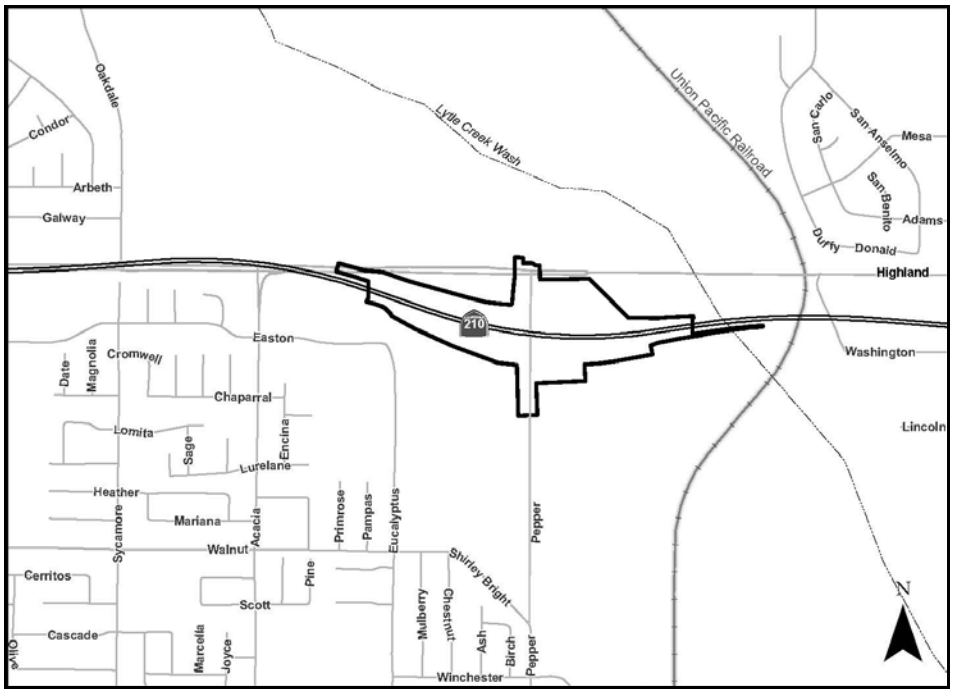
State Route 210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange Project



Visual Impact Assessment

City of Rialto, San Bernardino County, California
08-SBD-210 (PM 19.3/20.1)
Project ID: 0800020180
EA 08-443940

January 2014

Caltrans

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This Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared under the direction of the following Licensed Landscape Architect. The Licensed Landscape Architect attests to the technical information contained therein and the data upon which recommendations, conclusions, and decisions are based.

Reviewed by:
Jennifer Stock, License No. 5155
Project Landscape Architect

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BMPs	Best Management Practices
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
City	City of Rialto
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FTIP	Federal Transportation Improvement Program
I-	Interstate
KOPs	key observation points
PM	post mile
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NN	National Network
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
SANBAG	San Bernardino Associated Governments
SCAG	Southern California Association of Governments
SR	State Route
STAA	Surface Transportation Assistance Act
TA	Terminal Access
UPRR	Union Pacific Railroad
Valley	San Bernardino Valley
VIA	Visual Impact Assessment
Wash	Lytle Creek Wash

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Summary

The proposed project would not result in substantial adverse effects on visual resources under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Visual quality under the proposed project would remain moderate overall and in one instance where it is low currently would be enhanced slightly—this is due to the poor current condition and appearance of the previously installed Pepper Avenue local roadway improvements, and of the right of way along Highland Avenue in general.

No changes to significant views would occur (i.e., north-facing views to the San Gabriel/San Bernardino Mountain ridgelines), as most of the proposed improvements would occur at ground level; above ground level improvements would appear to be extensions of the existing SR-210 embankments (i.e., proposed interchange on- and off-ramps). Therefore, existing views by sensitive viewing groups such as residents and recreationists would not be adversely affected.

Although the project is proposed within the setting of Lytle Creek Wash, it would not significantly contrast with its current visual character or adversely affect its visual quality. In addition, all minor short-term disruptions to the visual setting as a result of excavation and construction activities will be readily addressed through the implementation of standard San Bernardino Associated Governments/California Department of Transportation Best Management Practices (BMPs). Therefore, no adverse effects would occur under NEPA and no significant impacts under CEQA would result.

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Chapter 1 Proposed Project

The San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG), in coordination with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the City of Rialto (City), is proposing to construct the new interchange along State Route (SR) 210 at Pepper Avenue, between post mile (PM) 19.3 and PM 20.1.

This proposed project is included in the 2013 Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) as project number 20110110. It is also included in the Southern California Association of Governments' (SCAG) 2012–2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) as project number 4M1007 (project identification number 08-0002-0180).

1.1 Project Background

The proposed SR-210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange project is located along SR-210 within the jurisdictional limits of the Cities of Rialto and San Bernardino (Figures 1 and 2). The interchange immediately to the west is Riverside Avenue and to the east is State Street/University Parkway. Preliminary engineering was previously completed, and final design was initiated, for the proposed interchange under the SR-210 freeway extension project. In mid-2003, this interchange was removed from the SR-210 freeway extension project since the construction of Pepper Avenue to Highland Avenue, which is a separate local project by the City of Rialto, was not completed. As part of the SR-210 freeway extension project, some grading occurred and partial right of way was preserved for a future diamond configuration interchange at SR-210/Pepper Avenue. Pepper Avenue currently extends approximately 2,000 feet north of Baseline Road to Shirley Bright Road (refer to Figure 2). The City of Rialto is now currently constructing the Pepper Avenue Extension as a four-lane roadway from this point up to approximately 1,300 feet south of Highland Avenue. The Caltrans right of way extends south along Pepper Avenue approximately 500 feet south of the proposed eastbound ramps intersection. The 1,300-foot portion of Pepper Avenue within Caltrans right of way from the City's terminus to Highland Avenue is planned to be constructed by the City as a two-lane roadway (one lane in each direction) until the interchange project is constructed. The City initiated construction of the four-lane extension of Pepper Avenue in July 2012 and expects to complete construction by the end of 2013. The City is also scheduled to initiate and complete construction of the two-lane gap closure portion of Pepper Avenue by the end of 2013. Both projects are scheduled to be completed well in advance of the proposed SR-210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange project (refer to Figure 3).

1.2 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed SR-210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange project is to:

- Provide improved connectivity to the regional transportation system from the local transportation network; and
- Help achieve the goals of the existing local planning documents regarding access to the regional transportation system.

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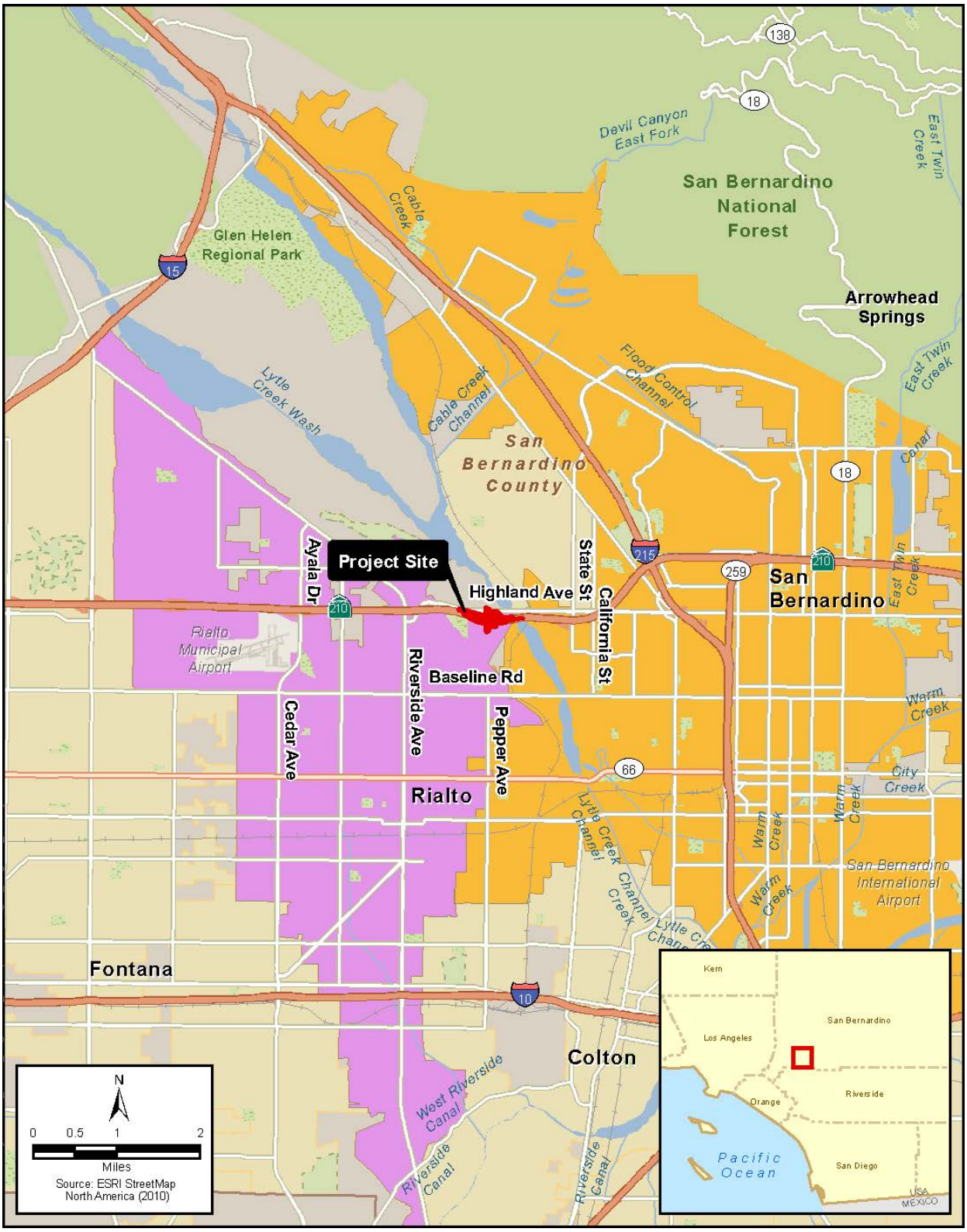

