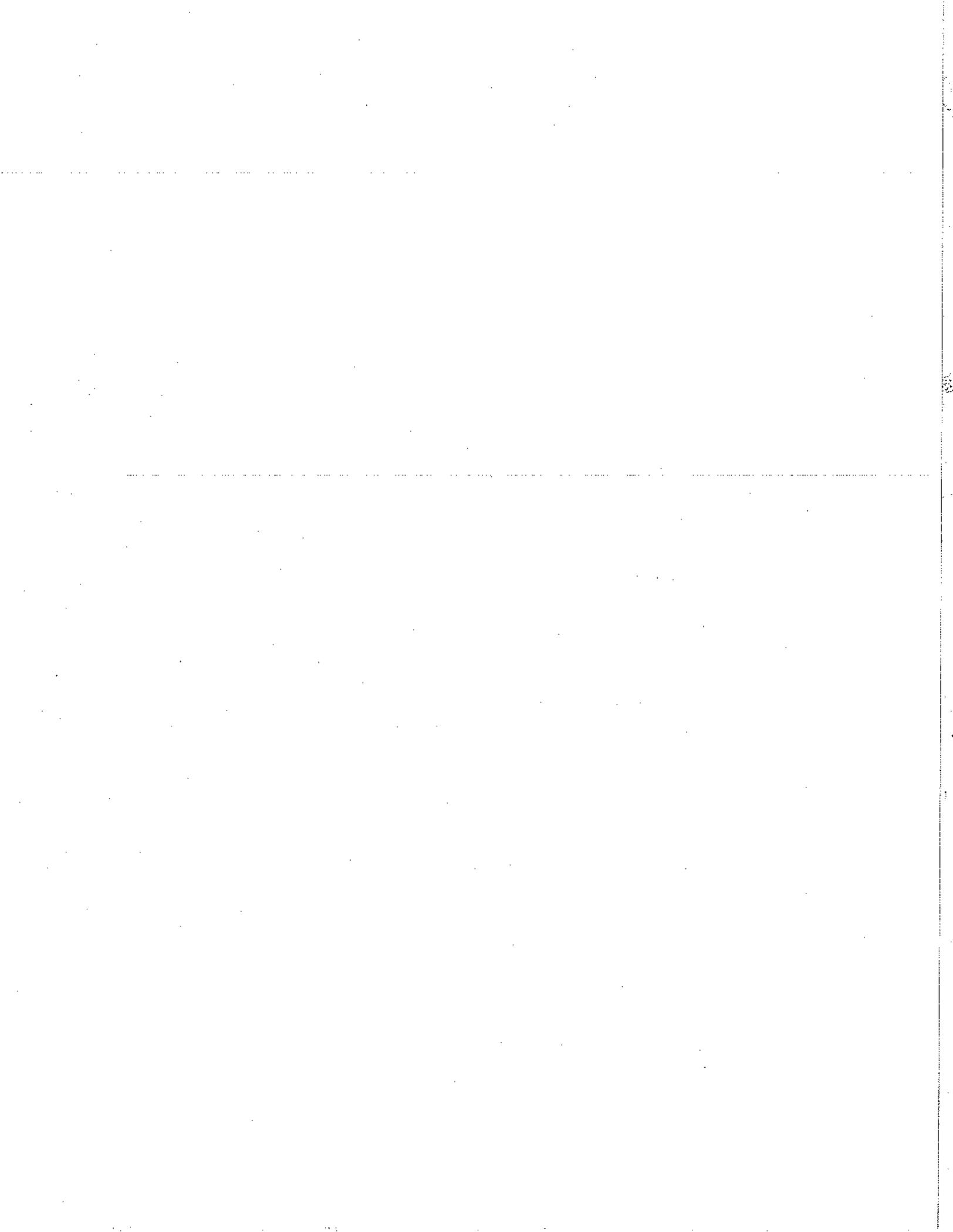


LV-34-9



2.0 IMPACT ANALYSIS

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

This section describes the existing visual resources within San Luis Obispo County, identifies regulations in place to protect resources, and discusses the potential impacts to aesthetics and visual resources associated with implementation of the proposed Bob Jones Pathway project (BJP; project). The analysis focuses on any anticipated alteration of the landscape, visual changes within the Highway 101 corridor, and potential impacts associated with individual visual resources.

2.1.1 EXISTING SETTING

REGIONAL SETTING

The County of San Luis Obispo is characterized by visual resources such as rolling hills, the Pacific Ocean coastline, scenic corridors (areas that have scenic or historic qualities that are visible from recognized roadways), agricultural and open spaces (agricultural and natural, undeveloped land), and the built environment (urban landscape). Mountains and ridgelines, unique geological forms ("seven sisters"), bays, and coastal views are the most obvious of these features. The county also includes many other visual resources such as open meadows, riparian corridors, wetland areas, forested areas, and open spaces. Agricultural areas also contribute to the county's visual quality and aesthetic character. Scenic views of these resources enhance the travel experience on rural roads and highways.

Community Separators

A characteristic that distinguishes unincorporated San Luis Obispo County from metropolitan areas is the presence of a defined rural landscape between identifiable communities and towns. These rural landscape areas between individual communities are referred to as community separators and are often considered scenic. The *2006 San Luis Obispo County Community Separator Study* recommended ways to implement separation in key areas. **Figure 2.1-1** illustrates the general locations identified in the Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE) of the San Luis Obispo County General Plan where special policies should apply (SLOCO 2010a). The BJP is located within a community separator between the City of San Luis Obispo and the community of Avila Beach.

Scenic Corridors

View areas, or "viewsheds," from popular public roads and highways that have unique or outstanding scenic qualities are frequently designated as scenic corridors. Inappropriate development or other introduced features such as billboards can intrude on these viewsheds. Some examples are highly visible graded roads and pads, buildings that are placed too close to a highway, buildings that are sited to silhouette against the skyline, or telecommunications facilities, utilities, signage, and other structures that dominate rather than blend with the natural landscape.

Scenic corridors are areas along highways and/or roadways that have been officially designated by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in order to conserve and enhance their scenic beauty. The COSE suggests that several roadways, including Highway 101, should be designated scenic corridors (see COSE Table VR-2). At this time, however, Highway 101 is not an officially designated scenic corridor. The nearest officially designated scenic corridor is Highway 1, which is a designated State Scenic Highway and National Scenic Byway from San Luis Obispo city limits to the Monterey county line.

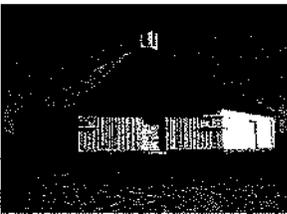
On a local level, the County has adopted Highway Corridor Design Standards for portions of Highway 101 (San Luis Obispo Land Use Ordinance §22.108.020). These development standards

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

are applicable to residential and related development located in specifically designated Sensitive Resource Areas (SRAs) and within 100 feet of the roadway. The proposed project is not subject to design requirements of the Land Use Ordinance; however, it is subject to the policies of the General Plan. According to the San Luis Obispo Area Plan (SLOCO 2010d), the SRA area covers the Irish and San Miguelito hills from the southern boundary of the planning area to the 200-foot elevation because these areas are highly visible from Highways 101 and 227, Los Osos Valley Road, Foothill Boulevard, and Prefumo Canyon Road.

PROJECT AREA VISUAL SETTING

The majority of the proposed path would be separated from existing streets and would parallel Highway 101 and the San Luis Obispo Creek (SLO Creek) corridor. Both sides of the pathway will be in a natural setting, with 50 percent of the route adjacent to orchards and fields.



The Octagon Barn

A Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for the proposed project was prepared by Wallace Group in conjunction with SWCA Environmental Consultants in January 2010 (Wallace Group 2010), which is included in **Technical Appendix T1** of this DEIR. Along the affected portion of Highway 101, the general character of the area is agricultural with scattered residences. The adjacent Irish Hills are a significant natural feature of this area. The existing visual environment of the BJP route is described as a trail segment, consistent with the areas identified in **Figure 1.0-2**.

Segment 1 – The Octagon Barn and the South Higuera/northbound Highway 101 on-ramp form the boundaries of Segment 1. The Octagon Barn, located at the trailhead, is a prominent historic architectural feature on the landscape and is clearly visible from Highway 101. The 5,000-square-foot, eight-sided building has a cupola on top reaching over 40 feet above the floor. The octagon structure was built around



Segment 2: View from South Higuera looking southeast toward Clover Ridge Lane

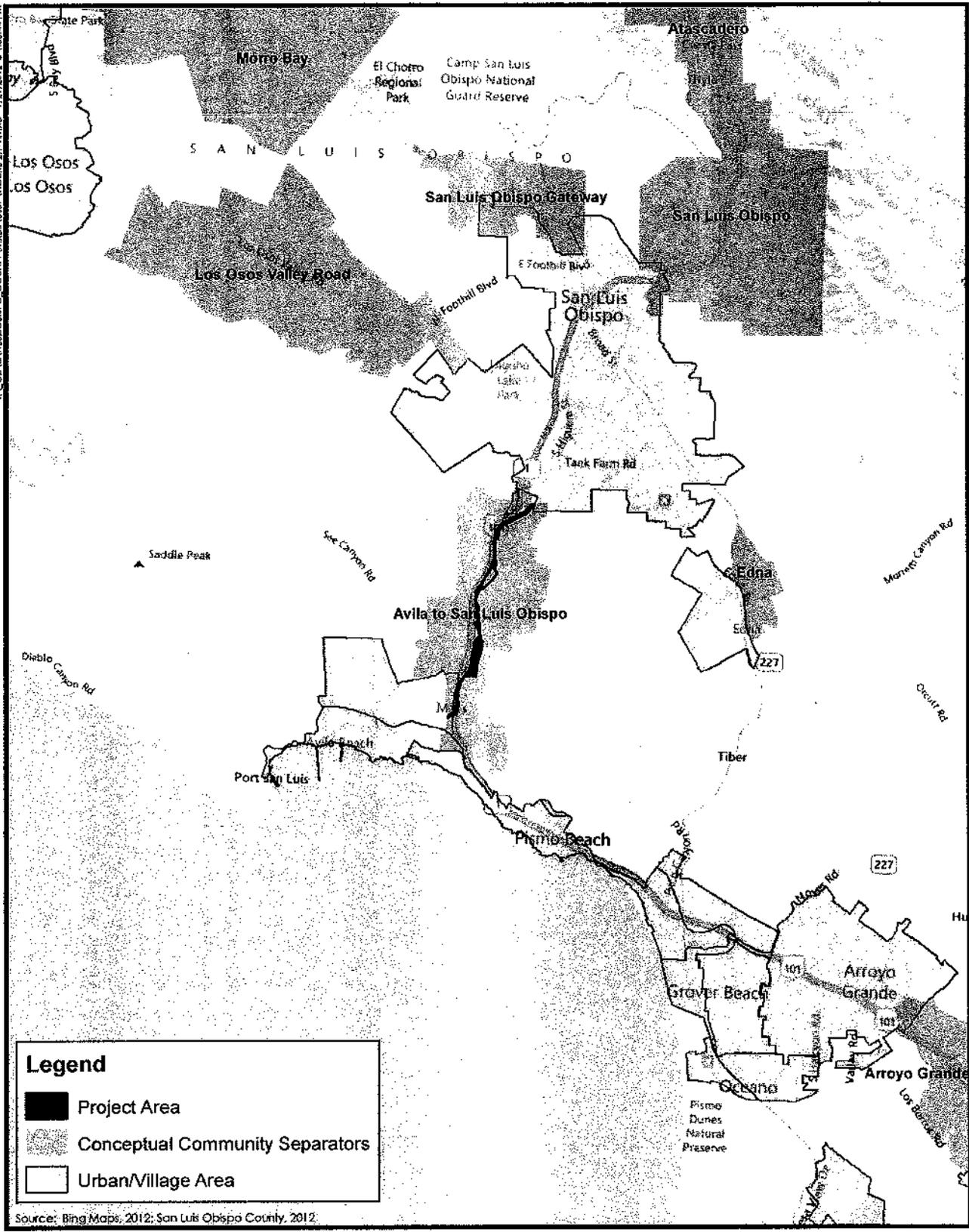
1900 as a dairy barn and is accompanied by smaller buildings referred to as the Milking Parlor, which was built in 1938, and the Calf Shed. Restoration of the barn began in 1997, when the barn was near collapse. San Luis Obispo Creek runs along the northwest side of South Higuera Street, with flat, fallow agricultural land southeast of the roadway. The creek crosses to the southeast just north of the Highway 101 on-ramp. Cyclists and vehicles are consistently visible along this stretch of roadway, which is rural in character.



Segment 1: View of South Higuera facing northeast looking toward Octagon Barn

Segment 2 – This segment continues south from the northbound Highway 101 on-ramp located near the existing South Higuera Bridge, past the interchange with Ontario Road, and ends at the Bunnell Bridge crossing of SLO Creek. South Higuera Street, Highway 101, and Ontario Road lie to the west. Riparian habitat along the SLO Creek corridor and agricultural land lie to the east, with the Irish Hills in the distance. This area is classified as generally rural, with the Highway 101/Ontario Road interchange providing the dominant visual element.

IN GIS SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY MAPS & SERVICES, FIGURE 2.1.1.AXD - 9/21/2012 @ 1:36:44 PM



Legend

- Project Area
- Conceptual Community Separators
- Urban/Village Area

Source: Bing Maps, 2012; San Luis Obispo County, 2012.



Figure 2.1-1
Conceptual Community Separators
PMC

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

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2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES



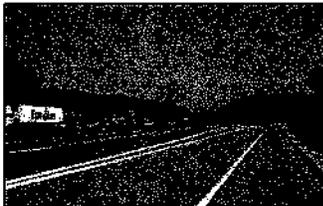
Segment 3: Monte Road looking north

Segment 3 – This segment runs parallel to Highway 101 from the Bunnell Bridge crossing to San Luis Bay Drive. The pathway connects to Monte Road near Baron Canyon Ranch Road. The visual character is dominated by the gap in the hills created by San Luis Obispo Creek. Apple orchards and vineyards run on either side of SLO Creek between the highway and Monte Road. The woodland and riparian vegetation within SLO Creek corridor and the adjacent farm and orchard land to the east provide an important secondary visual pattern in the visual scene.

Segment 4 – This segment runs between the Monte Road/San Luis Bay Drive intersection and the Highway 101/San Luis Bay Drive northbound off-ramp. SLO Creek crosses San Luis Bay Drive, and relatively dense riparian vegetation extends along the southeast side of the Highway 101/San Luis Bay Drive interchange. There are rolling hills with a residential community entrance off Ontario Road on the west side of Highway 101. The visual character of this area is a mix between rural and residential suburban.



Segment 4: San Luis Bay Drive from Monte Road looking west



Segment 5: Highway 101 looking north toward the San Luis Bay Drive overcrossing

Segment 5 – This segment starts on the eastern side and ends on the western side of Highway 101 at the existing Ontario Road Staging Area, where the existing Bob Jones Pathway continues. This segment is dominated by Highway 101 and the rolling hills along Ontario Road on the western side of the highway. There are a few commercial businesses and residences within view of the highway, and agricultural fields continue to run along the eastern side of the Highway 101 corridor. There is an existing overcrossing located at San Luis Bay Drive. SLO Creek runs parallel where the hills begin rising to create Squire Canyon; however is not visible from the highway due to dense riparian vegetation. From the Ontario Road Staging

Area, the existing Bob Jones Pathway follows the creek out to the community of Avila Beach.

EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Viewer Sensitivity and Visibility

Those traveling through the project area will have varying sensitivities regarding changes to the visual environment; however, they are anticipated to have moderately high expectations given the overall rural character of the area. A viewer's activities and expectations affect his or her sensitivity level. The number of potential viewers and the duration and dominance of views are important factors to consider, as is anticipated public opinion regarding the established visual character of the landscape.

While the project area has not been specifically designated as a scenic highway, the COSE (Table VR-2) suggests that Highway 101 should be designated a scenic corridor (SLOCO 2010a). Many of the viewers traveling along Highway 101 in the vicinity of the project area will be visitors and tourists to the Central Coast and will have higher visual sensitivity and expectations than the average commercial traveler on Highway 101. While retaining a high level of visual interest and quality, the project area is not a natural destination point such as a seashore community or an

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

area that generates high view quality expectations such as the vistas along Highway 1 farther to the north and south.

As shown in **Figures 2.1-2a** and **2.1-2**, the project area lies within a community separator between the City of San Luis Obispo and the community of Avila Beach. COSE Goal VR3 and associated policies and implementation strategies aim to preserve the visual identities of communities by maintaining these community separators between cities and communities. Policies include distinction between rural areas, preservation of rural character and open space, conservation tools and community involvement. In addition, the area has high scenic qualities and a well-defined sense of "vividness" as defined by Caltrans. The existing visual sensitivity of each segment of the BJP would vary, as summarized in **Table 2.1-1**. However, according to the VIA, the visual sensitivity of the overall area was determined to be moderately high.

TABLE 2.1-1
EXISTING VISUAL SENSITIVITY AND VISIBILITY FOR EACH PROJECT SEGMENT

| Segment | Visual Sensitivity and Visibility Rating |
|--|--|
| 1: Octagon Barn to South Higuera Street Crossing | Moderate |
| 2: South Higuera Street Crossing to Bunnell Crossing | Moderately High |
| 3: Bunnell Crossing to San Luis Bay Drive | Very Low |
| 4: San Luis Bay Drive Crossing | Moderately Low |
| 5: San Luis Bay Drive to Ontario Road Staging Area | High |

Notes: Low < 1,000 AADT; Moderate 1,000-10,000 AADT; High > 20,000 AADT

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Project Visibility

The greatest number of potential views of the project area will be from Highway 101, which averaged approximately 68,000 trips per day in 2007 (Wallace Group 2010). Portions of the proposed BJP, especially the highway overcrossing, will predominantly be visible from the highway and portions would be visible from South Higuera Street and Ontario Road, which have approximately 7,300 trips per day (Wallace Group 2010). According to the VIA, a travelway with potential users of less than 1,000 trips per day is classified as low; between 1,000 and 10,000 trips per day is classified as moderate; and over 10,000 trips or annual average daily trips (AADT) is classified as high. Put another way, rural roads are low, major highways such as Highway 101 are high, and most arterials and collectors will fall into the moderate category. The total combined AADT would result in approximately 79,400 potential viewers per day, which would be classified as high (Wallace Group 2010). However, the visibility of the various segments would vary greatly.

Visual Quality

In general, the project area has moderately high scenic qualities created by the hills and vegetation along the proposed BJP. Visual quality is evaluated based on the following three criteria: vividness, intactness, and unity. Vividness is the visual power or memorability of the landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns. Intactness is the visual integrity of the landscape and its freedom from non-typical encroaching elements. If all of the various elements of a landscape seem to "belong" together, there will be a high level of intactness. Unity is the visual harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. Unity represents the degree to which potentially diverse visual elements maintain a coherent visual pattern. These criteria are evaluated on a scale of one to seven (with one being very low and

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

seven being very high), both pre- and post-project, from various key viewing areas (KVAs) to assess the magnitude of the potential visual changes caused by a proposed project. The existing visual quality ratings range from moderately low to moderate as summarized in **Table 2.1-2**.

TABLE 2.1-2
EXISTING VISUAL QUALITY FOR EACH PROJECT SEGMENT AND KEY VIEWING AREA

| Segment/Key Viewing Area (KVA) | Vividness (V) | Infactness (I) | Unity (U) | Visual Quality (V+I+U/3) |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1: Octagon Barn to South Higuera Street Crossing | | | | Moderately Low to Moderate |
| KVA 1-1 | 4.00 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 3.67 |
| KVA 1-2 | 5.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.33 |
| KVA 1-3 | 4.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.33 |
| 2: South Higuera Street Crossing to Bunnell Crossing | | | | Moderate |
| KVA 2-1 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 4.00 | 4.67 |
| 3: Bunnell Crossing to San Luis Bay Drive | | | | Moderate |
| KVA 3-1 | 5.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.33 |
| 4: San Luis Bay Drive Crossing | | | | Moderately Low |
| KVA 4-1 | 3.50 | 3.50 | 4.00 | 3.66 |
| 5: San Luis Bay Drive to Ontario Road Staging Area | | | | Moderately Low to Moderate |
| KVA 5-1 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 4.00 | 4.67 |
| KVA 5-2 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 4.50 | 4.83 |
| KVA 5-3 | 4.50 | 4.50 | 4.00 | 4.33 |
| KVA 5-4 | 3.67 | 3.50 | 3.33 | 3.50 |
| KVA 5-5 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 3.00 | 3.67 |

Notes: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – moderately low; 4 – moderate; 5 – moderately high; 6 – high; 7 – very high

Source: Wallace Group 2010

2.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

Applicable state and local regulations that apply to aesthetic and visual resources within San Luis Obispo County are identified below.

STATE REGULATIONS

California State Scenic Highways Program

The California Scenic Highway Program aims to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of California by preserving and minimizing visual intrusion of highway improvements in areas of outstanding scenic quality and resources. A local jurisdiction defines and nominates a scenic corridor to the State Scenic Highway Program. Once a roadway is designated a state scenic highway, the city or county must also adopt (or document) ordinances and/or policies to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor, which make up the Corridor Protection Program. The Corridor Protection Program is required to include at a minimum the following five elements: (1) regulation of land use and density of development; (2) detailed land and site planning; (3) control of outdoor advertising; (4) careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and (5) the design and appearance of structures and equipment.

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

LOCAL REGULATIONS

San Luis Obispo County General Plan

The San Luis Obispo County General Plan includes various land use objectives, goals, and policies to protect visual resources within various areas within the county. Sensitive Resource Areas (SRA) are highly scenic areas that have been identified as important visual resources, related to communities, rural areas, and viewpoints as well as roads and highways. SRAs are designated in the General Plan and as a zoning overlay. The overlay zoning includes requirements for new development applications, to be designed to protect the existing resources, including but not limited to Highway Corridor Design Standards as applicable.

Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE)

The LUCE and the accompanying Land Use Ordinance provide the framework for County decisions on land use and development, and represent the values and goals of the county regarding land use.

Parks and Recreation Element (PRE)

The Parks and Recreation Element, adopted December 19, 2006 (Resolution 2006-47), identifies objectives and policies to ensure adequate park and recreation opportunities including trails for both residents and visitors. Parks and recreation opportunities often are valued primarily for aesthetic and resource preservation reasons. Policies 2.1 and 6.8 of the PRE require that parks are aesthetic and that signs and structures are minimized to reduce impacts on aesthetics of the park facilities.

Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE)

The COSE, adopted in May 2010, identifies objectives, goals, and policies to ensure protection of natural resources including majestic natural landmarks, outstanding scenic vistas, and other scenic resources. COSE Goal VR3 and associated policies and implementation strategies aim to preserve the visual identities of communities by maintaining community separators between cities and communities. Policies include distinction between rural areas, preservation of rural character and open space, conservation tools, and community involvement. Goal VR4 and associated policies and implementation strategies identify and protect distinct visual resources within scenic corridors. Policy VR4.1 requires that the County designate scenic corridors based on the recommendations for Scenic Corridor Studies. Policy VR4.2 requires the balanced protection of scenic resources with the protection of biological resources and agricultural resources that may co-exist within the scenic corridor. Goal VR5 and associated policies and implementation strategies protect views from scenic vistas and vista points. Additional COSE goals and policies can be found on the County's website.

General Plan Area Plans

The General Plan planning area is divided into 13 planning areas, with two of those further subdivided into inland and coastal areas. The proposed BJP lies within the San Luis Obispo Inland planning area and the San Luis Bay Inland planning area, and a small portion of Segment 5 lies within the Avila Beach Urban Reserve Line. The project area is designated for agriculture and rural land uses. The *San Luis Bay Inland Area Plan* (SLOCO 1980) includes rural area programs to protect viewsheds by preserving natural ridgeline profiles and scenic backdrops through open space agreements, contracts, or other appropriate instruments along the Highway 101 corridor.

2.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

An aesthetic or visual resources impact is considered significant if implementation of the proposed project would result in any of the following (based on State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G):

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- b) Substantially affect scenic resources or scenic views, including trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings within a State Scenic Highway, designated County Scenic Roadway, Scenic River Corridor, roadway eligible for listing as a scenic roadway/highway, or other public vantage point or scenic vista locally known for its scenic qualities.
- c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the county.
- d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views within the county.

For the purpose of this analysis, an adverse visual impact is also considered to be significant if:

1. Short-term visual impacts (those impacts lasting less than five years) result in the following: lower the visual quality rating by 1.5 (as identified in the Visual Quality Evaluations); have a viewer group with a high sensitivity rating to visual change; and have a number of viewers greater than 1,000.
2. Long-term impacts result in the following: degradation of the visual environment by a factor greater than "1" in the visual quality ratings as defined in the Visual Quality Evaluation tables; and are visible by a population with a viewer sensitivity rating of moderately high or above, and the number of viewers is classified as moderate or higher (greater than 1,000 persons daily).

METHODOLOGY

The visual resource analysis is based on review of the project plans prepared by Questa Engineering and SWCA Environmental Consultants in January 2012 (**Appendix A**) and the *Visual Impact Assessment for the Bob Jones Pathway – San Luis Obispo to Ontario Road, San Luis Obispo County, California* (VIA) prepared by Wallace Group in January 2010, which is included as **Technical Appendix T1** of this DEIR. The VIA analyzed the proposed project's potential impacts on sensitive visual resources as seen from public roadways, primarily Highway 101. The analysis methodology evaluated the aggregate effect that each of the individual project components may have on the overall visual character of the landscape. Where a change in character was identified, it was compared to the viewers' expected sensitivity and expectations, and was revised for consistency with applicable planning policies.

