

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

of the proposed



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VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Route 101 Operational Improvements in Carpinteria SB 101 Postmile 2.2/ 3.3 EA 4482U0

This Visual Impact Assessment was prepared using a process developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The process for assessing visual impacts satisfies the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). An intent of this visual impact assessment is to substantiate findings presented within the environmental study by acting as a technical support document.

INTRODUCTION

The project is located in the City of Carpinteria on Highway 101 in southern Santa Barbara County. Highway 101 through Santa Barbara County is an Eligible State Scenic Highway. Highway 101 is also classified as a “Landscaped Freeway” by department policy, based on the extent of maintained planting along the roadsides and median. Throughout the project limits Route 101 is principally a four-lane freeway section. This project proposes changes to both the highway and local road systems, includes new and rebuilt bridges, new and realigned roadways, retaining and sound walls, and other changes. Each of the proposed “build” alternatives are expected to result in substantial visual changes as seen from both the highway and the community.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

This project proposes a series of operational improvements on and near Route 101 in Carpinteria from south of Carpinteria Creek bridge to north of Franklin Creek bridge. There are four “build” alternatives and a no build option.

The following work is common to each of the build alternatives:

- Replace existing Linden southbound off-ramp.
- Remove existing Linden northbound on-ramp.

- Replace Casitas Pass overcrossing with five lanes, bike lanes, and sidewalks.
- Upgrade southbound Casitas on- and off-ramps.
- Remove existing Casitas northbound off-ramp.
- New northbound Casitas on- and off-ramps.

- Extend Via Real over Carpinteria Creek to Linden Avenue.
- New 2-lane bridge over Carpinteria Creek on Via Real.

- Replace and widen northbound and southbound Carpinteria Creek bridge on Highway 101.
- Remove existing bike path from Via Real over Carpinteria Creek and add new bike paths.

- Seven sound walls are proposed at various locations along north and southbound Highway 101.

In addition to the improvements listed above, work specific to each of the alternatives is as follows:

ALTERNATIVE 1

- Replace Linden Avenue overcrossing with five lanes, bike lanes, and sidewalks.
- New northbound Linden diamond on-ramp.
- Replace and widen northbound Franklin Creek bridge.

ALTERNATIVE 2

- Replace Linden Avenue overcrossing with four lanes, bike lanes, and sidewalks.
- New northbound Linden hook on-ramp.

ALTERNATIVE 3

- Replace Linden Avenue overcrossing with four lanes, bike lanes, and sidewalks.
- New northbound Linden hook on-ramp.
- New roundabout at Via Real and Ogan Road.

ALTERNATIVE 4

- Replace Linden Avenue overcrossing with five lanes, bike lanes, and sidewalks.
- New northbound Linden diamond on-ramp.
- Replace and widen northbound Franklin Creek bridge.

Proposed Landscaping

The project proposes landscaping as part of highway improvements. Caltrans is obligated by policy to replace highway landscaping removed as part of the proposed project. Replacement planting would be consistent with the state goals and design policies regarding safety, maintenance, and resource conservation.

EXISTING VISUAL SETTING

The region is characterized by coastal bluffs and plains rising into the rolling foothills of the Santa Ynez Mountains. The terrain is mostly flat near the coastal edge, with slopes becoming as steep as thirty percent near the hills. The form and ridge line of the mountains, at a distance of approximately one to five miles to the northeast, create a dominant element in the landscape, providing a clearly defined visual limit for the region.

Development can be seen from most areas throughout the project limits. Retail and service commercial development is located primarily west of the freeway. To the east, residential subdivisions, limited commercial business, and a few undeveloped parcels are visible. From the highway the roadsides are generally well-landscaped which effectively screens much of the built-character of the adjacent community.

The vegetation throughout the region is varied. Much of the area has been greatly influenced by development. Ornamental plants along the highway consist of myoporum, pittosporum, oleander, acacia, ice plant, ivy, and lantana. The typical skyline vegetation along the highway and developed areas consists of mature Monterey Cypress, Eucalyptus, Pines and Palms. Remnant orchards can be seen in areas east of the highway. Native vegetation is visible primarily on the hillsides, and consists

of coast live oak woodland, coastal sage scrub, chaparral and riparian plant communities. A small group of Coast Live Oaks exist along Via Real near Carpinteria Creek.

Although important at the regional scale, the presence of surface water plays a minor role in establishing the visual character within the project limits. The Pacific Ocean is not visible from within the study area, however Carpinteria and Franklin creeks cross the project area as they flow from the foothills to the ocean. Water in these creeks is seasonal and often not readily visible. Its presence in the landscape is mostly seen as a narrow corridor of riparian vegetation. Wetlands are present but not visible from within the project area, the largest is the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Reserve.

VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Visual impact is defined in terms of visual resource change and viewer response to that change. Often changes in the visual resources will not result in substantial impacts because there is limited response to the change or the change can be mitigated. However, those areas within a proposed project that experience the greatest change combined with viewers sensitive to change, may result in the greatest visual impact. A change in visual character can not be described as having good or bad attributes until it is compared with the viewer response to that change.

