
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

3.1 AESTHETICS

3.1.1 SETTING

Monterey County

Monterey County is characterized by a scenic ocean coastline along its western and northern borders, with rugged coastal mountains inland along its eastern boundary. The most significant visual resources are located along the coastline. Monterey County includes some of the most magnificent ocean shoreline in the world along the Big Sur coast, which is bounded on the east by the very steep Santa Lucia Mountain range.

The greatest visual expanse within inland Monterey County is the 130-mile long Salinas Valley, which stretches the length of the County. The Salinas Valley is a world-renowned agricultural area, and has a reputation as the nation's "Salad Bowl", due to lettuce and other vegetables that are grown there.

The 1982 Monterey County General Plan includes policies related to scenic highways, but does not address other specific visual resources (except for ocean resources and native vegetation). The General Plan states that land use controls shall be applied to protect the scenic corridors (Policy 40.2.2), and additional sensitive treatments will be used within the scenic corridors, such as agricultural and landscape controls (Policy 40.2.1).

The following roadways within Monterey County have been officially designated as parts of the California Scenic Highway System:

- State Highway 101 from the San Luis Obispo County line to State Highway 68
- State Highway 68 from State Highway 1 in Monterey to the Salinas River
- State Highway 156 from one mile east of Castroville to U.S. 101 near Prunedale
- Laureles Grade Road from State Highway 68 to Carmel Valley Road

The following roadways in Monterey County have been identified as eligible for inclusion in the California Scenic Highway System:

- State Highway 1 from State Highway 68 to the Santa Cruz County line
- U.S. 101 from State Highway 156 near Prunedale to the San Benito County line
- State Highway 25 from State Highway 198 to the San Benito County line

The County of Monterey has designated portions of U.S. 101, four State Highways and two County Roads as Scenic Roadways. These include:

- State Highway 1 from San Luis Obispo County to State Highway 68 (64 miles)
- State Highway 68 from Monterey city limits to Salinas River (10 miles)
- U.S. 101 from State Highway 156 near Prunedale to State Highway 156 near the Rocks (4 miles)
- State Highway 156 (4 miles)
- State Highway 198 from U.S. 101 near San Lucas to the Monterey County boundary (15 miles)
- Laureles Grade (5.5 miles)
- Interlake Road (11.5 miles)

The following roadways in Monterey County are proposed for designation as Scenic Roadways:

- Carmel Valley Road
- State Highway 1 from the State Highway 68 interchange to the Seaside city limits
- State Highway 1 from Marina to the Monterey County boundary at the Pajaro River
- State Highway 68 from the Carmel Hill interchange to New Monterey; and
- River Road

In addition, Holman Highway from the Carmel Hill Interchange to New Monterey has been proposed as a Scenic Highway by the City of Monterey.

San Benito County

In contrast to the other two counties in the Monterey Bay region, San Benito County has no coastline. It is characterized by the Diablo and Gabilan Mountain Ranges, and their associated inland agricultural valleys. Approximately seventy percent of the area within San Benito County can be characterized as public or private open space, with the majority of these areas in private ownership as Williamson Act lands that support active commercial agriculture.

The following roadways in San Benito County have been identified as eligible for inclusion in the California Scenic Highway System:

- U.S. 101 from the Monterey County line to the Santa Clara County line
- State Highway 25 from State Highway 198 to State Highway 156
- State Highway 146
- State Highway 156

The San Benito County General Plan Scenic Roads and Highways Element (1980) includes policies to provide for the protection of certain transportation corridors which are recognized as having unusual or outstanding scenic qualities (Policy 1), to carefully review all projects involving grading within Scenic Corridors (Policy 2), to enhance the visual character of Scenic Corridors, where appropriate (Policy 4), to minimize the visual impact of utility lines on Scenic Corridors (Policy 5), and to protect Scenic Corridors from the proliferation of unnecessary signs (Policy 6) The General Plan designates the following roadways as Scenic Highways, and describes the widths of the associated Scenic Corridors:

- U.S. 101 (entire length within San Benito County - the Scenic Corridor width includes all land 400 feet on either side of the centerline of the road)
- State Highway 129 from its intersection with U.S. 101 to the San Benito County boundary (the Scenic Corridor width includes all land within 340 feet on either side of the centerline of the road)
- State Highway 146 between State Highway 25 and the Monterey County line (the Scenic Corridor width includes all land 340 feet on either side of the centerline of the road)

Santa Cruz County

Santa Cruz County is characterized by scenic ocean coastlines along its western and southern borders, with rugged coastal mountains inland along its northern and eastern boundary, with visual resources generally similar to those of Monterey County described above.