Key Viewing Areas

Determination of Key Viewing Areas

Eleven key viewing areas (KVAs) were identified as representative of views where the proposed project and its components are visible. While there may be glimpses from other areas along Highway 101 and the frontage roads, these eleven areas were judged to best represent or illustrate the potential impacts of the project, including the worst-case scenarios. Context photos

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

are included in the VIA (**Technical Appendix T3**) to provide a sense of the character and context of the countryside between those locations selected for the KVAs, which are shown in **Figures 2.1-2a** and **2.1-2b**.

Visual Quality Evaluations by Segment

A Visual Quality Evaluation (VQE) was conducted in order to assess the magnitude of the potential visual changes caused by the proposed project consistent with the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) visual assessment methodology. The VQE compares the visual quality of both the existing and proposed conditions from each of the eleven KVAs. A numerical rating between one and seven was assigned for the visual quality of existing conditions from each viewpoint, with one having the lowest value and seven the highest. The rating was based on vividness, intactness and unity. Photo-simulations were prepared illustrating the likely appearance of each view after project construction. Numerical ratings were assigned to each of these "proposed" views. The numerical difference, if any, between the existing and proposed conditions quantifies the change that may occur as a result of the proposed project. If a numerical change in visual criteria was identified, this change was analyzed for its potential effect on the existing scenic character. In order to determine levels of visual impact, this numerical difference is compared to the expected sensitivities of potential viewer groups, as well as to community scenic values, as identified in applicable planning documents.

Alternative Conceptual Overcrossing Designs

To better identify design solutions to the Highway 101 overcrossing, three conceptual design alternatives were evaluated in the VIA. While the span remained the same for all of the overcrossing alternatives, two of the conceptual design alternatives included concrete spans with varying safety fences and the third alternative was a truss span, which was evaluated in two colors. These configurations are shown in Figure 2c of the VIA, which is included in **Technical Appendix T1**. Based on the VQE and visual simulations conducted on the various overcrossing alternatives, it was determined that an open truss design (Alternative C) in a gray-green color was the least intrusive alternative. This analysis is based on the project plans and the open truss overcrossing design in the gray-green color.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista

There are no officially designated scenic vistas within the project area. Therefore, the proposed project would have **no impact** on a scenic vista, and this issue is not addressed further below.

Light and Glare

Implementation of the proposed project will not introduce new sources of light and glare to the project alignment or adjacent properties. Therefore, **no impacts** to daytime or nighttime views within the county are expected, and this issue will not be addressed further.

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

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2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

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Substantially Damage Scenic Resources Within a State Scenic Highway

Impact 2.1-1 Implementation of the proposed project would result in the removal of vegetation, disturbance of land, and development of a new pathway, three bridges, and an overcrossing. These project components may result in short- and long-term effects to scenic resources adjacent to Highway 101. Although this section of Highway 101 is not currently a designated State Scenic Highway, County-adopted Highway Corridor Design Standards are applicable to two parcels within Segments 2 and 3. This would be considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable**, project impact.

The proposed project would result in the development of a multi-use pathway parallel to Highway 101. This section of Highway 101 is not a designated State Scenic Highway. However, it should be noted that the COSE suggests that this roadway be designated a scenic corridor. A future official scenic highway designation could result in more attention to sensitive design along Highway 101. In addition, the County has adopted Highway Corridor Design Standards for portions of Highway 101, which are applicable to two parcels (APNs 076-121-030 and 076-243-024) within the southern portion of Segment 2 and the northern portion of Segment 3. Development of the proposed project would potentially result in both short- and long-term effects on scenic resources in the area as described below.

The proposed project includes voluntary mitigation measure **VMM 1.1**, which requires that visibility from the scenic roadway/highway be minimized to the greatest extent practical by screening with topography, native landscaping, berms or fencing. Alternative locations or standards may be allowed where visual effects are reduced to an insignificant level or where visibility is desired.

Short-Term Effects

Construction activities associated with the proposed project will include, but not be limited to, grading and earthwork, paving, vegetation removal, and revegetation. These construction activities will be visible to travelers on South Higuera Street, Ontario Road, and Highway 101 at multiple locations. The removal of vegetation during construction may result in short-term adverse visual changes, which would be considered a potentially significant impact. Compliance with voluntary mitigation measure **VMM 1.1** would ensure that grading and landform alterations are minimized to the extent feasible and blend with the natural topography by following existing contours where feasible. In addition to compliance with voluntary mitigation measure **VMM 1.1**, implementation of the following mitigation measures would reduce this impact to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Measures

MM 2.1-1a For land within the project's footprint under the County's jurisdiction, the San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall retain a qualified professional to select appropriate native plant materials (i.e., ground cover for pathway shoulders, shrubs and trees for areas where these plants have been removed in the area of proposed bridges) that will cover graded cut and fill slopes and that are compatible with adjacent vegetation to minimize visual impacts. Selected species shall be compatible with the requirements of the Environmental Coordinator, or its designee. Landscape and planting plans shall be submitted to San Luis Obispo County Parks and the Environmental Coordinator, or its designee, for review and approval prior to start of construction. Revegetation of disturbed areas shall occur concurrent with construction. The San Luis Obispo County Environmental Coordinator or

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

its designee shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

MM 2.1-1b

For land within the project's footprint under Caltrans jurisdiction, the San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall select appropriate plant materials that will cover graded cut and fill slopes and that are compatible with adjacent vegetation to minimize visual impacts. Selected species shall be compatible with Caltrans requirements and landscape standards. Plans shall be submitted to Caltrans or its designee for review and approval prior to start of construction. Revegetation of disturbed areas shall occur concurrent with construction. The San Luis Obispo County Environmental Coordinator or its designee shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

Implementation of the above mitigation measures combined with voluntary mitigation measure **VMM 1.1** would ensure that short-term adverse effects to visual resources are minimized by requiring a revegetation plan for disturbed areas and immediate implementation of the approved plantings and that those plantings are monitored and maintained for a period of five years. These actions will reduce this impact to a less than significant level; therefore, the proposed project's short-term effect on visual resources would be considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable**, project impact.

Long-Term Effects

The majority of the proposed project would not result in visually prominent development features that would adversely affect scenic resources. Most of the route will remain screened from view and subordinate to the surrounding landscape. The primary visual components of the proposed BJP include an 8-foot-wide asphalt surfaced pathway with a 2-foot-wide shoulder on each side surfaced with base material; grading and landscaping on each side of the pathway, which would disturb an area approximately 12 to 20 feet wide; three bridges over SLO Creek; one 300-foot-long Highway 101 overcrossing with an elevated ramp on the eastern side of the overcrossing; and two at-grade crossings on South Higuera Street. Development of these proposed improvements would result in vegetation removal and alteration of the landscape that could substantially damage scenic resources over the long term. In addition, the proposed project would make improvements at the trailhead near the historic Octagon Barn Center, which would also be considered a scenic and historic resource adjacent to Highway 101. The totality of these changes would be considered a potentially significant impact.

As previously noted above, compliance with voluntary mitigation measure **VMM 1.1** would require that grading and landform alterations are minimized to the extent feasible and blend with the natural topography by following existing contours where feasible. In addition, new structures visible from the public right-of-way shall not silhouette against the sky, shall be low-profile, and colors shall complement the surroundings. Furthermore, implementation of mitigation measures **MM 2.1-1a**, **MM 2.1-1b**, **MM 2.1-2a** through **MM 2.1-2f**, **MM 2.3-1a**, **MM 2.3-1b**, **MM 2.3-4g**, and **MM 2.3-7** would all serve to minimize vegetation removal and trimming, require special landscaping treatment along the highway corridor to maximize screening, and require design limitations for bridge structures to limit visibility. Proposed improvements adjacent to the Octagon Barn would include a 10,000-square-foot trailhead, approximately 65 additional parking spaces (a total of 112 parking spaces), storage and restrooms, and bike parking facilities. Implementation of mitigation measure **MM 2.4-1b** would ensure that proposed trailhead improvements are consistent with the previously approved restoration activities at the Octagon Barn Center and ensure that the integrity of the historic Octagon Barn itself is not damaged. With implementation of these measures, impacts to scenic resources along Highway

101 would be reduced to a less than significant level; therefore, the proposed project's long term effect on scenic resources would be considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable**, project impact.

Substantially Degrade the Existing Visual Character or Quality

Impact 2.1-2 Implementation of the proposed project may result in the degradation of the existing visual quality and/or character of the project area, which serves as a community separator, has moderately high visual sensitivity and quality, and high visibility. This visual change would be considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable**, project impact.

The project area lies within the community separator between the City of San Luis Obispo and the community of Avila Beach (refer to **Figure 2.1-1**). The general character of the project area is agricultural with scattered residences, which are surrounded by the Irish Hills, a natural feature in this area. The vistas within the project area are the ridgelines of the Irish Hills and agricultural fields and orchards as viewed from Highway 101; however, there are no designated vista points, scenic vistas, or scenic corridors within the project area. The COSE does suggest that Highway 101 should be designated a scenic corridor, as previously noted above. According to the VIA, this area was determined to have moderately high visually sensitivity and visual quality, and due to the volume of trips on Highway 101, visibility is considered high.

The proposed improvements would provide a beneficial impact to the visual character of the existing Bob Jones Pathway by providing an improved route of travel that is primarily removed from traffic and in a more natural setting adjacent to riparian and agriculture habitat; however, various segments may be considered by some to adversely affect the overall visual quality and character of the surrounding area. The proposed bridge and overcrossing structures are the primary features that would most likely result in adverse effects to the visual character of the surrounding area, understanding that a person's sensitivity to changes in the visual character of the area can be very subjective. In order to evaluate the project's effect on the visual character, a Visual Quality Evaluation (VQE) was conducted to assess the magnitude of the potential visual changes consistent with the FHWA's visual assessment methodology. The VQE compares the visual quality of both the existing and proposed conditions from key viewing areas and quantifies the change in character based on a numerical rating.

Proposed Improvements

The proposed project will provide an off-street bicycle route giving bicycle users an alternative, to the shoulders of South Higuera Street and Ontario Road. The project will result in a separated Class I trail, where possible, between the Octagon Barn Center (south of the City of San Luis Obispo) and the existing Ontario Road Staging Area near the start of the existing Bob Jones Trail at the intersection of Ontario Road and San Luis Obispo Creek. The proposed alignment will separate pedestrians and cyclists from vehicle traffic and also offer greater scenic quality for users. Both sides of the pathway will be in a natural setting with approximately 50 percent of the route adjacent to orchards and fields, paralleling little-used roads as compared to the existing route along South Higuera Street and Ontario Road.

As identified previously, the primary visual components of the proposed BJP include an 8-foot-wide asphalt surfaced pathway, with a 2-foot-wide shoulder on each side surfaced with base material; grading and landscaping on each side of the pathway, disturbing an area approximately 12 to 20 feet wide; three bridges over SLO Creek; one 300-foot-long Highway 101 overcrossing with an elevated ramp on the eastern side of the overcrossing; and two at-grade crossings on South Higuera Street. A majority of the pathway would be unobtrusive and

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screened by vegetation. Therefore, most segments would have minimal impact on the existing visual quality of local surroundings. However, where extensive vegetation removal would be required and where the pathway is proposed to cross over Highway 101, the potential to degrade visual quality would increase. One segment of the pathway, Segment 5, would include an overcrossing and elevated ramp, which would bisect the visual plane of those traveling on Highway 101.

The Highway 101 overcrossing will consist of three prefabricated steel truss overcrossing segments (Alternative C on Sheet 6 of **Appendix A.5**) that are each 10 feet wide by 80 feet long constructed at a 2 percent grade. The overcrossing requires an elevated ramp on the eastern side of Highway 101. The elevated ramp will consist of nine prefabricated steel truss segments that are 10 feet wide by 50 feet long constructed at a 5 percent grade. The overcrossing will have a minimum clearance of 19 feet above Highway 101. Above the deck, the overcrossing will reach an elevation of 18 feet with safety fencing to a height of 10.5 feet. Refer to Sheet 9 in **Appendix A.2** and Sheets 5–7 in **Appendix A.5** for details of the proposed overcrossing.

Visual Quality Analysis

Various segments of the BJP would result in different effects to the visual quality and resources of the surroundings within each segment as viewed from eleven key viewing areas (KVAs). As previously mentioned, the magnitude of visual change is evaluated based on a change in pre- and post-project vividness, intactness, and unity, rated on a scale of one (very low) to seven (very high) as viewed from the KVAs. A Visual Quality Evaluation was performed from eleven KVAs located within the five segments (refer to **Figures 2.1-2a** and **b**). Pre- and post-project visual quality ratings are summarized in **Table 2.1-3**.

TABLE 2.1-3
VISUAL QUALITY RATING SUMMARY FOR EACH PROJECT SEGMENT AND KEY VIEWING AREA

| Segment/Key View Area (KVA) | Visual Quality Rating | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| | Existing | Post-Project | Difference |
| 1: Octagon Barn to South Higuera Street Crossing | | | |
| KVA 1-1 | 3.67 | 3.67 | 0.0 |
| KVA 1-2 | 4.33 | 4.33 | 0.0 |
| KVA 1-3 | 3.33 | 3.33 | 0.0 |
| 2: South Higuera Street Crossing to Bunnell Crossing | | | |
| KVA 2-1 | 4.67 | 4.67 | 0.0 |
| 3: Bunnell Crossing to San Luis Bay Drive | | | |
| KVA 3-1 | 4.33 | 4.00 | (0.33) |
| 4: San Luis Bay Drive Crossing | | | |
| KVA 4-1 | 3.66 | 3.33 | (0.33) |
| 5: San Luis Bay Drive to Ontario Road Staging Area | | | |
| KVA 5-1 | 4.67 | 4.67 | 0.00 |
| KVA 5-2 | 4.83 | 4.00 | (0.83) |
| KVA 5-3 | 4.33 | 3.25 | (1.08) |
| KVA 5-4 | 3.50 | 2.50 ⁽¹⁾ | (1.00) ⁽¹⁾ |
| KVA 5-5 | 3.67 | 3.33 | (0.34) |

Notes: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – moderately low; 4 – moderate; 5 – moderately high; 6 – high; 7 – very high

(1) West ramp = 3.33 with a difference of (0.17)

Source: Wallace Group 2010

The change between the existing visual quality rating and the post-project visual quality rating was used to determine if the project would have an adverse visual quality impact on a particular KVA. A negative difference in visual quality rating between existing and post-project conditions results in an adverse change to visual quality at that KVA. As shown in **Table 2.1-3**, proposed improvements within Segments 3, 4, and 5 would result in adverse changes to visual quality because the project results in negative changes in visual quality ratings. Visual simulations of these adverse changes are shown in **Figures 2.1-3a** through **2.1-3g** (visual simulations of all KVAs are included in **Technical Appendix T1**). The context of the changes is briefly described below by segment.

Segment 3

The proposed project will introduce the bicycle trail and orchard fencing shown in the simulation in **Figure 2.1-3a**. This segment is not visible from Highway 101 but is visible from Monte Road. Construction disturbance will vary between 16 and 20 feet in width; however, after the vegetation grows in per the landscaping plan, the only visible additional pavement will be 8 feet in width with 2 feet of base material on each side, which will be separated from Monte Road approximately 10 to 15 feet depending on the location. Since the grading and paving changes would be at ground level and the fence will be seen in the context of the adjacent orchard, the proposed project will create a minimal loss in both intactness and visual unity. However, the viewer will see more of the trail as a result of the higher viewing location along Monte Road, which is why the scenic value decreased by 0.33.

Segment 4

Construction of the bridge parallel to the existing San Luis Bay Drive Bridge will be most visible to travelers on eastbound San Luis Bay Drive due to the required trimming and/or removal of a 50-foot-wide strip of willow and related riparian vegetation adjacent to the existing road as reflected in **Figure 2.1-3b**. Viewers on the other three legs of the intersection would only glimpse views of the proposed change, given that their primary cones of vision are either away from or parallel to the visual change under discussion. According to the VIA, the removal of vegetation will affect the scenic value more than the visibility of the proposed bridge structure itself. The proposed improvements will not silhouette or affect the existing dominance of the hills and riparian vegetation of SLO Creek and agricultural land. The vividness of the scene would remain relatively unchanged, but both the intactness and unity factors would be somewhat reduced, which is why the scenic value decreased by 0.33.

Segment 5

Southbound Highway 101 – The proposed overcrossing northeast of the Salisbury Winery (Old Sante Fe Schoolhouse) would be clearly visible to those traveling southbound on Highway 101 as shown **Figures 2.1-3c** and **2.1-3d**. Views of the 550-foot-long elevated ramp would be visible to the east as shown in **Figure 2.1-3e**; however, most of the ramp would be screened by existing vegetation. While the proposed overcrossing would not silhouette above the backdrop hills from the north at this distance, it would ultimately silhouette for approximately 2 seconds before the traveler passes under the structure. The overcrossing would clearly introduce a significant new visual element for southbound travelers and would be the next major vertical man-made element visible after traveling under the existing San Luis Bay Drive Bridge. The proposed overcrossing would reduce the vividness of the natural scene, the intactness, and the unity ratings. Compared to existing conditions, the visual quality would decrease by 0.83 at KVA 5-2 and by 1.08 at KVA 5-3. The remaining portion of the BJP will not be visible from Highway 101 since it is at grade and completely screened by existing vegetation paralleling the highway.

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Northbound Highway 101 – The proposed overcrossing would silhouette above the backdrop hills along portions of Highway 101 (refer to **Figure 2.1-3f**) and add a new and significant visual component to the view of the northbound Highway 101 traveler as shown in **Figure 2.1-3f**. As with southbound travelers, the overcrossing structure will be the major vertical man-made element, which will silhouette prior to the traveler passing under the structure. The overcrossing structure would reduce the overall natural vividness of the scene, intactness, and the unity components, decreasing the visual quality by 1.00 at KVA 5-4 and by 0.34 at KVA 5-5. In addition, the approach ramp retaining wall located west of the overcrossing structure would be visible to northbound Highway 101 travelers as shown in **Figure 2.1-3g**. This improvement component would result in a 0.17 decrease in visual quality in an area that already has negative visual impacts. Neither the bicycle trail nor the eastern approach ramp to the overcrossing would be visible to those traveling northbound on Highway 101.

Proposed Improvement Impacts

The proposed project includes several components that have the potential to substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality. Most impacts are associated with removal of vegetation and construction of new man-made structures. Visual quality and character impacts associated with the proposed project are summarized below by improvement type.

According to the VIA, short-term impacts were identified as significant if the improvements lowered the visual quality rating by 1.5, had a viewer group with a high Sensitivity Rating to visual change, and had a number of viewers greater than 1,000 persons per day. Long-term impacts were identified as significant if the improvements lowered the visual quality rating by more than 1.0, were seen by a population with a sensitivity rating of moderate-high or above and where the number of viewers was greater than 1,000 persons per day.

The proposed project was designed consistent with the standard mitigation measures provided in Appendix F of the PRE, which address siting/design, building location, screening, ridgetop development, significant rock outcrops, slope limitations, building height and mass, and light and glare. Implementation of voluntary mitigation measure **VMM 1.1** also provides screening and grading requirements consistent with the standard mitigation measures in the PRE.

At-Grade Pathway Improvements

Most of the proposed BJP is not visible to local viewers because it is located primarily at grade, with primary impacts associated with vegetation removal as discussed above. With existing vegetation and trees in place, travelers on Highway 101 may occasionally see glimpses of the at-grade pathway within Segment 5 east of Highway 101. Removal of vegetation may increase visibility of the at-grade pathway improvements, which would be considered a potentially significant impact. However, implementation of mitigation measures **MM 2.1-1a** and **2.1-1b** would reduce any potential increase visibility of the at-grade pathway by ensuring that any disturbed areas are revegetated and maintained for a minimum of five years to ensure that any new plants are well established. This would ensure that visual impacts associated with the at-grade pathway improvement are reduced to a less than significant level; therefore, the effect of the proposed at-grade pathway improvements are considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable**, impact. No additional mitigation measures would be necessary.



Photo A: Existing conditions: Monte Road looking north.

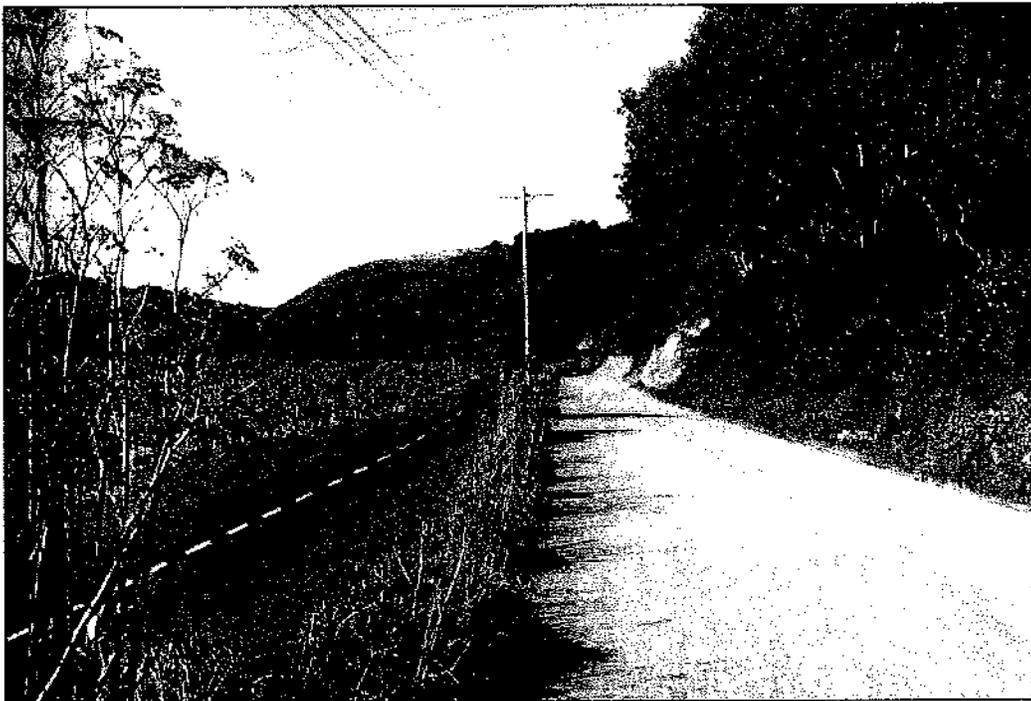


Photo B: Simulation of the proposed project – Typical representation of new bike trail along Monte Road.

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Figure 2.1-3a
Segment 3 (KVA 3-1) Visual Simulations

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Photo A: Existing conditions: San Luis Bay Drive at the US 101N off-ramp looking east toward Monte Road.

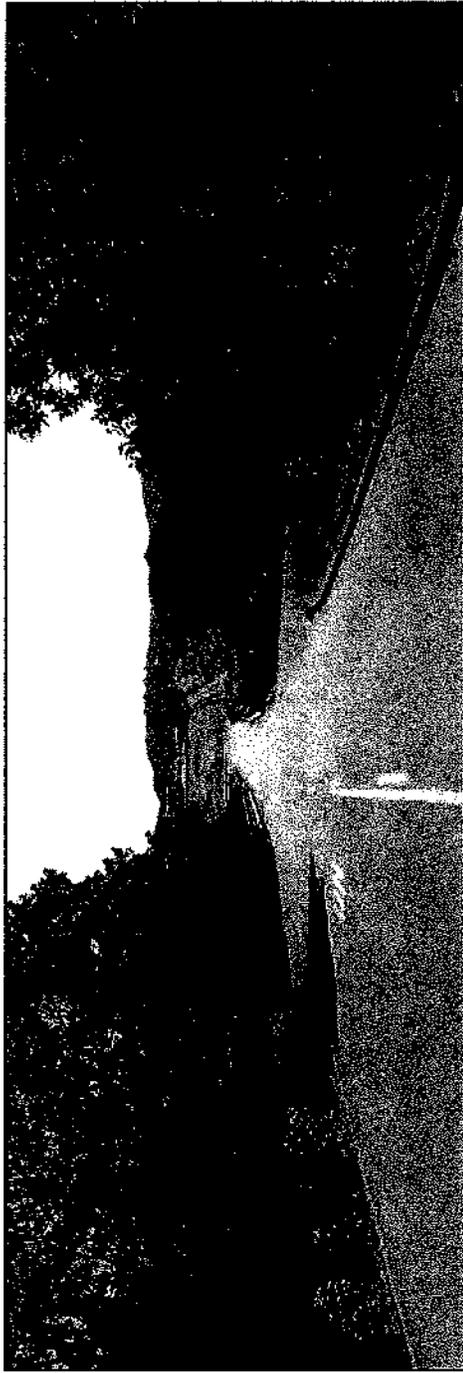


Photo B: Simulation of the proposed project.

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Figure 2.1-3b

Segment 4 (KVA 4-1) Visual Simulations



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Photo A: Existing conditions: US 101S looking south approximately 1,200 feet from proposed bridge crossing.



Photo B: Simulation of the proposed project – Gray-green Steel Truss Bridge Alternative C.