The residents of the local community have demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity to alteration of the aesthetic quality of this coastal area. The City of Carpinteria is on record as being concerned about the potential visual impacts of highway projects in the area. Community groups have expressed concerns about changing the visual character of the highway and the effects on local and visitor's perception of the area.

Planning Policies and Guidelines

Local planning documents and guidelines are indicators of the general level of community sensitivity regarding the aesthetic character of the project area and of the region. Assessment of the project's potential affect on local aesthetic values includes review of the City of Carpinteria General Plan/ Local Coastal Land Use Plan & Environmental Impact Report.

Understanding a community's self-image is a gauge of potential sensitivity to aesthetic change. The introduction to the Carpinteria General Plan says that "the relative isolation of Carpinteria has enabled it to remain one of the last small, rural southern California coastal communities". It further states that the goal of the community is "to preserve the essential character of our small beach town, its unique visual and natural resources and its open, rural surroundings while enhancing recreational, cultural and economic opportunities for our citizens".

Chapter 3.18, *Aesthetics* of the General Plan describes the community character as follows: "Carpinteria is a small beach town in a rural setting. The City's coastal setting is framed by the foothills of the Santa Ynez Mountains, and includes natural coastal terrain and agricultural lands."

Chapter 3.18 *Aesthetics* states that "U.S Highway 101 is the major public viewing corridor traversing the City. The highway affords excellent views of the mountains and ocean, as well as views of the agricultural land that surrounds the City itself". Highway 101 is referred to in this section as a "Sensitive viewing corridor".

The Community Design Element of the General Plan – The *Corridors* Section defines Highway 101, Linden Avenue, and Carpinteria Creek as “Major Corridors”. Major Corridors “both separate and connect neighborhoods and districts, and provide long-range views of the city”. Objective CD-9 of the Community Design Element is intended “To ensure that streets enhance the established city framework and design”. Related policy CD-9a states “The City shall promote the planting of appropriate street trees in existing and new neighborhoods to define and enhance the city’s streetscape”.

Objective C-1 of the *U.S. 101, State Routes & Freeway Interchanges* section is “To improve the community’s ability to access U.S. 101 and north of the freeway through the improvement of interchanges”. Related policy C-1a states: “The City shall work closely with Caltrans to assure improvements to freeway interchanges and overpasses compliment the small town quality and charm of the city”.

Observer Viewpoints

Seven viewing locations were identified which would best reveal the project’s features and any potential visual character change. These viewing locations, or Observer Viewpoints (OVs), were selected which best represent the typical visual character of the project, show unique project components or affected resources, and which represent an affected viewer group. The OV locations are listed below in Table 1. They are also located on Figure 1 for reference.

Table 1

Observer Viewpoints	
OV	Location
1	From northbound Via Real south of Carpinteria Creek.
2	From the existing Casitas Pass northbound off-ramp looking southbound.
3	From the existing Linden Ave. northbound on-ramp loop looking southbound.
4	From Linden Avenue south of Highway 101 looking north toward the overcrossing
5	From northbound Highway 101 south of Carpinteria Creek.
6	From northbound Highway 101 between Casitas Pass and Linden Avenue.
7	From Highway 101 looking south between Linden Ave. and Casitas Pass.

VISUAL RESOURCE ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Per FHWA guidelines, a Visual Quality Evaluation (VQE) was prepared for the proposed project. The VQE is a tool for quantitatively assessing visual quality from a specific observer viewpoint. The evaluation is prepared for both the existing condition and the proposed condition after construction is completed. With the “before” and “after” evaluation, the Visual Quality Difference can be measured. Whether positive or negative this difference equals the impact of the proposed project.

The evaluative criteria used in a VQE includes vividness, intactness, and unity. None of these is itself equivalent to visual quality; the average of all three must be high to indicate high quality.

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 (natural and man-made) and its freedom from non-typical elements. If all the various elements of a landscape seem to “belong” in the view, there would be a high level of intactness.

Unity is the visual harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. Unity represents the degree to which the visual elements maintain a coherent visual pattern, regardless of whether or not they are typical features seen in that landscape type.

The VQE determines the numerical change in the visual resource, identified as the visual quality difference. A summary of the visual quality difference will be analyzed in forthcoming sections.

Visual simulations

Seven key observer viewpoints were identified in the assessment and are shown in Figure 1. The viewpoints are representative of a range of visual resources within the project. For each observer viewpoint, the first image is the existing view and the accompanying view depicts the visual changes that may result from the proposed improvement. In order to best show the changes to roadway configurations and other proposed features, not all of the landscaping anticipated as part of the project was included in the simulations.

VISUAL QUALITY EVALUATIONS

Observer Viewpoint 1 - From northbound Via Real south of Carpinteria Creek.

Existing – This existing view looks north from the end of Via Real toward the generally undeveloped land near Carpinteria Creek. The mobile home park can be seen in the eastern portion of the view. The mature trees and other vegetation visible from this location increase the visual unity and intactness ratings. The Santa Ynez Hills can be seen from portions of this viewing area, which adds to the memorability and overall visual quality of the scenery.

Proposed (All Alternatives) - The extension of Via Real to the north would alter the visual character as seen from this viewpoint. The visibility of the new roadway and its associated built features combined with the loss of mature trees would reduce both the unity and intactness ratings as seen from this viewing area. The tree removal would open up views to the hills beyond, and along with the potential for visibility of Carpinteria Creek just north of this location, the memorability of this viewing area is expected to slightly increase.

