

Appendix A

Visual Impact Assessment

MEMORANDUM

To: Dale Sakamoto – County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works
From: Joshua Saunders, AICP – Environmental Planner
Subject: Colima Road Improvement Project – Abbreviated Visual Impact Assessment
Date: Type date here
cc: Jason Reynolds-Dudek Project Manager
Attachment(s): A - Project Location
B – Site Photographs

The purpose of this Visual Impact Assessment is to document potential visual impacts caused by the Colima Road Improvement Project (proposed project) and propose measures to lessen any detrimental impacts that are identified. Visual impacts are demonstrated by identifying visual resources in the project area, measuring the amount of change that would occur as a result of the project, and predicting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes. While the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) do not have direct oversight of the proposed project, the presentation of this Visual Impact Assessment generally follows the guidance outlined in the publication *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* published by the FHWA (FHWA; January 2015).

1 Project Overview

The proposed project is located on Colima Road in southeastern Los Angeles County between the eastern boundary of City of Whittier and unincorporated Rowland Heights. Colima Road is a part of County Route N8, a county highway traveling from the City of Whittier through Hacienda Heights, Rowland Heights, City of Industry to Interstate 10 in the City of West Covina. The project is located east of Interstate 10, south of State Route (SR) 60, and west of SR 57. The Project begins at the eastern boundary of City of Whittier and travels east through the unincorporated Los Angeles County limits of Hacienda Heights, Rowland Heights, and City of Industry, ending on Fullerton Road in Rowland Heights. Attachment A illustrates the regional location of the Project.

The proposed project would add a third lane in each direction of Colima Road from Halliburton Road to Fullerton Road. Colima Road would be widened by narrowing the existing median to 12 feet wide from Halliburton Road to Azusa Avenue 750 feet east of Stoner Creek Road to Fullerton Road. Along the City/County jurisdiction boundary, Colima Road would be widened by narrowing the existing median to 10 feet and widening the north side of the road by two feet from Azusa Avenue to 750 feet east of Stoner Creek Road. The proposed project would require repair of broken curb and gutter and sidewalk due to damage from trees. Table 1 provides a summary of the proposed scope of work for the Project road segments. Attachment A illustrates the project location.

Table 1. Proposed Road Improvement Scope of Work

Segment	Scope	Jurisdiction
Colima Road City of Whittier Boundary to Hacienda Boulevard	Cold mill the existing AC pavement full width 1 1/2 inches and overlay with 1 1/2 inches of tire rubber modified asphalt concrete pavement. Reconstruct the left-turn pocket at Camino Del Sur.	County
Colima Road Halliburton Road to Azusa Avenue and 640 feet east of Stoner Creek Road to Larkvane Road	Narrow the existing median to 12 feet wide to accommodate 3 lanes (11 feet, 10 feet, 10 feet) and a Class II Bike Lane in each direction. Widen the right turn pocket on southwest corner of Azusa Avenue and Colima Road by 2 feet.	County
Colima Road Azusa Avenue to 640 feet east of Stoner Creek Road	Narrow the existing median to 10 feet wide and widen the north side of the roadway 2 feet to accommodate 3 lanes (11 feet each) and a Class II Bike Lane in each direction. Reconstruct curb, gutter, driveway, sidewalk.	County, City of Industry
Colima Road Larkvane Road to Fullerton Road	Narrow the existing median to 12 feet wide to accommodate 3 lanes (12 feet each) in each direction.	County

Approximately 65 trees will be removed and landscape improvements consisting of the planting of trees (over 200), shrubs, and groundcover in medians throughout the corridor would be implemented. Tree species to be planted include Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*), ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba* “Autumn Gold”), holly oak (*Quercus ilex*), and water gum (*Trisaniopsis laurina*). The proposed project will also require repair of broken curb and gutter and sidewalk due to damage from trees. Lastly, the installation of new median hardscape throughout the corridor is also proposed.

2 Project Location and Setting

The proposed project is located in the California Mediterranean ecoregion of Southern California. More specifically, the project is located north of the Puente Hills in southern San Gabriel Valley and encompasses portions of the unincorporated areas of Hacienda Heights and Rowland Heights, and the City of Industry. Most of the area associated with the proposed project corridor is located within the unincorporated area of Hacienda Heights, though the portion of the corridor east of Azusa Avenue is located within unincorporated Rowland Heights, and the City of Industry.

