grading, development, and alteration of such hillsides to provide for the safety and welfare of local residents.

Santa Clarita Beautification Master Plan

The Santa Clarita Beautification Master Plan (Beautification Master Plan) was developed by the City to assist in the long-term goal of citywide streetscape improvements and beautification (City of Santa Clarita 2001). It addresses streetscape design, landscape enhancement, gateways, and monumental and signage features at both regional and community scales, and includes analysis of implementation costs, phasing, and priorities. City-wide guidelines are designed to unify the image of the city as a whole and create a regional identity, while continuity with community-level guidelines allows for the unique individuality of four communities identified within the city to be expressed, while retaining that overall theme.

Golden Valley and Newhall Ranch Roads are identified as Primary Corridors in the Beautification Master Plan (City 2001, p.I-19). According to this plan, medians should extend or complement existing median sections and should include special paving materials, trees, and shrub plantings (City of Santa Clarita 2001, p.I-20). The plan also specifies tree spacing, sizing, and character within the median and along sidewalks and requires that roadways incorporate attractive and functional landscaping that is

aesthetically pleasing and pedestrian friendly (City of Santa Clarita 2001, p.I-22). The plan also indicates that utility lines should be underground where possible, billboards and advertisement signs should be avoided, and fences should be uniform in height, material, and style (City 2001, p.I-28).

Bridges are also addressed in the plan, which recommends that bridge support columns should be minimized while maintaining a thin bridge structure; barrier rails should be an integral part of the bridge structure; and bridge abutment walls and other prominent features, such as light standards and fencing, should be visually complementary (City of Santa Clarita 2001 p.I-34).

County of Los Angeles General Plan

The County of Los Angeles General Plan (County of Los Angeles 1993) provides guidelines for the future resource allocation across the county. The document provides the regulatory framework for Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs), a designation which provides protection in conjunction with the Land Use and Open Space Elements of the County's General Plan. The Santa Clara River, which would be traversed by the proposed project, is designated as SEA Number 23 by the County of Los Angeles. A portion of the Santa Clara River is designated as Open Space in the City's General Plan. However, the areas within the river and adjacent to the proposed alignment are not open to the public. No other recreation/open space areas are designated in the vicinity of the project. Although the site provides visual relief from the surrounding developed area, there are no recreational opportunities available. The Santa Clara River is designated as a natural, wild river.

1.4 Methodology

This Visual Impact Assessment was prepared with guidance from the objectives and methods described in the FHWA's Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects (FHWA 1981) and from the goals and policies of the City's General Plan (City of Santa Clarita 1991), the Aesthetics Guidelines (City of Santa Clarita 2004a), and the Beautification Master Plan (City of Santa Clarita 2001). The following steps were conducted for this assessment:

1. The visual environment and existing landscape characteristic/urban districts within the project viewshed were defined and documented. For this project, the visual environment was evaluated for both the existing condition (undeveloped) and for the future, planned development condition.

2. Applicable planning documents were reviewed for pertinent policy and guidance information.

3. Major viewer groups within landscape units were identified and viewer responses for both existing and future conditions determined.

4. Key observation points for the visual assessment were selected, based on public viewing locations and typical viewing conditions.

5. After review of the project engineering plans, the type and degree of visual changes expected to result in the study area were documented.

6. Design recommendations for specific project features and locations were generated to enhance the visual environment for stationary and transient viewers of the proposed roadway.

7. Appropriate mitigation measures were identified.

The geographic limits for the Visual Impact Assessment consist of the viewshed boundary, or the area from which the project can be viewed. The viewshed boundary was determined in the field and through analysis of aerial maps. The character of the existing visual environment was then documented through field reconnaissance, photographic records, and aerial photograph interpretation. The character of the future environment was interpreted from approved planning documents. Viewer groups within the viewshed limit were determined through field visits, land use maps, and other planning documents. For the existing scenario, five landscape units were identified to represent the range of urban and natural environments within the viewshed.