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Figure 2.1-3c
Segment 5 (KVA 5-2) Visual Simulations

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Photo A: Existing conditions: US 101S looking south approximately 400 feet from proposed bridge crossing.



Photo B: Simulation of the proposed project – Gray-green Steel Truss Bridge Alternative C.

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Figure 2.1-3d
Segment 5 (KVA 5-3) Visual Simulations

2.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

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Photo A: Existing conditions: US 101S approximately 1,200 feet north from proposed bridge crossing looking south and zoomed in.



Photo B: Simulation of the proposed project – Approach ramp with Alternative C design.

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Figure 2.1-3e
Segment 5 (KVA 5-2 Ramp) Visual Simulations

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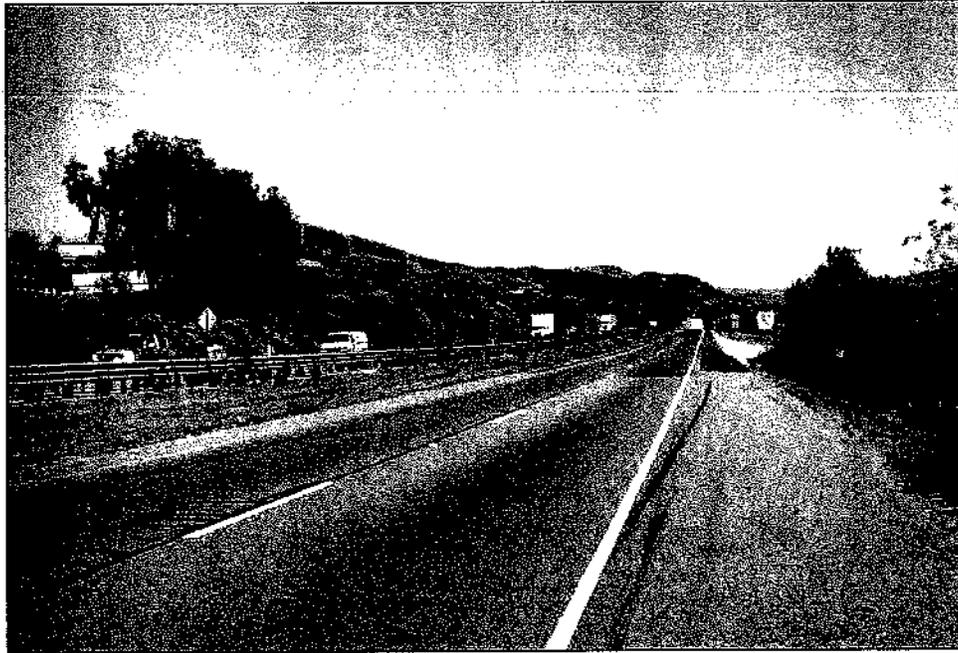


Photo A: Existing conditions: US 101N looking north approximately 300 feet south of proposed bridge crossing .

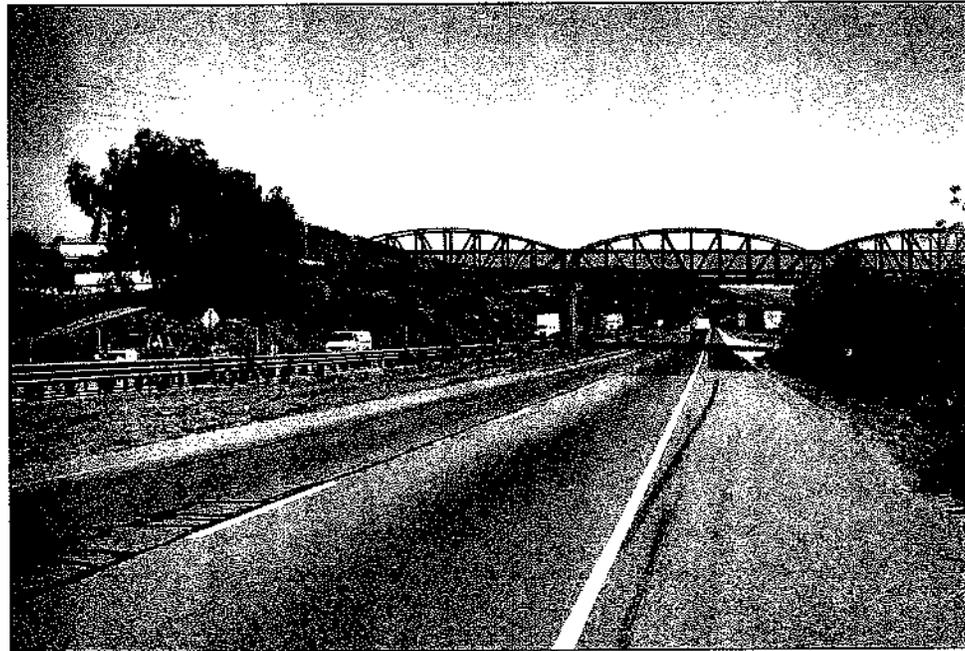


Photo B: Simulation of the proposed project – Gray-green Steel Truss Bridge Alternative C.

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Figure 2.1-3f
Segment 5 (KVA 5-4) Visual Simulations

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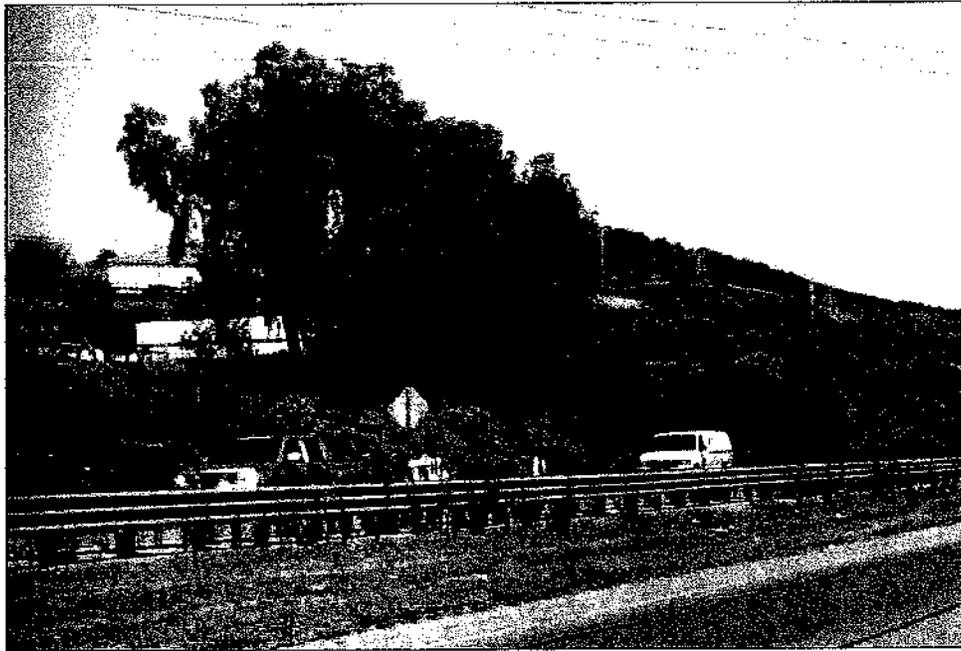


Photo A: Existing conditions: US 101N approximately 300 feet south of proposed bridge crossing zoomed in.

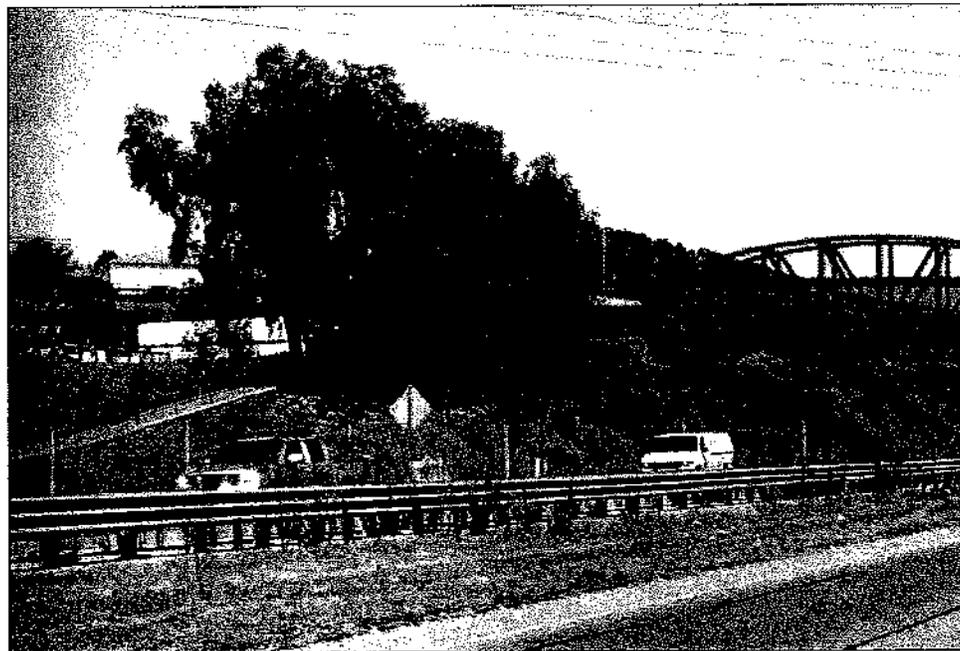


Photo B: Simulation of the proposed project – Retaining wall detail

Source: Wallace Group 2010

Figure 2.1-3g
Segment 5 (KVA 5-5) Visual Simulations

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Bridge Improvements

The proposed project includes three bridge crossings over SLO Creek, which are referenced herein as the following: South Higuera Bridge, Bunnell Bridge, and San Luis Bay Bridge. The South Higuera Bridge, located within Segment 1; the Bunnell Bridge, located within Segment 2; and the San Luis Bay Bridge, located within Segment 4. Removal of vegetation and the introduction of bridge structures themselves may decrease visual quality, which would be considered a potentially significant impact. However, implementation of mitigation measures **MM 2.1-1a** through **2.1-1c** provided below would require a revegetation monitoring and maintenance plan to ensure disturbed areas are revegetated and that plants are well established. These measures would reduce construction and vegetation removal impacts on visual character to a less than significant level. Potential impacts associated with proposed bridge improvements are summarized below, by segment.

Segment 1: South Higuera Bridge – Within this segment, the most visible change will be the addition of the bicycle path and the related wood rail fence on the west side of South Higuera Street. The VQE determined there would be no change in scenic values. The bridge would not be a primary visual component within this segment. Therefore, construction of this bridge would be considered a less than significant impact to visual quality and character.

Segment 2: Bunnell Bridge – There is potential for the bridge crossing of SLO Creek to be visible within this segment. The bridge visibility would be primarily the result of removal of vegetation at the crossing. This bridge is also located within an area subject to the Highway Corridor Design Standards. While the removal of vegetation will not result in a change in visual quality, it may be considered a loss of scenic character; therefore, construction of this bridge would be considered a potentially significant impact. Implementation of the mitigation measures below would reduce this impact to less than significant level.

Segment 4: San Luis Bay Bridge – Due to the required trimming and/or removal of a 50-foot-wide strip of willow and related riparian vegetation adjacent to the existing road bridge, construction of the San Luis Bay Bridge (parallel to the existing San Luis Bay Drive Bridge) will be most visible to viewers traveling eastbound on San Luis Bay Drive as shown in **Figure 2.1-3b**. Viewers at the other three legs of the intersection would only glimpse views of the proposed change, given that their primary cones of vision are either away from or parallel to the visual change under discussion. Although the removal of vegetation would affect the scenic value more than the visibility of the proposed bridge structure itself, the proposed project would still result in an adverse effect to the visual character; therefore, construction of this bridge would be considered a potentially significant impact. However, implementation of the mitigation measures provided below would reduce this impact to less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

MM 2.1-2a The San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall design the bridge structure and pathway improvements between Venado Lane and the end of Segment 2 (on Assessor's Parcel Number 076-121-030) and adjacent to Monte Road within Segment 3 (on Assessor's Parcel Numbers 076-243-024) in accordance with the Highway Corridor Design Standards. In addition, the bridge structure at the SLO Creek crossing within Segment 2 (Bunnell Bridge) shall have a maximum height limit that does not exceed an elevation of 80 feet (North American Vertical Datum 88 (NAVD88)), which equates to roughly 8 feet above the adjacent northbound Highway 101 lane, in order to reduce the vertical dimension of the structure and the potential for visual intrusion into the viewshed.

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- MM 2.1-2b** The San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall utilize some form of truss configuration and limit the maximum height of the bridge structure at the SLO Creek crossing within Segment 4 (new San Luis Bay Bridge) to an elevation of 80 feet (NAVD88), which equates to roughly 10 feet above the adjacent San Luis Bay Drive Bridge deck, to reduce the vertical dimension of the structure and the potential for visual intrusion into the viewshed.
- MM 2.1-2c** The San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall prepare a landscape plan that provides maximum feasible screening of all new structures (i.e., bridges, ramps, retaining walls) when seen from adjacent roadways. New trees shall be planted in conformity with County lists and shall be compatible with adjacent vegetation to supplement the screening of the bridge structures as seen from Highway 101 and San Luis Bay Drive. The design shall be prepared by a qualified professional and plans shall be approved by the Environmental Coordinator, or its designee, prior to start of construction. All revegetation and planting shall be implemented concurrent with project construction. The Environmental Coordinator, or its designee, shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

In addition to compliance with voluntary mitigation measure **VMM 1.1**, implementation of mitigation measures **MM 2.1-2a** through **MM 2.1-2c** would reduce the significance of potential impacts associated with the construction of the pathway and bridge structures by establishing height limits and ensuring compliance with Highway Corridor Design Standards for the proposed Bunnell Bridge structure; requiring a truss configuration for the proposed San Luis Bay Bridge; and by requiring a landscape plan that provides maximum screening of new structures. These measures would ensure that the proposed structures do not result in substantial degradation of the existing visual character and quality of the area. The resulting effect on visual character would be considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable**, project impact.

Overcrossing Improvement Impacts

The most visible component of the proposed project is the 300-foot Highway 101 overcrossing structure. The proposed overcrossing of Highway 101 within Segment 5 of the proposed BJP would introduce a new bridge and two ramp structures, which would degrade the existing visual quality ratings from various KVAs. The proposed overcrossing structure (Alternative C) consists of a steel truss design that incorporates a bottom deck structure just over 3 feet in height, with a curved arc truss varying from 5.5 feet to 18 feet in height with a protective 10.5-foot-high screen. The steel truss would be painted in a neutral gray-green. According to the VIA, the structure will decrease the visual quality rating by a factor of 0.83 at KVA 5-2, 1.08 at KVA 5-3 in the southbound direction, 1.00 at KVA 5-4, and 0.34 at KVA 5-5 in the northbound direction. Although the visual quality rating at KVA 5-3 would decrease by more than 1.0, the existing visual quality rating at KVA 5-3 is 4.33, which is considered moderate (see Table 2.1-2). Since the existing visual quality rating is less than moderately-high, the decrease in the visual quality rating at KVA 5-3 would be not be considered a substantial short- and/or long-term effect on the visual quality of the area. In addition, standard mitigation measures (Appendix F of the PRE) state that alternative standards may be approved where visibility is desired. Visibility of the overcrossing structure may be desired since a pedestrian/bicycle overcrossing represents the community goal of encouraging the use of and investing in safe pedestrian and bicycle facilities. As the proposed overcrossing would not insubstantially degrade a visual quality rating of moderately-high or greater by 1.0, this would be considered a **Class III, less than significant**, project impact.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Adverse Impacts to Visual Character

Impact 2.1-3 Implementation of the proposed project, combined with other reasonably foreseeable projects may result in the degradation of the existing visual quality and/or character of the Highway 101 corridor between the cities of San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach. This largely undeveloped area serves as a community separator, has moderately high visual sensitivity and quality, and high visibility. The proposed project's effect on the visual character of this area would be considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable**, cumulative impact.

The proposed overcrossing and two ramp structures proposed within Segment 5 would contribute to the cumulative and incremental degradation of the overall visual quality of the Highway 101 corridor between the Cities of San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach. Although there are no "similar" projects to the BJP, the introduction of new construction, infrastructure, and man-made features within the corridor represents a regional concern to the visual integrity of the corridor. Although the 300-foot overcrossing would not degrade the visual quality of the area to a degree that would be considered significant, it would add another man-made structure to the Highway 101 corridor between the City of San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach. In addition, a 550-foot elevated approach ramp would be constructed on the eastern side of the overcrossing and a vertical retaining wall would be constructed adjacent to the approach ramp on the western side of the overcrossing. The elevated eastern approach ramp is located at a lower elevation and some distance from Highway 101, as shown in **Figure 2.1-3f**. While the western approach ramp is smaller than the eastern approach ramp, the structure would be located closer to the highway and would present to viewers traveling on Highway 101 as a solid vertical 200-foot-long wall, varying in height from 2 to 6 feet as shown in **Figure 2.1-3g**. According to the design team, the retaining wall adjacent to the western approach ramp will be textured to create shadow patterns and to avoid a broad expanse of uniform concrete.

The resulting improvements would be considered a potentially significant cumulative impact. Implementation of mitigation measures **MM 2.1-1a**, **MM 2.1-1b**, and **MM 2.1-2a** through **MM 2.1-2c** would reduce the proposed project's contribution to short- and long-term effects on visual quality by requiring re-vegetation and continued maintenance of the disturbed areas, establishing design standards for the proposed bridges; and requiring landscape screening of new structures. In addition to these measures, an innovative method to address cumulative visual impacts is to remove an equivalent amount of visual clutter from the Highway 101 corridor in the vicinity of the project area. According to the VIA, the increased impact generated by an overcrossing structure would be decreased or offset for the typical driver by a reduction in other visual clutter within 4 to 5 minutes of travel time along this corridor. The Land Conservancy currently has a billboard on their property that is a candidate for removal, assuming they are compensated for the lost revenue generated by the leasing of the billboard space. Implementation of the following mitigation measures would reduce the project's cumulative impact.

Mitigation Measures

MM 2.1-3a The County of San Luis Obispo General Services Agency shall remove or cause to be removed one (1) standard-size billboard within the section of Highway 101 between San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach. The removal of a standard-size billboard shall be considered an equivalent offset for the proposed project's incremental contribution toward the degradation of the

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visual quality within the corridor. The billboard shall be removed prior to the start of construction of the overcrossing and associated ramp improvements.

MM 2.1-3b

Prior to approval of final improvement plans, the San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall ensure that the southwest approach of the western ramp structure is located in such a way that minimizes impacts to existing trees (within approximately 5 feet of conceptual design alignment). New trees deemed compatible with the adjacent vegetation shall be added to supplement the screening of the approach ramp. The design shall be prepared by a qualified professional and plans shall be subject to review and approval by the Environmental Coordinator, or its designee, prior to start of construction. All plantings and revegetation shall be implemented concurrent with construction.

For land within the project footprint under Caltrans jurisdiction, the San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall select appropriate plant materials that will cover graded cut and fill slopes and that are compatible with adjacent vegetation to minimize visual impacts. Selected species shall be compatible with Caltrans requirements. Plans shall be submitted to Caltrans or its designee for review and approval prior to start of construction. All plantings and re-vegetation shall be implemented concurrent with construction.

The Environmental Coordinator, or its designee, shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

MM 2.1-3c

Prior to approval of final improvement plans, the San Luis Obispo County General Services Agency shall identify a texture or pattern for the vertical retaining surface specifically designed to reduce the large plane of uniform vertical surface. In addition, appropriate landscape shrubs are to be planted between the retaining wall and the highway to provide screening. The design shall be subject to review and approval by the Environmental Coordinator or its designee for compliance prior to start of construction. Caltrans shall also be consulted where the project falls within its jurisdiction.

The Environmental Coordinator, or its designee, shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

MM 2.1-3d

Prior to approval of final improvement plans, the San Luis Obispo County Environmental Coordinator shall ensure that all proposed design and landscaping requirements are incorporated into the final design drawings. Final design drawings and visual simulations from KVAs 5-3 and 5-4 shall be subject to review and recommendation by County of San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Commission.

Implementation of mitigation measure **MM 2.1a** would remove existing man-made structures within the corridor offset the proposed project's new man-made structures. Implementation of mitigation measures **MM 2.1-3b** and **MM 2.1-3c** would require retention of existing trees and special design and landscaping requirements at the approach ramps. These measures, combined with mitigation measure **MM 2.1-3d**, would reduce the proposed project's incremental contribution towards the degradation of the visual quality along the Highway 101

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corridor. Therefore, the proposed project's affect on visual quality would not be considered cumulative considerable and this would be considered a **Class II, significant but mitigable,** cumulative impact.

APPENDIX T1: AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

**Visual Impact Assessment for the
Bob Jones Pathway – San Luis Obispo to
Ontario Road, San Luis Obispo County,
California**

Prepared for:

County of San Luis Obispo

Prepared by:

**Andrew Merriam,
Wallace Group**

In conjunction with:

SWCA Environmental Consultants®

January 2010

**VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
FOR THE
BOB JONES PATHWAY –
SAN LUIS OBISPO TO ONTARIO ROAD**

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January 2010

SWCA Project Number: 13872

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study evaluates the visual impacts which may occur with the addition of a new bicycle and pedestrian trail, the Bob Jones Pathway – San Luis Obispo to Ontario Road (project). The project is adjacent to U.S. Highway 101 (US 101) beginning south of San Luis Obispo adjacent to the historic Octagon Barn to its crossing over to the west side of the highway near the Salisbury Winery, where it will connect with the existing trail (refer to Figure 1). This analysis evaluates potential visual changes that may occur to the environment and the degree to which these changes may affect the existing setting.

To define the potential for the project to result in impacts on sensitive visual resources as seen from public roadways, primarily US 101, the existing visual condition is analyzed, the visual resources identified, and a baseline scenic character established. The analysis methodology evaluates the aggregate effect that each of the individual project components may have on the overall visual character of the landscape. Where a change in character is identified, it is compared to viewers' expected sensitivity and expectations, and is reviewed for consistency with applicable planning policies. Application of this methodology is described in detail in Section 5.1.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The goal of the project is to remove bicycle use from the shoulders of South Higuera and Ontario Road. It will create a separated Class I trail, where possible, for a distance of approximately 4.5 miles between south San Luis Obispo and the start of the Bob Jones Trail at the intersection of Ontario Road and San Luis Obispo Creek. The existing route places bicyclists immediately adjacent to motorists on the shoulder of both of these roads. It also requires an at-grade crossing at the intersection of San Luis Bay Drive and Ontario Road. This is a congested intersection, with frontage road connections immediately adjacent to US 101 exit and entry ramps. The existing location can be physically dangerous and places the non-vehicular user adjacent to queued motor vehicles and their associated fumes. The new trail system will offer improved pathways for bicycles, new opportunities for pedestrian uses, and it will encourage greater use by families with smaller children as is now the case with the existing Bob Jones Trail as it approaches Avila. The new route with its separation from the existing streets will also offer greater scenic quality for users. Both sides of the pathway will be in natural setting with approximately 50 percent of the route adjacent to orchards and fields, paralleling little used roads as compared to the existing route along Ontario Road.

The visual components of the project generally incorporate an eight foot wide asphalt surfaced bicycle path with shoulders of two feet on each side surfaced with base material. The necessary grading and landscaping on each side creates a typical disturbance area of 12 to 20 feet wide. This trail will extend approximately 4.4 miles between the Octagon Barn and the Salisbury Winery and will run parallel to San Luis Obispo Creek and US 101. To accomplish this connection, the trail will bridge San Luis Obispo Creek three times and US 101 once with a 300-foot long multiple span structure. In addition there will be an at-grade crossing of South Higuera about 0.5 miles south of the Octagon Barn. Selected cross sections showing the relationship of the pathway to the adjacent environment are shown in Figures 2a and 2b. To better identify design solutions to the US 101 bridge crossing, three design alternatives have been provided by the County design team for evaluation. Further, the truss alternative will be evaluated in two colors. These configurations are shown in Figure 2c. While the span remains the same in these alternatives, two are concrete spans with varying safety fences and the third is a truss Alternative. The preliminary design calls for the bridges to be 10 feet in width and provide for six foot high protective fencing on each side. This fencing may either be chain link or a combination of other fencing materials incorporated into the truss alternative (refer to Figure 2c.)