<u>Viewpoint 1</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	5.0	5.1	5.3	=	5.1	
Proposed	5.2	4.1	4.2	=	4.5	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.6	

Observer Viewpoint 2 - From the existing Casitas Pass northbound off-ramp looking southbound.

Existing – This existing view from Casitas Pass Road toward the south includes the highway and related components, as well as residences to the north. The landscaping along the highway and in the adjacent neighborhood is generally mature and well-established, providing a visual continuity for the area. This elevated viewpoint at the top of the ramp allows for somewhat longer-range views of the highway and of the community. Most of the elements within this view are typical of a freeway environment which results in a moderately high rating for visual intactness. The mature landscaping increases the overall unity rating. No ocean views are available from this location and the vividness rating is within the average range.

Proposed (All Alternatives) - The proposed project would increase the built character of this view through the visibility of the new on and off ramps and the loss of existing vegetation. Views of the background hills should increase as a result of the vegetation removal. These changes are expected to reduce the intactness and unity ratings and to slightly increase the vividness as seen from this location.

<u>Viewpoint 2</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>VisualQuality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.9	5.0	5.1	=	4.7	
Proposed	4.1	4.6	4.4	=	4.4	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.3	

Observer Viewpoint 3 - From the existing Linden Avenue northbound on-ramp loop looking southbound.

Existing – The view from along Linden Avenue north of the highway is generally of a suburban freeway setting. The visual elements include the highway, the northbound ramps as well as Via Real and the adjacent residential neighborhood. Mature landscaping provides a degree of visual unity for the area. This view is generally free from non-typical visual elements, resulting in a slightly above average rating for intactness.

Proposed (Alternatives 1 & 4) - Alternatives 1 and 4 propose to replace the existing loop-type on-ramp with a standard diamond on-ramp configuration north of Linden Avenue. As seen from this vantage point, the ramp removal would slightly decrease the built characteristic of the view. The overall unity and intactness are expected to be increased to a minor extent, and the vividness rating would generally remain unchanged. Just southeast of this viewpoint, Via Real would be extended through a portion of the existing residential neighborhood.

<u>Viewpoint 3</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.8	4.9	4.9	=	4.5	
Proposed	3.8	5.0	5.0	=	4.6	
Visual Quality Difference				=	+0.1	

Proposed (Alternative 2) - Alternative 2 would construct a new northbound hook-type off ramp and extend Via Real to Linden Avenue. A similar loop on ramp configuration would remain in place. The new off ramp and Via Real extension would add more visible hardscape to the view, slightly decreasing the unity and intactness ratings. In this area, the greatest amount of visual change would

occur south of Ogan Road, where Via Real would replace the residences. Views would be opened-up where structures and existing vegetation are removed, resulting an overall increased visual presence of the highway and roadway facilities. Although the visual character would be altered to some degree, the overall vividness or memorability is not expected to appreciably change.

<u>Viewpoint 3</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.8	4.9	4.9	=	4.5	
Proposed	3.8	4.7	4.4	=	4.3	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.2	

Proposed (Alternative 3) - Alternative 3 proposes a new roundabout with Via Real, Ogan Road and the northbound on-ramp as legs. As seen from this vantage point, the roundabout would be more visible than the existing configuration and would slightly increase the built characteristic of the view. The overall unity and intactness are expected to be reduced to a minor extent. The vividness rating would increase because of the uniqueness of the roundabout. This visual change would tend to further urbanize the area and would reduce the intactness and unity ratings as seen from the surrounding area.

<u>Viewpoint 3</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.8	4.9	4.9	=	4.5	
Proposed	3.9	4.5	4.3	=	4.2	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.3	

Observer Viewpoint 4 - From Linden Avenue south of Highway 101 looking north toward the overcrossing.

Existing – This view represents how the Linden Avenue overcrossing appears when approaching from the south. The viewing context is one of a suburban freeway landscape. From this viewing location the existing unity and intactness ratings are moderate to high due to the generally well-landscaped roadsides and community. The vividness of the view is increased by the scenic Santa Ynez Hills rising up in the background.

Proposed (Alternatives 1 and 4)- From this location the increased five-lane width of the new structure would be evident. As the built component of the view becomes more dominant, the vividness and unity ratings are affected. The increased urbanization of the existing landscape would somewhat lower the visual quality ratings. The loss of mature trees near the structure would add to the urbanization and result in a more noticeable visual change. In close vicinity to the bridge structure, the new ramps and loss of existing vegetation would open-up views to the freeway as seen from Linden Avenue.

<u>Viewpoint 4</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	4.0	5.1	5.2	=	4.7	
Proposed	3.8	4.7	4.7	=	<u>4.4</u>	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.3	

Proposed (Alternatives 2 and 3)- Alternatives 2 and 3 widen the Linden overcrossing bridge to four lanes. As with the other alternatives, the increased width of the new structure would be evident. This additional width would be more noticeable than the current condition. The increased urbanization of the existing landscape would somewhat lower the visual quality ratings. As with Alternatives 1 and 4,

the loss of mature trees near the structure would add to the urbanization and result in a more noticeable visual change. In close vicinity to the bridge structure, the new ramps and loss of existing vegetation would open-up views to the freeway as seen from Linden Avenue. The visual affect of the four-lane bridge would be similar to the five-lane bridge proposed with Alternatives 1 and 4, although to a lesser degree.