A number of variables affect the degree of visibility, visual contrast, and ultimately project impacts including scale and size of facilities, distance and viewing angle, color and texture, and influences of adjacent scenery or land uses. Even where visible, viewer response and sensitivity vary depending on viewer attitudes and expectations. In conformance with FHWA guidelines, viewer sensitivity is distinguished among project viewers in recreation, residential, commercial, and office/industrial areas, with the first considered to have relatively high sensitivity, the second to have moderate sensitivity, and the latter two to have low sensitivity. Activities can either encourage a viewer to observe the surrounding area more closely (scenic driving) or discourage close observation (commuting in heavy traffic). All of these viewer elements were considered when evaluating expected viewer response.

The selection of typical views was made based on the major viewer groups potentially affected by the project in both the current undeveloped condition and the future built condition, and considering the type of planned roadway improvement. Four key views were selected for analysis. Visual changes or impacts within the study area were evaluated by viewing the existing visual character of the landscape from each typical view and assessing the degree to which construction of the bridge would change those views.

The evaluation of visual changes or impact within the study area was made based on an assessment of the existing visual character of the landscape seen from each key view and the degree to which the proposed project would change or contrast with the existing (or anticipated) view from that location. The existing quality or character of views was determined by evaluating three visual elements – vividness, intactness, and unity. The determination of impact considered the existing quality of the key, as well as the number

and sensitivity of viewers. An evaluation of how the proposed alternatives would conform to pertinent City planning documents is also provided.

Section 2 documents the existing visual resources and types of viewers within the project area viewshed. The degree of visual change that is expected to result from construction of the bridge and an analysis of potential impacts is provided in Section 3, along with a summary of visual effects. Mitigation measures are recommended in Section 4. Section 5 lists the references used for this report and the individuals involved in its preparation.

2 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Project Viewshed

The FHWA Handbook defines the viewshed as: "the surface area visible from a given viewpoint or series of viewpoints: it is also the area from which that viewpoint or series of viewpoints may be seen. Put another way, a viewshed is a tool for identifying the views that a project could actually affect" (FHWA 1981 p.26). For the Cross Valley Connector East Project, the project viewshed includes areas on the east, south, and west of the proposed alignment. The project will also be visible from the Castaic Lake Water Agency to the north; however, this view will not be accessible to the public. Further west, views of the road from residences located north of the proposed alignment will be obstructed by topography.

Along the eastern segment of the alignment, to the east of Golden Valley Road, commercial/industrial land uses dominates the adjacent property. A recycling facility, supply yard, and industrial buildings have been identified. Commercial land uses continue along both the north and south side of Soledad Canyon Road, south of the proposed alignment. An MTA facility is located south of the midpoint of the alignment.

Residential land uses are more developed on the eastern portion of the alignment, becoming more dense 0.8 kilometer (0.5 mile) and beyond past the eastern terminus of the alignment. The residential development east of the Golden Valley Road portion of the project is located beyond the commercial/industrial land uses. Residential land use is sparse south of Soledad Canyon Road, and the residential development northwest of the alignment is blocked by hillsides.

A portion of the Santa Clara River is designated as Open Space in the City's General Plan. However, the areas within the river and adjacent to the proposed alignment are not open to the public. No other recreation/open space areas are designated in the vicinity of the project. Although the site provides visual relief from the surrounding developed area, there are no recreational opportunities available. The Santa Clara River is designated as a Significant Ecological Area, and is designated as a natural, wild river.

Roadways to the east of the project – Sierra Highway, Soledad Canyon Road, and SR-14 – are located nearly 4.8 kilometers (3 miles) east of the alignment. Soledad Canyon Road is currently a heavily traveled, 4-lane roadway that accommodates a steady flow of automobile, bus, and truck traffic. Bouquet Canyon Road is a four-lane heavily traveled road on the west end of the project. On much of the roadways, it is not possible to have distant views of the road, particularly on the southern portion, due to the numerous buildings and vegetation blocking the view. Views are temporary because of the transitory nature of the traffic.