Figure 1
Project Vicinity Map
State Route 210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange Project

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Figure 2
Project Location Map
State Route 210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange Project

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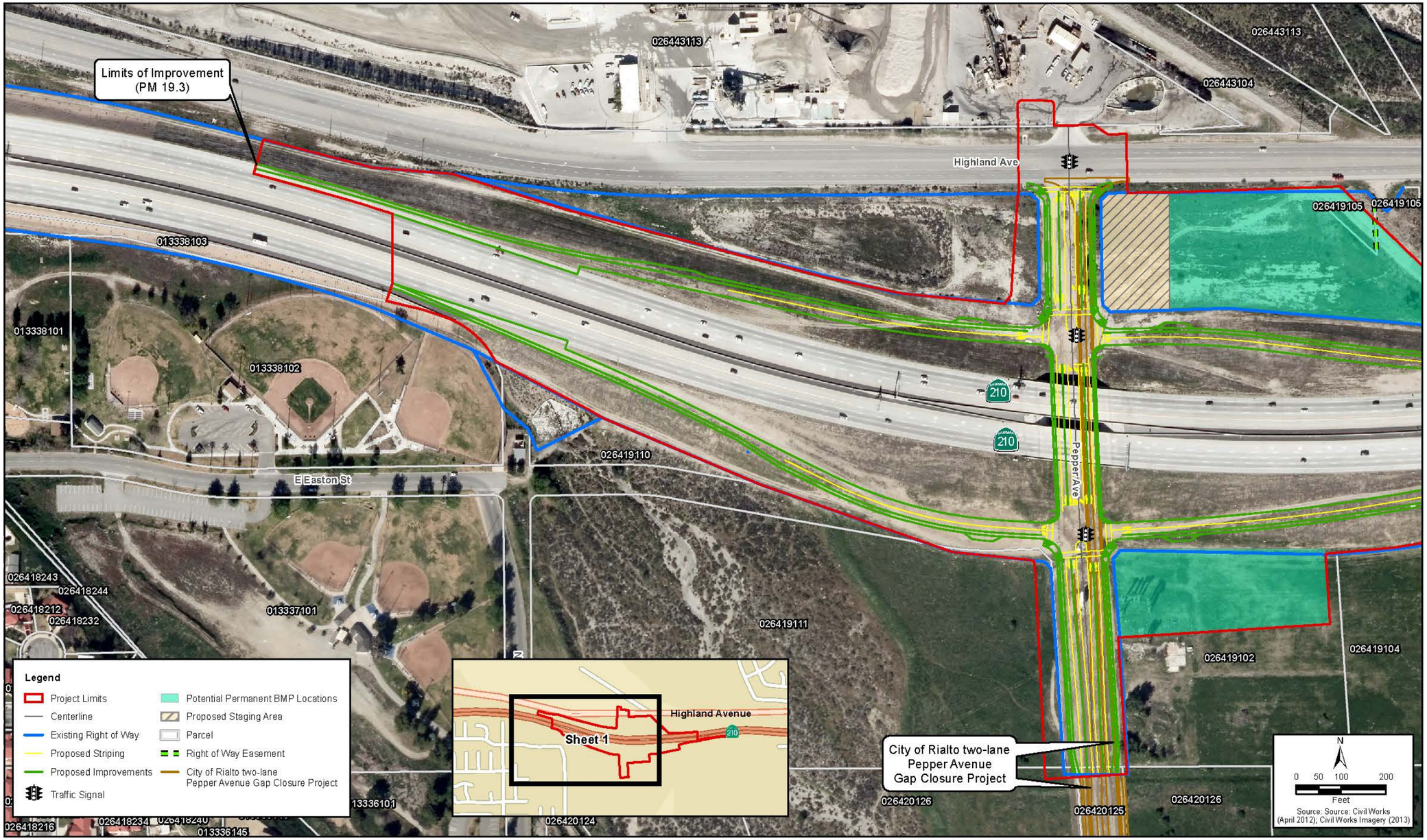

Figure 3 – Sheet 1
Build Alternative
State Route 210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange Project

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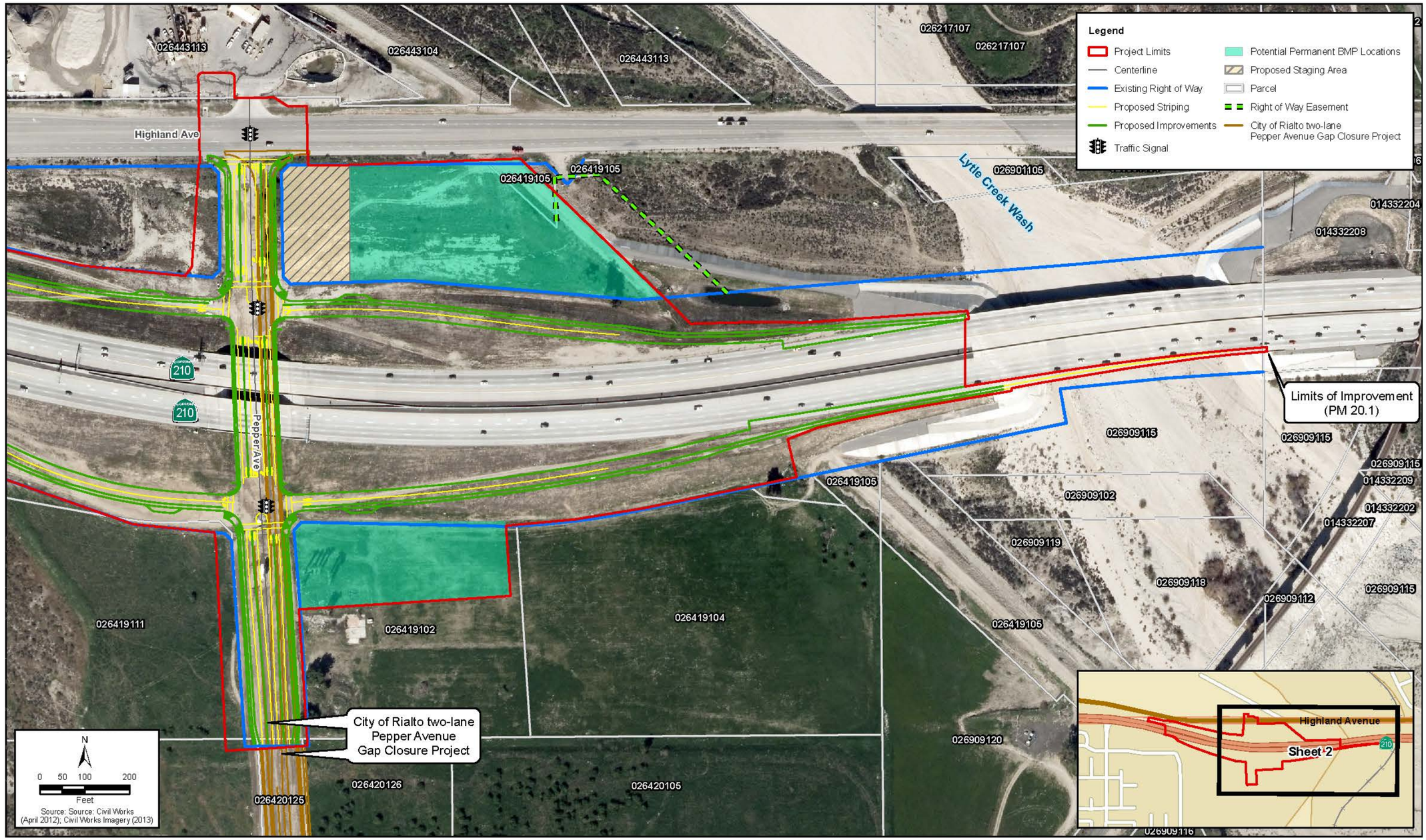

Figure 3 – Sheet 2
Build Alternative
State Route 210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange Project

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Access between SR-210 and Interstate (I)-10 is restricted at the east end of the City of Rialto due to the orientation of Lytle Creek, a tributary of the Santa Ana River. Lytle Creek runs diagonally across the east end of the City of Rialto, which results in a limited number of north/south roadways to the east of Acacia Avenue and to the north of Baseline Road. This limits access for both local traffic attempting to access the regional transportation network, and in particular in trying to access SR-210, and for regional connectivity to the local transportation network, particularly in the eastern portion of Rialto.