<u>Viewpoint 4</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	4.0	5.1	5.2	=	4.7	
Proposed	3.9	4.9	4.7	=	<u>4.5</u>	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.2	

Observer Viewpoint 5 - From northbound Route 101 south of Carpinteria Creek.

Existing - This viewpoint represents how the project area appears to northbound highway travelers approaching the off ramp to Casitas Pass Road. Mature plantings screen most views from the road and focus the views forward. Where visible, the Santa Ynez mountains form a strong visual back drop. These factors combine to give the viewpoint an above average rating for all three visual quality criteria; vividness, intactness, and unity.

Proposed (All Alternatives) - The proposed view represents what the new northbound ramps would look like to highway travelers. Visible improvements at this location include replacement of the existing mainline bridges over Carpinteria Creek, as well as a new separate bridge structure to accommodate a new northbound off ramp. The construction of the new bridges would add to an urban character. The removal of mature roadside vegetation would have a negative affect on the visual intactness and unity ratings. The elevated profile of Highway 101 over Carpinteria Creek in combination with the removal of some roadside trees would increase views of the Santa Ynez Mountains in the background and as a result increase the vividness rating to a minor extent.

<u>Viewpoint 5</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	4.0	5.0	5.1	=	4.9	
Proposed	4.2	4.7	4.7	=	<u>4.5</u>	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.4	

Observer Viewpoint 6 - From northbound Route 101 between Casitas Pass and Linden Avenue.

Existing - This viewpoint represents how the project area appears to northbound highway travelers between Casitas Pass Road and Linden Avenue. The highway is mostly below the grade of the surrounding development throughout this segment. In general, mature roadside planting screens most views from the road and increases the degree of visual unity. Existing planting in the median adds to the visual continuity of the view. Where visible, the Santa Ynez mountains form a scenic back drop along this section of the highway. These factors combine to give the viewpoint a slightly above average rating for all three visual quality criteria; vividness, intactness, and unity.

Proposed (Alternatives 1 & 4) - The proposed view represents how the section of highway between Casitas Pass and Linden overcrossings would look to northbound highway travelers. Views of

Alternative 1 as seen from this location would show a removed northbound hook on-ramp as well as the standard off ramp configuration ahead north of Linden overcrossing. Construction of the on-ramp and Franklin Creek Bridge widening north of Linden Avenue would cause the removal of vegetation along the northbound shoulder. A proposed soundwall north of Linden would add to the urbanized appearance of the corridor. Replacement landscaping required by Caltrans policy would regain some of the visual unity and intactness lost due to increased paving and walls.

<u>Viewpoint 6</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.9	5.1	5.6	=	4.8	
Proposed	3.9	4.7	5.0	=	<u>4.5</u>	
Visual Quality Difference				=	- 0.3	

Proposed (Alternative 2) - Alternative 2 includes a revised hook-type on-ramp at Via Real near Linden Avenue. Removal of the existing northbound on-ramp from Via Real would potentially allow more landscaping in that area. The realigned northbound on ramp associated with Alternative 2 would cause the removal of some of the roadside vegetation. As seen from this viewpoint, the Vividness, intactness and unity ratings would remain similar to the existing conditions, with a slight reduction due to vegetation removal. Soundwalls north of Linden Avenue would effect views as described from Alternatives 1 and 4 above.

<u>Viewpoint 6</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.9	5.1	5.6	=	4.8	
Proposed	3.9	5.0	5.5	=	<u>4.8</u>	
Visual Quality Difference				=	0.0	

Proposed (Alternative 3) - Alternative 3 proposes a roundabout, which would be somewhat visible from Highway 101. The most noticeable elements of the roundabout would be the circular traffic pattern and the increased directional signage. Alternate 3 would add to the urbanized character of the area and would result in a decrease in both the unity and intactness ratings. The area would become somewhat more vivid due to the uniqueness of the roundabout, but this memorability would not be related to an improved view quality.

<u>Viewpoint 6</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.9	5.1	5.6	=	4.8	
Proposed	3.8	4.5	4.9	=	<u>4.4</u>	
Visual Quality Difference				=	-0.4	

Observer Viewpoint 7 - From Highway 101 looking south between Linden Avenue and Casitas Pass.

Existing - This viewpoint represents how the project area appears to southbound highway travelers south of Linden Avenue overcrossing. This view includes generally mature trees and shrubs and groundcover along the roadside and median, and within the adjacent community, which adds to the visual unity rating. Some commercial and residential development is visible beyond the roadside landscaping, having an affect on the intactness of the scene. This somewhat typical suburban highway view rates average to above average for all three visual quality evaluation criteria.

Proposed (All Alternatives) - As seen from this viewpoint the southbound roadside of Highway 101 would remain generally as it currently appears.