Vegetation types surrounding the project area consist primarily of wetland/riparian communities and upland scrub communities. Five upland communities border the wetlands within the biological study area

including Venturan coastal sage scrub, alluvial fan sage scrub, mainland cherry forest, Great Basin mixed scrub, and chenopod scrub. The five wetland/riparian habitats that occur are southern riparian scrub, southern willow scrub, southern cottonwood willow riparian forest, mule fat scrub, and freshwater marsh. The remaining habitats present in the project area are nonnative and disturbed habitats. These habitats are described as nonnative grassland, nonnative woodland, ruderal, ornamental, developed, and disturbed habitat.

The quality of views of the project site from surrounding areas varies from one location to another within the viewshed for many reasons: the low elevation and a low profile of most of the roadway; the undulating terrain; the urbanized level of development within 0.4 kilometer (0.25 mile) of the alignment; the mature vegetation growth on the hillsides and in the Santa Clara River; and the visible views of the alignment from some elevated roadways. Unobstructed views of the alignment are restricted to motorists and pedestrians on surrounding roadways, commercial establishments south and southwest of the project site, the mobile home park south of the roadway, and elevated residences southeast of the alignment. Views from surrounding residential areas are generally partially to completely blocked by vegetation, hillsides, or buildings.

Future Planned Land Uses: Riverpark Housing Development

NLFC has proposed a residential, recreation, and open space development approximately bounded by the proposed roadway on the north and east, the Santa Clara River on the south, and Bouquet Canyon Road on the west. The tentative plans for the development encompass 281 hectares (695 acres) residential and commercial uses. This would enable construction of 1,183 dwelling units, including 439 single-family and 744 multi-family units, and up to 40,000 square feet of commercial uses (City of Santa Clarita 2004b).

2.2 Landscape Units

Land uses and topographic patterns have created a patchwork of areas, each with a distinct character and viewer type. In accordance with Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects (FHWA 1988), two landscape units have been identified for the existing environment: Developed and Undeveloped Units.

Developed Unit – This unit includes all land which has permanent structures associated with it. The commercial area adjacent to the western terminus of the project, and the mobile homes and commercial areas adjacent to the eastern terminus are included in this unit.

Undeveloped Unit – This unit includes disturbed and natural lands which do not have permanent structures associated with them. In the vicinity of the project site, this includes the Santa Clara River and natural areas surrounding it.

2.3 Viewer Types and Anticipated Viewer Response

Within the two landscape units, viewer types include residents, consumers at commercial establishments, industrial workers, and motorists. The only residential development that has an unobstructed view of the proposed alignment project would be the Greenbrier mobile home park. There are 316 mobile homes at this park, many of which would be affected by direct views onto the site of the proposed project during and after construction. Such views would be tempered by foreground fences and some vegetation. Additionally, employees and visitors to the commercial and industrial premises in the vicinity of the proposed project would likewise experience views of the road, both while under construction and during operations.

Motorists along Soledad Canyon Road and Bouquet Canyon Road will have middle-ground views of the roadway, periodically obstructed by intermediate buildings, vegetation, and topography. Roadways surrounding the proposed project currently operate at poor levels of service (LOS) during peak hours. The intersections of Bouquet Canyon Road/Newhall Ranch Road and Bouquet Canyon Road/San Fernando Road/Soledad Canyon Road/Valencia Boulevard currently operate at between LOS C and D during the weekday morning peak hour, and between D and F during the evening peak hour (KOA 2004 p.6). Such extended delays would increase exposure to views of the proposed project by motorists on these roads, although the distance between the motorists and the proposed project would diminish the apparent magnitude of the views.