According to the City of Rialto General Plan (adopted in 2010), due to its location and access to SR-210, I-10, rail lines, and airports, the City is attractive to goods movement businesses. Truck routes have been designated in the City to accommodate the large volumes of truck traffic associated with goods movement. Caltrans has designated two truck route classes based on California legislation: National Network (NN) and Terminal Access (TA) routes. The truck routes in Rialto are defined as TA routes. These routes are portions of state routes or local roads that can accommodate Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) standard trucks. TA routes allow STAA trucks to: 1) travel between NN routes; 2) reach a truck's operating facility, or 3) reach a facility where freight originates, terminates, or is handled in the transportation process.

Within Rialto, Pepper Avenue is designated as a truck route. Pepper Avenue currently does not connect to SR-210, which hinders the ability of the route to accommodate the truck traffic and to meet the defined requirements of TA routes. As previously noted, Pepper Avenue was planned as an interchange when the SR-210 freeway was originally built, and most of the necessary right of way was reserved for the interchange at that time. The Pepper Avenue Interchange is shown as a future interchange in the City of Rialto's General Plan, and Pepper Avenue is also shown in the General Plan as a north/south truck route.

The next closest north/south designated truck route is Cedar Avenue/Ayala Drive, which is located approximately 2.5 miles to the west. This results in a less direct access route between SR-210 and I-10 for travelers in Rialto as trucks and other traffic have to follow a more circuitous route to travel between these facilities, increasing the miles travelled for traffic heading east on SR-210.

1.3 Alternatives

This section describes the proposed action and the design alternatives that were developed to meet the identified need through accomplishing the defined purpose while avoiding or minimizing environmental impacts. For the proposed project, a Build Alternative and a No-Build Alternative are being considered.

1.3.1 Build Alternative

The proposed Build Alternative would construct a new tight diamond interchange along SR-210 at Pepper Avenue. The project would provide freeway access ramps at each of the four quadrants of the diamond configuration interchange. The eastbound and westbound off-ramps would widen from one lane where the ramps diverge from SR-210 to two lanes at the intersection with Pepper Avenue where a dedicated left turn lane and a dedicated right turn lane would be provided. The eastbound and westbound on-ramps would each include two lanes at the intersection with Pepper

Avenue and would taper to one lane prior to merging onto SR-210. At the ramp intersections with Pepper Avenue, traffic signals would be installed. A traffic signal would also be installed at the Pepper Avenue/Highland Avenue intersection.

Pepper Avenue would be widened from two (constructed as the City's gap closure project) to four through lanes from Highland Avenue to south of the intersection of Pepper Avenue and the eastbound ramps; a distance of approximately 1,300 feet. This portion of Pepper Avenue would ultimately consist of two 12-foot through lanes in each direction with an 8-foot shoulder, curb and gutter, a 6.5-foot parkway, and a 5-foot sidewalk on both sides of the roadway (i.e., next to the 6.5-foot parkway northbound and southbound from the freeway), except within the undercrossing where the sidewalk would be 6.5 feet wide. A dedicated 12-foot left turn lane from northbound Pepper Avenue to the westbound on-ramp and from southbound Pepper Avenue to the eastbound on-ramp would also be constructed. The south end of the interchange project would match the four-lane Pepper Avenue Extension project that is currently under construction by the City of Rialto.

Two retaining walls would be constructed along Pepper Avenue beneath the undercrossing structures at the abutment slopes of the structure. They are anticipated to each be approximately 400 feet long with a 10-foot design height. The retaining walls would include aesthetic design treatments and features consistent with the State Route 210 Corridor Master Plan. Utilities would be adjusted or relocated, as needed, to accommodate the new interchange. Best Management Practices (BMPs) features, including modifications to existing, or the installation of new, water quality control features, would also be part of the project. This is anticipated to include two additional water quality basins, which would be adjacent to the southeast corner of the proposed eastbound on-ramp and the northeast corner of the proposed westbound off-ramp along the Pepper Avenue extension. The water quality basins would be designed and planted so they would blend into the existing sage scrub landscape. Limited additional landscaping appropriate to the setting, and any necessary irrigation, will be installed to preserve and enhance existing landscape character. Also, to the fullest extent practicable, water quality-related BMPs would be designed to convey both stormwater quantity flows and peak flows.

Some permanent right of way acquisition is anticipated for the proposed Build Alternative.

1.3.2 No-Build Alternative

Under the No-Build Alternative, no interchange would be constructed along SR-210 at Pepper Avenue. The No-Build Alternative does not meet the project purpose and need; however, it would not preclude the construction of future improvements as part of a future project. Under this alternative, the Pepper Avenue Extension project would be completed; however, the 1,300-foot, two-lane gap closure portion of Pepper Avenue beneath SR-210, connecting Pepper Avenue with Highland Avenue, would operate as a two-lane facility and not be widened to four lanes under this alternative.

Chapter 2 Affected Environment

2.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal and state policies require that aesthetics and potential impacts to visual resources be considered in the design of the proposed project. In addition, local policies governing aesthetics, as codified in the City of Rialto General Plan will also be taken into consideration in developing the project. This chapter provides an overview of the pertinent federal, state, and local policies governing aesthetics.

2.1.1 Federal Requirements

Federal Highway Administration Visual Impact Assessment Guidance

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects provides an analytical framework for identifying and assessing qualitative changes to the visual environment that could be introduced as part of a transportation project. It is intended to satisfy the provisions of both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as they relate to aesthetic impacts. The process used in the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) generally follows the guidelines outlined in the publication Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects, Federal Highway Administration, March 1981, as follows:

- Define the project setting and viewshed.
- Identify key views for visual assessment.
- Assess existing visual resources and viewer response.
- Depict the visual appearance of project alternatives.
- Assess changes to visual resources and predict viewer response to those changes.
- Assess the visual impacts of project alternatives.
- Propose methods to mitigate adverse visual impacts.

This analysis has been prepared in accordance with the objectives and methods described in FHWA and Caltrans visual impact assessment guidelines. Consistent with FHWA (and Caltrans) guidance, in assessing a project's potential to adversely affect visual quality, the following steps have been taken:

- The visual environment and existing landscape characteristics within the visual resources study area have been defined and documented. The visual environment has been evaluated for both the existing condition and the future planned condition.
- Applicable planning documents (e.g., general plans, planning and zoning codes, etc.) have been reviewed for pertinent policy and guidance information.

- Major viewer groups have been identified, and predicted viewer responses have been documented.
- Typical views for the visual assessment have been identified, based on the actual and predicted responses of representative viewers.
- Review of the project description, engineering plans, and other project drawings took place, and the type and degree of visual changes expected to result in the visual resources study area have been documented.
- Design recommendations for specific project features and locations were reviewed to enhance the visual environment for stationary and transient viewers.
- Appropriate mitigation measures have been identified.

A number of variables affect the degree of visibility, visual contrast, and the ultimate impact of a project. Such variables include the scale and size of facilities, distances and viewing angles, color and texture, and the influences of adjacent scenery or land uses. Even where visible, viewer response and sensitivity vary depending on viewer attitudes and expectations. Viewer sensitivity is distinguished among adjacent viewers in recreation, residential, and commercial and office/industrial areas, with the first considered to have the highest potential for sensitivity, while the latter two generally possess low levels of sensitivity, in part, because viewer activities can either encourage a viewer to observe the surrounding area more closely (e.g., driving for pleasure) or discourage close observation (e.g., commuting in heavy traffic). All of these viewer elements are considered when evaluating expected viewer response.

2.1.2 State Requirements

CEQA requires an evaluation of scenic resources when considering project effects on the environment. The evaluation considers site-specific history, context, and area sensitivity. CEQA guidance is based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, and is listed in Section 4.2.3, "Thresholds of Significance."

2.1.3 Local and Regional Requirements

City of Rialto

Key policies related to aesthetics in the City of Rialto, and more specifically within the project area, are found in the City of Rialto General Plan, dated December 2010.

The General Plan contains six elements and six sub-elements. These six elements are:

- Land Use (sub-elements of which include Open Space and Recreation, Community Design, and Conservation)
- Economic Development (sub-elements of which include Redevelopment, Infrastructure, and Public Services and Facilities)
- Circulation
- Safety and Noise

- Housing
- Cultural and Historic Resources

Only three of the Elements contain goals and policies that are relevant to aesthetics. These include the Land Use, Circulation, and Cultural and Historic Resources Elements.

Land Use Element

The overarching vision expressed in the Land Use Element includes attracting high-quality new development, using streetscape enhancements and the design of its public facilities to improve the quality of its physical environment, and providing infrastructure to support mobility alternatives to the automobile, such as public transit, bicycling, and walking.