<u>Viewpoint 7</u>	<u>Vividness</u>	<u>Intactness</u>	<u>Unity</u>	=	<u>Visual Quality</u>	<u>(VQ=V+I+U/3)</u>
Existing	3.8	5.0	5.5	=	4.7	
Proposed	3.8	5.0	5.5	=	4.7	
Visual Quality Difference				=	0.0	

Visual Quality Evaluation Results

Review of the visual quality ratings for each of the Observer Viewpoints indicates that the existing visual quality for the project vicinity is moderate to moderately high. The overall landscape of the area can be generally described as a suburban setting with a relatively strong scenic backdrop created by the Santa Ynez mountains to the north. The highway facility and the community of Carpinteria throughout the project area are mostly well-landscaped with mature trees and shrubs. This mature landscaping provides a visual continuity and increases the visual quality throughout the region. As seen from the adjacent neighborhoods, roadside vegetation partially screens views to the adjacent highway. Orchards and greenhouses can be seen in the region and contribute to the visual identity valued by the local community. In terms of visual rating criteria, the project setting has generally similar characteristics throughout its length. Other than the undeveloped area in the Carpinteria Creek area east of Casitas Pass and north of the highway, the visual landscape includes both built and natural-appearing features. Elements which detract from the otherwise high visual quality include the highway facility itself, vehicle traffic, commercial development along the highway corridor, highway and business signage, and overhead utilities.

The numerical differences indicated in each Visual Quality Evaluation rating show that the project would cause a perceived change in the visual environment. From each viewpoint the numerical ratings for all alternatives drop compared to the existing conditions. These changes were generally the result of the increased scale of the highway or roadway facility and the loss of existing mature vegetation. In some instances, the removal of existing vegetation caused a rating reduction which was somewhat counter-balanced by a resulting increase of views to the Santa Ynez Mountains. Generally the unity and intactness ratings were the most affected by the proposed project. A difference of the intactness rating is often an indicator of overall visual character change, where the existing landscape “type” is subject to a fundamental modification. The greatest numerical rating changes occur at viewpoints along the freeway and at viewing locations along Via Real south of Casitas Pass Road.

PROJECT IMPACT SUMMARY

The results of the Visual Quality Evaluation mentioned above, combined with anticipated viewer sensitivity as indicated in planning documents is the basis for determining potential visual impact. The Carpinteria General Plan clearly states the community goal of preserving the character of a “small beach town in a rural atmosphere”. Local planning policy emphasizes protection of visual resources such as the coastline and the Santa Ynez Mountains to the north. Review of the General Plan as well as an awareness of community interest regarding previous transportation projects on state facilities suggests a relatively high degree of viewer sensitivity to the potential changes proposed as part of this project. The General Plan also acknowledges that additional development would likely occur in the

areas of the community affected by the project, and that improvements to the freeway interchanges are a goal of the City.

Each of the alternatives proposed by the project would result in substantial visual changes to the community. The following discussion summarizes the extent and type of visual changes organized by specific project areas.

Along Highway 101 – As seen from the highway, the visual changes associated with improvements along the immediate Highway 101 corridor would be mostly due to the overall increase of roadway width combined with the loss of vegetation along the roadsides. With all alternatives the northbound and southbound lanes south of Casitas Pass Road would be raised as much as 10 feet higher than the existing roadway profile. This raised vantage point would provide greater views to the Santa Ynez Mountains. The elevated roadway however would not block views to the mountains or to the Pacific Ocean from critical off-site locations. As experienced from the highway, each of the alternatives propose a wider northbound bridge over Carpinteria Creek which would result in a somewhat more urbanized appearance. In all cases the overall highway facility south of Casitas Pass would appear quite a bit larger than the existing condition. With all alternatives the northbound ramps south of Casitas Pass Road would remove vegetation and add more paved surface, but by closing the existing off-ramp, existing paving would be removed and additional landscaping would be possible.

In the vicinity of Linden Avenue, views from the northbound lanes of the freeway would differ with each alternative. Alternatives 1 and 4 which remove the existing on-ramp south of Linden Avenue, would include more available planting area than currently exists. Alternative 2 which retains the same basic configuration as the existing ramp, would result in little visual change after required landscaping. Alternative 3 would be the most noticeable from highway vantage points because of the concentration of vehicles using the roundabout, the increased pavement and the necessary signage and lighting. Alternatives 1 and 4, which extend a new northbound on-ramp under the Linden Avenue bridge and widens the northbound Franklin Creek Bridge would result in a somewhat more urbanizing affect at those locations.

Along the southbound lanes of the highway, the vegetation removal necessary to construct and improve the Linden Avenue and Casitas Pass ramps, as well as the additional pavement would decrease visual quality.

As seen from Highway 101, each of the alternatives would increase the built scale of the highway facility, and would reduce the amount of roadside vegetation. These changes would result in a somewhat more urban-appearing highway corridor through the community, resulting in an adverse effect on visual quality. It is anticipated that the visual perception of these changes would be somewhat tempered since the elements proposed with the project would not appear unusual within the highway environment. Required replacement landscaping would over time help reduce the urban appearance of the project.