Figure 2a. Selected Project Cross Sections

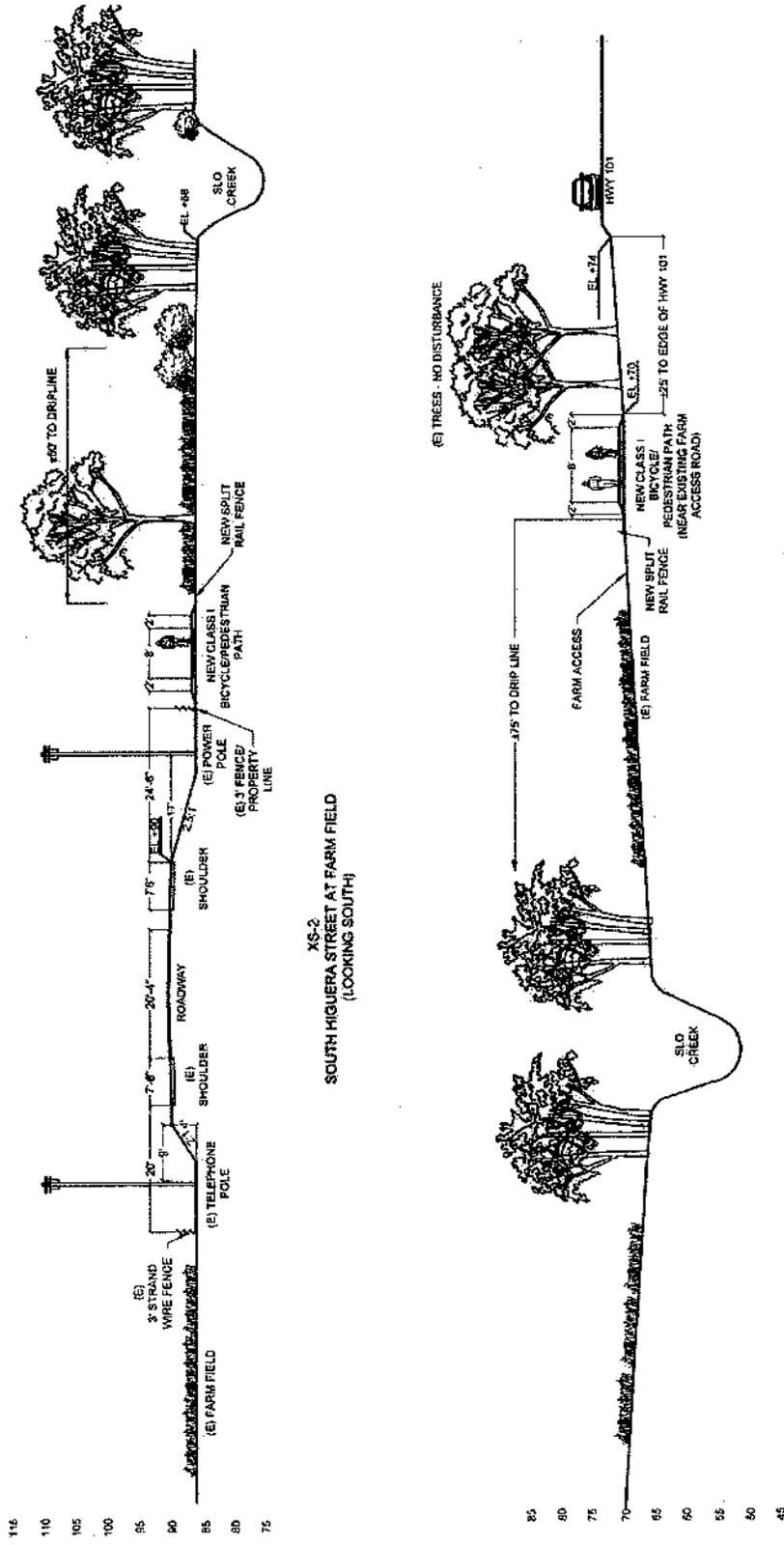
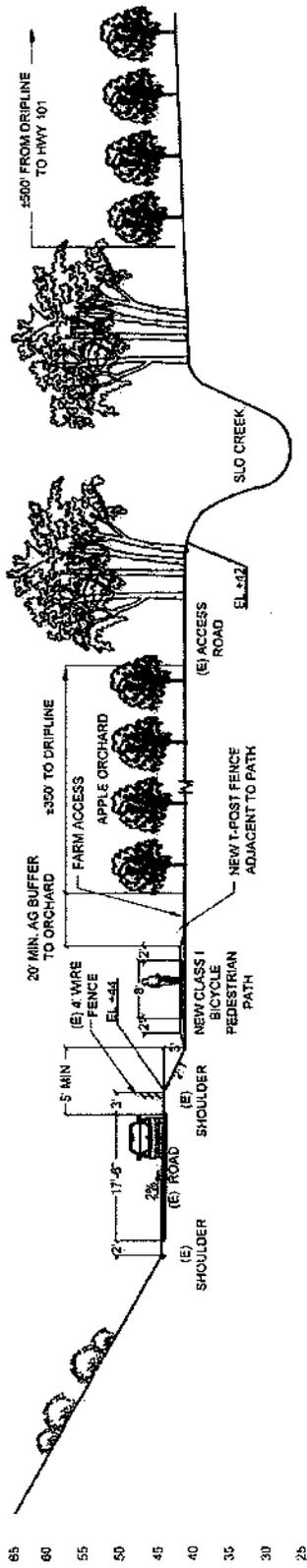
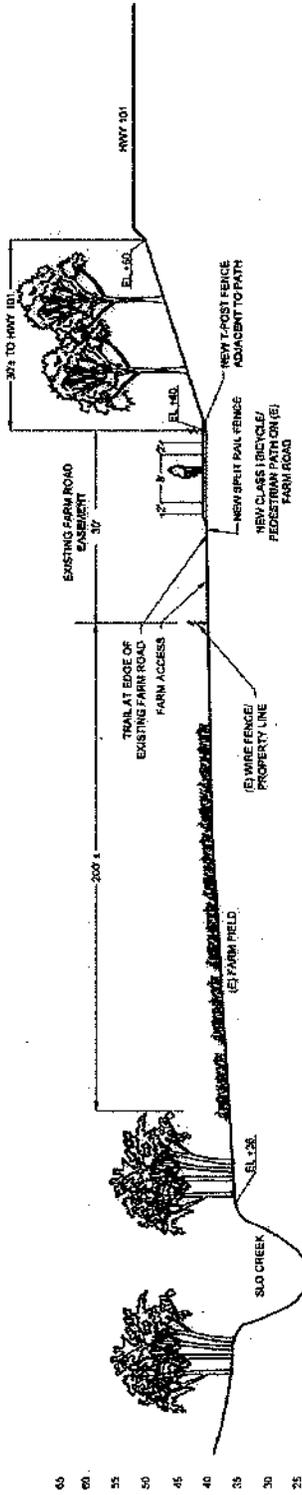


Figure 2b. Selected Project Cross Sections

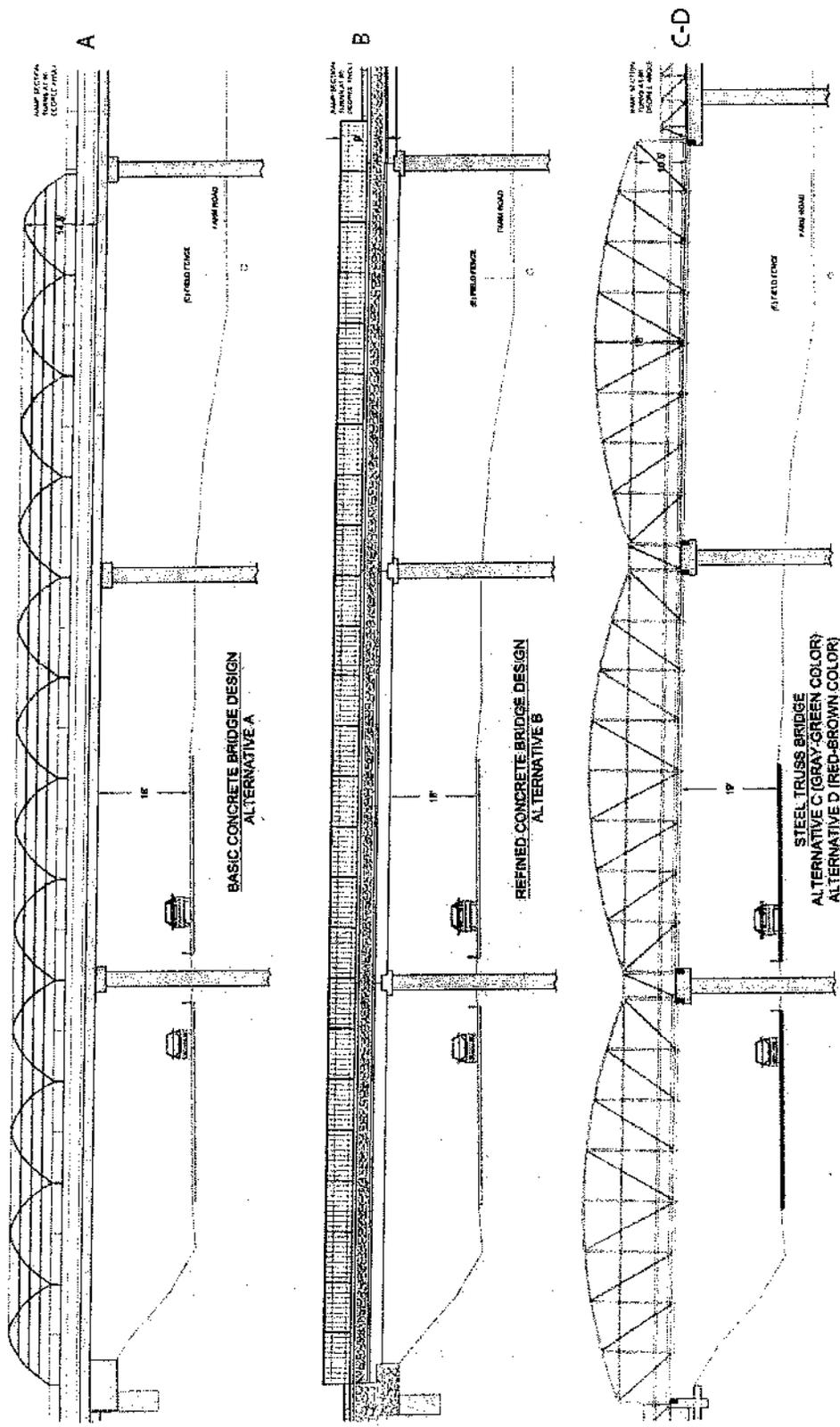


XS-15
MONTE ROAD NORTH OF SAN LUIS BAY DRIVE
(LOOKING SOUTH)



XS-16
FARM ROAD SOUTH OF SAN LUIS BRIDGE
(LOOKING SOUTH)

Figure 2c. Conceptual US 101 Overcrossing and Approach Alternatives



Given the length and complexity of this project, the analysis will be divided into five segments to allow a more detailed evaluation and description of the impacts. The specific conditions, segment by segment, are included graphically below in Section 3.

For the most part, the top of the bicycle path would be at-grade with short sections raised four to six inches in poorly drained areas. The exposed grades on each side will be hydro seeded with a mix compatible with adjacent vegetation. In some places, especially at the creek crossings, there will be some trimming of limbs and potentially tree removal to allow for construction of the bridge structures. In many areas, as identified in more detail on the graphics, there will also be landscaped and revegetated areas to meet restoration requirements. (For the complete documentation of the project, see the Bob Jones City to Sea Trail engineering studies prepared for the County of San Luis Obispo [County] by Questa Engineering Corporation [Questa Engineering], composed of approximately 35 pages of large scale drawings.)

The visual evaluation will include both the effects of the actual construction, as well as changes to the vegetation adjacent to the trail.

3. EXISTING VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

The project is located in San Luis Obispo County, south of the City of San Luis Obispo and north of Pismo Beach, along US 101 as shown on Figure 1. Along the affected portion of US 101, the general character of the area is agricultural with scattered residences. The adjacent hills, designated as The Irish Hills, are a significant natural feature of this area. To facilitate discussion of this four-mile route, the existing environment and following evaluation of impacts are divided into segments. These segments coincide with the Preliminary Plan documents prepared for the County by Questa Engineering and are included with the general discussion of the Natural Environmental Study being prepared by Morro Group, a division of SWCA. Context photos documenting the existing visual environment are included at the end of this section in Photographs I through II.

3.1 SEGMENT 1

The Octagon Barn and the South Higuera/Northbound US 101 entrance form the boundaries of Segment 1, which is approximately 0.7 mile in length. San Luis Obispo Creek runs along the west side of South Higuera, with flat agricultural land to the east of the travel corridor. Vegetation adjacent to the creek blocks views to and from US 101. Approximately 200 feet from the highway entrance at the south end, San Luis Obispo Creek crosses under the road, and the thick vegetation also follows the creek to the east side of South Higuera. Cyclists and vehicles are consistently visible along this stretch of road, which may be classified as generally rural in character.

3.2 SEGMENT 2

This one-mile segment continues from the Northbound US 101 entrance, south past the interchange with Ontario Road, to the area of the proposed bicycle bridge crossing of San Luis Obispo Creek, which runs along the east side of US 101 and South Higuera. To the west, the Ontario Range lies directly adjacent to the highway and frontage road forming a series of steep slopes. Thick riparian vegetation runs along the east side of the highway, with flat agricultural land between San Luis Obispo Creek and hills approximately 600 feet east. The frontage road crosses from the east to west side of US 101 at the northbound South Higuera Street (South Higuera) exit. This area is classified as generally rural with the highway interchange providing the dominant element in the visual environment in this segment.

3.3 SEGMENT 3

This 1.5-mile segment is generally parallel to the US 101 corridor which is running north and south. The visual character is dominated by the gap in the Ontario Hills created by San Luis Obispo Creek. However, the tree and riparian vegetation adjacent to the creek and the adjacent farm and orchard lands east of the creek create an important secondary visual pattern in the visual scene.

3.4 SEGMENT 4

Segment 4, 0.25 mile in length, is located between Monte Road and US 101 directly north of San Luis Bay Drive. Apple orchards and vineyards run on either side of San Luis Obispo Creek between the highway and Monte Road. The creek crosses San Luis Bay Drive and relatively dense riparian vegetation extends along the south east side of the highway interchange. There are rolling hills with a residential community entrance off Ontario Road on the west side of the highway. This area is a cross between rural and residential suburban in nature.

3.5 SEGMENT 5

This 0.75-mile segment is dominated by US 101 and the rolling hills along Ontario Road on the west side of the highway, which includes a few commercial businesses and residences within view of the highway. Agricultural fields continue to run along the east side of the US 101 corridor with the creek running parallel for approximately 800 feet. Fields continue beyond the creek for approximately 1,200 to 1,500 feet where the hills begin rising to create Squire Canyon. While near several access roads to the community of Avila Beach, the proposed bridge crossing point is not classified as a gateway to either Avila or San Luis Obispo by the County of San Luis Obispo. The existing Bob Jones Bike Trail picks up at the end of Segment 5. A parking lot for trail users (i.e., the Ontario Road Staging Area) is accessed off Ontario Road and lies adjacent to an historic schoolhouse, which has been converted into Salisbury Winery, a separate property. San Luis Obispo Creek crosses under US 101 just south of the Ontario Road Staging Area. From the staging area, the existing Bob Jones Bike Trail follows the creek out to the community of Avila Beach.

4. VIEWER SENSITIVITY AND RESPONSE

In addition to the physical changes in the landscape, a visual analysis also incorporates the relative sensitivity and number of those viewing the project. Viewer sensitivity varies with the viewer's activities and expectations. Anticipated public opinion concerning the established visual character of the landscape, and the response to the changes resulting from the proposed project, are the basis for evaluating the contrast in the visual character and ultimately the visual impact generated by the project. In determining viewer sensitivity level, the number of potential viewers, as well as the duration and dominance of views, are considered.

4.1 PLANNING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

The proposed project is located within the permit jurisdiction of the County and the State of California (Caltrans). Sensitivity regarding aesthetic issues is reflected in applicable planning policies and guidelines. The regulatory setting pertaining to visual resources includes review of the proposed project's consistency with the County's General Plan (Land Use Element, Circulation Element, Agriculture, Open Space, and Conservation Elements).

While this area has not been specifically designated as a scenic highway in the County General Plan documents, the US 101 corridor has been called out for further analysis. Many of the viewers will be visitors and tourists to the Central Coast with higher sensitivity and expectations than, for example, the

commercial traveler along US 101. However, this area is not a natural destination area such as seashore communities or generating high expectations of view quality such as vistas along Highway 1. Therefore, Viewer Sensitivity is rated as moderately high, given that this area is a natural buffer between the communities of San Luis Obispo, Avila Beach, and Pismo Beach. It has high scenic qualities and a well defined sense of “Vividness” as defined by Caltrans.

4.2 PROJECT VISIBILITY

The greatest number of potential viewers of the project will be from US 101, along both the north and south directions, averaging around 68,000 trips per day (Caltrans statistics for the year 2007). Bicycle trail improvements, especially the highway crossing east of the Salisbury Winery will predominantly be seen from the highway. Some portions of the trail project will also be visible from South Higuera and Ontario Road, where they run parallel to the highway, with approximately 7,300 trips per day since they are essentially a continuation of each other.

In summary, the number of potential Viewers (even discounting for some overlap in the figures below since the majority of the South Higuera traffic, for example, will have also been included in US 101 figures) will be over 79,400 per day, and is classified as high. However the visibility of various components of the bicycle trail varies greatly and is quantified below by Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) counts:

1. Views from South Higuera: 7,300 AADT (County of San Luis Obispo, 2007)
2. Views from US 101: 68,000 AADT (Caltrans, 2007)
3. Views from San Luis Bay Drive eastbound: less than 3,600 AADT (County of San Luis Obispo, 2007)
4. Views from Monte Road: less than 500 AADT (Consultant estimate based on units served).

For the purposes of this study, the analysis will use the same ratings that have been used in the past 10 years by this consultant for both the County and the California Energy Commission: Travel ways with potential users of less than 1,000 trips per day is classified as low; between 1,000 and 10,000 is classified as moderate; and over 10,000 trips or AADT is classified as high. Put another way, rural roads are low, major highways such as US 101 are high, and most arterials and collectors will fall into the moderate category.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 METHODOLOGY

As the basis for analysis, this visual assessment was prepared using a process developed by the United States Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This process for assessing visual impacts satisfies the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

In order to develop an accurate assessment of the project's appearance, locations and dimensions of critical project features and landform alterations were identified based on site plan information, cross-sections, and images provided by Questa Engineering, dated November 2008. This information is summarized in the Project Description in Section 2 of this analysis.

The project site was viewed from all potential viewing locations on the adjacent transportation corridors and public recreation areas. As a result of these field studies, representative viewpoints were determined for further analysis. Key Viewing Areas (KVAs) were selected that would best illustrate the visual

changes proposed by the project as experienced by the community and its visitors. The KVAs were specifically chosen based on anticipated viewer sensitivity, view access, and viewing duration. Photographs were taken from the KVAs, and photo-simulations were prepared illustrating the likely appearance of the project as proposed. These images were used to quantify potential project visibility and to assess related impacts. To provide a realistic evaluation of visual impacts, these simulations were prepared showing mitigation planting, where identified in the mitigation measures, in place with five years of growth.

The simulation and evaluation of visual quality by KVA are covered in Section 6. The final determination of impacts, which combine the demonstrated change in visual quality with Viewer Sensitivity and Number of Viewers, is identified in Section 7, Project Impacts and Related Mitigation.

5.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

NEPA compliance includes consultation with local agencies for the development of specific criteria relative to impacts. Therefore local ordinances and previous public actions in similar cases are relevant to determining the thresholds of significance.

The County Land Use Ordinance (Title 22, Section 106.020 for the San Luis Bay Planning Area) does not identify specific design standards nor does it identify this section of the US 101 corridor as a scenic resource. However, the County's general intent can be derived by reviewing the San Luis Bay Rural Area Standards under the heading for Pedestrian and Bikeways—New Land Divisions. This section states: "Provide for safe and site-sensitive [underlining provided] pedestrian and bike circulation facilities in the design of roads for new subdivisions where feasible." Also in the US 101 Corridor Standards (for rural areas south of Arroyo Grande Section 22.112.040 of Title 22) includes language where the intent is to "maintain views of varied topography including ridgelines and rock features; significant stands of trees and historic buildings or pastoral settings." This language is derived from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) language and thresholds.

According to Section 15382 of the CEQA *Guidelines*, an effect on the environment is considered to be significant if it is a substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area being studied, "including...objects of aesthetic significance." The guidelines in Appendix G specifically address the questions of whether the project would:

- a) have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- b) substantially damage scenic resources including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, historic buildings within a state scenic highway
- c) substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings
- d) create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in an area.

Section 15064.7 of CEQA states that each public agency is encouraged to develop thresholds for the agency to use in the determination of the significance of environmental effects. The section further states that "A threshold of significance is an identifiable quantitative, qualitative or performance level of a particular environmental effect, non-compliance with which means the effect will normally be determined to be significant by the Agency and compliance with which means the effect normally will be determined to be less than significant".

For the purpose of this Study, adverse visual impacts were considered to be significant if they:

1. resulted in short term visual impacts (those impacts lasting less than five years) where they in combination lowered the visual quality rating by 1.5 (as identified in the Visual Quality Evaluations), had a viewer group with a high Sensitivity Rating to visual change, and had a Number of Viewers greater than 1000.
2. resulted in a long term degradation of the visual environment by a factor greater than “1” in the visual quality ratings as defined in the Visual Quality Evaluation tables, were seen by a population with a Sensitivity Rating of moderate-high or above and a Number of Viewers classified as moderate or higher (greater than 1000 persons daily).

6. KEY VIEWING AREAS

6.1 DETERMINATION OF KEY VIEWING AREAS

Determining the extent of the project’s visibility is an important part of analyzing the potential visual impacts created by the project. In order to determine where the project is most visible, field studies were conducted to gather information and take photographs along the 4.4-mile right-of-way.

The results of this study are shown in the context and base line photographs identified in Figures 3a and 3b. Eleven viewing locations were identified as representative of views where the proposed project (refer to Table 1, Figures 3a and 3b) and its components are visible. While there may be glimpses from other areas along US 101 and the frontage roads, these eleven areas were judged to best represent or illustrate the potential impacts of the project including the worst case scenarios. Given the relatively extended character of the bicycle trail, context photos are included so that readers can see the character and context of the countryside between those locations selected for the KVAs.

Table 1. Key Viewing Areas

| KVA | Location | Figure No |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 1-1 | Segment 1: From South Higuera facing south | 4 |
| 1-2 | Segment 1: From South Higuera facing south | 5 |
| 1-3 | Segment 1: From South Higuera facing north | 6 |
| 2-1 | Segment 2: From southbound US 101 facing potential creek crossing | 7 |
| 3-1 | Segment 3: From Monte Road facing north | 8 |
| 4-1 | Segment 4: From San Luis Bay Drive at northbound ramp facing east to bridge at San Luis Obispo Creek | 9 |
| 5-1 | Segment 5: From US 101 southbound lanes facing south toward overpass | 10a, b |
| 5-2 | Segment 5: From US 101 southbound lanes 0.25 mile from overpass facing south | 11a,b,c |
| 5-3 | Segment 5: From US 101 southbound 400 feet from proposed overpass facing south | 12a,b,c |
| 5-4 | Segment 5: From US 101 northbound 300 feet from overpass facing north | 13a,b,c |

Table 1. Key Viewing Areas

| KVA | Location | Figure No. |
|-----|---|------------|
| 5-5 | Segment 5: From US 101 northbound 0.2 mile from overpass facing north | 14a,b,c |
| 5-2 | Segment 5: eastern approach ramp to main bridge at US 101 | 15 |
| 5-4 | Segment 5: retaining wall at the west side of the main US 101 bridge | 16 |

6.2 VISUAL QUALITY EVALUATIONS BY SEGMENT

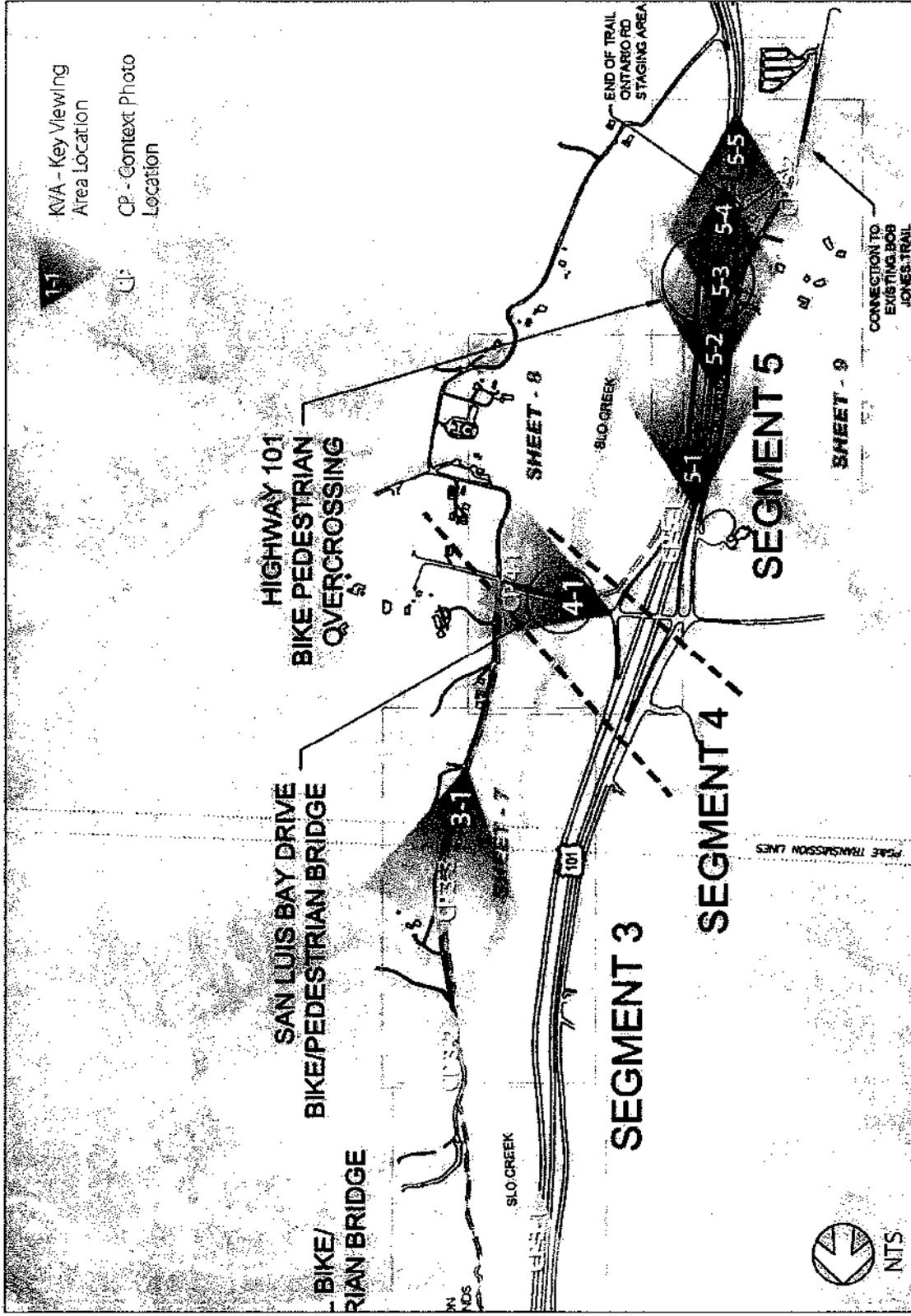
Consistent with the FHWA visual assessment methodology, a Visual Quality Evaluation (VQE) was conducted in order to assess the magnitude of the potential visual changes caused by the proposed project. The VQE compares the visual quality of both the existing and proposed conditions. A separate VQE was done from each of the 11 KVAs. A numerical rating between one and seven was assigned for the visual quality of existing conditions from each viewpoint, with one having the lowest value and seven the highest. Photo-simulations were then prepared illustrating the likely appearance of each view after project construction (Figures 4 through 16). Numerical ratings were assigned to each of these “proposed” views. The numerical difference, if any, between the existing and proposed conditions quantifies the change that may occur as a result of the proposed project.