The local area landscape is characterized by a developed and relatively flat valley floor though the western end of the corridor briefly parallels undulating, hilly terrain of the Puente Hills. Segments of the corridor through the Hacienda Heights area also border sloping, elevated (and landscaped) terrain to the south and through the City of Industry, elevated land occurs to the south of the corridor. The entirety of the corridor is developed with a mix of uses including residential, education, institution, recreation (Peter F Schabarunm Regional Park), and commercial with the dominant use being single-family residential. Between Azusa Avenue and Stoner Creek Road, the dominant land use along the corridor is commercial as evidence by the presence of multiple shopping centers including Bixby Hacienda Shopping Center in Hacienda Heights, Puente Hills Mall in City of Industry, and Ross Plaza Shopping

Center in Rowland Heights to the north and south of the road. Despite the consistent of development and associated landscaping along the corridor, longer views to the distant San Gabriel Mountains are occasionally available to motorists and other users of Colima Road where development and landscaping are setback or absent from the corridor.

Non-native landscaping is commonplace along the corridor and the removal of natural vegetation and alteration of landforms to accommodate development is evident in the project area.

From west to east, the project limits extend from the City of Whittier boundary to approximately Fullerton Road in Rowland Heights (approximately 4.8 miles long). The segment of Colima Road included in the project limits generally features two travel lanes in each direction; however, between Larkvane Road and Fullerton Road (the easternmost 1,200 feet of Colima Road within the project limits), three eastbound lanes and two westbound lanes are provided. A raised, unvegetated median (10 to 12 feet wide) is provided along the entire length of the corridor within the project limits. Landscaping and trees tend to be installed on one or both sides of the sidewalk (continuous along the corridor) within the project limits.

Photographs of existing conditions along the proposed project corridor are provided in Attachment B, Site Photographs.

While Colima Road is not a designated or eligible state scenic highway (Caltrans 2021), it is a designated scenic corridor outside of the project limits in the City of Whittier. Figure 5-2, Recreation Opportunities, of the Whittier General Plan identifies Colima Road as a Scenic Route from approximately Mar Vista Street northeast to the City limit near Casino Drive (a distance of approximately 1.4 miles) (City of Whittier 1993). However, within the project limits, Colima Road has not been designated as a scenic route by the County of Los Angeles or the City of Whittier General Plans (Los Angeles County 2015, City of Industry 2014). Despite the lack of scenic designation within the project limits, views to hillsides and ridgelines are occasionally available from the Colima Road corridor. Scenic resources designated as such by the County include the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills and because these landforms are generally visible (pursuant to local atmospheric conditions and haze associated with smog) from the corridor to northbound motorists (i.e., San Gabriel Mountains) and southbound motorists (i.e., San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills), scenic resources are considered to be present.

Lastly, Los Angeles County has established policies concerning the protection of scenic resources however, none are specifically applicable to the preservation of distant views to scenic resources. For example, Policy C/NR 13.1 of the General Plan concerns the protection of scenic resources through land use regulations and Policy C/NR 13.2 seeks to protect ridgelines from incompatible development that diminishes their scenic value.

3 Visual Resources and Resource Change

The visual character of the proposed project will be compatible with the existing visual character of the corridor. The basic horizontal form of existing roadway features including travel lanes, sidewalk, median, and parkways would generally be maintained. The addition of a third lane in each direction from Halliburton Road to Fullerton Road, and the widening or narrowing of the road median would not result in the substantial degradation of existing visual character of the corridor, which is an existing, primarily four lane road border by developed lands uses (e.g.; residential and commercial land uses). Narrowed or widened medians, striping associated with new Class II Bike Lanes, and the removal and replanting of median and sidewalk/parkway landscaping would result in slight

alterations to existing lines displayed by medians and the road surface; however, these changes would be consistent with the existing developed character of the road and more generally, the developed project setting. New landscaping, and road resurfacing from the Whittier city limit to Hacienda Boulevard in the Hacienda Heights area, would result in the introduction of vibrant or fresh colors where proposed yet these character elements would be compatible and progressively blend with existing surfaces and landscaping present along the corridor. Furthermore, the introduction of new median landscaping to include trees, shrubs, and groundcover (and the installation of river rock paving) would result in improved visual quality over existing medians that are generally paved with asphalt throughout the corridor. Lastly, the reconstruction of curb, gutter, driveway, sidewalk, and turn pockets, and the relocation of utilities, would be not result in substantial visual change as these features display a regular presence along the existing corridor.