Linden Avenue and Casitas Pass Overcrossings – All alternatives widen Casitas Pass overcrossing to five lanes, with bicycle lanes and sidewalks on both sides. Alternatives 1 and 4 widens Linden Avenue overcrossing to five lanes, while Alternatives 2 and 3 widen the Linden Avenue bridge to four lanes. In all cases, the widening would be most noticeable from viewing locations on the bridges or approaching from local roadways. From Highway 101 the two new overcrossing bridges would be most noticeable by the new bridge profile and bridge rail. Views from along Linden Avenue and Casitas Pass Road would present a substantially wider, more urban-scale structure. The new bridges

would include solid bridge rail. No ocean views are currently available from either of the structures, and construction of the new bridges would not change that condition. Views of the Santa Ynez Mountains would not be adversely affected by the new structures. Each of the alternatives proposes substantial visual scale changes to the Linden Avenue and Casitas Pass overcrossings. In spite of bridge structures being relatively common visual elements in a highway/ roadway setting, the magnitude of proposed changes would contribute to a more urban character as seen from the local roadways, and would reduce the visual quality at both locations.

Affects on Adjacent Neighborhoods – The project alternatives would have an affect on residential neighborhoods primarily north of Highway 101. The proposed changes include extending Via Real adjacent to residential areas east of Casitas Pass Road, and through residential neighborhoods between Casitas Pass Road and Linden Avenue. The area east of Linden Avenue is the most populated and has the greatest number of potential viewers. Because of existing development and landscaping, views to the project area are somewhat limited to properties in the immediate vicinity of the project and from adjacent road intersections. Common to all alternatives, the proposed connection of the northbound Linden Avenue off-ramp to Via Real would result in the greatest visual change. Proposed soundwalls north of Via Real through this area would substantially screen views from the neighborhoods to the increased scale of Highway 101 and Via Real. New traffic signals and intersection lighting would add to the urbanizing effect of the project. Landscaping anticipated as part of the project would partially reduce the visual impacts to the adjacent neighborhoods.

The Carpinteria Creek Area – Currently the views along Carpinteria Creek north of Highway 101 are seen by relatively few people. From the highway, views to the creek itself are mostly screened due to the thick growth of riparian vegetation. Viewing opportunities from the community are limited to those utilizing the existing Class I bicycle path from Via Real, and a few of the residents in the neighborhood north of the highway. All of the project alternatives propose substantial visual changes in the area of Carpinteria Creek. These changes include the extension of Via Real and construction of a new bridge over the creek, and the relocation of the existing bicycle path. In addition, immediately north of the highway, each of the alternatives would widen the existing highway bridge structure over Carpinteria Creek for the new northbound on-ramp.

The extension of Via Real and new bridge would adversely change the character of the setting by adding built elements to an existing undeveloped area. At the same time however, the new road and bridge would make viewing opportunities of the Carpinteria Creek corridor more accessible for the community. A new community park is planned by the City of Carpinteria in the vicinity of Carpinteria Creek. The proposed park's proximity to the realigned Via Real and bike paths would offer increased visual access to open space and recreation for the community. From viewpoints along the bicycle path below the proposed bridges, the structures would reduce visual quality by darkening the pathway and creek views, creating a tunnel-type space, and by increasing the graffiti potential.

Soundwalls - As many as seven new soundwalls may be constructed as part of the project. The soundwalls are all proposed to be approximately 10 feet tall. The majority of the proposed walls would be along the northbound lanes of the highway and Via Real, through the more developed sections of the community. The soundwalls would increase the built character of the area. The walls would be most noticeable along Via Real due to the close viewing proximity. From the highway perspective the walls would be somewhat set back from the roadway and would be less noticeable. Required landscaping placed in front of the walls where possible would reduce visibility of the walls and appear more consistent with the remainder of the Highway 101 corridor. These soundwalls have the potential for adverse impacts if they are placed in locations which prohibit planting in front of them

and aesthetic treatments are not included. Because the majority of the walls are proposed for areas with existing development and landscaping, the walls' affect on views to the Santa Ynez Mountains or other coastal resources would be minimal.

MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maintain the visual quality of Carpinteria and the Highway 101 corridor, and provide a project consistent with community visual resource objectives, the following actions are recommended:

1. An Aesthetic Design Advisory Committee shall be established during the design phase of the project to represent local and state interests concerning project aesthetics. Community and Caltrans interests shall be represented on the committee. The purpose of the committee will be to advise project designers, with the goal of:
 - Minimizing impacts on existing visual quality while maintaining safety.
 - Maintaining visual compatibility and integration of project features into the surrounding environment.
 - Creating an aesthetically pleasing facility.
2. To the greatest extent possible final determination of state right-of-way needs shall include sufficient area for landscaping, as recommended by the Caltrans District Landscape Architect.
3. The project shall include replacement planting to the greatest extent possible, including but not limited to:
 - a. Trees shall be planted at the bridge abutments at Casitas Pass Road and Linden Avenue overcrossings, and at the Via Real/ Carpinteria Creek bridges to soften the presence of the structures.
 - b. Street trees shall be included along all new local roads. Street trees shall be clustered as necessary to maintain views to the Santa Ynez Mountains as seen from public areas.
 - c. Additional planting shall be included along Via Real in the vicinity of the "Ogan property" to visually screen the property from the new roadway. Specific planting design shall be determined in conjunction with the Caltrans Cultural Resources representative.
 - d. Native vegetation planting shall be included in the vicinity of the Via Real/Carpinteria Creek bridge and the bicycle paths to help visually integrate the project with the natural setting and the proposed community park.
4. Appropriate safe and maintainable planting shall be included in the center of the roundabout proposed with Alternative 3.
5. An appropriate amount of aesthetic treatments and design shall be incorporated into all new bridge structures.
6. The Highway 101/ Carpinteria Creek bridges and the Via Real/ Carpinteria Creek bridge shall include open-style bridge rail such as Type 80.
7. Aesthetic treatment and safe, maintainable planting opportunities shall be incorporated into all proposed retaining walls and soundwalls.
8. Any existing median planting removed or damaged as part of the project shall be replaced in the median.