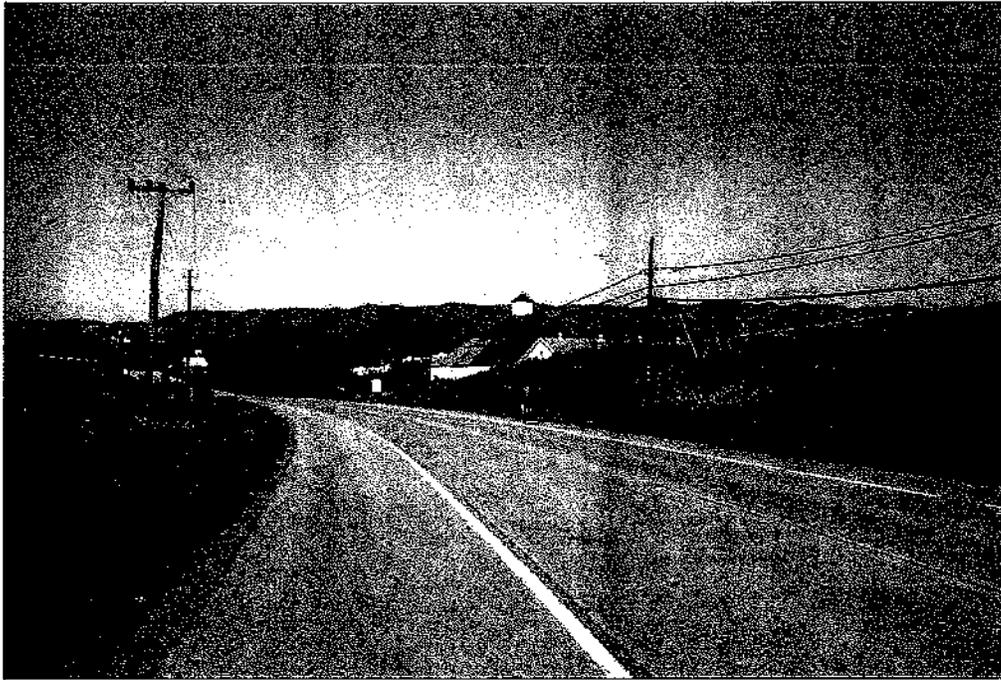
The numerical rating system described above is based on evaluative criteria using three primary components identified as vividness, intactness, and unity. These three criteria are described as follows:

- **Vividness** is the visual power or memorability of the landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual pattern.
- **Intactness** is the visual integrity of the landscape and its freedom from non-typical encroaching elements. If all of the various elements of a landscape seem to “belong” together, there will be a high level of intactness.
- **Unity** is the visual harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. Unity represents the degree to which potentially diverse visual elements maintain a coherent visual pattern.

The VQE determines which specific criteria contribute most to the existing quality of each view, and if a change were to occur to that criteria as a result of the project. If a numerical change in visual criteria was identified, this change was analyzed for its potential affect on the existing scenic character. In order to determine levels of visual impact, this numerical difference is compared to the expected sensitivities of potential viewer groups, as well as community scenic values, as identified in applicable planning documents.

Figure 3b. KVA Map - Segments 3-5





**Context Photograph 1-1. South Higuera facing northeast looking toward Octagonal Barn
(Pathway proposed at left)**



**Context Photograph 2-1. South Higuera looking south toward Cloveridge Lane
(Pathway proposed at left)**



**Context Photograph 2-2. Cloverridge Lane looking southwest
(Class III travelway provided on roadway shoulders)**



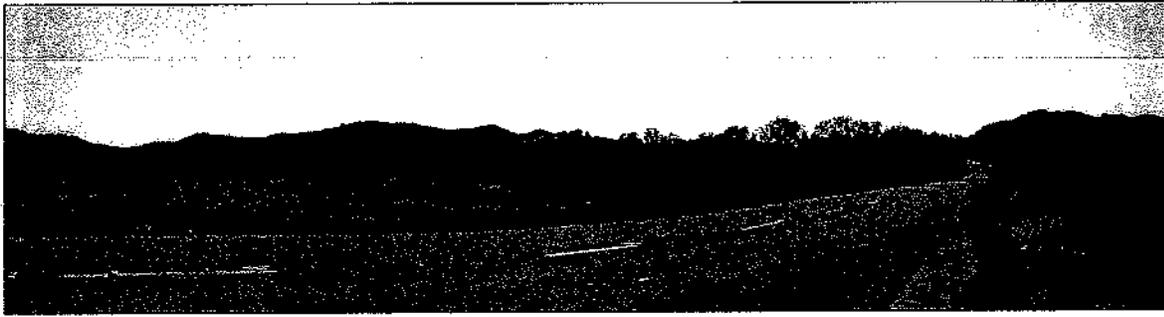
**Context Photograph 3-1. US 101N looking north
(Pathway to be located to right of existing vegetation)**



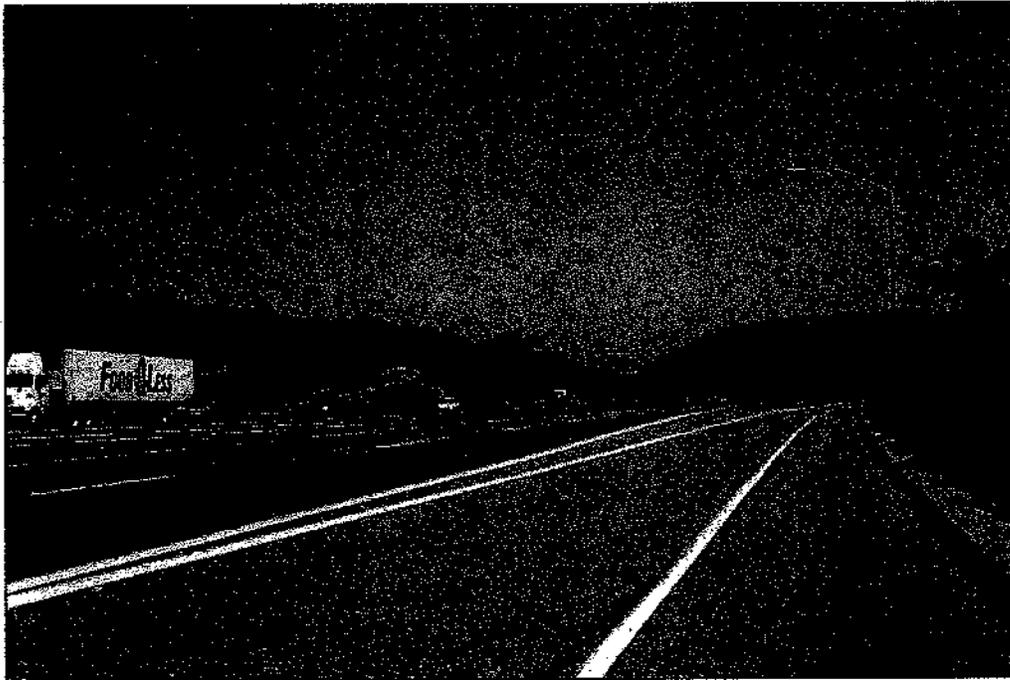
**Context Photograph 3-2. Monte Road looking north
(Class III shared use pathway proposed on Monte Road)**



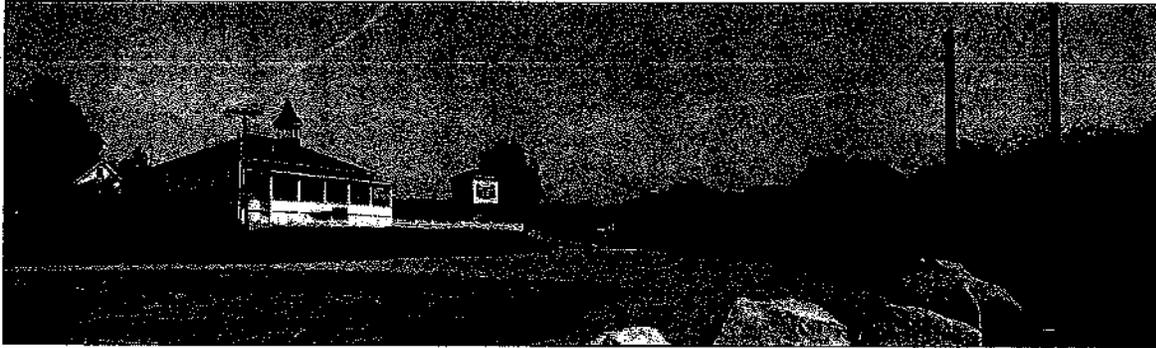
**Context Photograph 3-3. Monte Road looking south
(Pathway proposed to right of fence)**



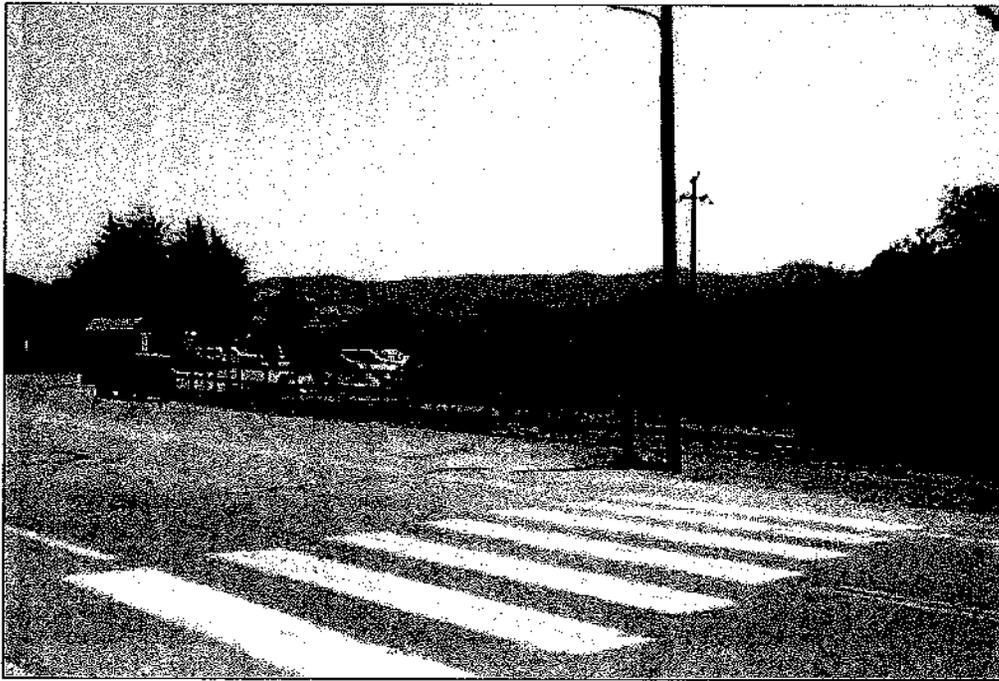
**Context Photograph 4-1. San Luis Bay Drive from Monte Road intersection looking west
(Pathway proposed at left)**



**Context Photograph 5-1. US 101N looking north toward existing
San Luis Bay Drive bridge crossing
(Pathway not visible in this photo)**



Context Photograph 5-2. Salisbury Winery – Pathway connects to parking area in Caltrans right-of-way.



Context Photograph 5-3. Existing Ontario Road staging area parking for Bob Jones Pathway



Context Photograph 5-4. Existing entrance to Bob Jones Pathway to Avila Beach.

Following are the numerical visual quality ratings of the existing conditions and the proposed project, as seen from each of the 11 KVAs and alternative design.

6.2.1 Segment 1

The visual changes occurring within this segment will typically be the creation of a detached bicycle path which will result in eight feet of visible paving and two feet of base on each side being viewed by adjacent travelers on South Higuera or potentially US 101. The change for existing bicyclists is considered as slightly positive since they will now have their own dedicated right-of-way and will not have to be concerned about the visual distractions of riding on the shoulders of South Higuera. Three KVAs were selected (see Table 1) and these are evaluated in more detail below as being representative of the conditions encountered in Segment 1.

KVA 1-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 1-1.

Table 2. KVA 1-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | Value (V) |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Existing | 4.0 | 3.0 | 4.0 | 3.67 |
| Proposed | 4.0 | 3.0 | 4.0 | 3.67 |
| Visual Quality Difference | | | | 0.0 |

Existing View Rating for KVA-1-1

The most significant feature in the existing view is backdrop of the Ontario Hills, which is relatively vivid or memorable. However, the scenic value or intactness is reduced somewhat by the PG&E power lines and the large cut for US 101 visible in the photo, center right. The unity rating is moderate/high considering the agricultural land and the backdrop hills (refer to Figure 4, Existing Conditions). This KVA receives a 3.67 rating.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 1-1

As seen from this viewpoint, the most visible change will be the addition of the bicycle path and the related wood rail fence to the right of South Higuera. In general, the view maintains its existing condition. The vividness, intactness, and unity ratings remain the same because the view and landscape character is essentially the same as in the existing condition (refer to Figure 4, Simulation). The area of visual change, after revegetation of the shoulders, will be approximately eight feet. Some drivers may consider the addition of a bicycle path in these energy consciousness days to be a positive attribute and will not mind minor alterations to the landscape to accomplish this goal. The resulting value for the proposed condition remains at 3.67. There is no change in scenic values for this location.

KVA 1-2 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 1-2.

Table 3. KVA 1-2 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | Value (V) |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Existing | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.33 |
| Proposed | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.33 |
| Visual Quality Difference | | | | 0.0 |

Existing View Rating for KVA 1-2

The most significant feature in this existing view is again the backdrop of the Ontario Hills, which is relatively vivid or memorable. This vividness is enhanced by the encroaching hill on the left and the greater perception of the riparian vegetation. However, the scenic value or intactness is still reduced

somewhat by the power lines. The unity rating is moderate/high considering the agricultural land and the backdrop hills (Refer to Figure 5, Existing Conditions). This KVA receives a 4.33 rating.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 1-2

As seen from this viewpoint, the most visible change will be the addition of the bicycle path and the related wood rail fence to the left of the South Higuera right-of-way. As such, it will not silhouette nor affect the existing dominance of the hills and adjacent structures, riparian vegetation of San Luis Obispo Creek, and farmlands. This change is classified as negligible. Therefore, the vividness, intactness, and unity ratings remain the same as in the existing condition (refer to Figure 5, Simulation). As with KVA 1-1, some drivers may consider that the positive aspects of a bicycle trail will offset any minor alterations to the landscape. In this case, the addition of the fence is also consistent with the adjacent agricultural landscape. The resulting value for the proposed condition remains at 4.33. There is no change in scenic values for this location.

KVA 1-3 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 1-3.

Table 4. KVA 1-3 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | Value |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Existing | 4.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.33 |
| Proposed | 4.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.33 |
| Visual Quality Difference | | | | 0.0 |

Existing View Rating for KVA 1-3

This view looks north from the South Higuera frontage road. US 101 is visible to the left. The most significant feature in this view is the edge of the Ontario Hills somewhat marred by the cut for US 101. In addition, the power lines, signage, and repaired pavement pattern provide additional distraction to the overall vividness of the scene. Similarly, the intactness and unity factors are reduced in this scene when compared to the previous views (refer to Figure 6, Existing Conditions). This KVA receives a 3.33 rating.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 1-3

While there will be additional paving visible to northbound travelers on South Higuera, the change will be minimal and in two dimensions with the exception of the rail fence. There is no change in visual quality. This KVA also receives a 3.33 rating.

6.2.2 Segment 2

This segment is similar to Segment 1, with the bicycle trail located east of South Higuera, past the intersection of this street with US 101, and then terminating just beyond the crossing of San Luis Obispo Creek to the east side of that channel. The impacts are similar to those identified in Segment 1, except for the potential changes at the proposed bridge crossing. This location was chosen as KVA 2-1.

KVA 2-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 2-1.

Table 5. KVA 2-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | Average |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Existing | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.67 |
| Proposed | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.67 |
| Visual Quality Difference | | | | 0.0 |

Existing View Rating for KVA 2-1

The vividness of this view is rated as moderately high given the convergence of the Ontario Hills adjacent to the valley created by San Luis Obispo Creek. The intactness is also moderately high since the landscape is relatively free of non-typical encroaching elements. The only exception is US 101 itself, which also affects the unity of the scene. The concluding value is 4.67.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 2-1

The additional paving will not be visible from US 101 given its topography and/or separation from South Higuera by San Luis Obispo Creek. While there is potential for the bridge crossing of San Luis Obispo Creek to be visible, primarily through the removal of vegetation at the crossing, the concern in this scene is that the removal of the vegetation to allow the bicycle to cross San Luis Obispo Creek might create loss of scenic character. The actual bicycle path will not be visible in this view. As demonstrated by the simulation of Figure 7, the loss of vegetation, while visible when compared to the existing situation, will not create any loss of vividness, intactness, or unity. Therefore, the values for these items remain the same as in the existing condition at 4.33. There is no change in visual quality.

6.2.3 Segment 3

This segment encompasses the portion of the trail which runs parallel to Monte Road and is entirely east of San Luis Obispo Creek. The trail is not visible to travelers on either US 101 or Ontario Road. KVA 3-1 demonstrates the characteristic visual changes in this segment.

KVA 3-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 3-1.

Table 6. KVA 3-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | V+I+U/3 |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Existing | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.33 |
| Proposed | 5.0 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4.00 |
| Visual Quality Difference | | | | <0.33> |

Existing View Rating for KVA 3-1

This view looks north along Monte Road. Orchards are visible to the left in the San Luis Obispo Creek flood zone. The most significant feature in this view is the edge of the Ontario Hills, with oak woodlands to the right and the orchards to the left. Vividness is rated moderately high. In regards to intactness and unity, the only slightly distracting feature is the power line (refer to Figure 8, Existing Conditions). This KVA receives a 4.33 rating.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 3-1

The project will introduce the bicycle trail and orchard fencing shown in the simulation of Figure 8. While the construction disturbance will vary between 16 and 20 feet in width, after the vegetation grows in per the landscaping plan, the only visible additional pavement will be eight feet in width with two feet of base on each side, and separated from Monte Road by some 10 to 15 feet depending on location. This location is not visible from US 101. These grading and paving changes are essentially at ground level based upon the submitted design since the fence will be seen in the context of the adjacent orchard. The introduction of the bicycle trail will create a minimal loss of both intactness and visual unity. This loss is greater than in previous KVAs because the viewer is will see more of the trail as a result of the higher viewing location along Monte Road. The result is a value of 4.0. The scenic value decreases by 0.33.

6.2.4 Segment 4

This segment is very short compared with the adjacent segments and addresses the transition of the bicycle trail west from the Monte Road corridor to the San Luis Bay Drive interchange with US 101. The primary potential for impacts is the bridge crossing of San Luis Obispo Creek, which is addressed by KVA 4-1.

KVA 4-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 4-1.

Table 7. KVA 4-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | V+I+U/3 |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Existing | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4.0 | 3.66 |
| Proposed | 3.5 | 3.0 | 3.5 | 3.33 |
| Visual Quality Difference | | | | <0.33> |

Existing View Rating for KVA 4-1

This view from the eastbound San Luis Bay Drive (east of US 101) looks generally in the direction of Squire Canyon. The primary elements of this scene are the immediate vegetation adjacent to San Luis Obispo Creek (bridge is visible in middle ground and the oak woodland is visible on the distant hills) (refer to Figure 9, Existing Conditions). The vividness is less than in the previous views. The intactness is also moderate given the highway signs and housing visible in the Squire Canyon area. The unity of the scene is also moderate resulting in an overall rating of 3.66.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 4-1

The construction of a bridge parallel to the existing San Luis Bay Drive Bridge will be the most visible component for eastbound travelers along the San Luis Bay Drive because of the trimming and/or removal of an approximately 50-foot-wide strip of willow and related riparian vegetation adjacent to the existing road bridge (refer to Figure 9, Simulation). Motorists on the other three legs of the intersection will have only glimpsed views of the change, given that their primary cones of vision are either away from or parallel to the visual change under discussion. The loss of vegetation will affect scenic values more than the visibility of the bridge structure itself. The change will not silhouette nor affect the existing dominance of the hills and riparian vegetation of San Luis Obispo Creek and farmlands. The vividness of the scene is relatively unchanged, but both the intactness and unity factors are reduced somewhat. The resulting value is 3.33, which is a net reduction of 0.33.

6.2.5 Segment 5

This segment of the bicycle trail would have the greatest visibility from US 101 given its adjacency and the required 550-foot approach ramp and 300 foot long bridge over the freeway. To better identify the potential effects, five KVAs were selected to provide close and medium distance north and southbound views, and a more distant southbound view since there is a longer approach to the bridge from this direction. Further, the analysis includes several design and color alternatives to better identify the alternative which best reduces potential visual impacts. The intent was to simulate these alternatives to determine whether a truss bridge design, as compared to the more standard concrete deck usually associated with highways, would reduce visual impact when using the criteria of vividness, intactness, and unity. Further the simulations compared a gray-green colored truss structure compared to a “natural rusty-brown” color.

The concrete deck bridge alternatives illustrate a three foot deep support structure, three feet of solid railing with a treated surface, and an additional chain link fencing or tubular steel rail rendered in a natural gray color. The basic unadorned design is identified as Alternative A and has the total rail fence height of 14.5 feet. Alternative B seeks to improve the visual appearance by adding texture to the visible sides of the main girders and replaces the arches and chain link protective fencing with nine foot pickets. The visual effect of either alternative is a solid mass six feet high surmounted by the 5.5 foot gray railing. The steel truss design (Alternatives C/D) incorporates a bottom chord/deck structure just over three feet in height surmounted by curved arc truss varying from 5.5 feet to 13.5 feet in height with a protective eight foot high screen. The steel truss painted in a neutral gray-green is designated as Alternative C. The same steel truss bridge design in a natural steel dark rust-brown color is designated as Alternative D. These four alternatives have been identified by Questa Engineering as part of the preliminary project description and design process.

After review of the simulations, it is apparent for the purposes of this analysis that there is not enough visual difference to make a distinction between Alternatives A and B in so far as they affect the vividness, intactness, or unity of the visual landscape as seen from several of the KVAs. These two alternatives are therefore combined in Tables 8, 9 and 10.

In addition to the US 101 bridge structure, the bridge approach ramps have the potential to affect the visual quality of the scene. While much less visible than the main structure, simulations have been made of the 550 foot long east approach ramp as seen from KVA 5-2 where it is most visible and of the west ramp retaining wall as seen from KVA 5-4 where it is visible. The potential impacts of these ramps are shown in the respective tables for the KVAs and analyzed in Section 7.

KVA 5-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project, including alternatives, for KVA 5-1.

