

3.16 Visual Quality

This section describes the potential impacts on visual quality resulting from the proposed changes to the approved project. Factors affecting visual quality include the potential to degrade the existing visual character and quality of the Capitol Expressway corridor, negatively affect scenic vistas, and introduce new sources of light and glare. People that are potentially affected by these factors are called “sensitive visual receptors” and include residents and recreationalists in proximity to the project corridor.

Environmental Setting

The existing visual character and quality within the Capitol Expressway corridor is largely unchanged subsequent to the certification of the 2014 Subsequent IS/MND. North of Ocala Avenue, the corridor passes through residential development. South of Ocala Avenue, much of the corridor passes by the Reid-Hillview Airport, Raging Waters, car dealerships, and Eastridge Mall. The corridor also passes by residential developments east of Capitol Expressway between Ocala Avenue and Cunningham Avenue, and south of Tully Road.

Some minor visual changes have occurred within the vicinity of the corridor subsequent to the certification of the 2014 Subsequent IS/MND, including improvements to the Eastridge Transit Center completed in 2015 and the construction of the Thompson Creek Trail in 2017. Improvements to the Eastridge Transit Center increased the visual quality of the station with upgraded parking lots and bus loops, safer pedestrian circulation routes, pedestrian shelters, landscaping, and an overall design that creates a unified sense of place. In addition, VTA completed improvements to the vacant building located at the Eastridge Transit Center in September 2017 and moved its VTA Access Paratransit staff to the Eastridge Park-and-Ride Lot. Refer to Chapter 2, *Changes to the Approved Project, Changes in Circumstances, and Introduction of New Information*, for additional information regarding the Thompson Creek Trail. The nearest portion of the trail to the location of the proposed changes to the approved project is located adjacent to Capitol Expressway between south of Tully Road and Quimby Road. The new paved portion of the Thompson Creek Trail skirts the creek on its western levee and is not a notable visual feature in the landscape. However, the trail slightly increases the number of sensitive visual receptors near the Capitol Expressway corridor.

Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

This impact discussion primarily focuses on the proposed changes to the approved project that could result in new or more significant visual quality impacts compared to the impacts previously identified and analyzed for the approved project.

SCENIC VISTAS

The closest designated scenic route to the Capitol Expressway corridor is U.S. 101, located 2 miles west of Capitol Expressway. As with the approved project, the location of

the proposed changes to the approved project would not be visible from this segment of U.S. 101 and the proposed changes would not negatively affect scenic vistas. In addition, as discussed in Section 3.5, *Cultural Resources*, there are no buildings that qualify as historical resources under CEQA within the Capitol Expressway corridor. Thus, the potential impacts on scenic vistas associated with the proposed changes to the approved project would not be increased compared to the impacts previously identified and analyzed for the approved project.

Impact: Based on the analysis above, the proposed changes to the approved project would not result in new significant impacts or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant impacts related to scenic vistas.

Mitigation: None required. This impact is “Less than Significant.”

Less-than-significant impact. No mitigation required.

LIGHT AND GLARE

Similar to the approved project, nighttime construction activities associated with the proposed changes to the approved project would involve the use of lighting equipment that could cause glare, potentially affecting the residents adjacent to the project corridor. The proposed changes to the approved project would not substantially increase light and glare during construction beyond what was previously identified and analyzed for the approved project.