9. All areas where existing ramps and other roadways are removed shall be made suitable for planting. All paving and base material shall be removed, the earth shall be ripped or scarified, and topsoil placed.
10. Where possible, the project shall not install yellow barrel-type crash cushion end treatments.
11. All new lighting in the vicinity of the residential neighborhoods north of Highway 101 shall minimize excess light and glare by careful placement of the poles, height and position of luminaires, the use of cut-off lenses where feasible, and other measures.

RESIDUAL IMPACTS

An analysis of the project indicates that each alternative would cause at a minimum a short-term (up to approximately five years) reduction in existing visual quality. Short term impacts would diminish as the proposed replanting matures. The long-term visual impacts would be substantially reduced with the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project proposes replacement of the Las Casitas and Linden Avenue overcrossings as well as operational improvements on Route 101 and on local roads in the City of Carpinteria in Santa Barbara County. There are four "build" alternatives.

Views throughout the project area, both to and from Highway 101, are of moderate to moderately high visual quality. The primary beneficial visual components throughout the project area and along the corridor are the mature highway landscape and vistas of the Santa Ynez Mountains to the north. Detractors to the existing viewing experience include the lanes of Highway 101 and local roads, associated traffic, and the visual clutter of overhead utilities and signage. No ocean or coastline views are available from within the project limits.

Community sensitivity to visual issues is partly reflected in the City of Carpinteria General Plan and Coastal Land Use Plan. The Community Design Element defines Highway 101 as a “Sensitive viewing corridor”. The General Plan defines a goal to “preserve the essential character of our small beach town, its unique visual and natural resources and its open, rural surroundings while enhancing recreational, cultural and economic opportunities for our citizens”. The General Plan also encourages efforts “to assure improvements to freeway interchanges and overpasses compliment the small town quality and charm of the city”.

Each of the proposed alternatives would have some affect on the visual character of the Highway 101 corridor through Carpinteria and along some local roadways. In general, the project would cause an increased urbanized appearance due to additional pavement, larger bridge structures, new soundwalls and retaining walls, and loss of mature vegetation. Overall the magnitude of visual change would be similar with each alternative. The type of change and visual effect depends on the specific viewing location.

Along the southbound side of the highway, the alternatives are basically the same and would result in equivalent visual impacts. The revised southbound off-ramp for Linden Avenue would cause the removal of some of the existing roadside vegetation in that area. Potential soundwalls along this southbound side would further affect the views. These changes would create a more urbanized character along the highway corridor. Highway landscaping , as required by Caltrans policy would help reduce the urban appearance. With the mitigation measures requiring aesthetic treatment and planting along all walls and structures, the visual impacts associated with the alternatives along the southbound lanes would be minimized.

Seven new soundwalls are proposed throughout the project, mostly along the north side of the highway and Via Real. These walls would contribute to an increased urban appearance along the corridor, and particularly in the area along Via Real. Because the soundwalls are proposed in areas of existing development and mature vegetation, the walls would only have a minor affect on views to the Santa Ynez Mountains. Aesthetic treatments and landscaping would reduce visibility of the walls and re-establish visual continuity with the highway and neighborhood corridors.

Along the northbound side of the highway, the project alternatives and related visual impacts are identical except in the area of the Linden Avenue overcrossing from Vallecito Road to Franklin Creek. East of Casitas Pass, near Carpinteria Creek each alternative would result in substantial changes in the

visual setting. The extension of Via Real through this currently undeveloped area would introduce a built element into open space, but would also create new viewing opportunities of Carpinteria Creek and the proposed community park. These quality views of the creek corridor are consistent with the scenic goals of the City, and would be available to a greater segment of the community than what currently exists. In this area, mitigation measures such as an open-style bridge rail and native planting would retain the desirable character defined in local planning policy and would reduce potential visual impacts.