Table 8. KVA 5-1 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | V.I.U. |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Existing | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.67 |
| Proposed – 5-1A/B | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.67 |
| Proposed – 5-1C | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.0 | 4.67 |
| Proposed – 5-1D | 5.0 | 5.0 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-1A/B (Concrete bridge Alternative) | | | | 0.0 |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-1C (Gray-green steel truss Alternative) | | | | 0.0 |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-1D (Rust colored steel truss Alternative) | | | | <0.17> |

Existing View Rating for KVA 5-1

The area’s visual quality is moderately high. The Irish Hills form the dominant feature in this scene and have a high scenic vividness, but this rating is reduced somewhat given the co-dominance of the freeway and the glimpsed visibility of various structures in the Squire Canyon and Avila Estates areas (refer to Figure 10a, Existing Conditions). Similarly, the intactness of the scene is relatively high, but it is somewhat diminished by the aforementioned man-made structures. The unity is reduced by the dominance of the freeway. This KVA receives a 4.67 view rating.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 5-1

Unlike previous segments, the changes required by the introduction of the bicycle trail/pathway are of a more visible and three dimensional nature in this Segment (refer to Figures 10a and 10b, Simulations). The major change will be the 300 foot long overpass just east of the Salisbury Winery. In this view, which is taken at the entrance ramp from San Luis Bay Drive approximately 2,100 feet north of the proposed bicycle bridge, the bridge structure is located within the context of the US 101 near the lowest point of the freeway. As such, it does not significantly impact any of the scenic characteristics affecting the views of the southbound traveler, and is given the same view rating as the existing view, a rating of 4.67

Note that all four Alternatives are simulated in Figures 10a and 10b. Alternative A shows the concrete span and Alternative B is shown as an inset (refer to Figure 10a). Alternative C is the gray-green painted steel truss and Alternative D the natural rusted red-brown of an unfinished steel truss (refer to Figure

10b). Of these alternatives, Alternative D has the most potential to be visible since its darker color contrasts somewhat more against the backdrop of the highway gray and the lighter gray/tan of the cut of the Ontario Ridge at Avila Beach Drive.

As shown in Table 8 for KVA 5-1, the first three alternatives do not significantly affect the visual quality of the scene. Alternative D does diminish the visual quality slightly because of the color, and this attribute is above the level of significance for this KVA.

KVA 5-2 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 5-2.

Table 9. KVA 5-2 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | Average |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Existing | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.5 | 4.83 |
| Proposed – 5-2A/B | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.00 |
| Proposed – 5-2C | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.00 |
| Proposed – 5-2D | 4.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 3.67 |
| Proposed East Ramp | 5.0 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.67 |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-2A/B (Concrete bridge Alternative) | | | | <0.83> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-2C (Gray-green steel truss Alternative) | | | | <0.83> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-2D (Rust colored steel truss Alternative) | | | | <1.16> |
| Visual Quality Difference – east approach ramp | | | | <0.16> |

Existing View Rating for KVA 5-2

This KVA is located approximately 1,000 feet north of the proposed bicycle bridge. As with KVA 5-1 above, the visual quality is rated moderately high for both vividness and intactness. The Irish Hills, which frame the Avila Valley on both sides of San Luis Obispo Creek, are still the dominant visual element (refer to Figure 11a). The unity factor is also the same when compared to KVA 5-1, since the US 101 freeway components remain similar.

Proposed View Rating for KVA 5-2

The 300 foot long overpass just east of the Salisbury Winery will be clearly visible. The 550 foot ramp up to the bridge, visible to the left of US 101, will be glimpsed. However, for the most part, the ramp is screened by existing vegetation which is shown to be retained in the preliminary design. While these structures will not silhouette above the backdrop hills from the north at this distance (refer to Figures 11b and 11c), their construction will definitely be a significant new visual element for southbound travelers. This new element will be the major vertical man-made element visible for approximately 10 to 12 seconds after traveling under the existing San Luis Bay Drive Bridge. The bridge will ultimately silhouette for approximately two seconds before the traveler passes under the structure (refer to

simulations for KVA 5-3, Figures 12b and 12c). The balance of the at-grade portion of the bicycle trail will not be visible from US 101 since it is completely screened by existing vegetation that is parallel to the highway.

With the introduction of the bridge structure, all three evaluation factors, the vividness of the natural scene, the intactness, and the unity components, must be reduced as the result of the proposed project. Both Alternatives A/B (concrete structure) and C (gray-green steel truss) result in visual quality reductions of 0.83 points. Alternative D (rust colored steel truss), as with KVA 5-1 above, has a slightly higher impact given its contrast with the muted greens of the hills and the gray of US 101, for loss of 1.16 points.

The eastern approach ramp while somewhat visible in the simulations is more fully developed in the simulation of Figure 21. The County design team has proposed a low impact truss and some additional landscape mitigation. As seen in Table 2.8, this ramp, given its distance from US 101, does not generate an impact above the level of significance. However, it is still a contributing factor the impacts as seen from this KVA. A landscaping mitigation measure is included in this report to insure further reduction of visual impacts.

KVA 5-3 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 5-3.

Table 10. KVA 5-3 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | V-I-U/3 |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Existing | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.0 | 4.33 |
| Proposed – 5-3A | 3.5 | 2.75 | 2.25 | 2.83 |
| Proposed – 5-3B | 3.5 | 3.25 | 2.5 | 3.08 |
| Proposed – 5-3C | 3.75 | 3.5 | 2.5 | 3.25 |
| Proposed – 5-3D | 3.5 | 2.75 | 2.25 | 2.83 |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-3A (Basic Concrete bridge Alternative) | | | | <1.5> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-3B (Enhanced Concrete bridge Alternative) | | | | <1.25> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-3C (Gray-green steel truss Alternative) | | | | <1.08> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-3D (Rust colored steel truss Alternative) | | | | <1.25> |

Existing View Rating for KVA 5-3

This KVA is located approximately 400 feet north of the proposed bicycle overpass. Area visual quality is moderate given the somewhat greater predominance of the highway roadway which is now broadly visible curving up into the background hills and the guard rail structures and freeway sign compared to the previous KVAs. The hills framing the Avila Valley on both sides of San Luis Obispo Creek while

forming the skyline are now considered co-dominant with the highway (refer to Figure 12a, Existing Conditions).

Proposed View Rating for KVA 5-3

The 300 foot bridge structure is shown in the simulations of Figures 12a and 12b. While the structure will not silhouette above the backdrop hills from this location, the bicycle overpass will add a major new component to the view of the southbound traveler as seen in the simulations. Neither the bicycle trail nor the approach ramps to the bridge will be significantly visible from this view. As with KVA-2, the new bridge structure will be the major vertical man-made element visible for approximately 30 seconds after passing under the existing San Luis Bay Drive bridge and the bridge will ultimately silhouette for about two seconds before the traveler passes under the structure; by this time, the cone of vision of vehicle occupants will be focused beyond the bridge or cut off by the roof of the vehicle.

From this KVA, the bridge structure does significantly reduce the overall vividness of the scene, and it reduces both the intactness and the unity. The various design Alternatives have somewhat different levels of impact, with Alternative A and D having the greatest impact. This is true given the slightly higher solidity of the concrete girder and especially the higher fence (Alternative A), and of the greater visibility of the naturally rusted steel (Alternative D). Therefore, Alternative C becomes the superior alternative with a corresponding loss of visual quality of 1.08 as shown on Table 10. Values over 1.0 are considered significant in this analysis.

KVA 5-4 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 5-4.

Table 11. KVA 5-4 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | V(I)U/S |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Existing | 3.67 | 3.5 | 3.33 | 3.5 |
| Proposed – 5-4A | 2.67 | 2.33 | 2.25 | 2.42 |
| Proposed – 5-4B | 2.67 | 2.50 | 2.33 | 2.5 |
| Proposed – 5-4C | 2.67 | 2.5 | 2.33 | 2.5 |
| Proposed – 5-4D | 2.25 | 2.25 | 2.25 | 2.25 |
| Proposed west ramp | 3.67 | 3.33 | 3.0 | 3.33 |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-4A (Basic Concrete bridge alternative) | | | | <1.08> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-4B (Enhanced Concrete bridge Alternative) | | | | <1.0> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-4C (Gray-green steel truss Alternative) | | | | <1.0> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-4D (Rust-colored steel truss Alternative) | | | | <1.25> |
| Visual Quality Difference – west ramp | | | | <0.17> |

Existing View Rating for KVA 5-4

This KVA is located approximately 300 feet south of the proposed bicycle overpass. Area visual quality is moderate given the great predominance of the highway, the reduction in the predominance of the Irish Hills when compared to previous KVAs, and the visibility of structures to the west (residences adjacent to Avila Valley Estates, and the Salisbury Winery) (refer to Figure 13a, Existing Conditions). The backdrop hills framing the Avila Valley while forming the skyline are less dominant and on the right are replaced by small scale trees and bushes (refer to Figure 16a, Existing Conditions).

Proposed View Rating for KVA 5-4

The alternative 300 foot bridge structures are shown in the simulations of Figures 13b and 13c. In all cases, the structure silhouettes above the backdrop hills from this location, and the bicycle overpass will add a new and significant visual component to the view of the northbound traveler. The somewhat simpler, and therefore less intrusive, characteristics of the flat bridge are equaled by the less massive, more open structure of the gray-green truss. Alternative D in this case is the most visually intrusive (refer to Figure 13c). Neither the bicycle trail nor the eastern approach ramp to the bridge will be visible from this view. As with KVA-5-3, the new bridge structure will be the major vertical man-made element silhouetting for approximately six seconds before the traveler passes under the structure.

The bridge structure will significantly reduce the overall natural vividness of the scene and it will degrade both the intactness and the unity components. Again the alternative designs have somewhat different levels of impact, with Alternative D creating the most impact given the slightly higher visibility of the naturally rusted steel, followed by the concrete deck bridge (Alternative A) and then the enhanced concrete girder bridge and the painted gray-green steel truss of Alternative C. The corresponding values in loss of visual quality are shown on Table 11 and range from a negative 1.25 for the natural steel truss to a negative 1.0 for the gray-green steel truss and the concrete deck bridge. All alternatives are considered significant in this analysis.

The approach ramp retaining wall on the west as seen from KVA 5-4 is shown in Figure 16. The simulation flagstone texture is shown on the vertical surface as proposed by the County design team. While there is little negative impact to the immediate visual quality of the area (refer to Table 11), this project component does slightly degrade the area in which there are already negative impacts. The mitigation measure of additional planting along the wall and ramp corridor will help reduce this potential impact.

KVA 5-5 Visual Quality Evaluation

The following table depicts the difference in visual quality between the existing and proposed project for KVA 5-5.

Table 12. KVA 5-5 Visual Quality Evaluation

| | Vividness (V) | Intactness (I) | Unity (U) | Avg (V+I+U)/3 |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Existing | 4.0 | 4.0 | 3.0 | 3.67 |
| Proposed – 5-5A/B | 4.0 | 3.0 | 2.5 | 3.17 |
| Proposed – 5-5C | 4.0 | 3.5 | 2.5 | 3.33 |
| Proposed – 5-5D | 4.0 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 3.00 |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-5A/B (Concrete bridge Alternative) | | | | <0.50> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-5C (Gray-green steel truss Alternative) | | | | <0.34> |
| Visual Quality Difference – 5-5D (Rust colored steel truss Alternative) | | | | <0.67> |

Existing View Rating for KVA 5-5

This KVA is located approximately 1,000 feet south of the proposed pathway overpass. Area visual quality is moderate given the great predominance of the highway structures, the reduction in the predominance of the Irish Hills ridgeline seen in previous KVAs, and the visibility of structures to the west (residences adjacent to Avila Valley Estates, the Salisbury Winery and the PG&E building). The hills framing the Avila Valley on both sides of San Luis Obispo Creek, while forming the skyline, are now considered co-dominant with the US 101 bridge structures and adjacent buildings (refer to Figure 14a).

Proposed View Rating for KVA 5-5

The 300 foot bridge structure is shown in the simulations of Figures 14b through 14c. While the structure will not silhouette above the backdrop hills from this location, the bicycle overpass will add a new component to the view of the northbound traveler. Neither the bicycle trail nor the eastern approach ramp to the bridge will be visible from this view. As with previous KVAs in Segment 5, the new bridge structure will be the major vertical man-made element visible for approximately 10 to 12 seconds and the bridge will ultimately silhouette for approximately two seconds before the traveler passes under the structure. By this time, the cone of vision of vehicle occupants will be focused beyond the bridge or cut off by the roof of the vehicle.

While the bridge structure does not significantly reduce the overall vividness of the scene, it will degrade somewhat both the intactness and the unity. The various design alternatives have somewhat different levels of impact, with Alternative D having the greatest impact, given the slightly higher visibility of the naturally rusted steel, followed by the concrete deck girders of Alternatives A/B, which has somewhat greater visibility than the painted gray steel truss of Alternative C. The corresponding values in loss of visual quality are shown on Table 12 and range from a negative 0.67 for the natural red-brown steel truss to a negative 0.34 for the gray-green steel truss.

Figure 4. KVA 1 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations



Existing conditions: South Higuera Street looking southwest.



Simulation of the proposed project – Typical representation of new pathway along South Higuera

Figure 5. KVA 1-2 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations



Existing conditions: South Higuera looking southwest toward existing bridge and US 101N on-ramp.



Simulation of the proposed project.

Figure 6. KVA 1-3 - Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations



Existing conditions: South Higuera looking northeast toward existing bridge and US 101N on-ramp.

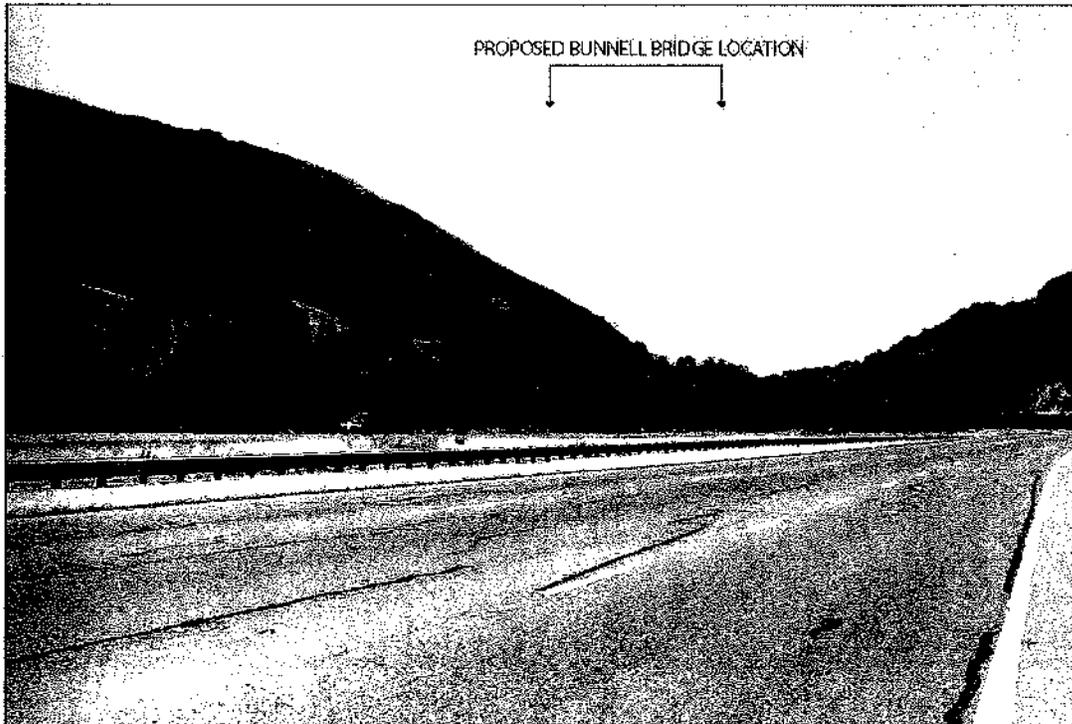


Simulation of the proposed project.

Figure 7. KVA 2-1 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations



Existing conditions: US 101S looking south toward proposed Bunnell Bridge.



Simulation of the proposed project.

Figure 8. KVA 3-1 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations



Existing conditions: Monte Road looking north.



Simulation of the proposed project – Typical representation of new bike trail along Monte Road.

Figure 9. KVA 4-1 - Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations



Existing conditions: San Luis Bay Drive at the US101N off-ramp looking east toward Monte Road.

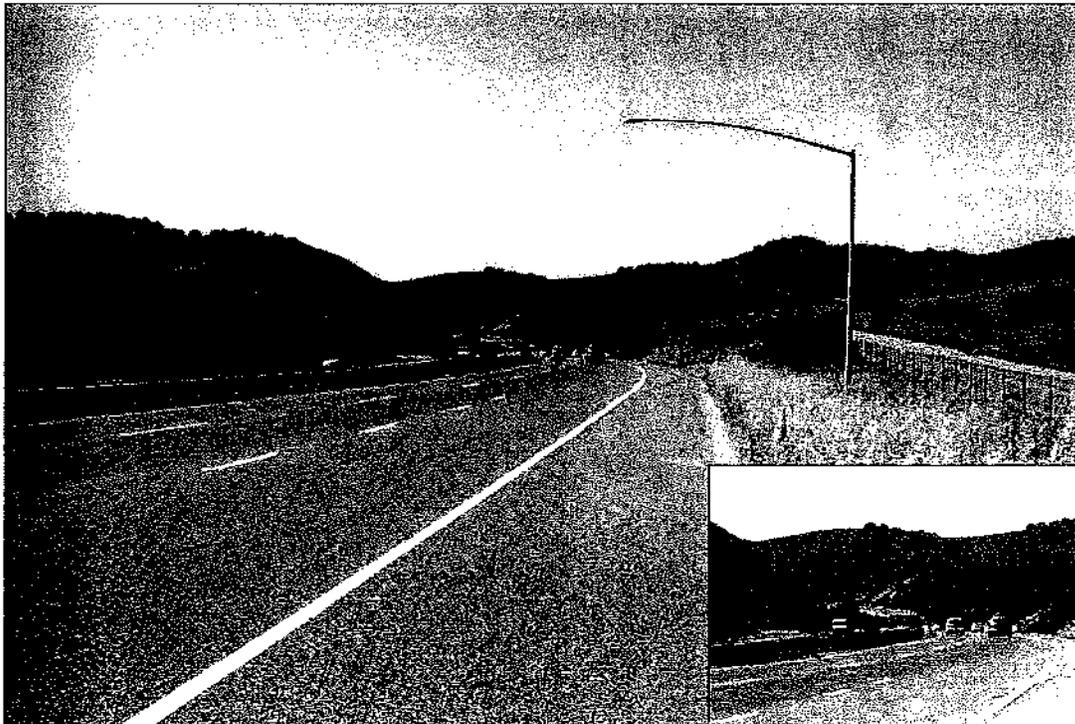


Simulation of the proposed project.

**Figure 10a. KVA 5-1 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations
(Concrete Bridge Design Alternatives)**

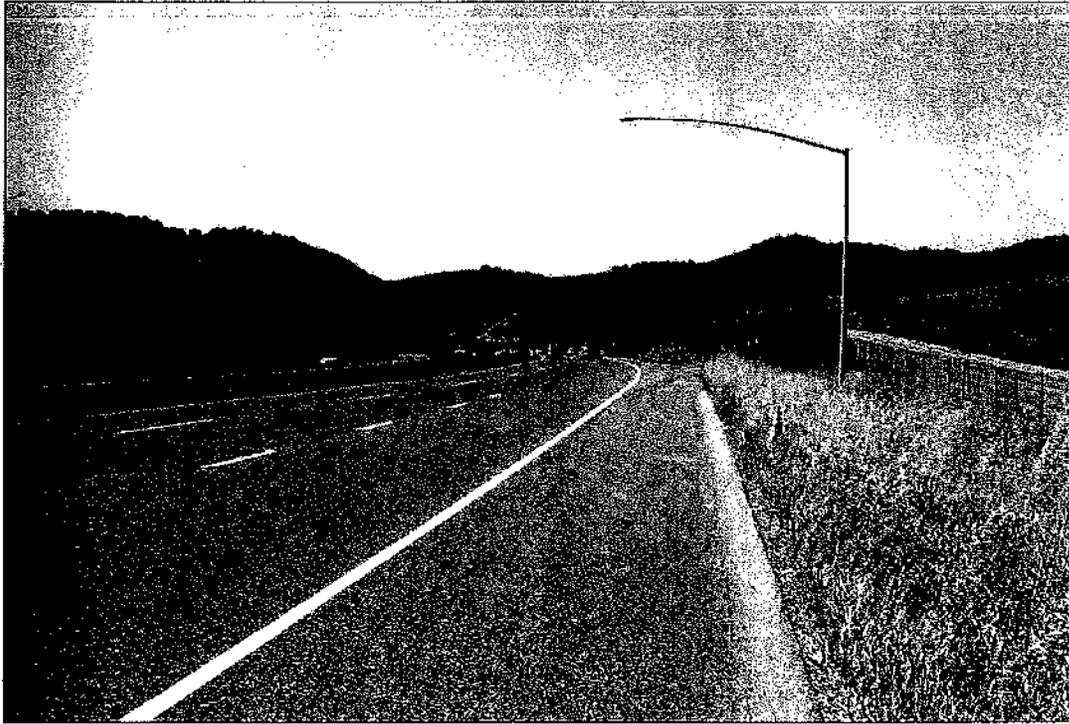


Existing conditions: US 101S at San Luis Bay Drive on-ramp looking south.

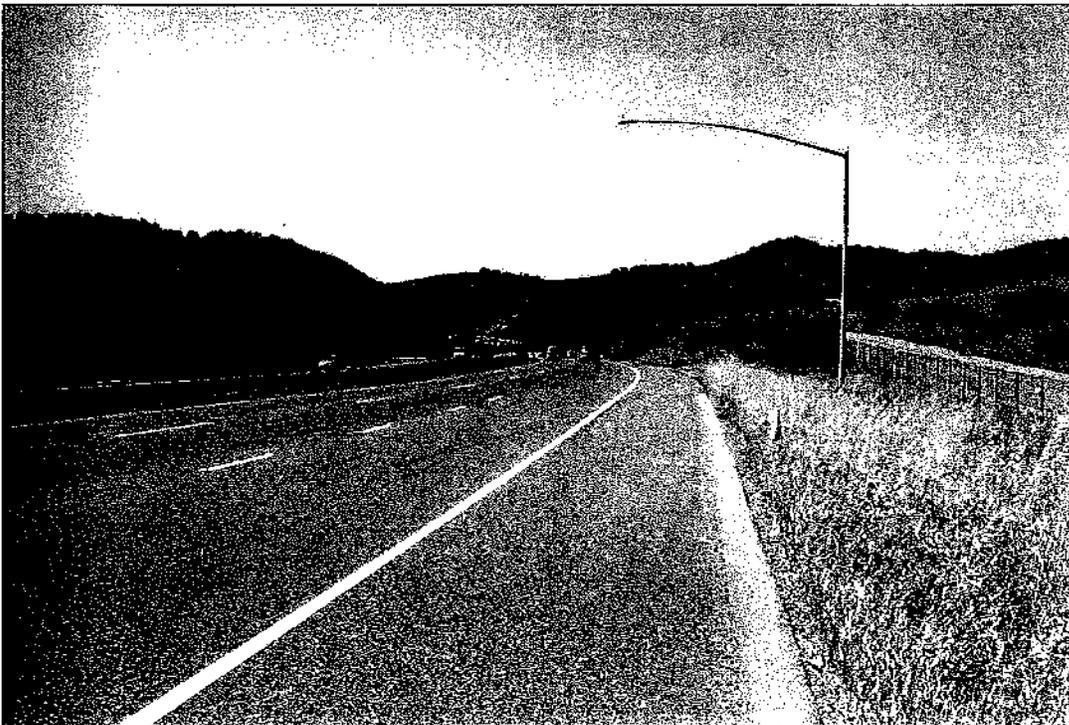


*Simulation of the proposed project - Basic Concrete Bridge Design Alternative A
(Refined Concrete Bridge Design Alternative B inset).*

**Figure 10. KVA 5-2 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations
(Truss Bridge Alternatives)**

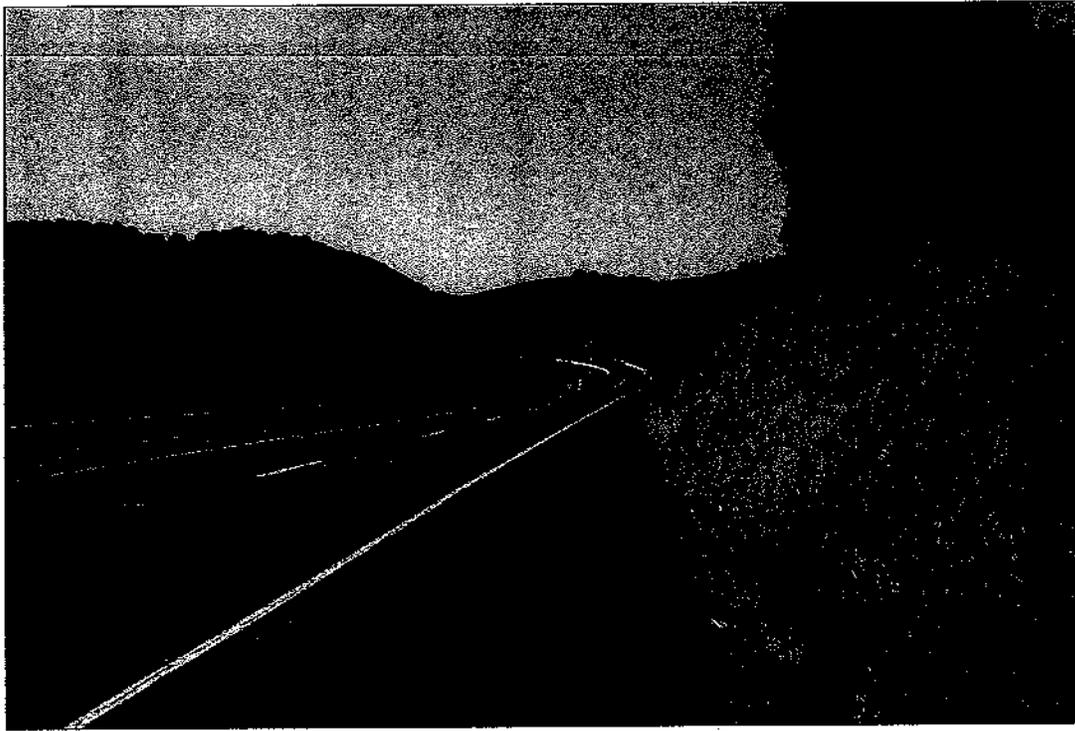


Simulation of the proposed project - Gray-green Metal Truss Bridge Alternative C.