The Community Design sub-element states that views of the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains, and of local foothills, are a scenic resource (pages 2-22 through 2-23); however, specific scenic views/vistas are not identified. Lytle Creek, a tributary of the Santa Ana River, and Lytle Creek Wash (Wash), are identified as significant open space and natural resources areas—one containing important wildlife and plant communities, as well as mineral deposits (p. 2-34). One of the stand out open space features within the Wash is Lytle Creek Ranch, which is classified as "an open space resource" (Exhibit 2-4). Lytle Creek Ranch is located approximately 1.75 miles northwest of the project area, and thus, falls outside foreground and mid-range views from the project area. It is identified as one of the City's four "development opportunity areas," all of which are located 1.5 miles or more south and south west of the project area.

The Land Use Element presents approximately 40 goals as well as related implementation policies. Of these 40 goals eight appear to be pertinent to the proposed project. The eight goals are listed below:

- Preserving and improving established residential neighborhoods in Rialto (Goal 2-8), as well as its related policy: "Promote neighborhood identity and preservation of individual neighborhood character by preserving or creating neighborhood gateway features," including along Pepper Avenue (Policy 2-8.1, p. 2-50).
- Creating distinctive gateways at all entry points into Rialto (Goal 2-10), as well as its related policy: "Design and implement theme landscape treatments near freeway off- and on-ramps to announce entry into Rialto" (Policy 2-10.2, p. 2-51).
- Designing streetscapes that support and enhance the City's image as a desirable place to live work, shop and dine (Goal 2-11, p. 2-51).
- Protecting scenic vistas and scenic resources (Goal 2-14), as well as its related policies that call for protecting views of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains (Policy 2-14.1), and using design materials that do not produce glare (Policy 2-14.3, p. 2-53).
- Providing high quality and environmentally sustainable landscaping (Goal 2-17), and its related policies: planting street trees along public streets to improve airshed conditions, lessen high wind impacts, and minimize the heat island effect (Policy 2-17.1); and requiring the use of drought-tolerant native landscaping and smart irrigation systems (Policy 2-17.3, p. 2-55).

- Protecting Rialto's small-town character (Goal 2-18) by protecting "the natural character of the areas bordering, or in close proximity to, Lytle Creek" (Policy 2-18.2, p. 2-55).
- Utilizing opportunities to increase and enhance open spaces (Goal 2-24), as well as its related policy: "Identify and explore opportunities for acquisition of land in the Lytle Creek floodplain, and fault impacted areas, for use as open space, parkland, or recreational areas" (Policy 2-24.1, p. 2-59).
- Protecting and enhancing the City's Surface waters and groundwater basins (Goal 2-28), and related policy that calls for designing sidewalks and roads to minimize impervious surfaces. (Policy 2-28.3, p. 2-60).

Circulation

The Circulation Element contains policies related to highways, railroads, and City streets and bike routes. In it, Pepper Avenue is classified as a proposed "Major Arterial," as well as a truck route (Exhibits 4.1, p. 4-9 and 4.5, p. 4-18, respectively). Bike routes are also identified in the Circulation Element. The closest of these follows a north-south route along Riverside Avenue, which at closest, is located approximately 1-mile west of the project area (Exhibit 4.4, p. 4-13).

Two goals indirectly address aesthetics concerns. Goal 4-1 calls for providing traffic and congestion reducing improvements that, per related policies, will require:

- Coordination with the Caltrans, SANBAG, and the neighboring jurisdictions to implement the improvement of Riverside Avenue, Baseline Road and Foothill Boulevard as six-lane arterials, and completion of the SR-210/Pepper Avenue Interchange project (Policy 4-1.6 and Policy 4-1.10, pages 4-20 through 4-21).

Goal 4-8 calls for establishing and maintaining a comprehensive system of pedestrian trails and bicycle routes that provide viable connections throughout the City.

Specific reference to scenic highways and corridors is not included in the Circulation Element, nor is reference made to the Caltrans' list of the officially designated and/or eligible scenic highways occurring in the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains. Caltrans' list of officially designated highways includes a portion of SR-18 near the South Fork Campground, approximately nine miles northeast of the project area, and thus, well outside the project area viewshed. The closest listed "eligible" state scenic highways include SR-330, SR-173, SR-138, and SR-38, which are respectively, 10 miles east, 13 miles northeast, 15 miles northeast, and 12 miles southeast of the project area, and hence, well beyond the project viewshed.

Cultural and Historic Resources Element

One goal in the Cultural and Historic Resources Element addresses the connection between historic architecture and aesthetics:

- Preserve significant historical resources "as a source of community identity, stability, aesthetic character and social value" (Goal 7-1, p. 7-9)

2.2 Physical Setting

The project area is located in western San Bernardino County, approximately 55 miles east of Los Angeles. The proposed project is primarily within the city limits of Rialto, with a small portion of the project site within the City of San Bernardino limits to the east. The City of Fontana is located west of the project, unincorporated County to the southwest, and the City of Colton to the south and east. Portions of the unincorporated County area fall within the City of Rialto's Sphere of Influence.

At 22 square miles, Rialto is the sixth largest city in San Bernardino County, and is located in what is known as the San Bernardino Valley (Valley). The Valley includes some 15 cities and unincorporated areas, and nearly 75 percent of the county population, but occupies only 2.5 percent of San Bernardino County's approximately 20,000-square mile land area. The primary defining geographic features include the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains to the north and northeast, respectively (flanking Cajon Pass). On clear air days these form a dramatic visual backdrop to the City and Valley, and to the Santa Ana River Watershed, tributaries of it include Cajon and Lytle Creeks, which occur within the broad wash that borders the City on the northeast. The City rests upon a wide alluvial fan that extends in a northwesterly-to-southeasterly direction gently enough as it extends from the San Gabriel Mountains such that much of Rialto appears to be essentially flat to a casual observer.

Lytle Creek Wash is a unique, valuable habitat with a diverse assortment of plant and animal communities. Primary plant communities include Riversidian sage scrub, alluvial fan sage scrub, and riparian plant habitat for wildlife, as well as ruderal vegetation.

Outside the Lytle Creek Wash area, both the City and Valley are urbanized. Rialto is characterized by extensive residential and industrial development and a much smaller allocation of commercial development, as found within downtown and along major east-west streets, such as Rialto and Foothill Boulevard, as well as north-south streets that have interchanges with the I-10, I-15, and SR-210 freeways (e.g., Riverside and Cactus Avenues). Single-family wood-frame dwellings, either one or two stories in height, predominate when residential development is present. This typifies suburban residential development in portions of the Valley that were established during the 1960s or later.

2.2.1 Local Setting

The project area is dominated visually by the Vulcan Materials Company—a large industrial facility which extends for hundreds of feet along the north side of Highland Avenue—and by the presence of Lytle Creek Wash. The roadbed of Highland Avenue and the SR-210 facility are both higher in elevation than the adjacent industrial facility and Lytle Creek Wash. Other streets that border the Wash area include Eucalyptus Avenue, which is situated approximately 10 to 15 feet higher than the adjoining Wash floor. Approximately 0.5-mile south, the extant terminus of Pepper Avenue at the time of survey (located between the Wash and Baseline Road within a single-family residential subdivision), was approximately 30 feet above adjoining portions of the floor of the Wash. The Wash landscape is typical for the regional context and features a stream bed which is dry during much of the year, with sandy, gray soil. Moderately

dense clusters of pale green to evergreen-colored scrub plant growth dot its terrain as well as grasses that turn a golden color during the summer and fall months.

The majority of the project is located within the Pepper Avenue Specific Plan area (currently suspended by the City). Generally, the area is designated in the Rialto General Plan for single-family residential use (Residential 6), including the entire area extending east from Eucalyptus Avenue falling within the Lytle Creek Wash, as measured south from SR-210 and east to Rialto's eastern municipal limits. Frisbie Park, located south from SR-210 and west of Eucalyptus Avenue at Easton Avenue is designated for "Open Space – Recreation" uses, while a small reserve just east of it at Easton Avenue is designated for the development of a future public school facility. Despite the conspicuous presence of the Vulcan Materials Company facility along Highland Avenue, the entire area north of SR-210 is designated for open space uses (Open Space–Resources).

Approximately 1.0 mile to the west at the Riverside Avenue /SR-210 interchange is the closest commercial and multi-family development. The land use is classified as Community Commercial, Business Park, Office Commercial, and Residential 21 (i.e., 21.1 to 30 dwelling units/acre). This commercial district and the adjacent residential area to the north (along Galway Street and Oakdale Avenue) sit atop a low plateau that has far-off east-facing views looking out over the project area and Wash. This corridor along Riverside Avenue forms the farthest western edge of the project viewshed.

Located towards the eastern edge of the Wash is the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) alignment, which traverses the Wash in a generally south-to-north direction atop an elevated concrete causeway. The City of San Bernardino lies to the east. A commercial/light industrial district along Highland Avenue, and single-family residences along Duffy Street (north of Highland Avenue) and Macy Street (south of Highland Avenue) have west-facing mid-range views of the UPRR and far-off views (i.e., distances of approximately 0.75 mile) of the project area.