In the future, the viewshed may include extensive residential development, open space, and recreational opportunities. In this case, many residents would have a view of the roadway. Fencing and screening through tree planting, as recommended in the Aesthetics Guidelines (City of Santa Clarita 2004a),

3 VISUAL IMPACTS

3.1 Visual Impacts

Visual resources are defined as the natural and manufactured features that comprise the aesthetic qualities of an area. These features form the overall impression than an observer receives of an area or its landscaped character. Landforms, water surfaces, vegetation, and manufactured features are considered characteristic of an area if they are inherent to the structure and function of the landscape.

The effect of a change in visual character is influenced by social considerations, including public value placed on the resource, public awareness of the area, and general community concern for visual resources in the area. These social considerations are addressed as visual sensitivity and are defined as the degree of public interest in a visual resource and concern over adverse changes in the quality of that resource.

Visual impacts may be associated with changes in either the human-made or natural environment and can be short or long term in duration. The presence of grading activities and heavy machinery (e.g., large trucks, bulldozers, cranes) during construction of the project is considered a short-term visual impact. Long-term changes are associated with altering the natural topography; building permanent structures (e.g., buildings, bridges, walls); and removing vegetation, including mature trees. The focus of this analysis is on long-term physical changes that are permanent in nature.

The evaluation of visual effects is very subjective and depends upon the degree of alteration, the scenic quality of the area disturbed, and the sensitivity of the viewers. The degree of alteration refers to the extent of change to the natural landform and the introduction of urban elements into an existing natural environment, while acknowledging any unique topographical formations or natural landmarks. Scenic quality is often indicated by special zoning and planning overlay zones. Sensitive viewers are those who utilize the outdoor environment or value a scenic viewpoint to enhance their daily activity and are typically residents, recreational users, or motorists in scenic areas. Changes in existing landscape where there are no identified scenic values or sensitive viewers are not considered adverse. It is also possible to acknowledge a visual change as possibly adverse but not a substantial adverse effect if viewers are not sensitive or the surrounding scenic quality is low.

The following impact analysis addresses construction impacts and operational impacts of the proposed roadway extension and all associated project alternatives.

3.2 Typical Views

Four key views were chosen to evaluate the existing view and the proposed view resulting from the roadway extension (Table 1). The four locations were chosen based on locations that are accessible to the public, including residential locations (Figure 4).

Table 1 Key Views

Key View	Location	Viewer Type	Alignment Features Visible	Relevant Figures
1	View north from mobile home park, south of the proposed roadway	Residents	Golden Valley Road and Newhall Ranch Road extension and bridge	5
2	View north from Soledad Canyon Road	Customers, Commuters	Newhall Ranch Road extension and bridge	6
3	View south from the CLWA property	Customers, Recreational	Newhall Ranch Road extension	7, 8
4	View east from Newhall Ranch Road/Bouquet Canyon Road intersection	Customers	Newhall Ranch Road extension	9, 10

These key views were chosen based on vantage points surrounding the project that are visible to citizens and employees in their places of residence or employment, or from the roadway system. There is no key view of the project area facing south because the northern portion of the project consists of hillsides that prevent public views of the project area. It is important to assess how the viewpoints would change for the residents and visitors of Santa Clarita as a result of the proposed project.

For the purposes of this Visual Impact Assessment, sight distance is defined as: foreground (0 – 0.4 kilometer [0 – 0.25 mile]); middle ground (0.4 – 4.8 kilometers [0.25 – 3 miles]); and background (4.8 kilometers [3 miles] and farther).

3.3 Impacts to Viewers

The visual impacts of the proposed project to area viewers were determined based upon the following criteria:

- The existing visual quality of the key views as evidenced by the degree of vividness, intactness, and unity associated with each of the existing settings.

- The degree of change to the existing setting based upon the types of roadway structures that would be viewed; the sensitivity of the viewer; the degree to which these features would obstruct, diminish, or dominate existing view qualities; and the potential for landscape treatment or other mitigation to improve visual quality. Computer-generated perspective plots and cross-sections were used to aid in this evaluation.