As with the approved project, the proposed changes to the approved project would be located within the median of or on parcels directly adjacent to Capitol Expressway. The majority of the proposed changes to the approved project (including the revisions to Capitol Expressway roadway lane configurations; modifications to Eastridge Station platforms and track; reduction in parking spaces at the Eastridge Park-and-Ride lot; minor shift in the location and straightening of the Story Station pedestrian overcrossing; modification to Story Station pedestrian access; and relocation of a construction staging area) would not involve an increase in light or glare. There is one proposed change to the approved project (the extension of the aerial guideway to grade-separate the Ocala Avenue and Cunningham Avenue intersections) that would result in a nominal increase in daytime glare and intermittent increases in nighttime lighting. Daytime glare would result if sunlight reflects off of passing train windows and can be seen by nearby residents. However, this is not expected to be a factor affecting residential viewers because the proposed aerial guideway would be at a level that is higher than residences. The aerial guideway may create shading, which could negatively affect nearby residences, especially in the winter when sun angles are lower. While the aerial structure would not include any lighting, intermittent increases in nighttime lighting may be seen by nearby residents as trains along the aerial guideway pass at night. However, like the potential for glare, such intermittent increases are not likely to affect sensitive residential receptors because the passing light would be at a higher elevation than the roofs of residences. Therefore, it is not very likely that the light would be seen flashing in

windows as the trains pass at night. Similarly, as a result of the increase in height of the TSPs and the proximity to Reid-Hillview Airport, PG&E may need to install FAA obstruction lighting on some or all of the new poles in accordance with FAA requirements. However, red LED obstruction lighting on the TSPs would be at a higher elevation than the roofs of residences and the red lighting would be warm colored so it would not likely brighten the night sky or create glare or nuisance light spill. Therefore, it is not likely that substantial amounts of light from the obstruction lighting would be visible at night. Thus, the potential impacts on light and glare associated with the proposed changes to the approved project would not be increased compared to the impacts previously identified and analyzed for the approved project.

Impact: Based on the analysis above, the proposed changes to the approved project would not result in a new significant impact or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant impacts related to light and glare.

The following impacts from the 2005 Final EIR would still apply to the proposed changes to the approved project: VQ (CON)-1 (Creation of a New Source of Substantial Light or Glare) and VQ-1 (Creation of a New Source of Substantial Light or Glare).

Mitigation: Operational. The following mitigation measure from the 2005 Final EIR would still apply to the proposed changes to the approved project: Mitigation Measure VQ-1 (Incorporate Lighting Design Standards to Minimize Fugitive Light and Glare). Inclusion of this mitigation measure would reduce this impact to “Less than Significant.”

Construction. The following mitigation measure identified in the 2005 Final EIR would still apply to the proposed changes to the approved project: VQ (CON)-1 (Direct Lighting toward Construction Areas). Inclusion of this mitigation measure would reduce these impacts to “Less than Significant.”

Less-than-significant operational and construction impacts with mitigation.

VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY

Capitol Expressway is an existing major transportation corridor that occupies the visual landscape with overhead transmission lines, vertical poles, lattice steel transmission towers, lighting, signage and other equipment associated with transportation infrastructure.

Construction activities for the proposed changes to the approved project involving the use of heavy equipment, transport of soils and material, and other visual signs of construction would occur along the Capitol Expressway corridor and at construction staging areas, similar to the approved project. These activities would be most visible to pedestrians

along the corridor and residents of adjacent homes. Viewers traveling through the corridor such as VTA bus transit passengers, automobile drivers, and bicyclists would have intermittent views of these activities and construction staging areas. However, the construction-related visual changes would be short-term in nature and would not substantially alter the visual character of the urban expressway, where roadway maintenance activities are accepted visual elements. The proposed changes to the approved project would not substantially increase the degradation of visual quality during construction beyond what was previously identified and analyzed for the approved project.

The majority of the proposed changes to the approved project (including the revisions to Capitol Expressway roadway lane configurations; reduction in parking spaces at Eastridge Park-and-Ride lot; minor shift in the location and straightening of the Story Station pedestrian overcrossing; modification to Story Station pedestrian access; and relocation of PG&E electrical transmission facilities) would involve modifications to existing or approved project structures. Similarly, the proposed relocation of a construction staging area could result in the degradation of visual character and quality at the site of the relocated staging area, but this impact would be temporary.