State Highway 152 is the only Santa Cruz County roadway that has been officially designated as part of the California Scenic Highway System. However, the following Santa Cruz County roadways have been identified as eligible for inclusion in the California Scenic Highway System:

- State Highway 9
- State Highway 17

The 1994 General Plan and Local Coastal Program for the County of Santa Cruz contains several policies related to preserving and protecting the visual resources within the County. One policy calls for the protection of significant public viewsheds from all publicly used roads and vista points by minimizing disruption of the landform caused by grading or “inappropriate landscaping and structure design” (Policy 5.10.3). Policies regulate the design of structures within County-designated visual resources areas (Policy 5.10.2) and require supplemental landscaping as visual mitigation for development within the viewshed of designated Scenic Roads (Policy 5.10.13). Policy 5.10.10 designates the following roads and highways as Scenic Roads:

- State Highway 1 from San Mateo County to Monterey County
- State Highway 9 from State Highway 1 to Santa Clara County
- State Highway 17 from State Highway 1 to Santa Clara County
- State Highway 35 from State Highway 17 to San Mateo County
- State Highway 129 from State Highway 1 to San Benito County
- State Highway 152 from State Highway 1 to Santa Clara County
- State Highway 236 from State Highway 9 in Boulder Creek to State Highway 9 at Waterman Gap

The Santa Cruz County General Plan also identifies the following roadway segments as scenic County roads:

- Amesti Road from Varni Road to Browns Valley Road
- Beach Road from State Highway 1 to Palm Beach
- Bonita Drive and San Andreas Road from State Highway 1 to Beach Road
- Bonny Doon Road from State Highway 1 to Pine Flat Road
- Browns Valley Road from Eureka Canyon Road to Hazel Dell Road
- Buena Vista Drive from San Andreas Road to Larkin Valley Road
- Casserly Road from Mt. Madonna Road to State Highway 152

- Corralitos Road from Freedom Boulevard to Browns Valley Road
- Empire Grade from the Santa Cruz city limit to the end of Empire Grade
- East Cliff Drive from 33rd Avenue to 41st Avenue
- Eureka Canyon Road from Highland Way to Corralitos
- Graham Hill Road from Lockwood Lane to State Highway 9
- Hazel Dell Road from Browns Valley Road to Mt. Madonna Road
- Highland Way from Summit Road to Eureka Canyon Road
- Ice Cream Grade
- Martin Road from Pine Flat to Ice Cream Grade
- Mt. Hermon Road from Scotts Valley city limit to Graham Hill Road
- Mt. Madonna Road from Hazel Dell Road to Casserly Road
- Pine Flat Road from Bonny Doon Road to Empire Grade
- Sand Dollar Drive
- Smith Grade
- Summit Road from State Highway 17 to Highland Way
- Sunset Beach and Shell Road
- Swanton Road from State Highway 1 to Davenport Landing to State Highway 1 at Greyhound Rock

3.1.2 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Implementation of the three plans could have a significant environmental impact if it were to result in:

- A substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantial damage to scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- Substantial degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or

- The creation of a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area.

The three plans are program-level planning documents containing a listing of financially constrained Action Element transportation programs and projects. In the case of most of the listed programs and projects, specific design details have not yet been established. Therefore, the following impact discussion relative to the listed projects is general, and does not evaluate any site-specific visual and other aesthetic impacts which may be associated with individual transportation system improvement projects. As detailed engineering plans are prepared for specific projects, an evaluation of site-specific visual and other aesthetic impacts will be required by the agency responsible for the implementation of each individual project as part of the environmental review and approval process.