2.2.2 Project Viewshed

The limits of the project viewshed are defined by the visual limits of the views from the No-Build and Build alternatives. The viewshed also includes the locations of viewers likely to be affected by visual changes brought about by the proposed project. For this project, the viewshed is defined as extending approximately 1.0 mile to the west from the project area (to the Riverside Avenue /SR-210 interchange), 0.75 mile to the east, 0.5 mile north, and 0.5 mile south to Baseline Road. No local scenic vistas or corridors are present within the project viewshed.

Chapter 3 Environmental Consequences

3.1 Assessment Methodology

3.1.1 Key Views and Landscape Units

The VIA guidelines provide an evaluative framework that defines the visual setting in terms of landscape units and/or key views. A landscape unit is a specific portion of the regional landscape and can be thought of as an outdoor room that exhibits a distinct visual character. A landscape unit often corresponds to a place or district that is commonly known among local viewers. A key view is a point from which a select view is analyzed from the perspective of potential key viewer groups. The landscape unit approach is useful when a highway project traverses visually distinct settings that can be readily defined geographically, whereas the key view approach is useful when the views are largely homogeneous throughout the *viewshed*. The key view approach can be adopted for a densely urbanized and developed setting. Due to the fairly consistent but not necessarily homogenous character of the *viewshed* within the highway corridor, this assessment uses a key view approach in lieu of the landscape unit approach.

A viewshed comprises all the surface areas visible from an observer's viewpoint. The limits of a viewshed are defined as the visual limits of the views from the No-Build and Build alternatives. The viewshed also includes the locations of viewers likely to be affected by visual changes brought about by the proposed project.

Within the evaluative framework, changes in the quality and character of visual resources in the viewshed are assessed with respect to viewer response, as discussed in the following sections.

3.1.2 Determining Quality and Character of Visual Resources

Identify Visual Character—The visual character of a view is described by the topography, land uses, scale, form, and natural resources depicted in the view. The assessment of the visual character is descriptive and not evaluative because it is based on defined attributes such as physical traits—including form, color, line and texture (pattern elements)—as well as pattern character traits—the dominance, scale, and diversity or continuity of visual elements.

Assess Visual Quality—Visual quality refers to the aesthetics of the view. Determining the quality of a view can be subjective because it is based in part on the viewer's values and notions about what constitutes a quality setting. In an effort to establish an objective framework, this assessment applies the evaluative criteria (i.e., vividness, intactness, and unity) and qualitative rankings (low, medium, and high) presented in the FHWA guidelines.

FHWA states that this method should correlate with public judgments of visual quality well enough to predict those judgments. This approach to evaluating visual quality can also help identify specific methods for mitigating each adverse impact that may occur as a result of a project. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality can be defined as follows:

- Vividness is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns.
- Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. It can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings.
- Unity is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. It frequently attests to the careful design of individual human-made components in the landscape.

Views of high quality may have topographic relief, a variety of vegetation, rich colors, impressive scenery, and unique natural and/or built features. Utilizing a rating scale of from 0 through 7, with 0 representing the very low visual quality and 7 representing very high visual quality, this is equivalent to visual quality rating numbers 5.5 through 7. Views of medium quality may have interesting but minor landforms, some variety in vegetation and color, and/or moderate scenery (equivalent to visual quality rating numbers 3.5 through 5.4). Views of low quality have uninteresting features, little variety in vegetation and color, uninteresting scenery, and/or common elements (equivalent to visual quality rating numbers 0 through 3.4).

3.1.3 Assessing Viewer Response

Viewer response is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. These elements combine to form a method of predicting how the public might react to visual changes brought about by a highway or railroad project.

Viewer exposure is typically assessed by measuring the number of viewers exposed to the resource change, type of viewer activity, duration of their view, speed at which the viewer moves, and position of the viewer. High viewer exposure heightens the importance of early consideration of design, art, and architecture and their roles in managing the visual resource effects of a project. Because objects in the foreground have more detail, views from nearby locations are more detailed compared to objects that are indistinguishable in the distance. Viewers would experience visibility of a proposed project to varying degrees in a particular viewshed, depending on distance or other intervening structures or obstacles.

Viewer sensitivity is defined both as the viewer's concern for scenic quality and the viewer's response to change in the visual resources that make up the view. Local values and goals may confer visual significance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a visual resource analysis. The sensitivity of viewers in their perception of visual quality, as well as their sensitivity to changes in visual quality, varies based on familiarity with the view, sense of ownership of the view, and the nature of one's activity while receiving the view. In turn, these considerations determine how much attention the receptor focuses on the view.

Residential viewers typically have a high sensitivity to visual quality and changes in visual quality, because of their familiarity with the view, investment in the area (as, for example, homeowners or long-time residents), and sense of ownership of the view. In a way, the view from residences and their yards represents a visual extension of residents' property, and changes in this view are noticeable and can result in strong positive or negative reactions. Other viewers,

with exceptions, usually have an average sensitivity to visual quality or change. These include people on the local roadway system, including commuting motorists and pedestrians. If they are traveling simply to get from one place to another for work reasons, or doing errands, their sensitivity would normally be average. However, at those times when they are traveling for pleasure, it is likely that they would be somewhat more sensitive to their surroundings.

Recreationists also have a range of potential sensitivities. Players participating in team sports activities and spectators at such sports events are presumed to have a low to average sensitivity to the visual setting outside the playing field because their attention is generally intently focused on the playfield. By contrast, recreationists engaged in bicycling, hiking and running often have higher levels of sensitivity because they frequently choose recreational settings for their activities based on visual appeal.

Viewers in the project viewshed include some residents who have north and east facing mid-frame and far-off views of the project area, commuting motorists on SR-210 and Highland Avenue, and recreationists and spectators at Frisbie Park baseball and softball events.

3.1.4 Key Views

Because it is not feasible to analyze all the views in which the proposed Project would be seen, it is necessary to select a number of key viewpoints that would most clearly display the visual effects of the proposed Project. Key views also represent the primary viewer groups that would potentially be affected by the proposed Project.

For purposes of this analysis, a view is considered key if at least one of the following circumstances apply:

- Visual resources are present, regardless of the quality of the view. The sensitivity of the affected viewer group is medium or high, and the duration of the view is long-term.
- The quality of the view is medium or high, regardless of whether visual resources are present. The sensitivity of the viewer group is medium or high, and the duration of the view is long-term.
- The view is distinct, clear, and unobstructed from the roadway to adjacent businesses and is viewed regularly by a large number of commuters. In this case, the viewer sensitivity is medium, and the view is long-term.

The analysis identified nine specific key views that could be noticeably altered by the proposed Project. These are shown in Photos 1 through 9 (Appendix A). The key views were chosen:

- to provide a representative cross-section for scenic quality;
- to represent typical views along the alignment; and
- to represent views from a potential nearby sensitive viewer group (i.e., residents).

In addition, three of these representative views have been designated as key observation points (KOPs). These KOPs were chosen for analysis of the highway corridor's visual character and quality

because they uniquely convey the visual character and quality of the viewshed at locations where components of the proposed Project are proposed and/or where sensitive viewers are present.

KOP 1 (Photo 2) - View east from Frisbie Park, across Eucalyptus Avenue towards Pepper Avenue

KOP 2 (Photo 4) – View just east of Chestnut Avenue on East Walnut Avenue/Shirley Bright Road, looking northeast across Lytle Creek Wash towards project area

KOP 3 (Photo 7) – View at Highland and Pepper Avenues looking southeast along the Pepper Avenue right of way towards SR-210

All photographs documenting the nine photo locations, including the KOPs, can be found in Appendix A. Figure 4 shows the photo vantage locations and can be found in Appendix A.

Detailed discussion of current conditions at KOP 1 through KOP 3 follows. Table 1 summarizes those observations.

Table 1. Existing Visual Quality at Key Observation Points

Key Observation Points	Vividness	Intactness	Unity	Average (V+I+U/3)	Visual Quality Rating
KOP 1	4	3	4	3.66	Moderate
KOP 2	6	5	5	5.33	Moderate
KOP 3	2	2	2	2	Low

Source: ICF International. July 2012

Definition of Visual Impact Levels

The VIA is intended to ensure that visual resources are adequately considered as part of the NEPA/CEQA environmental review process. The VIA considers whether the proposed Project could result in character inconsistency and obstruction of views, thus affecting the area's visual character and quality.

- Criterion 1 (Character Consistency): An adverse visual effect under NEPA or a significant visual impact under CEQA would result if a proposed project would introduce new visual elements that would strongly contrast or be incompatible with the character of the existing landscape or key view.
- Criterion 2 (Obstruction of Views): An adverse visual effect under NEPA or a significant visual impact under CEQA would result if a proposed project would obstruct key views. The importance of a view is based on its character and quality, its viewers, and the duration of the view. For purposes of this analysis, a view is considered key if at least one of the following circumstances applies.
    - Visual resources are present, regardless of the quality of the view. The sensitivity of the affected viewer group is medium or high, and the duration of the view is long-term.

- The quality of the view is medium or high, regardless of whether visual resources are present. The sensitivity of the viewer group is medium or high, and the duration of the view is long-term.
- The view is distinct, clear, and unobstructed from the highway to adjacent businesses and is viewed regularly by a large number of commuters. In this case, the viewer sensitivity is medium, and the view is long-term.