The FHWA evaluation methodology consisted of ranking the existing quality of views according to high, moderate, and low levels of vividness, intactness, and unity. These three qualities are defined below:

Insert Figure 5

Insert Figure 6

Insert Figure 7

Figure 7
Key View 3: Facing South from the CLWA Property

Figure 8
Key View 3 Simulation: Newhall Ranch Road from the CLWA Property

Figure 9
Key View 4: Facing East from Newhall Ranch/Bouquet Canyon Road Intersection

Figure 10
Key View 2: Facing North from Soledad Canyon Road

- Vividness – The memorability of the visual impression received from contrasting landscape elements as they combine to form a striking and distinctive visual pattern.

- Intactness – The integrity of visual order in the natural and man-built landscape, and the extent to which the landscape is free from visual encroachment.

- Unity – The degree to which the visual resources of the landscape join together to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern. Unity refers to the compositional harmony or intercompatibility between landscape elements.

Viewer response to the changes in the visual resources at the four key views was assessed using the following criteria:

Low- Minor adverse change in visual quality caused by the project only slightly affecting the resource, or the viewers are not sensitive to change, or the viewers are at a great distance from the change.

Medium- Major adverse change caused by the project in visual quality. Landscape treatment or other mitigation measures would improve the visual quality.

Medium-High- Major change caused by the project in visual quality due to large change in the resource as seen by sensitive viewers. Major landscape treatment or other mitigation measures will be required and may take longer than three years to mitigate.

High- Major change in visual quality caused by the project to the extent that landscape treatment or other measures cannot mitigate the problem. An alternative solution may be required.

The final determination of significance considered the existing visual quality and the anticipated viewer response. Table 2 summarizes the assessment rankings for all four key views.

Table 2 Summary of Visual Impact Assessment

Key View	Existing Visual Conditions			Viewer Response	Significance Determination
	V	I	U		
1	L	L	L	Low	Not Significant
2	L	L	L	Low	Significant
3	M-H	H	M	High	Potentially Significant
4	L	L	L	Low	Not Significant

V = Vividness; I = Intactness; U = Unity

L = Low; M = Medium; M-H = Medium-High; H = High

3.3.1 Key View No. 1 – View North from Mobile Home Park, South of the Proposed Roadway

Key View 1 (Figure 5) represents the scene that is viewed by residents of the mobile home park on Soledad Canyon Road as they look northward, toward the slopes behind the mobile home park. Foreground views encompass the mobile home park, and middle- to background views of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which transects the project site. The slopes consist of scattered scrub vegetation.

Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the view from this location would not change. The degree of vividness, intactness, and unity would remain as at the present.

Alternative 2: Alignment No. 1

Residential properties lie to the south of this location, such that typical viewers of this scene would include residents of the mobile home park. At present, the foreground encompasses the mobile home park, while the middle ground views include the Los Angeles Aqueduct amidst slopes covered in sparse scrub. Under Alternative 2, these features would still be visible, with the addition in the middle ground of the proposed roadway as it inclines toward the north-west.

From this view, the roadway would rise toward the northwest. Beyond the aqueduct, the roadway would be concealed from view behind the adjacent slopes. A large fill slope below the roadway would be evident from this view; however, the higher elevation of the roadway would largely obscure the road bed surface from visibility. Consequently, the road itself would not be particularly vivid, although the fill slope would be a somewhat memorable feature in the landscape. The intactness of this landscape is already reformed by the presence of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, which the roadway would cross at right-angles, and foreground views of the mobile home park. Consequently, intactness and unity are already relatively disturbed. Although the roadway would constitute an additional man-made feature within the view, the presence of other non-natural features would lessen the incremental change in visual quality due to the road. Consequently, the vividness, intactness, and unity of this view would be affected only in a minor way by the presence of the proposed roadway.