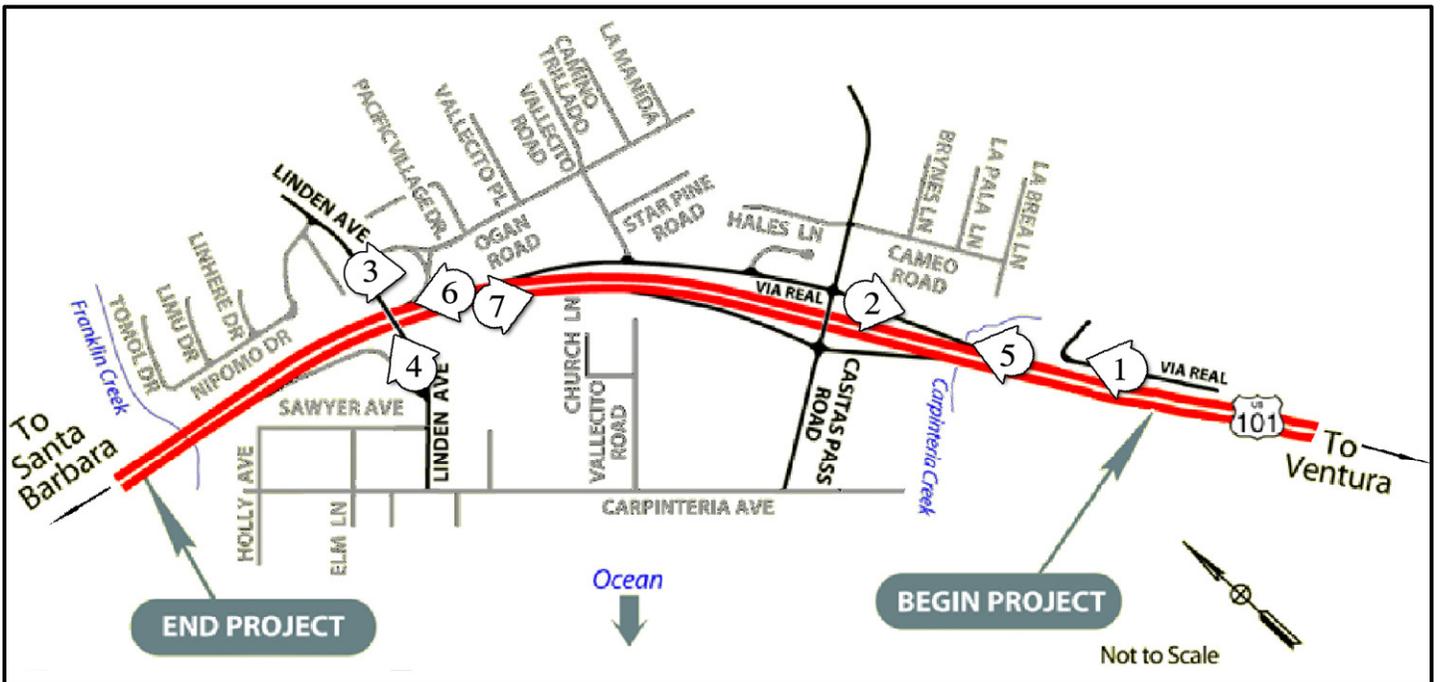
West of the Casitas Pass Road overcrossing Via Real would be slightly widened and extended to Linden Avenue. Where Via Real currently exists, the visual changes would be minor. From Vallecito Road west, Via Real would extend through the neighborhood, causing the removal of structures and the reconfiguration of parcels. The overall visual character of the area is not expected to appreciably change with the alternatives, since the basic defining elements such as houses, local streets, and landscaping would remain part of the view. The street tree mitigation measures would help integrate the somewhat larger roadway into the setting and would result in less than significant visual impacts at this location.

Near Linden Avenue, Alternatives 1 and 4 propose removal of the existing northbound on-ramp and construction of a new “diamond”-type on-ramp north of Linden Avenue. These two alternatives would decrease the amount of pavement east of the vicinity of Linden Avenue bridge and would increase pavement and vegetation loss north of the bridge structure. Alternative 2 is similar to the configuration that currently exists, and would result in minor visual changes. Alternative 3 would connect the on and off-ramps to Via Real by means of a roundabout, resulting in a greater visual change along the local street and the neighborhood. With all alternatives, the landscaping requirements combined with the tree mitigation measures would reduce visual impacts. The proposed changes would likely be consistent with viewer expectations at this location, which already includes ramps, intersections and the bridge.

The Linden Avenue and the Casitas Pass overcrossing bridges would be widened with each of the project proposals. Alternatives 1 and 4 widens Linden Avenue overcrossing to five lanes, and Alternatives 2 and 3 widen the Linden Avenue bridge to four lanes. These changes in scale would be most readily noticed from viewpoints on the bridges or approaching them from local roads. Although the wider bridges would add to the urbanized character to some degree, views are in the visual context of the highway setting, and already include the existing bridge structures. With implementation of aesthetic treatment to the bridges, combined with associated tree planting and landscaping, the impacts related to the larger bridges would be reduced.

Each of the project alternatives would have a visual affect on the community of Carpinteria and along the Highway 101 corridor, based primarily on the larger scale of the proposed facilities and the vegetation loss. Many of the visual changes are in locations of an existing highway or roadway setting. With implementation of the Caltrans-required landscaping, and the mitigation recommended in this study, the visual affect on the community and the highway traveler would be substantially reduced.

OBSERVER VIEWPOINT LOCATION MAP



Key:  - Number and direction of Observer Viewpoint



Existing view



Conceptual view
All Alternatives





Existing view



Conceptual view
All Alternatives





Existing view



Conceptual view
Alternative 1



Conceptual view
Alternative 2



Conceptual view
Alternative 3



Conceptual view
Alternative 4











Existing view



Conceptual view
All Alternatives
(no change)