The visual quality of the existing corridor will not be negatively altered by the proposed project. With the exception of occasional views to the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills, the visual quality and vividness of the corridor is low and is informed by the regular presence of development and street trees that are not particularly exemplary. With the exception of replanted trees (approximately 65 trees would be removed and over 200 new trees would be planted) and relocated street lights and traffic signals, the project does not include vertical elements that could potentially interfere with existing views to scenic resources (i.e., the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills). Regarding trees and vertical utilities, because these features are currently present along the corridor and replanting and relocation would generally result in maintenance of these features in the general vicinity, substantial new blockage or interruption of distant views to scenic landforms is not anticipated. Therefore, effects to existing vividness would be low and subtle. Concerning intactness, the project consists of traffic relief measures that would be implemented on an existing road and travel corridor. The features included in the project (i.e., road resurfacing, reconstructed turn pockets, narrowed and widened medians, new bike lanes, reconstructed curb, gutter, driveway, and sidewalk, relocated and/or reconstructed utilities, and landscaping removal and replanting) would not result in the introduction of eyesores or particularly “new” features to the corridor. Thus, the project would have a low effect on existing intactness of the corridor. Lastly, as the existing right-of-way width of Colima Road is adequate to accommodate the additional lanes and all work would generally occur within the developed limits of the Colima Road right-of-way, the introduction of improvements would display unity and be visually consistent with the existing developed character and quality of corridor. As such, effects to unity would be low.

In summary, resource change (changes to visual resources as measured by changes in visual character and visual quality) associated with implementation of the project will be low.

4 Viewers and Viewer Response

Neighbors (persons with views to the road) and users of Colima Road (people with views from the road) will not be substantially affected by the proposed project. While construction activities associated with the implementation of improvements may be viewed as a nuisance by neighbors and road users, temporary nuisances are anticipated due to construction noise, additional vehicles and activities in/along the corridor, and potential travel delays associated with construction activities. The effects associated with construction of the project would be temporary and would not result in substantial/significant impacts to existing scenic views or the established visual character and quality of the existing urbanized corridor. Once constructed, road users would be exposed to views of the proposed improvements as they utilize the corridor and travel through the Hacienda Heights and Rowland Heights area, and briefly, the City of Industry. Due to their assumed familiarity with the urbanized corridor, and the nature

of the proposed improvements which are consistent with existing features present along the Colima Road corridor, viewer sensitivity to change associated with road improvements would be low. While exposure would be high, low sensitivity to the roadway improvements proposed by the project, and the nature of the improvements that would be visually consistent with the existing developed road corridor, road users will not be substantially affect by the project.

Regarding neighbors, permanent visual change associated with the project would be localized and experience from private vantage points. As such, the entirety of project changes/road improvements would not be experienced by individual residents from their properties. Furthermore, except where residential land uses are located upslope from the surface of Colima Road such as near the City of Whittie boundary, between Hacienda Boulevard and Punta Del Este Drive, and between Countrywood Avenue and Aleppo Place, views from residential properties to the corridor features with the exception of trees, streetlights, and traffic signals, are generally blocked by private yard fencing and landscaping. Where visible to neighbors, roadway improvements and features would be consistent and compatible with road features of the existing corridor. The project would not introduce substantially new or contrasting features relatively to the existing corridor. Therefore, while views to improvements would be narrow, exposure would be long-term due to the permanency of residents in the visual landscape, and sensitivity is typically considered to be high, the overall low visual change resulting from the project would not substantially affect neighbors. Once constructed, it is anticipated that the average response of all viewer groups will be low.

5 Visual Impact

Implementation of the project would result in low visual change to the Colima Road corridor and adjacent developed landscape. As previously stated in Section IV, Visual Resources and Resource Change, the overall visual change associated with implementation of the proposed improvements to the existing developed Colima Road corridor would be low. Project features would generally repeat the basic forms, lines, colors, and textures of existing elements within the road corridor and as a result, effects to existing vividness, intactness, and unity of the visual experience along Colima Road within the project limits would be low. Furthermore, once constructed the visual consistency of proposed improvements within the existing Colima Road corridor would not create substantial contrast that would otherwise draw viewer attention.