Simulation of the proposed project - Red-brown Steel Truss Bridge Alternative D.

Figure 11a. KVA 5-2 - Existing Conditions

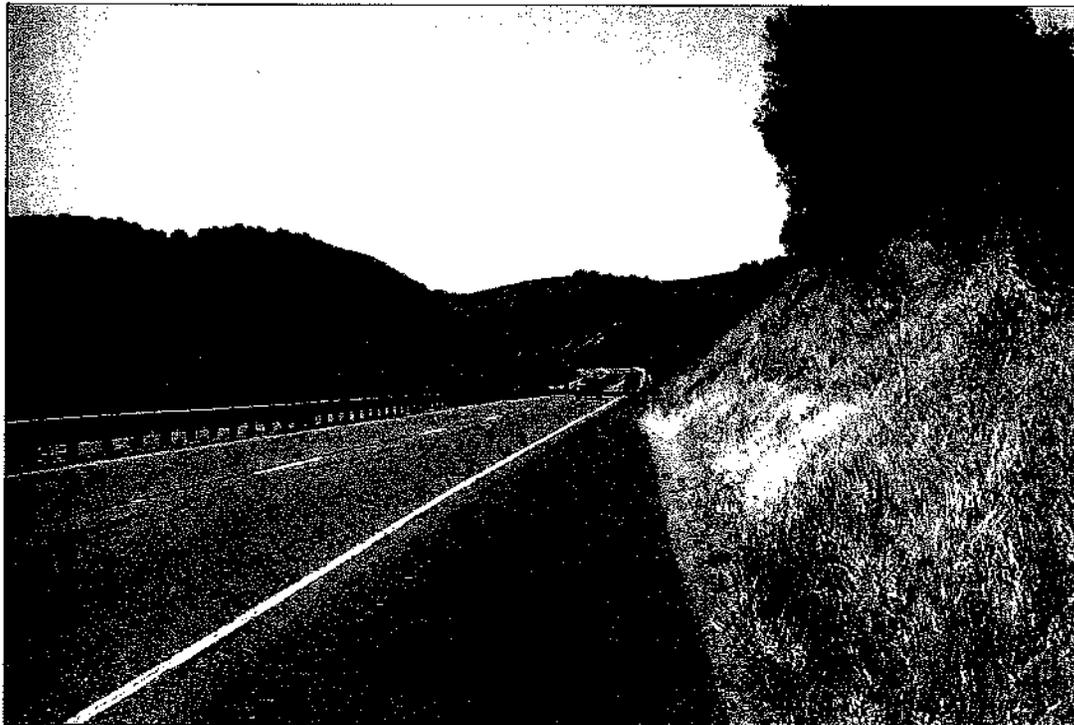


Existing conditions: US 101S looking south approximately 1200 feet from proposed bridge crossing.

**Figure 11b. KVA 5-2 –Proposed Project Simulations
(Concrete Bridge Design Alternatives)**

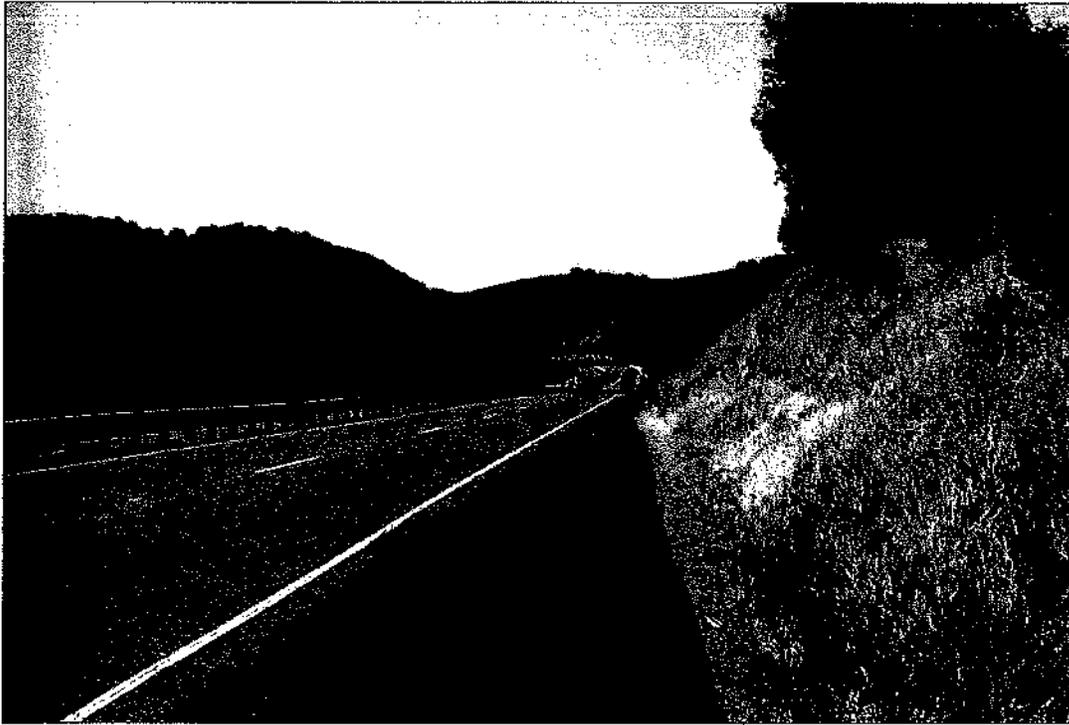


Simulation of the proposed project - Basic Concrete Bridge Design Alternative A.



Simulation of the proposed project - Refined Concrete Bridge Design Alternative B.

**Figure 11c. KVA 5-2 –Proposed Project Simulations
(Truss Bridge Alternatives)**



Simulation of the proposed project - Gray-green Steel Truss Bridge Alternative C.



Simulation of the proposed project - Red-brown Steel Truss Bridge Alternative D.

Figure 12a. KVA 5-3 – Existing Conditions

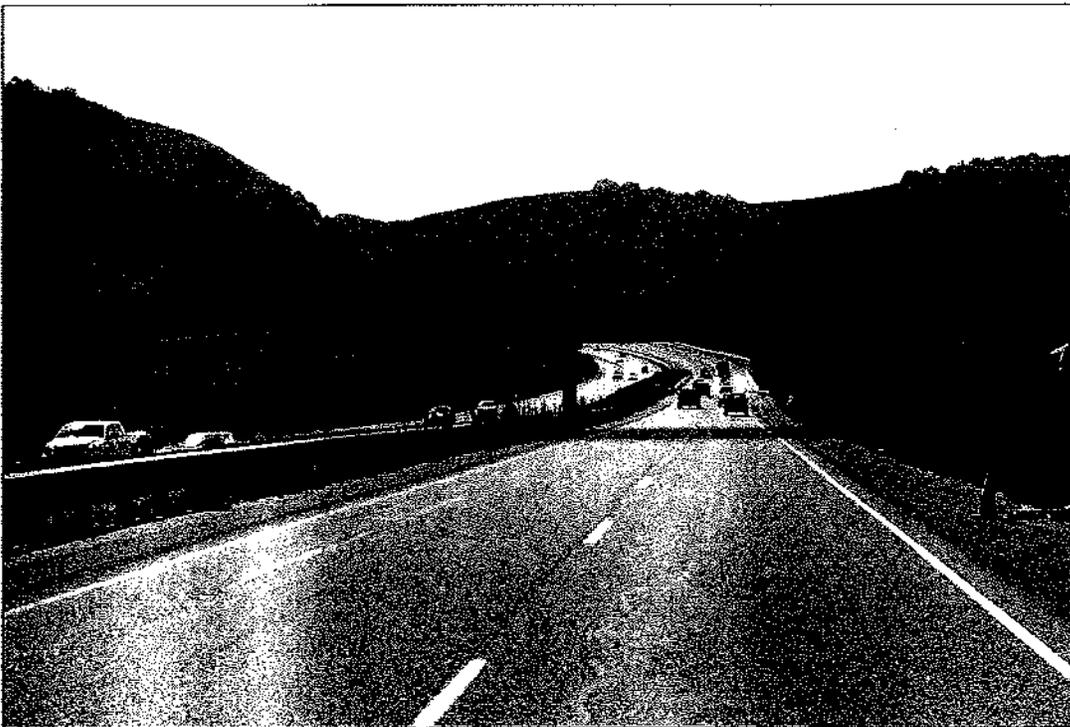


Existing conditions: US 101S looking south approximately 400 feet from proposed bridge crossing.

**Figure 12b. KVA 5-3 –Proposed Project Simulations
(Concrete Bridge Design Alternatives)**



Simulation of the proposed project - Basic Concrete Bridge Design Alternative A.

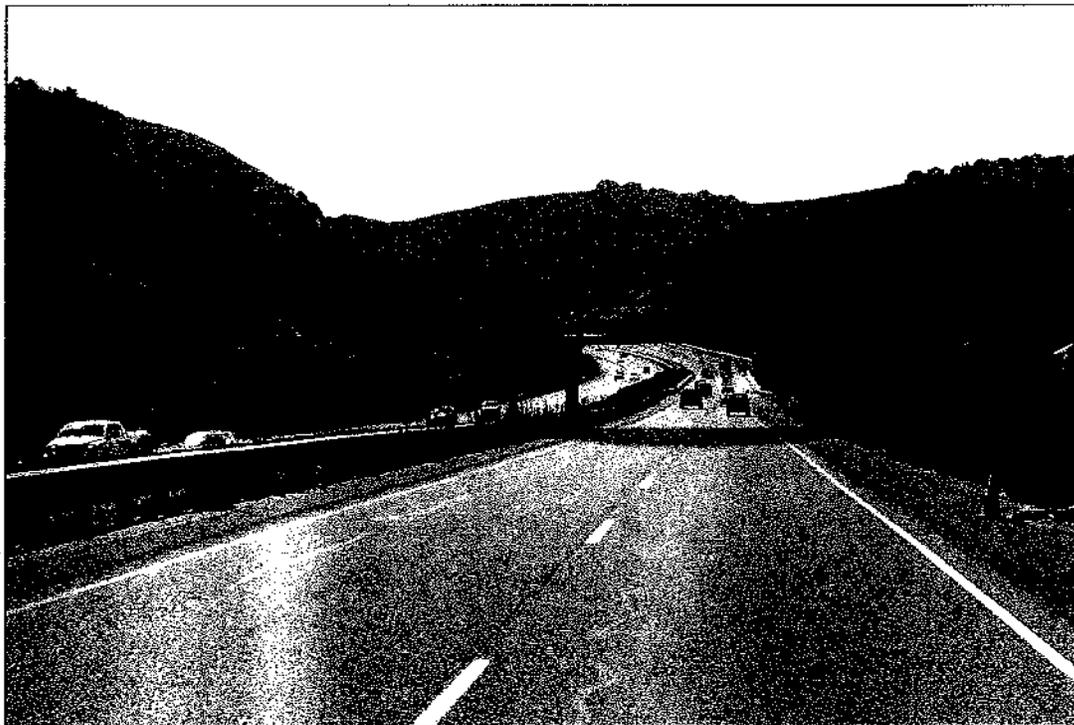


Simulation of the proposed project - Refined Concrete Bridge Design Alternative B.

**Figure 12c. KVA 5-3 –Proposed Project Simulations
(Truss Bridge Alternatives)**



Simulation of the proposed project - Gray-green Metal Truss Bridge Alternative C.



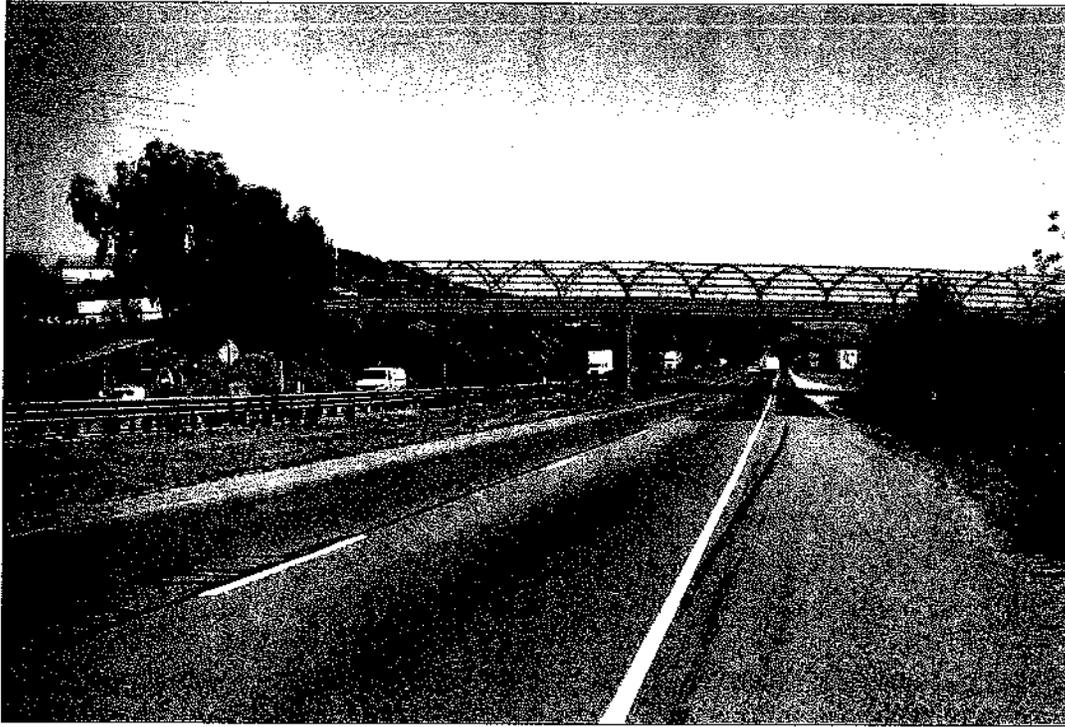
Simulation of the proposed project - Red-brown Steel Truss Bridge Alternative D.

Figure 13a. KVA 5-4 – Existing Conditions

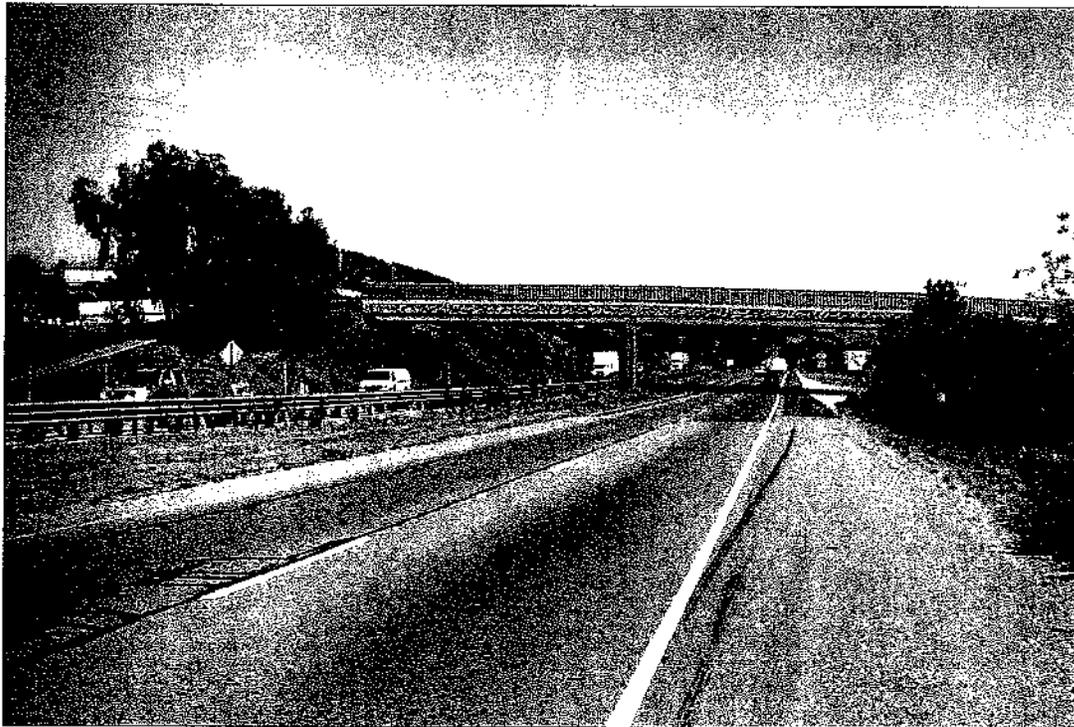


Existing conditions: US 101N looking north approximately 300 feet south of proposed bridge crossing.

Figure 13b. KVA 5-4 – Proposed Project Simulations
(Concrete Bridge Design Alternatives)

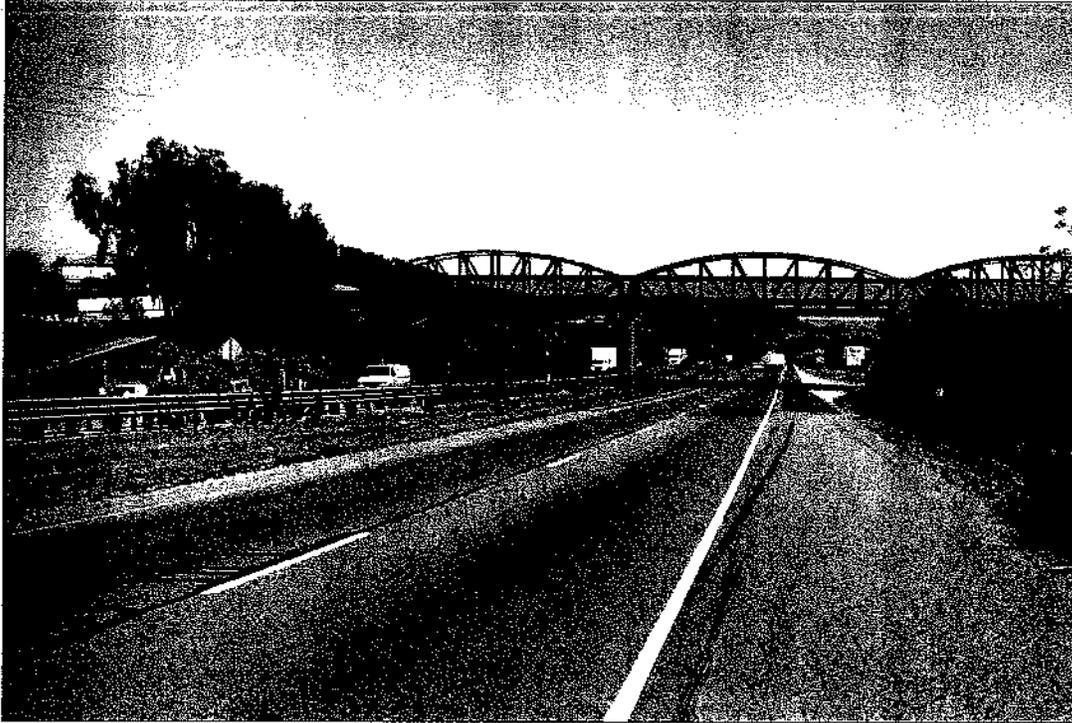


Simulation of the proposed project - Basic Concrete Bridge Design Alternative A.

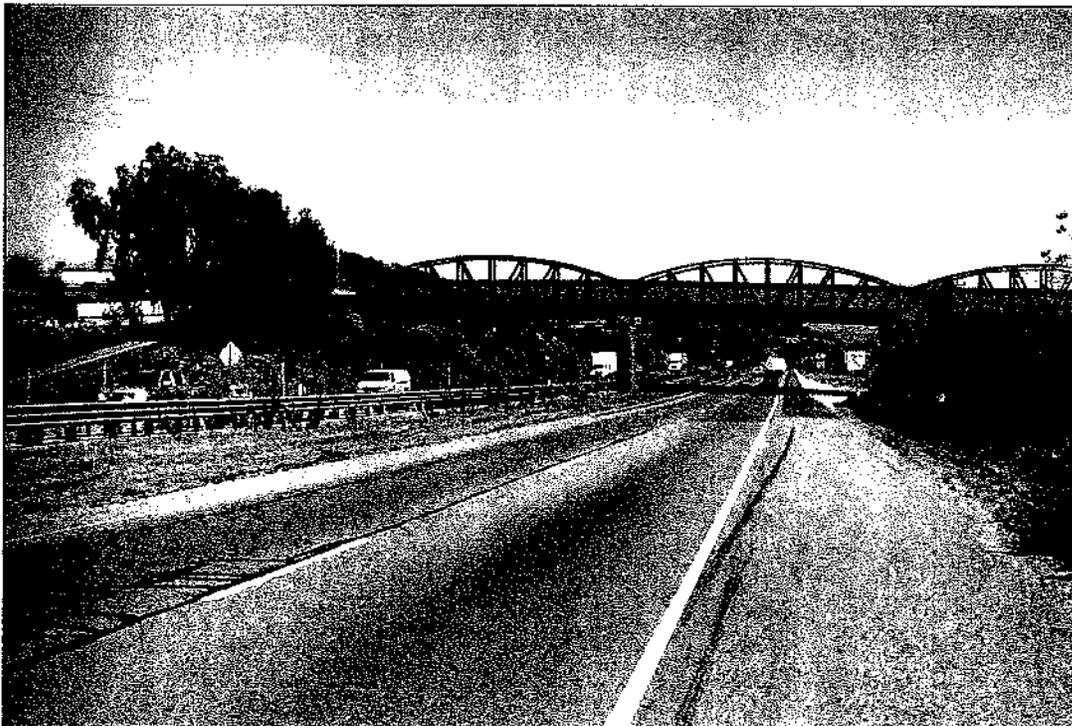


Simulation of the proposed project - Refined Concrete Bridge Design Alternative B.

**Figure 13c. KVA 5-4 – Proposed Project Simulations
(Truss Bridge Alternatives)**



Simulation of the proposed project - Gray-green Steel Truss Bridge Alternative C.



Simulation of the proposed project - Red-brown Steel Truss Bridge Alternative D.

Figure 14a. KVA 5-5 – Existing Conditions

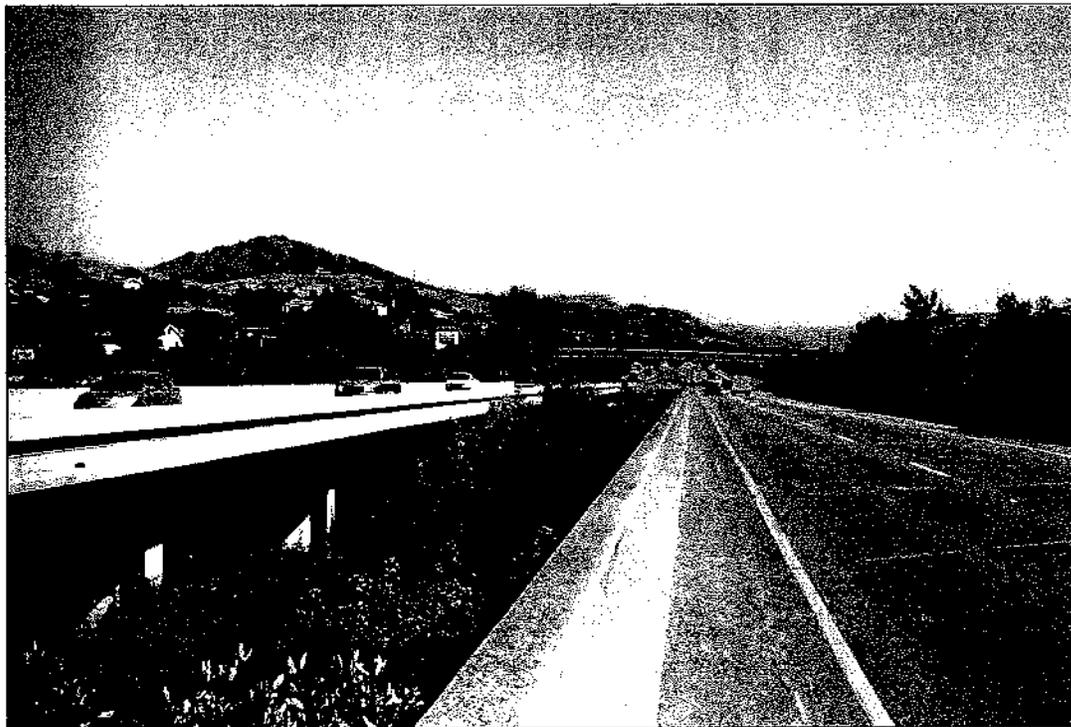


Existing conditions: US 101N looking north toward proposed bridge crossing.