Impacts are then characterized by their potential levels of significance.

- Very Low—Minor adverse change to the existing visual resource, with low viewer response to change in the visual environment. Unlikely to require mitigation.
- Low—Minor adverse change to the existing visual resource, with low viewer response to change in the visual environment. May or may not require mitigation.
- Moderate—Moderate adverse change to the visual resource with moderate viewer response. Impact can be mitigated within five years using conventional practices.
- Moderately High—Moderate adverse visual resource change with high viewer response or high adverse visual resource change with moderate viewer response. Extraordinary mitigation practices may be required. Landscape treatment required will generally take longer than five years to mitigate.
- High—A high level of adverse change to the resource or a high level of viewer response to visual change such that architectural design and landscape treatment cannot mitigate the impacts. Viewer response level is high. An alternative project design may be required to avoid highly adverse impacts.

Overall Assessment of Visual Character and Quality

Visual character within the project viewshed can be described as both urbanized and consisting primarily of the open space within Lytle Creek Wash (Photos 1-2; 4-5). Views along Highland Avenue are of low quality (Photos 6-8) and are dominated by the Vulcan Materials Company industrial facility along the north side of the street. Outside of the project area, but within the project viewshed, is Frisbee Park, a heavily utilized public park with baseball and softball playing fields (Photo 3). Densely developed residential areas border the park on the south along the southwestern edge of the Wash.

A large proportion of the built environment consists of detached, one- and two-story residences. This contrasts slightly with the horizontality of the nearly flat-appearing topography in many foreground and mid-frame vantage points. The residential development and mineral extraction operations that occur along the streets bordering the Wash on the south and west block views across the Wash, and of SR-210, from most locations along the public streets (Photo 9).

Horizontal lines dominate most views within the project viewshed, with many of the south and west-facing views terminating at the horizon. In the portion of the project viewshed north of SR-210, south-facing views terminate with the freeway's elevated roadway.

When low air quality does not obscure them, the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains provide a dramatic backdrop to north-facing views, and the mountain ridgelines provide a significant contrasting curvilinear line pattern to the predominant horizontal line patterns found throughout the viewshed. Scattered clusters of mature evergreen trees provide another important contrasting curvilinear element to the predominant horizontal line patterns, as well as a contrasting color element in a setting in which gray, tan, and pale brown predominate within the palette of colors.

Table 2. Viewer Sensitivity and View Duration by Viewing Group

Viewing Group	Viewer Sensitivity	View Duration
Commuting Motorists	Low	Short-term
Motorists Driving for Pleasure	Moderate	Long-term
Residents	Moderate	Long-term
Recreationists (Spectator Sports)	Moderate	Long-term

Source: ICF International. July 2012

KOP 1 (Photo 2)—View Looking Northeast, Across Eucalyptus Avenue at Frisbie Park

Photo 2 shows current conditions at KOP 1. Mid-frame and far-off views from this location are of Lytle Creek Wash at the base of SR-210, which appears as a strong elevated feature on the north. The terrain ranges from rolling near the freeway to appearing essentially flat. It is carpeted with sage scrub plant growth ranging in color from evergreen, gray-green, and tawny to gray. Visual resources are present in this portion of the viewshed, and views in this location possess a moderate degree of vividness from the looming presence of the San Bernardino Mountains, a backdrop element to the northeast, as well as the presence of scrub and ruderal vegetation and scattered clusters of evergreen trees. These features give the view a moderate vividness rating (visual quality rating 4).

SR-210, the UPRR causeway (located 0.5 mile away), and I-215, which appears as a far-off element in east-facing views (located two miles away), as well as other disparate manmade elements present in the views (e.g., debris, aggregate extracting machinery and small utilitarian industrial buildings in the Wash; freeway vehicles and traffic signage), give the views a relatively low degree of intactness and only a moderate degree of overall compositional unity (visual quality ratings 3 and 4, respectively). Seasonal views to the mountain ridgelines (when air visibility conditions permit), as a distant backdrop element, are the most significant visual resource. As shown in Table 1, existing visual quality was rated as 3.66 (medium/moderate). The primary viewer groups consist of recreationists/park patrons at Frisbie Park who are participating in or viewing softball and baseball games. SR-210 commuting motorists comprise a numerically significant secondary group who can glimpse fleeting views of the Wash and of the proposed Pepper Avenue interchange. Residents south of Frisbie Park, along Eucalyptus Avenue would also have far-off, not very distinctive views of the project.

Under the proposed project, the eastbound on/off-ramps would be visible in this view, as would the short southern extension, by approximately 400 feet, of the Pepper Avenue roadway. Vegetation within environmentally sensitive areas adjacent to the alignment of Pepper Avenue and slopes of the SR-210 on- and off-ramps will be protected and restored where appropriate. In addition, the proposed on-ramp and off-ramp features at Pepper Avenue (e.g., dedicated left turn lane and a dedicated right turn lane; two lanes at the intersection tapering to one lane prior to joining and merging onto SR-210) as well as the proposed traffic signals would read as extensions of the existing SR-210 freeway and freeway signage to viewers.

Changes in Visual Character

Under the proposed project design, improvements are occurring within the current Caltrans right of way in the basin of Lytle Creek Wash. The improvements would be installed at ground level, as well as along the sloping sides of the existing elevated SR-210 embankments, where the ramps would appear as extensions of the freeway. Prior improvements included partial grading, roadway paving installation, and ground clearing for the Pepper Avenue roadway. The Pepper Avenue undercrossings at SR-210 and Lytle Creek Wash were also previously constructed. Thus, the project would not strongly contrast with existing visual character in the project area but would merely read as an extension of existing roadway features.

Changes in Views

The proposed project would not alter significant north-facing views of far-off mountain ridgelines at KOP 1.

Effects

The change in visual quality is shown in Table 3. Visual quality under the proposed project would diminish only slightly due to the slight increase in paving and installation of traffic lights at the interchange, but would remain medium.

Table 3. Visual Quality at Key Observation Points – Proposed Project

Key Observation Points	Vividness	Intactness	Unity	Existing Average (from Table 1)	Average Under Proposed Conditions (V+I+U/3)	Change From Existing Conditions	Visual Quality Rating (with Project)
KOP 1	4	3	4	3.66	3.5	-0.16	Medium
KOP 2	6	5	5	5.33	5.33	0.0	Medium
KOP 3	2	2	2	2.0	2.5	+0.5	Low

Source: ICF International. July 2012

KOP 2 (Photo 4)—View from Just East of Chestnut Avenue on Shirley Bright Road, Looking Northeast Across Lytle Creek Wash Towards the Project

Photo 4 shows current conditions at KOP 2. Foreground and mid-frame views from this location are of Lytle Creek Wash. Far-off views are framed by the dramatic backdrop of the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains on the north and SR-210, which appears as a soft elevated feature at the base of the mountains. The terrain ranges from flat to slightly rolling in the foreground and mid-frame, and is carpeted with sage scrub plant growth ranging of colors from evergreen, gray-green, tawny, to gray. Visual resources are present in this portion of the viewshed, and views in this location possess a high degree of vividness due the looming presence of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains—backdrop elements to the north and northeast, respectively. The presence of scrub and ruderal vegetation, and scattered clusters of evergreen trees, is an important secondary visual resource. These features give the views at KOP 2 a high degree of vividness (visual quality rating 6).

The SR-210, UPRR causeway, and I-215 appear as minor far-off elements on the north and east and seemingly disappear into the wide expanse of the sage scrub landscape and low-scale urban development that lies farther east. The previously constructed Pepper Avenue undercrossings and the grading that accompanied it as part of prior unrelated roadway improvements can be seen from this vantage, as well as some scattered manmade elements, such as aggregate extracting machinery and small utilitarian industrial buildings. However, these elements are easily lost amidst the sweeping panoramic views across the Wash. This gives the views a moderately high degree of intactness and unity (visual quality ratings 5 and 5, respectively). Seasonal views to the mountain ridgelines (when air visibility conditions permit), as a distant backdrop element, is the most significant visual resource. As shown in Table 1, existing visual quality was rated as 5.33 (moderate quality). The primary viewer group consists of single-family residents at the north end of Chestnut Avenue and along East Walnut Avenue/Shirley Bright Road with north-facing views. These viewers are approximately 0.5 mile away from the project area giving such views a far-off less distinctive quality.

Under the proposed project, the southern ramps of the proposed quadrant of on/off-ramps would be visible as far-away features within this sweeping panoramic view, as would the small southern extension, by approximately 400 feet, of the Pepper Avenue roadway. Vegetation within environmentally sensitive areas adjacent to the alignment of Pepper Avenue and slopes of the SR-210 on- and off-ramps will be protected and restored where appropriate. In addition, the proposed on-ramp and off-ramp features at Pepper Avenue (e.g., dedicated left turn lane and a dedicated right turn lane; two lanes at the intersection tapering to one lane prior to joining and merging onto SR-210) as well as the proposed traffic signals would appear as extensions of the existing SR-210 freeway and freeway signage to viewers. The proposed water quality basins would be designed and planted so that they would blend into the existing sage scrub landscape, and limited additional setting-appropriate landscaping, and any necessary related irrigation, will be installed.