Two proposed changes to the approved project (the extension of the aerial guideway to grade-separate the Ocala Avenue and Cunningham Avenue intersections and the modifications to Eastridge Station platforms and tracks) would change the visual character and quality of the Capitol Expressway corridor. The proposed modifications to Eastridge Station platforms and tracks would be beneficial compared to the impacts previously identified and analyzed for the approved project because these changes would eliminate the reconstruction of Eastridge Loop/Capitol Expressway intersection and would lower the Tully Road bridge crossing such that it would not require a substantial alteration to the visual environment.

Figure 3.16-1 shows the existing view and the visual simulation at Eastridge Station looking north. As shown in Figure 3.16-1, the proposed changes to the approved project at the Eastridge Station platforms and track would complement the existing station design and would not degrade the quality of views associated with the station. In addition, the height of the single platform would be similar to the height of the two platforms included in the approved project and, thus, would not obstruct background views of the Diablo Range for pedestrians on the at-grade sidewalk. The other proposed design changes at the Eastridge Station would be minor and would not degrade the visual quality of the area.

The proposed aerial guideway would include concrete columns supported on pile foundations. The aerial guideway would also include aerial sound walls. Figure 3.16-2 shows the existing view and the visual simulation at Ocala Avenue intersection looking southeast. As shown in Figure 3.16-2, when looking southeast from Ocala Avenue, the proposed extension of the aerial guideway would be a major visual change compared to existing conditions. Figure 3.16-3 shows the existing view and the visual simulation at Ocala Avenue intersection looking northwest. As shown in Figure 3.16-3, the aerial guideway would tower over nearby single-story residences and is likely to be perceived as a visual intrusion in the landscape. This proposed change would result in a large,

elevated structure that would typically be 20 to 35 feet high at the top-of-rail with a maximum height of approximately 60 feet with the overhead catenary system and poles compared to the at-grade alignment that would be included in the approved project. This structure would be highly visible to motorists and pedestrians on Capitol Expressway as well as from many nearby residences. The proposed changes would add or relocate major structural elements that would alter the existing visual character and quality of the corridor to a greater degree compared to the impacts previously identified and analyzed for the approved project.

Impact: The introduction of the aerial guideway into the visual setting would result in a major change in the views from the residences along the Capitol Expressway corridor and it would diminish the privacy of the residences, which would be visible from the aerial guideway. Specifically, the sensitive visual receptors in the adjacent residences would likely experience an invaded sense of privacy from light rail users being able to look down and into their backyards and into the upper levels of their residence. In addition, the proposed aerial guideway would dominate the landscape within the Capitol Expressway corridor by creating a less suburban neighborhood feeling and more of an urban neighborhood feeling compared to the approved project because the aerial guideway would introduce large-scale, elevated transportation structure into the landscape. In addition, the landscape would be more visually cluttered due to the proposed aerial guideway compared to the approved project.

The following impact from the 2005 Final EIR would still apply to the proposed changes to the approved project: Impact VQ-3 (Degradation of Existing Visual Quality).

Mitigation: Operational. The following mitigation measures identified in the 2005 Final EIR would still apply to the proposed changes to the approved project: VQ-3 (Refine Project Design for Consistency with the Community), and VQ-4 (Incorporate Landscaping in the Project Design). Inclusion of these mitigation measures would reduce this impact to “Less than Significant.”

Construction. None required. This impact is “Less than Significant.”

Less-than-significant operational and construction impacts with mitigation.

Existing View



Simulation



Graphics ... 00011318 (6/21/18)

Source: Callander Associates 2018.

Figure 3.16-1
Existing View and Simulation – Eastridge Station Looking North

Existing View



Simulation



Graphics...0001118 (6/21/18)

Source: Callander Associates 2018.

Figure 3.16-2
Existing View and Simulation – Ocala Avenue Intersection Looking Southeast

Existing View



Simulation



Graphics...0001118 (6/21/18)

Source: Callander Associates 2018.

Figure 3.16-3
Existing View and Simulation – Ocala Avenue Looking Northwest