Figure 14b. KVA 5-5 – Proposed Project Simulations
(Concrete Bridge Design Alternatives)



Simulation of the proposed project - Basic Concrete Bridge Design Alternative A.



Simulation of the proposed project - Refined Concrete Bridge Design Alternative B.

Figure 14c. KVA 5-5 - Proposed Project Simulations
(Truss Bridge Alternatives)



Simulation of the proposed project - Gray-green Steel Truss Bridge Alternative C.

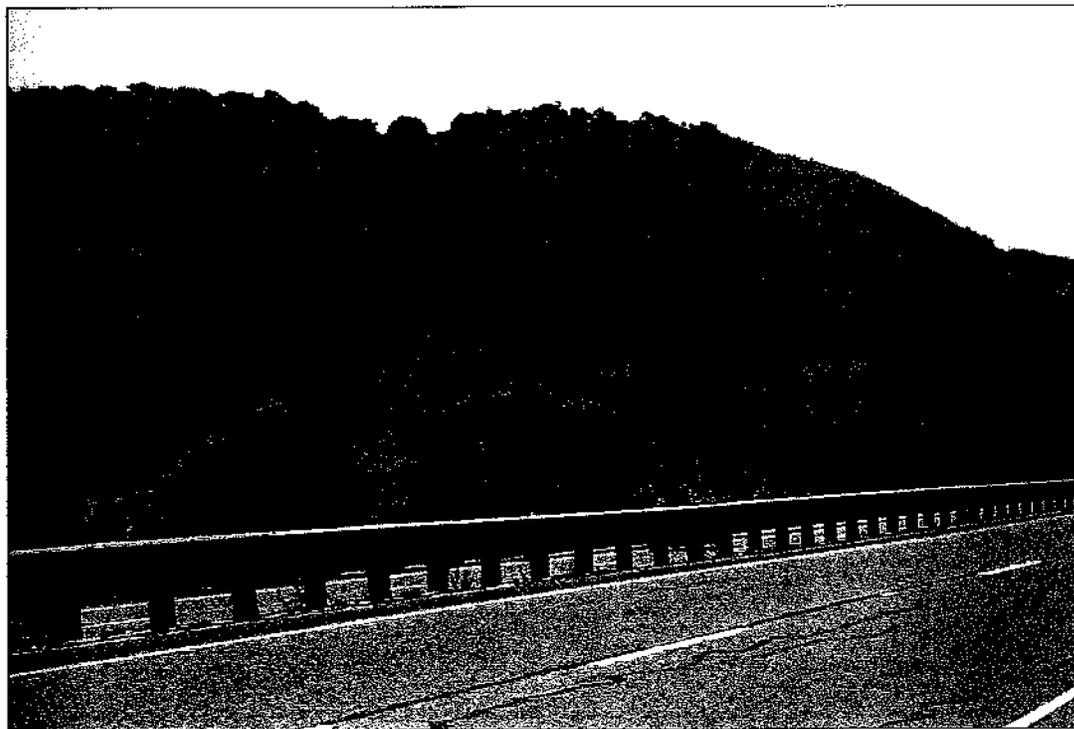


Simulation of the proposed project - Red-brown Steel Truss Bridge Alternative D.

Figure 15. KVA 5-2 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations
(Ramp Simulation without Mitigation)



Existing conditions: US 101S approximately 1200 feet north from proposed bridge crossing zoomed in.

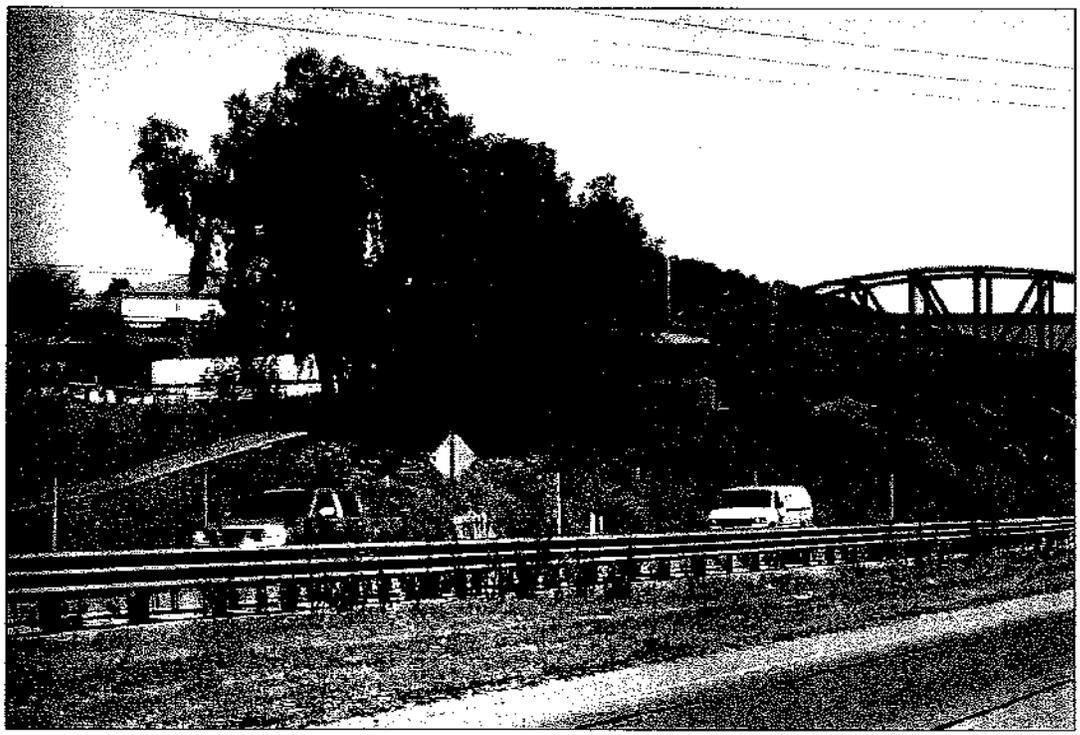


Simulation of the proposed project - Approach ramp with Alternative C design

**Figure 16. KVA 5-5 – Existing Conditions and Proposed Project Simulations
(Retaining Wall Simulation without Mitigation)**



Existing conditions: US 101N approximately 300 feet south of proposed bridge crossing zoomed in.



Simulation of the proposed project - Retaining wall detail

7. PROJECT IMPACTS AND RELATED MITIGATION

To summarize the previous discussion, the existing visual quality of the project area varies from moderate to moderately high depending on the location and direction of the viewer as he/she approaches the various KVAs.

Viewers of the project will have varying sensitivities regarding changes to the visual environment, but are expected to have moderately high expectations given the overall rural character of the area and the generally moderately high scenic qualities created by the hills and vegetation along the 4.4-mile corridor.

Given the relative length and varied qualities of the corridor, the impacts will be reviewed segment by segment, since each segment has differing visual elements

7.1 IMPACT EVALUATION BY SEGMENT

7.1.1 Segment 1: South Higuera, Octagon Barn to US 101N Entry

As reviewed in Section 6, this portion of South Higuera has a moderate visual quality based upon the analysis of vividness, intactness, and unity of the scene. The number of viewers is classified as moderate with 7,300 vehicular trips per day, where moderate is classified as between 1,000 and 10,000 trips per day. The construction of the bicycle trail/pathway, which will be adjacent to South Higuera on the west side, requires additional paving and revegetation that will be visible to travelers on South Higuera. Construction of the trail will also remove cyclists from the shoulders of South Higuera; therefore, while there will be visible changes as identified in the simulations of Figures 4, 5, and 6, they will not negatively affect the visual quality to a level of significance. There is the potential for visual impacts if landscaping is not required on re-graded areas and maintained until it is well established over a period of five years. This impact can be reduced to insignificance by implementing mitigation measure VR/mm-1.

7.1.2 Segment 2: South Higuera to Interchange and US 101 to Trail Crossing at San Luis Obispo Creek

The corridor for this portion of the bicycle trail traverses a more scenic area than Segment 1 and is given a visual quality rating of Moderately High. The number of viewers is classified as moderate for the South Higuera component and high for the US 101 component. Viewer Sensitivity is rated as moderately high.

There are two areas of potential impacts. The first impact relates to the trail running to the east of South Higuera. The potential for the trail to generate impacts is the same as evaluated for Segment 1, since both the construction and the relationship to viewers is the same. The second component with impacts is where the trail must cross San Luis Obispo Creek with a bridge. As can be seen from the simulation in Figure 7, this bridge will not be visible by travelers on US 101 given the location and relative topography. The only potential for visibility will be from the removal of adjacent vegetation. This issue can be mitigated to a level of insignificance by implementing mitigation measure VR/mm-2.

7.1.3 Segment 3: Trail Running Parallel to Monte Road

This section of the trail corridor continues parallel to Monte Road for over 1.5 miles. Segment 3 has a High visual quality rating. However, the number of viewers is classified as very low since only about a dozen residences are served by the component of Monte Road. Their sensitivity will be high however. As demonstrated in Table 6, there will be some loss of visual quality but given the minimal number of viewers, this difference is determined to be less than significant if mitigation measure VR/mm-1 is implemented, ensuring revegetation of the graded shoulders of the trail.

7.1.4 Segment 4: Transition from Monte Road to San Luis Bay Drive Interchange

This relatively short segment has a Moderate visual quality rating, a moderately low number of Viewers (estimated at 3,600) and their expectations will be moderately high, but the time of viewing will be relatively short. The visual quality will be somewhat degraded by the addition of the project. However, this negative difference (see Table 7), relating primarily to the loss of intactness and unity of the scene, is classified as less than significant since the change will be seen in the context of the much wider existing vehicular bridge crossing San Luis Obispo Creek. Also, the application of mitigation measure VR/mm-2 will further make the bicycle bridge more integral to the scene by retaining existing trees, providing for the new bridge to be of a consistent nature with the existing structure and requiring additional tree screening of the proposed creek crossing.

7.1.5 Segment 5: US 101 from San Luis Bay Drive Interchange to Overcrossing

Segment 5 covers the approximately 0.67 miles of the bicycle trail immediately east of US 101, including a 550-foot approach ramp and a 300-foot bridge crossing of the freeway. The number of viewers is high (there are over 68,000 vehicular trips per day). The time of visibility will typically be around 15 to 20 seconds in either direction which is classified as moderate. The viewer sensitivity is rated as moderate to moderately high. As seen on Tables 8 through 12, there will be a varying level of negative impacts on the visual quality once the project is constructed. While the potential for the project to silhouette is low, except when the vehicle is within a few hundred feet of the overpass and is about to pass underneath it, the bicycle overpass will definitely introduce a new visual element into this stretch of the highway (refer to Figures 11 through 14, Simulations). These figures also simulate various design options including a natural concrete span, a gray painted steel truss, and an unfinished "rusted" finish on a steel truss.

Four components of the project have the potential to generate visual impacts. The most visible is the overpass itself. Since there is no reasonable way to screen the structure, the bridge at this location will generate a significant visual impact given the loss of visual quality, the number of viewers, and the viewer sensitivities.

One potential way of reducing visual impacts is to remove an equivalent amount of visual clutter from the US 101 corridor in the nearby vicinity. This approach has been utilized in the past on the Central Coast for projects which are not capable of direct mitigation. In this case the mitigation should occur within four to five miles in either direction along US 101 from the structure generating the impact. For the typical driver, the increased impact of the bridge structure would be decreased or offset by a reduction in visual impacts within four to five minutes of travel time along this corridor. This mitigation approach is defined in mitigation measure VR/mm-3.

Further, when comparing the four project alternative designs (flat concrete deck spans as Alternatives A and B, the open curved top truss painted a neutral gray-green as Alternative C, and the open curved top truss left in a "natural" rusted steel color as Alternative D), there is an opportunity to select a bridge design which will be less intrusive to the visual environment by evaluating the project within the context of the following general criteria:

1. The colors selected shall be most compatible with the surrounding countryside against which the structure will be viewed. The greatest proportion of the viewing time by the traveler will see the bridge against the generally gray green of the surrounding hills and briefly when immediately passing under the structure the various gray and blues of the sky.
2. The bridge form shall be designed to reduce the visual mass and potential obscuring of the backdrop hills.

A review of the various simulations indicates that the open truss in gray-green (Alternative C) is generally the least intrusive alternative. This is for two reasons; first the open truss structure gives a lighter and more open appearance than the flat concrete deck span and therefore is somewhat less degrading to the visual criteria (refer to Tables 8 through 12). Further, some travelers will be more likely to identify the more open truss structure with bicyclists since they will be more visible and therefore generating a less intrusive activity than if the structure were more like the typical highway overpass related to the automobile. The typical traveler will also identify that the bridge is also a connecting link to Avila Beach which also has positive connotations. Finally the gray-green color is more compatible with the natural landscape muted green colors appearing within the view shed. Thus the criteria of vividness, intactness, and unity are somewhat less negatively impacted. With implementation of mitigation measure VR/mm-3, the visual impacts can be reduced to a less than significant level.

It is noted, however, that some in the community may find a bridge structure that emphasizes the County's bike/pedestrian trail system symbolized by the rust colored truss system a positive visual statement. Thus it is possible that the least obtrusive design may not be the one most desired by the local community or County decision makers. The community will have a chance to express itself on this issue during the CEQA scoping process.

In summary, the ranking of the various Alternatives in ascending order from low to high by their negative impact on the visual quality for all the KVAs in Segment 5 is as follows:

- **Alternative C – gray-green truss:** this structure, by color and configuration, is both less intrusive than the standard more monolithic gray concrete girder, slab, and chain link fence of Alternatives A and B and is also slightly less visually reminiscent of standard highway design. Thus, it is more likely to indicate that this bridge is for special uses not typically related to highway vehicles. However, construction of this alternative will still generate a significant impact unless mitigated.
- **Alternative B – Standard concrete slab and girder with supplemental pattern on the bridge sides and picket railing nine feet above the roadway:** this structure, while almost identical in mass and form to Alternative A, will be perceived by many travelers as having greater refinement of detailing and therefore slightly less intrusive than the basic design. This perception, however, varies by the individual and could not be incorporated into the basic VIA methodology utilized by the Federal Highway System in the methodology described above. The impact of this alternative is significant unless mitigated.
- **Alternative A – standard concrete bridge design with girder, slab, and chain link fence with arched supports to 14.5 feet above the roadway:** as noted above the mass and configuration is very similar to Alternative B, but the higher railing configuration and minimal detail will be perceived by some as being more industrial, therefore creating a greater impact through the loss of intactness and unity of the visual scene. The impact of this alternative is significant unless mitigated.
- **Alternative D- Arched truss configuration same as Alternative C but colored in a natural red-brown:** simulations of this alternative demonstrated that the color was the most visible of the alternatives evaluated and therefore generated the greatest impact under the methodology utilized. It is noted that even evaluation of the simulations found that Alternative D created only a somewhat greater impact than Alternative C. The issue of relative impact could be reasonably debated by interested parties per the discussion in paragraph preceding this discussion.

The second component of potential impact in Segment 5 is the 550-foot ramp leading up to the east side of the overcrossing. The relative change in visual conditions is shown in Figure 15. Given the lower and more distant nature of this structure from the freeway, the retention of the existing trees and provision of additional landscaping and the tree planting called for in the project description mitigation reduce the potential impact. Building this structure does not significantly affect the scenic quality of the adjacent area. The applicant designated mitigation is implemented by VR/mm-4 below.

The third component is the vertical retaining wall associated with the west side approach to the overcrossing. The detail character and potential visual impact of this retaining wall is shown in the simulation of Figure 16. While smaller than the east side approach ramp, this structure is closer to the highway traveler and presents a solid vertical wall 200 foot in length to the viewer and varying from two to six feet in height. The design team has specified that the wall will be textured to create shadow patterns and avoid a broad expanse of concrete. While this wall will be visible, it does not significantly change the overall scenic character of the immediate area. The visual impact generated by this expanse of wall can be reduced by adding additional landscape screening. This mitigation measure is identified as VR/mm-5 below.

Finally, the location of the at-grade bicycle trail on the east side of US 101 is such that it would only be occasionally glimpsed by travelers when the existing vegetation and trees are retained. To reduce the potential for vegetation removal and a greater visual exposure of the pathway, a mitigation requirement is provided by VR/mm-1 which reduces this potential impact to a less than significant level.

In addition to potential impacts as seen by viewers looking toward the proposed Bob Jones Pathway, there are two other potential areas of impact consideration.

1. How will the views by users of the Pathway be affected? As noted in the project description, views and the aesthetic experience of traveling the Pathway will be considerably enhanced by the removal of the bike lanes from the shoulder area of South Higuera and Ontario Road.
2. The provision of the new pathway for bicycles and pedestrians is not considered to generate a significant new source of light and glare for either nearby residents or travelers along adjacent roads and highways. This is true since no stationary lighting sources are proposed in the project and the use of the pathway will be minimal after dark. The only potential source of light would be bicycle headlights. The intensity is minimal, the direction focused away from potentially sensitive receptors and of short duration.

7.1.6 Short Term Impacts

There will be short term visual impacts for all segments during the period of construction and the time it takes for the revegetation to mature. The term of this impact will be five years or less. After that point, the impacts will be considered long term as identified above.

7.2 PROJECT IMPACTS AND PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES

VR/Impact 1 **There is potential for the grading and vegetation removal required for the bicycle route and related fencing to negatively affect the visual resources of Segments 1 through 5. (With the mitigation identified below, this impact can be reduced to a less than significant level; Class II)**

VR/mm-1a *For land under the County's jurisdiction, the County shall retain a landscape architect to select appropriate plant materials (i.e., ground cover for pathway shoulders, shrubs and trees for areas where these plants have been removed in*

the area of proposed bridges) that will cover graded cut and fill slopes and that are compatible with adjacent vegetation to minimize visual impacts. Selected species shall be compatible with the requirements of the County of San Luis Obispo Office of Environmental Coordinator. Plans shall be submitted to San Luis Obispo County Parks or its designee for review and approval prior to start of construction.

The County Office of Environmental Coordinator or its designee shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

VR/mm-1b

For land under Caltrans jurisdiction, the project design team shall select appropriate plant materials that will cover graded cut and fill slopes and that are compatible with adjacent vegetation to minimize visual impacts. Selected species shall be compatible with Caltrans requirements. Plans shall be submitted to Caltrans or its designee for review and approval prior to start of construction.

The County Office of Environmental Coordinator or its designee shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

VR/Impact 2

There is potential for the bridge crossings at San Luis Obispo Creek opposite south of Cloveridge (Segment 2) and adjacent to San Luis Bay Drive (Segment 4) to negatively affect the visual resources of the area both through the removal of vegetation and with an intrusive bridge design. (With the mitigation identified below, this impact can be reduced to a less than significant level; Class II)

VR/mm-2a

At the creek crossing south of Cloveridge, the County design team shall limit the maximum height of the bridge structure to an elevation of 80 feet (North American Vertical Datum 88 (NAVD88)), which equates to roughly 8 feet above the adjacent Northbound US 101 lane, to reduce the vertical dimension of the structure and, therefore, the potential for visual intrusion into the viewshed.

VR/mm-2b

At the creek crossing adjacent to San Luis Bay Drive, the County design team shall utilize some form of truss configuration and limit the maximum height of the bridge structure to an elevation of 80 feet (NAVD88), which equates to roughly 10 feet above the adjacent San Luis Bay Drive Bridge deck, to reduce the vertical dimension of the structure and, therefore, the potential for visual intrusion into the viewshed.

VR/mm-2c

The County design team shall develop a landscape plan that provides maximum feasible screening of the new structures when seen from adjacent roadways. New trees shall be planted in conformity with County lists and shall be compatible with adjacent vegetation to supplement the screening of the bridge structures as seen from US 101 and San Luis Bay Drive. The design shall be prepared by a landscape architect and plans shall be approved by the San Luis Obispo County Office of Environmental Coordinator or its designee prior to start of construction.

The County Office of Environmental Coordinator or its designee shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to ensure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

VR/Impact 3

At the proposed pathway overpass of US 101 in Segment 5, the visual quality will be reduced by the addition of the new bridge and two ramp structures in the vicinity of the Salisbury Winery. The project design team has proposed four design alternatives which have been evaluated and simulated. All of these alternatives have the potential to create a significant visual impact. (With the mitigation measure(s) identified below, this impact can be reduced to a less than significant level; Class II)

VR/mm-3

Reduce other visual impacts along this sector of US 101 between Pismo Beach and south San Luis Obispo as an offset to the increased visual impact generated by the Bob Jones Pathway overpass through the removal of a standard size billboard within the US 101 corridor between San Luis Obispo and Pismo Beach. The intent shall be to maintain the net visual quality within the corridor for travelers along the highway (the analysis concludes that a standard sized billboard adjacent to US 101 with its commercial connotations is generally equivalent to the loss in visual quality generated by the addition of one of the bridge alternatives.).

VR/Impact 4

There is potential for the approach ramp up to the east side of the US 101 bridge/overpass in Segment 5 to negatively affect the visual resources of the area. (With the mitigation identified below, this impact can be reduced to a less than significant level; Class II)

VR/mm-4

The County shall refine the location of the southwest approach of the structure (within a matter of five feet) in such a way that a majority of the existing trees will be retained. New trees deemed compatible with the adjacent vegetation shall be added to supplement the screening of the approach ramp. The design shall be prepared by a landscape architect and plans shall be approved by the San Luis Obispo County Office of Environmental Coordinator or its designee prior to start of construction.

For land under Caltrans jurisdiction, the project design team shall select appropriate plant materials that will cover graded cut and fill slopes and that are compatible with adjacent vegetation to minimize visual impacts. Selected species shall be compatible with Caltrans requirements. Plans shall be submitted to Caltrans or its designee for review and approval prior to start of construction.

The County Office of Environmental Coordinator or its designee shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to insure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

VR/Impact 5

There is potential for the approach ramp retaining wall up to the west side of the US 101 bridge/overpass in Segment 5 adjacent to the Salisbury Winery, and all within the County jurisdiction, to negatively affect the visual resources of the area. (With the mitigation identified below, this impact can be reduced to a less than significant level; Class II)

VR/mm-5 *The County design team shall select a texture or pattern for the vertical retaining surface to reduce the large plane of plain vertical surface. In addition appropriate landscape shrubs are to be planted between the retaining wall and the highway to provide screening.*

The design shall be reviewed by the County Office of the Environmental Coordinator for compliance prior to start of construction. Caltrans shall also be consulted where the project falls within their jurisdiction.

The County Office of Environmental Coordinator or its designee shall be responsible for mitigation monitoring to insure mitigation planting is installed and maintained for five years.

VR/Impact 6 **There is potential for the overpass at US 101 to generate public controversy as generating an additional visual element in this sector of the Avila Valley/US 101 corridor.**

VR/mm-6 *While the general location and bridging requirement has been established as the most feasible location in meeting the continuity requirements for the Bob Jones Pathway, the visual characteristics of the bridge element can be refined to minimize the community perceptions of visual impact. To address this issue, the County shall appoint an advisory design review committee which would make recommendations regarding the refinement of specific forms, textures, and colors of the overcrossing and related project structures. Three bridge alternatives and two color options for the truss alternative have been previously evaluated as a potential basis for this community based review.*

7.3 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The discussion of cumulative impacts relates to the potential for this project to contribute to an aggregate change in visual quality of the area. The corridor between the southern end of the city of San Luis Obispo and the city of Pismo Beach has seen a limited amount of residential or commercial development over the last several years that will be visible to travelers along the US 101 corridor, and most of this work is now complete and no new major projects are known to be in the application stages that will be visible along the corridor. A future development that would be visible from US 101 between Los Osos Valley Road and Madonna Road several miles north of the project site (formerly known as the Dalidio project) has been proposed but withdrawn for redesign; this project is speculative at this time and has not been included as a cumulative visual element.

There are several US 101 improvements that are currently under construction. These include southbound ramp alignment and widening improvements and a reconfigured and widened underpass at Avila Beach Drive. While these improvements will modify the undercrossing and ramp configuration as well as the length of merging lanes in the area south of the new Bob Jones overcrossing, this effort, now complete, does not create a noticeable visual difference to the average traveler since they are changes to existing highway structures.

The proposed Los Osos Valley Road/US 101 interchange will result in substantial visual changes at that location including bridge widening and reconfiguration of the approach ramps and the attendant grades. While within the general corridor of the Bob Jones Pathway, this modification of the Los Osos Valley highway structures will not be directly visible by highway travelers in the area of the proposed Bob Jones highway bridge.

In conclusion the project will contribute to the developed quality of this relatively rural corridor. However, this change is expected to be less than significant with the implementation of the designated mitigation measures.

8. REFERENCES

Caltrans Traffic Counts – Traffic Information Site: see 2007 data (traffic-counts.dot.ca.gov/2007all.htm)

County of San Luis Obispo – General Plan: Land Use Element, Circulation Element, and Agriculture, Open Space and Conservation Elements

County of San Luis Obispo – Public Works Department, Traffic Information Site:
www.sanluisobispo.com/traffic/-45

2006 CEQA Statutes and Guidelines: Appendix G, enacted in 1970 by California Legislature

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Environmental Guidebook:

- FHWA Memorandum to Regions, “Esthetics and Visual Quality Guidance Information” (August 1986)
- Environmental Impact Statement, Visual Impact Discussion, FHWA (undated)
- Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects, FHWA Office of Environmental Policy, Publication Number: FHWA-HI-88-054 (March 1981)