Changes in Visual Character

Under the proposed project design, improvements would occur within the current Caltrans right of way in the basin of Lytle Creek Wash. Most of the improvements would be installed at ground level; where project improvements are proposed above ground level, such as along the sloped sides of the existing elevated SR-210 embankments and the SR-210 on-ramps and off-

ramps, they would appear as shoulder-like extensions of the freeway. The prior SR-210 Extension Project and local roadway improvements included partial grading and other ground clearing for the Pepper Avenue roadway. The Pepper Avenue undercrossing at SR-210 was also previously constructed. Thus, the project would not strongly contrast with existing visual character in the project area but would merely read as an extension of existing roadway features. In addition, after the construction period, the proposed water quality basins would be designed and planted such that they would blend into its landscape setting and be undetectable to causal viewers at this vantage point.

Changes in Views

Because the changes are occurring along the sides and at the base of the existing SR-210 Freeway and its undercrossing they do not have the potential to interfere with views of the mountains to the north of the freeway. Therefore, the proposed project would not alter significant north-facing views of far-off mountain ridgelines at KOP 2.

Effects

The change in visual quality is shown in Table 3. Due to the distance separating the viewers from the project area (0.5 miles) visual quality under the proposed project would not diminish, as the slight increase in paving and installation of traffic lights at the interchange would disappear as insignificant features within the sweeping views across the Wash. Visual quality would remain medium.

KOP 3 (Photo 7)—View Looking South from the South Side of Highland Avenue Along the Right of Way

Photo 7 shows current conditions at KOP 3. Foreground and mid-frame views are south-facing (i.e., looking away from the mountains) and are of the Pepper Avenue right of way, which was already partially excavated and paved as part of the local roadway system, and sits barricaded by a temporary earth berm. SR-210, which appears as a strong elevated feature on the south, is immediately adjacent. With the exception of its fully constructed undercrossing, which permits limited views looking south across the Wash, SR-210 largely blocks south-facing views. The terrain near the freeway is rolling in the near foreground along Highland Avenue and then rises up as part of the freeway embankment. It is both paved in places or features sage scrub and other ruderal groundcover, such as grasses, and/or areas of bare gray ground. There is also scattered debris.

As in other locations around the Wash the palette of colors ranges from evergreen, gray-green, tawny, to gray. Visual resources are not present in this portion of the viewshed, and therefore, views in this location possess a low degree of vividness (visual quality rating 2).

SR-210 appears as a looming foreground element, as well as other disparate manmade elements present in the views (debris, aggregate extracting machinery and small utilitarian industrial buildings in the wash; freeway vehicles and traffic signage). This gives the views a relatively low degree of intactness and overall compositional unity (visual quality rating 2, respectively). As shown in Table 1, existing visual quality was rated as 2.0 (low). The primary viewer group consists of Highland Avenue and SR-210 commuting motorists. Freeway motorists would have only fleeting views of the Pepper Avenue interchange, however.

Under the proposed project, the westbound on/off-ramps would be visible in this view, as would the small revamped extension of the Pepper Avenue roadway from Highland Avenue to the freeway. The proposed on-ramp and off-ramps features at Pepper Avenue (e.g., dedicated left turn lane and a dedicated right turn lane; two lanes at the intersection tapering to one lane prior to joining merging onto SR-210) as well as the proposed traffic signals, would read as extensions of the existing SR-210 freeway and freeway signage to motorists. Residential viewers to the west near Riverside Avenue and to the east in San Bernardino would have highly constrained indistinct views of the improvements due to the distances that separate them from the project area (0.75 and 0.5 mile away, respectively).

Changes in Visual Character

Under the proposed project, design improvements would occur within the current Caltrans right of way in the basin of Lytle Creek Wash. Most of the improvements would be installed at ground level; where project improvements are proposed above ground level, such as the sloped sides of the existing elevated SR-210 embankments for the SR-210 on-ramps and off-ramps, the ramps would appear as extensions of the freeway. Partial grading associated with prior improvements, and ground clearing and grubbing for the Pepper Avenue roadway, are in a deteriorating condition, and the area has a poorly maintained appearance at present. The Pepper Avenue undercrossings were also previously constructed. Thus, the project would actually improve the appearance of the right of way in contrast to its current unmaintained condition. In addition, it would not strongly contrast with existing visual character in the project area but would merely read as an extension of existing roadway features.

Changes in Views

Although the views from KOP 3 faces south and away from the mountains, the proposed project does not have the potential to alter significant north-facing views of far-off mountain ridgelines from other nearby vantage points.

Effects

The change in visual quality is shown in Table 3. Despite the slight increase in paving and installation of traffic lights at the interchange, visual quality under the proposed project would improve slightly because the current deteriorated, unmaintained graded areas would be refurbished and extended, but would remain low.

3.1.5 Construction-Period Impact Assessment Methodology

Potential impacts would occur during the construction period if its activities were to:

- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

Based upon the criteria contained in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, each of these is considered in the assessment of potential impacts and also references the NEPA criteria for adverse effect.

3.1.6 Operational-Period Impact Assessment Methodology

Potential impacts would occur during the operation of the project if it would:

- result in a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista; or
- substantially damage scenic resources, such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings; or
- substantially degrade existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- create a new source of substantial light and glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

As with the construction-period impact assessment methodology, each of the CEQA criteria is considered in the assessment of potential impacts and also references the NEPA criteria for an adverse effect.

3.2 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures are not being proposed because the proposed SR-210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange Project would not significantly alter visual character and quality in the project viewshed because that existing close-up and mid-frame views (such as those at KOP 3) are dominated by the SR-210 freeway, Highland Avenue, and partial existing road infrastructure at Pepper Avenue. Visual quality adjoining SR-210 is low-to-moderate at present. Also, the proposed project would simply expand existing road features that are chiefly at-grade or nearly at-grade; it would not introduce new structural elements that would block existing views that exhibit high visual quality (such as north-facing views of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains). Furthermore, in mid-frame and far-off views of the project acquired when looking across Lytle Creek Wash toward the project area (such as those at KOPs 1 and 2) project features will appear as minor, sometimes indistinct, elements that will not contrast with the setting in which they are being proposed, nor would they block existing views that exhibit high visual quality.

Temporary changes to resident, motorist, and recreationist views as a result of grading and construction activities would be less than significant and accompanied by standard SANBAG/Caltrans BMPs, which are designed to preserve visual quality (e.g., screening construction staging sites, protecting and restoring native vegetation). This would further minimize disruption to views within the project viewshed.

3.2.1 Construction-Period Effects

Impacts/effects accompanying the proposed project would result from ground clearing, excavation, establishment of temporary construction staging, barricade installation, the presence of construction equipment and stockpiled materials, as well as the installation of minor structures and signage. However, because sensitive viewing groups (i.e., recreationists at Frisbie Park; residents) would have constrained, generally far-off views of these activities this minor reduction in overall visual quality during the construction process would not be considered substantially adverse under NEPA/significant under CEQA.

3.2.2 Operational-Period Effects

Changes in visual quality as a result of the proposed project are noted in Table 3. Viewer sensitivity ranges from low to moderate, being highest for residents and recreationists at Frisbie Park—both viewing groups having constrained, far-off views of the project. Visual quality under the proposed project would remain low to moderate overall. No adverse changes to key views would result, such as north-facing views of the local mountains. This is because the project features either would occur at grade or would appear as shelf-like extensions from the embankments of the SR-210 freeway. Although the project is being proposed within the context of Lytle Creek Wash, the Pepper Avenue undercrossing is already in place and the street right of way was previously graded as part of the local roadway system. In addition, these features are part of a sweeping panoramic visual setting that serves to diminish them in visual terms. As such, the project would not contrast with the visual character of the setting to any significant degree. Figures 5 and 6 depict the visual changes that are anticipated as a result of the proposed project at KOPs 1 and 2.

3.2.3 Cumulative Effects

The proposed project will occur primarily within the City of Rialto municipal boundaries. The City provided a list of some 42 capital improvement and development projects that were either recently completed or which are proposed for completion within approximately the next two to three years. Virtually all of these are site-specific rehabilitation or construction projects that do not have the potential to affect significant visual resources (e.g., north-facing views of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains), and which are occurring well outside the project viewshed. Examples of such projects include traffic signalization improvements, City facility rehabilitation and expansion projects, City well replacements, repairs to municipal parking lots, citywide curb/gutter/sidewalk/alley repair and replacement programs, as well as improvements to Rialto Channel. Only one of the 42 projects occurs within the project viewshed - the City of Rialto Pepper Avenue Extension project.

The City's extension project is extending Pepper Avenue from the south side of the existing SR-210 right of way, which is located approximately 1,300 feet south of Highland Avenue along the proposed Pepper Avenue alignment. From the current end-of-pavement at Shirley Bright Road, a new four-lane arterial roadway is being constructed northwards to the Caltrans right of way at the SR-210 freeway. The proposed Pepper Avenue roadway would cross a tributary of Lytle Creek for a distance of approximately 725 feet. The Pepper Avenue Extension area is approximately 9.1 acres and the total length of the new roadway is approximately 2,900 feet. The Pepper Avenue Extension project includes the following principal components: grading; installation of culverts; placement of fill; construction of bedding and paving; construction of curb, gutter, sidewalk; streetlights; and the installation of two water quality basins, which would be designed and planted such that they would blend into its landscape setting and be undetectable to casual viewers.