In consideration of scenic vistas, views to the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills are regularly available along the Colima Road corridor. These resources (and other prominent regional landforms) are identified as scenic resources in the Los Angeles County General Plan. With the exception of replanted trees (approximately 65 trees would be removed and replanted) and relocated street lights and traffic signals, the project does not include vertical elements that could potentially interfere with the availability of views to scenic resources (i.e., the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills). Regarding trees and vertical utilities, these features are currently present along the corridor and replanting and relocation would generally result in maintenance of these features in the general vicinity of their current location. Therefore, substantial new blockage or interruption of distant views to scenic landforms from a mobile vantage point (i.e., Colima Road) is not anticipated. Regarding stationary vantage points, the corridor is developed and with the exception of Peter F Schabarunm Regional Park, the project corridor generally lacks opportunities for scenic vistas from public vantage points. Trails and potential observation points within the regional park are generally setback from the Colima Road corridor and are situated atop elevated terrain. The elevated vantage points, and distance from vertical elements within the corridor, reduce opportunities for vertical project elements to be viewed in line with regional scenic resources including the San Gabriel Mountains and Puente Hills.

In addition, these features currently occur within the corridor and tree replanting and/or utility relocation would not result in substantial blockage or interruption of existing views. Thus, impacts to scenic vistas would be less than significant.

Colima Road is not a designated or eligible state scenic highway (Caltrans 2021). The nearest state scenic highway, State Route 57 (an eligible state scenic highway) between Brea and Diamond Bar, is located over 3.5 miles from the eastern extent of the project limits (i.e., Fullerton Road) and due to distant and intervening terrain and development, does not offer views to the project corridor. As such, implementation of the project would not damage scenic resources present within a state scenic highway. No impact would occur.

As previously stated in Section IV, the visual character of the proposed project will be compatible with the existing visual character of the corridor. The basic horizontal form of existing roadway features including travel lanes, sidewalk, median, and parkways would generally be maintained. The addition of a third lane in each direction from Halliburton Road to Fullerton Road, and the widening or narrowing of the road median would not result in substantial degradation of existing visual character, which is an existing, primarily four lane road border by developed uses. Narrowed or widened medians, striping associated with new Class II Bike Lanes, and the removal and replanting of median and sidewalk/parkway landscaping would result in slight alterations to existing lines displayed by medians and the road surface; however, these changes would be consistent with the existing developed character of the road and more generally, the developed project setting. New landscaping, and road resurfacing from the Whittier city limit to Hacienda Boulevard in the Hacienda Heights area, may result in the introduction of vibrant or fresh colors where proposed yet these character elements would be compatible and progressively blend with existing surfaces and landscaping present along the corridor. Lastly, the reconstruction of curb, gutter, driveway, sidewalk, and turn pockets, and the relocation of utilities, would not result in substantial visual change as these features display a regular presence along the existing corridor. Impacts would be less than significant.

Construction of the project would occur during daylight hours and would not require the use of mobile lighting to illuminate the corridor. The project includes the relocation of street lights and traffic signals. Street lights and traffic signals are existing elements along the corridor and their relocation within the generally vicinity of existing light and signal locations is not anticipated to result in substantially altered lighting conditions during nighttime hours. As with existing lighting, relocated street lights would be hooded/shielded and feature downward directed fixtures. The project corridor is an existing road that features street lighting and traffic signals and thus, is generally illuminated by these elements during nighttime hours. Therefore, the relocation of street lights and traffic signals would not adversely affect the quality of existing nighttime views and impacts would be less than significant.

6 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

As discussed above in Section VI, the visual impacts resulting from construction and operation of the project would be less than significant. As such, mitigation measures are not required. In addition, due to the anticipated low visual change associated with implementation of the project, no avoidance or minimization measures are proposed at this time.

Landscape enhancements consisting of the installation of trees, shrubs, and groundcover within corridor medians (new hardscape elements consisting of river rock paving would also be installed in medians) are a component of the project and would result in an improved visual condition and experience for motorists, other users of Colima Road, and nearby land uses.

7 References Cited

Caltrans (California Department of Transportation). 2021. California State Scenic Highways. <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways>. Accessed May 20, 2021.