Scenic Vistas

IMPACT 3.1.1: Substantial Adverse Effects on Scenic Vistas. Construction of some of the projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans may result in a substantial change in existing scenic vistas along roadways that are included in the California Scenic Highway System, that are eligible for inclusion in the California Scenic Highway System, or that have been identified as Scenic Roadways/Scenic Highways/Scenic Roads by one of the three counties in the Monterey Bay region. Examples of projects which might involve such impacts may include (but are not necessarily limited to) operational, safety and capacity improvements to portions of Highway 1 with views of the Pacific Ocean, and projects that would involve improvements on roadways that have been identified as eligible for inclusion in the California Scenic Highway System or that are locally-designated scenic routes. This could represent a **potentially significant environmental impact** associated with the implementation of these types of projects.

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE

MITIGATION MEASURE 3.1.1: Visual/Scenic Resources Analysis

The implementing agency for any proposed project that may result in substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas shall, where appropriate, conduct a detailed visual assessment during the environmental review process and mitigate for significant visual impacts, where feasible. Visual assessments for improvement projects related to roadways that have been designated as part of the California Scenic Highway System shall, where appropriate, be prepared in consultation with Caltrans. Proposed median barriers and soundwalls should be carefully studied to determine if they are really needed, what alternatives may be available, and what mitigation measures (i.e., landscaping) may be appropriate.

RESULTING LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

Through this process of assessment, for most projects it may be possible to identify mitigation measures or alternatives which could reduce project-specific impacts on scenic vistas to a level of

less than significant for most projects. However, even with the implementation of the mitigation measures, impacts associated with a few projects may remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Scenic Resources

IMPACT 3.1.2: Substantial Damage to Scenic Resources. Construction of some of the projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans may result in substantial damage to scenic resources, particularly in the vicinity of roadways that are included in the California Scenic Highway System, that are eligible for inclusion in the California Scenic Highway System, or that have been identified as Scenic Roadways/Scenic Highways/Scenic Roads by one of the three counties in the Monterey Bay region. Examples of projects which might involve such impacts may include (but are not necessarily limited to) road widenings, installation of median barriers, and construction of interchanges or new roadways. In addition, construction of individual improvement projects may affect public views of scenic resources that could result in the short-term blockage of views by construction equipment and staging areas, disruption of views by temporary signage, and exposure of slopes and removal of vegetation. This could represent a **potentially significant environmental impact** associated with the implementation of these types of projects.

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE

MITIGATION MEASURE 3.1.2: Scenic Resource Avoidance by Design

A. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, ensure that any project that may affect scenic resources (particularly along a Scenic Roadway, Scenic Highway or Scenic Road) be designed to have the minimum possible impact on existing vegetation, landscape architecture and natural scenic views, and to avoid or minimize the removal of significant stands of trees and damage to rock outcroppings to the maximum extent possible.

B. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, design transportation project alignments to avoid or minimize substantial physical alteration of the land, due to large amounts of cut and fill. Where a particular improvement project would affect adjacent landforms, the implementing agency shall, where appropriate, ensure that recontouring provides a smooth and gradual transition between modified landforms and existing grade. Where hillsides cannot be totally avoided, consideration shall, where appropriate, be given to dividing the roadway to better fit the topography, or to lengthening the alignment to follow existing contours, where appropriate. Where significant cuts and fills cannot be avoided, plans should be developed and implemented to mitigate identified impacts to the surrounding scenic resources (e.g., extensive landscaping with mature plants, rounding natural portions of cut and fill areas, regrading to the approximate previous visual grade, and design and placement of landscaping and signs to preserve and create scenic views for the motorist). Visual disruption shall, where appropriate, be minimized by re-grading to the approximate natural grades, rounding natural portions of cut and fills, and using retaining walls where appropriate and compatible with existing surrounding land uses.

C. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, prepare grading plans which minimize the removal of scenic resources such as trees, rock outcroppings and historic buildings.

D. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, design roadway alignments to avoid or minimize removal of significant mature trees. Where the retention of significant mature trees is not feasible, tree replanting shall, where appropriate, be undertaken using compatible native species in rural areas and appropriate street trees in urban areas at the completion of the construction process.

E. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, ensure that native, drought-tolerant plants and other landscape materials enhance landform variation, provide erosion control and blend with the surrounding natural setting. To ensure compliance with approved landscape plans, the implementing agency shall, where appropriate, provide a monetary performance security equal to the value of the landscaping/irrigation installation.

F. Where the use of soundwalls or other architectural features that could block views of scenic resources may be necessary to mitigate potential noise effects associated with specific projects, implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, ensure that such features incorporate offsets, accents and landscaping to prevent monotony, and that they be designed in accordance with the architectural review requirements of the local jurisdiction.

RESULTING LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

The effective application of this type of mitigation by the implementing agencies could reduce impacts to scenic resources to a level of less than significant for most projects. However, even with the implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts associated with a few projects may remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Visual Character

IMPACT 3.1.3: Substantial Degradation of Visual Character. Construction of some of the projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans may result in substantial degradation of the existing visual character or quality of project sites and/or surroundings, particularly in areas which are currently rural in character. Examples of projects which might involve such impacts may include (but are not necessarily limited to) the development of rail stations (although in some instances, new rail stations may enhance the existing visual character of an area), construction of a new roadways, construction of new bridges or bridge improvements, road widenings, and the construction of lighting facilities, bus shelters and signs. This could represent a **potentially significant environmental impact** associated with the implementation of these types of projects.

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE

MITIGATION MEASURE 3.1.3: Visual/Scenic Resources Analysis

A. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, prepare a visual assessment for any proposed project which may result in substantial degradation of the visual character of the project site and/or surroundings. Through this process of analysis and evaluation, it may be possible to identify mitigation measures or alternatives which would reduce project-specific visual impacts.

B. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, ensure that transportation system improvement projects are designed to minimize visual impacts through project siting and design, including minimizing vegetation removal.

C. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, avoid the removal of existing mature trees associated with transportation system improvement projects to the extent possible. Any trees lost shall, where appropriate, be replaced at a minimum 2:1 basis with native trees (or consistent with tree replacement ratios of the local jurisdictions in which impacts could occur) and incorporated into the landscaping design for the project.

D. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, minimize roadway, transit station, park-and-ride lot and wharf facility lighting to the extent possible, and shall, where appropriate, not allow lighting fixtures to exceed the maximum height limits set by the local jurisdiction in which such projects would occur.

E. Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, ensure that bus shelters and other ancillary transportation facilities are designed and constructed in accordance with the architectural review requirements of the local jurisdiction.

RESULTING LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

The effective application of this type of mitigation by the implementing agencies could reduce impacts to scenic resources to a level of less than significant for most projects. However, even with the implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts associated with a few projects may remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Light and Glare

IMPACT 3.1.4: Increased Light and Glare. Construction of some of the projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans may result in the creation of a new source of substantial light or glare which could adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the immediate vicinity of the project sites. Examples of projects which might involve such impacts may include (but are not necessarily limited to) construction of new roadways or roadway extensions, the development of rail or transit stations, and the construction of lighting facilities and signs. This

could represent a **potentially significant environmental impact** associated with the implementation of these types of projects.

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE

MITIGATION MEASURE 3.1.4: Minimize Intrusion of Lighting

Implementing agencies shall, where appropriate, ensure that all lighting associated with transportation system improvement projects is designed to minimize intrusion onto adjacent properties and meets the architectural review and lighting requirements of the local jurisdiction in which the improvements would occur. Lighting that accompanies any proposed project should be minimized to the extent possible, consistent with safety requirements. Plans for individual projects should incorporate design features, such as hooded light shields (to direct lighting to the ground or toward the facility and away from adjacent residential and other uses), the use of dense landscaping to block light and glare from spilling over into adjacent uses, the use of unobtrusive signage that does not reflect light or glare onto nearby occupied properties, and the use of white reflective paint in lieu of reflective materials to the extent possible.

RESULTING LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE

The effective application of these light/glare reduction design techniques by implementing agencies could reduce project-specific impacts to a level of less than significant.