The roadway will be constructed atop a raised earthen embankment. Drainage underneath the roadbed in this area is being accommodated by four 10-foot by 10-foot reinforced concrete block culvert structures of varying lengths ranging in length from 111 to 193 linear feet. The culverts will be positioned and constructed to accommodate seasonal stream flows within the tributary and to maintain existing hydrologic conditions. The bottoms of the culverts will be buried two feet below existing grade and provide for an eight-foot-high by 10-foot-wide opening with a natural bottom.

Existing View

Simulated View

Figure 5
Existing and Simulated Views from N. Eucalyptus Avenue at Frisbie Park

Existing View

Simulated View

Figure 6
Existing and Simulated Views from E. Walnut Avenue / N. Shirley Bright Road, 100 Feet East of N. Chestnut Avenue

The effect of the Pepper Avenue Extension project on visual resources would not be individually significant in visual terms because the improvements would read as extensions of the existing freeway, and of the roadway that was installed to provide access to it. As no other proposed, or reasonably foreseeable, projects are being considered within the project‘s area for visual effect, the effect of the proposed project on aesthetics would not be cumulatively significant.

The area of effect for cumulative effects to visual resources would consist of a viewshed that falls within Lytle Creek Wash, extending out 0.75 mile on the west and 0.75 mile east, and 0.5 mile north and south from the project area. Visual quality within the project viewshed was assessed as low-to-moderate, with visual quality ratings at the three KOPs ranging from 2.5 (low) to 5.33 (moderate). The ratings were generally highest where reasonably intact, vivid views across the Wash could be acquired, where the sage scrub vegetation appeared least disturbed, and in which dramatic backdrop views of the San Bernardino Mountains were present (e.g., north-facing views from the residential areas bordering the Wash on the south as along East Walnut Avenue/Shirley Bright Road and Pepper Avenue north of Winchester Drive).

It is not anticipated that the proposed project or No-Build Alternative would result in a cumulative effect in relation to the other related projects in the City of Rialto that fall within the project viewshed. No identified scenic vistas or corridors are present within the project viewshed. The views within the project viewshed are of low or medium quality, and visual resources are limited to views across intact portions of the Wash and somewhat seasonal far-off north-facing views of the local mountains. In addition, visual quality within the portion of the project area that abuts the proposed Pepper Avenue interchange is rather low at present due to the deteriorating appearance of the existing graded areas and lack of maintenance. It is expected that the completion of the proposed project improvements and the more regular maintenance that would accompany them would actually enhance visual quality in the project area from vantages along Highland Avenue, and in westbound vantages from SR-210. Furthermore, following standard Best Management Practices, SANBAG, in cooperation with Caltrans and City, would implement measures appropriate to the setting to ensure the protection of visual quality in the Wash, including installing context-appropriate landscaping and any necessary related irrigation. Specific measures would include, at a minimum, installation of native hydroseed planting where the project requires the removal of the existing native scrub vegetation.

Finally, the proposed project would not introduce new structural elements that would block existing significant views of mountain ridgelines, as improvements would largely be limited to ground surfaces. Where project improvements are proposed above ground level, such as the SR-210 on-ramps and off-ramps, they would be viewed as extensions of the existing freeway rather than as new visually intrusive elements. Nor would the project adversely affect north-facing sightlines to the mountain ridgelines, as all current views would continue to be available to viewers.

No local scenic vistas or corridors are present within the project viewshed; the Caltrans Scenic Highways and Eligible Scenic Highways list identifies no scenic corridor closer than 8.5 miles from the project area.

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Chapter 4 Conclusions

The proposed project would not result in adverse effects to visual resources under NEPA or CEQA. Visual quality under the proposed project would remain moderate overall and in one instance where it is low currently would be enhanced slightly—this is due to the poor current condition and appearance of the previously installed Pepper Avenue improvements, and of the right of way along Highland Avenue in general.

No changes to significant views would occur (i.e., north-facing views to the San Gabriel/San Bernardino Mountain ridgelines), as most of the proposed improvements would occur at ground level; where project improvements are proposed above ground, such as the SR-210 on-ramps and off-ramps, they would appear as extensions of the SR-210 embankments. Although the project is proposed within the setting of Lytle Creek Wash it would not significantly contrast with its current visual character or adversely affect its visual quality. In addition, all minor short-term disruptions to the visual setting as a result of excavation and construction activities will be readily addressed through the implementation of standard SANBAG/Caltrans BMPs, including installing context-appropriate landscaping and any necessary related irrigation as appropriate. At a minimum, installation of native hydroseed planting would be done where the project requires the removal of the existing native scrub vegetation. Construction staging sites would also be appropriately screened per SANBAG/Caltrans BMPs. To minimize visual impacts, the new interchange shall include landscaping consistent with Caltrans' 210 Corridor Landscape Plan. Therefore, no adverse effects would occur under NEPA and no significant impacts under CEQA would result.

Caltrans and FHWA mandate that a qualitative aesthetic approach be taken to mitigate for visual quality loss in the project area. The proposed project fulfills these requirements because it is expected that it will address the actual loss of visual quality that would occur in the project viewshed. The project will be implemented in adherence to the guidance found in the Caltrans' Highway Design Manual and other Caltrans memoranda regarding landscape design policy which mandates consideration of the local design context in which the work is proposed and obtaining the input of local governmental agencies. In addition, the project will be designed and implemented with the concurrence of the District Landscape Architect.

In summary, substantial adverse effects under NEPA/significant impacts per CEQA are not anticipated.

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Chapter 5 References

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Appendix A Photos and Key Observation Points

Figure 4
Photo Vantage Points
State Route 210/Pepper Avenue New Interchange Project

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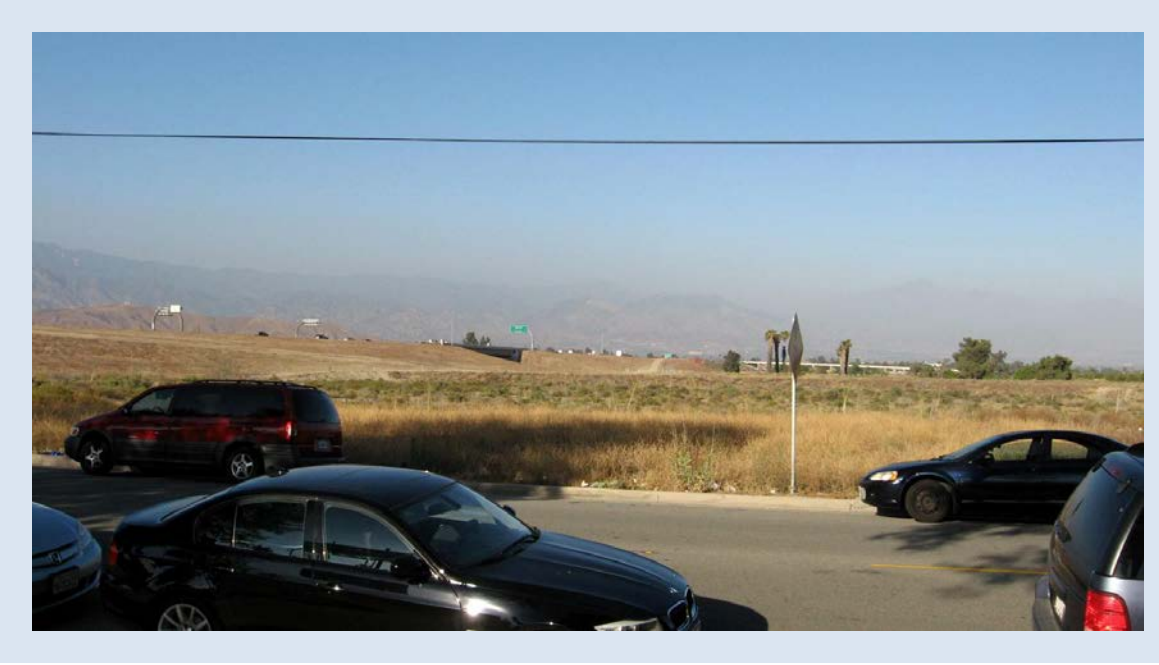

PHOTO 1: View Looking Northeast Across Eucalyptus Ave. from Frisbie Park

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 2 (KOP 1): Close-up Northeast View of Project from Frisbie Park

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 3: Frisbee Park. View Northeast of the Northern Baseball Fields

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 4 (KOP 2): View Northeast from Shirley Bright Rd., East of Chestnut Ave.

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 5: Pepper Ave. (North of Winchester Dr.) Dead-end, Looking North

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 6: View South, Across Highland Ave. of Pepper Ave. Extension Area

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 7 (KOP 3): Close-up View, Looking South, Pepper Ave. Extension

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 8: View Looking East of Project Area, Along Highland Ave.

ICF International, June 2012.

PHOTO 9: View Toward Project Area, Across Eucalyptus Ave., South of Frisbie Park

ICF International, June 2012.

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