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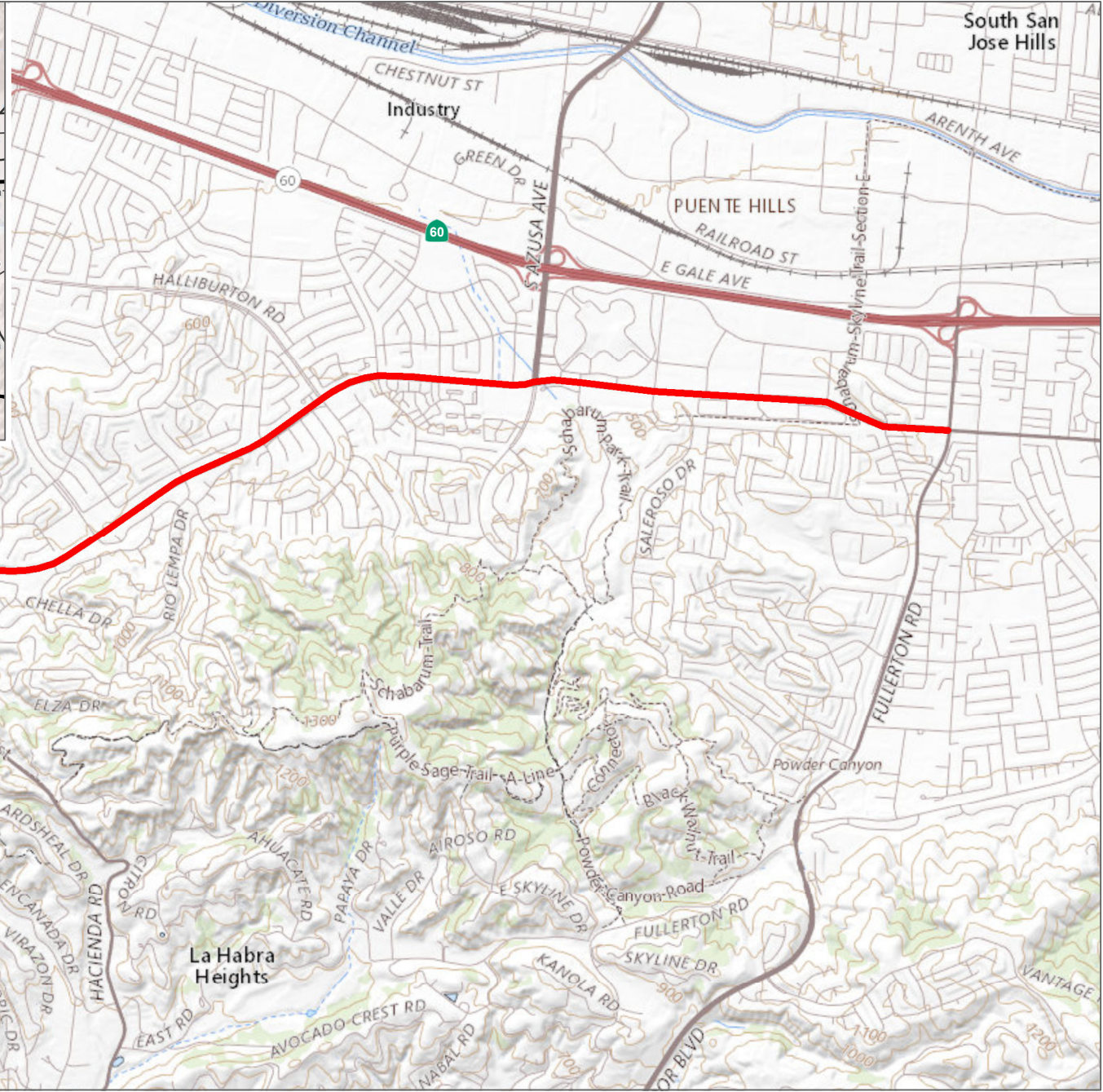
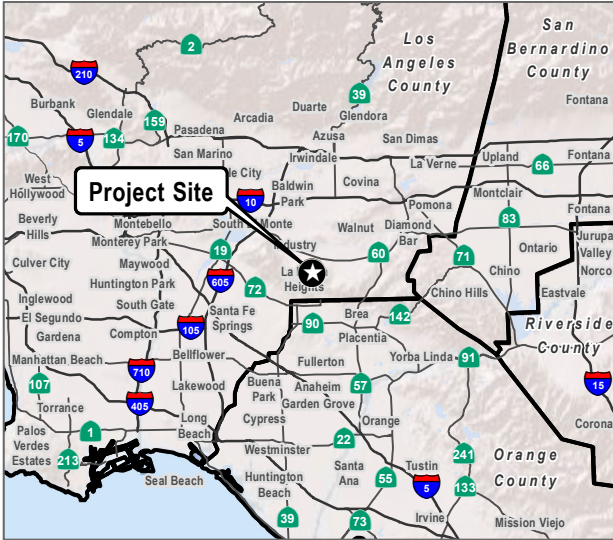
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Attachment A

Project Location



 Colima Road Project

SOURCE: USGS National Map 2021;
La Habra Quadrangle



Project Location
Colima Road Improvement Project

Attachment B

Site Photographs