Alternative 3: Alignment No. 2

At this locality, Alternative 3 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 3 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

Alternative 4: Alignment No. 3

At this locality, Alternative 4 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 4 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

3.2.2 Key View No. 2 – View North from Soledad Canyon Road

Key View 2 (Figure 6) shows a view from Soledad Canyon Road to the north toward the proposed project alignment. The foreground encompasses Soledad Canyon Road and the adjacent sidewalk. Views of the Santa Clara River are obscured from this vantage point, as the topography drops off immediately beyond the edge of Soledad Canyon Road. Distant views of the Castaic Lake Water Authority facilities are visible from this location. Views of the project site from this location are generally transient, being experienced predominantly by passing motorists using Soledad Canyon Road.

Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the view from this location would not change. The degree of vividness, intactness, and unity would remain as at the present.

Alternative 2: Alignment No. 1

Typical viewers of this scene would include passing motorists, particularly those exiting the Park and Ride facility for which these traffic lights were installed. Occasional pedestrians may also experience this view toward the north, as they wait to cross Soledad Canyon Road. From this locality, the proposed roadway alignment would be visible below the ridgeline, paralleling Soledad Canyon Road. The majority of typical viewers are anticipated to be passing motorists; hence, the view of a roadway is not anticipated to be particularly memorable. The distance from this view point also diminishes the road's vividness. As the road would be at approximately the same elevation as Soledad Canyon Road and located at a distance of more than 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) from this viewpoint, cut and fill slopes would be more noticeable than the road itself. Such slopes may lessen the degree of intactness between the roadway and the current landscape, although the road would parallel the long, horizontal lines of Soledad Canyon Road and the ridgeline, contributing both to the intactness and unity of the view. Consequently, the vividness would be somewhat affected, though the intactness and unity may be enhanced by the presence of the proposed roadway.

Alternative 3: Alignment No. 2

At this locality, Alternative 3 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 3 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

Alternative 4: Alignment No. 3

At this locality, Alternative 4 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 4 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

3.3.3 Key View No. 3 – View South from the CLWA Property

Key View 3 (Figure 7) represents the view toward the south/south-west from the CLWA property. The view is at a higher elevation than the proposed project site, which roughly follows the existing grading. Sparse, low-lying vegetation makes up the rest of this scene. The distance to residential and commercial facilities in the background diminishes their overall impact on the scene, further contributing to the impression of an otherwise largely natural setting.

Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the view from this location would not change. The degree of vividness, intactness, and unity would remain as at the present.

Alternative 2: Alignment No. 1

Typical viewers would include staff and visitors to CLWA. Figure 8 provides a visual simulation of the proposed roadway from this location, showing the surface of the proposed roadway, which crosses the view at an oblique angle. Landscaping associated with the proposed project, the bike lane, and pedestrian paths would also be visible from this location. Construction of the proposed roadway would require removal of existing vegetation and disturbance of a relatively intact view. The fill slopes on the far side of the proposed roadway would not be evident from this view.

The proposed roadway would constitute an obvious feature in this landscape, as it represents a new, non-natural feature in the midst of a relatively natural scene. The existing graded surface is somewhat intrusive (see Figure 7), rendering it more prominent and diminishing the proposed roadway's unity within this setting. This in turn contributes to the degree to which the proposed roadway would be memorable. The proposed roadway would also disrupt the intactness by intruding upon the scene. Vividness, intactness, and unity of the view from this location would therefore all diminish with the proposed project.

Alternative 3: Alignment No. 2

At this locality, Alternative 3 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 3 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

Alternative 4: Alignment No. 3

At this locality, Alternative 4 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 4 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

3.3.4 Key View No. 4 – View East from Newhall Ranch Road/Bouquet Canyon Road Intersection

View 4 (Figure 9) shows the view toward the east from the western terminus of the proposed project alignment. From this location, the immediate foreground currently includes asphalt, while sparse vegetation coverage and a winding asphalt road form the middle-ground views. The background consists of ridgelines and the distant hills. The scene is typical of that across much of Santa Clarita and, although pleasant, is not particularly memorable or unusual. The continuity of an otherwise natural scene in the foreground is interrupted by littered trash and the winding, asphalt road, which encroach visually on the integrity of the scene.

Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the view from this location would not change. The degree of vividness, intactness, and unity would remain as at the present.

Alternative 2: Alignment No. 1

Typical viewers of this scene include residents and employees at the commercial center, located immediately adjacent to the western terminus of the proposed project. Future users of the proposed roadway would also experience the roadway from this vantage point, as illustrated in the simulation in Figure 9. From this viewpoint, the proposed roadway would be a memorable feature of the landscape as the primary viewers would be motorists. The proposed landscaping, as outlined in the Cross Valley Connector Aesthetics Guidelines (see Section 1.3, above) would incorporate landscaping to ensure the road would be aesthetically appealing and would blend into the surrounding communities. The conceptual-level landscaping depicted in the Figure 10 simulation would enhance the local landscape, contributing to a positive impression of the proposed roadway. The Aesthetics Guidelines would also ensure the intactness and intercompatibility of the proposed project with surrounding communities. Consequently, although the proposed project would constitute a substantial change from this viewpoint, it would enhance the vividness, intactness, and unity of the scene for roadway users, local residents, and employees.

Alternative 3: Alignment No. 2

At this locality, Alternative 3 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 3 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

Alternative 4: Alignment No. 3

At this locality, Alternative 4 would be identical to Alternative 2; hence, the effects for Alternative 4 would be identical to those for Alternative 2. Issues of vividness, intactness, and unity would be similar to that explained for Alternative 2.

3.4 Summary of Visual Effects

The proposed project would entail the extension of Newhall Ranch and Golden Valley Roads, and the construction of two bridges over the Santa Clara River and the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Such features, traversing a relatively natural setting, would have both negative and positive effects on the scenic quality of the immediate area. Negative effects include the intrusive nature of a bridge structure over the natural channel of the Santa Clara River, and the necessity of large cut and fill slopes. Positive effects include the replacement with landscaped surfaces that provide a consistent theme throughout the project corridor and link cohesively to surrounding communities.

4 MITIGATION MEASURES

4.1 Alternative 1: No Build

There would be no impacts associated with the No Build Alternative; therefore, no mitigation is necessary.

4.2 Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 (Build Alternatives)

The proposed project would entail extension of Newhall Ranch and Golden Valley Roads, and construction of two bridges over the Santa Clara River and the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Such features, traversing a relatively natural setting, would have both negative and positive impacts on the scenic quality of the immediate area. The following measures are proposed to minimize the visual impact of the proposed project. These measures would apply to all three Action alternatives.

1. The bridges over the Santa Clara River and the Los Angeles Aqueduct shall be textured and/or stained with muted colors to diminish stark contrasts with the existing setting.

2. To the extent consistent with the Cross Valley Connector Aesthetics Guidelines, retaining walls shall be textured, patterned, and/or colored, and shall include landscape elements, to reduce their visual scale and assist their visual blending with the existing environment.

3. The extent of cut and fill slopes shall be minimized. Where cut and fill slopes are needed, appropriate visual attenuation shall be achieved through use of texturing and/or muted colors, consistent with the Cross Valley Connector Aesthetics Guidelines.

4. Landscaping shall be consistent with the requirements of the Cross Valley Connector Aesthetics Guidelines.

5 REFERENCES/LIST OF PREPARERS

5.1 References

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1981 Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects. March.

5.2 List of Preparers

This Visual Impact Assessment was prepared by EDAW Inc. for the City of Santa Clarita, the FHWA, and Caltrans District 7. The professional staff listed below were principally responsible for preparing the Visual Impact Assessment.

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