VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

MID COUNTY PARKWAY PROJECT
08-RIV-MCP PM 0.0/16.3; 08-RIV-215 PM 28.0/34.3
EA 08-0F3200 (PN 0800000125)

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This final 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 herein and the data upon which recommendations, conclusions, and decisions are based.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ac  acre(s)
BLM  Bureau of Land Management
BSA  Biological Study Area
Cal-IPC  California Invasive Plant Council
Caltrans  California Department of Transportation
CEQA  California Environmental Quality Act
EIR  Environmental Impact Report
EIS  Environmental Impact Statement
FHWA  Federal Highway Administration
ft  foot or feet
I-15  Interstate 15
I-215  Interstate 215
MCP  Mid County Parkway
mi  mile(s)
mph  miles per hour
NEPA  National Environmental Policy Act
RCIP  Riverside County Integrated Project
RCTC  Riverside County Transportation Commission
SANBAG  San Bernardino Associated Governments
SR-79  State Route 79
VIA  Visual Impact Assessment
SUMMARY

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

In Spring 2009, to address the concerns identified in public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) as the lead agency under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as the lead agency under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) acting as an agent and providing oversight for the NEPA process, developed an approach for completing the EIR/EIS process for the Mid County Parkway (MCP) project. This approach modified the MCP project limits from 32 miles (mi) (Interstate-15 [I-15] to State Route 79 [SR-79]) to 16 mi (Interstate 215 [I-215] to SR-79) in order to focus transportation funding where the need is the greatest, between I-215 to SR-79. On July 8, 2009, the RCTC Board formally took action to focus the MCP project between I-215 and SR-79 and to prepare a Recirculated Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS for the modified project.

The purpose of this Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) is to support the Recirculated Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS for the modified MCP project. This VIA describes the potential impacts of the proposed MCP project relating to visual character, visual quality, regionally outstanding views, community changes, and light and glare. Of the original 29 Key Views selected for the previously approved VIA for a 32 mi MCP project (March 2008), 14 Key Views are still applicable for the modified project limits and are analyzed in this VIA.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

The RCTC, in cooperation with the FHWA, Caltrans District 8, the County of Riverside, the Cities of San Jacinto and Perris, proposes to construct the MCP, a new highway project in Riverside County, California. The project area is located in western Riverside County, primarily along or parallel to the existing Ramona Expressway. The MCP study area is approximately 16 mi long and ranges from 1 to 5 mi wide.

The MCP will serve as a major east-west connection within western Riverside County. The proposed action would adopt an MCP alignment and construct a major, limited-access freeway to meet current and projected 2040 travel demand from I-215 on the west to SR-79 on the east.

PROJECT VISUAL IMPACT SUMMARY

All of the modified MCP Build Alternatives would result in both short-term and long-term adverse visual impacts. Short-term impacts would occur during the construction period, and include demolition of existing structures, clearing of existing vegetation, grading of cut and fill slopes, construction vehicles, and construction staging areas. Construction activities are temporary, and the adverse visual impacts would cease after completion of construction. Long-term impacts would result
from the permanent alteration of the visual environment through construction of the highway and associated bridges, interchange structures, retaining walls, and sound walls. As noted in the discussion of Key Views 16 to 29, visual impacts of the MCP project include changes to the visual character of many areas (particularly areas that are rural residential or open space) and blocking views of existing viewer groups in other locations.

VISUAL AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES

The avoidance and minimization measures listed below are designed to avoid, minimize, or reduce the potential adverse visual impacts that may result from the construction and operation of any of the modified MCP Build Alternatives.

VIS-1 Construction Plan. Prior to construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will locate construction and staging areas within public rights of way and within the maximum project disturbance footprint defined for the Mid County Parkway (MCP).

VIS-2 Landscape Plan. Prior to construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will prepare a Landscape Plan that will be incorporated into the final design of the Mid County Parkway (MCP) project. The local entities will be responsible for long-term maintenance of the roadside landscaping until such time as the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) assumes responsibility for the MCP if it is designated as a State Highway. Highway planting is warranted on new highways where adjacent properties are developed at the time the highway is accepted. The Landscape Plan shall be submitted for review and approval by the Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect. The Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect shall approve the parts of the Landscape Plan applicable to State Highway right of way.

The landscape plan will include the following components:

- Incorporation of applicable procedures and requirements as detailed in the publication Caltrans Highway Design Manual, Section 902.1, Planting Guidelines (September 2006), and the applicable local agency General Plan.

- Identification of areas within the project limits for revegetation, including landscaping for graded areas with plant species consistent with adjacent vegetation and enhancement of new project structures (ramps, sound walls, and retaining walls) to the extent feasible.

- Planting of trees and shrubs along the MCP and at interchange locations to enhance the existing visual planting character of the area.

- Planting of drought-resistant plants along the MCP so as to be consistent with Metropolitan Water District guidelines which promote the use of xeric (adapted to arid conditions) landscaping techniques. The irrigation design and implementation practices will also conform to the water conservation measures established in Assembly Bill 325, the Water Conservation in Landscaping Act of 1990 (in effect
January 1, 1993). Plants should also be durable, relating to urban pollutants such as smog.

- Incorporate soil erosion control planting (groundcover, native grasses, wildflowers) into the embankments and within the areas of steeper slopes. Vegetation planted adjacent to walls will not be highly sensitive to shadow and shade. All plantings will be drought-resistant and, where applicable, shadow-resistant to ensure plant longevity and the sustainable use of water resources.

- Incorporate slope rounding and contour grading to minimize the slopes and visually soften grade changes.

**VIS-3 Trees.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Project Engineer minimize removal of existing mature trees. If removal of mature trees cannot be avoided, additional landscape improvements will be incorporated into the final design. The replacement ratio of any trees removed shall be determined in consultation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 8 Landscape Architect.

**VIS-4 Hardscape.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Project Engineer incorporate attractive walls, medians, and other visually pleasing hardscape in the project design.

**VIS-5 Sound Walls.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will include aesthetic enhancements for sound walls in the final design. The designs of sound walls require compliance with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) standards for sound attenuation (where the walls provide that function), safety requirements, and other pertinent standards. The design of sound walls requires compliance with the Highway Design Manual Standards and aesthetic treatments shall be reviewed and approved by the Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect. The Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect shall approve the design of any sound walls within State Highway right of way. The walls should include the following features:

- Attractive, decorative elements like local art should be incorporated into wall design in order to increase the visual quality of the area and to provide an expression of the regional “sense of place.”

- Areas in front of sound walls shall be landscaped, where landscaping can be accommodated within the public right of way, including trees, shrubs, and vines (depending upon the space available), to break the visual monotony, soften the appearance of sound walls, and deter graffiti.

**VIS-6 Retaining Walls.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will include potential aesthetic enhancements for retaining walls in the project design. Attractive, decorative elements such as local art should be incorporated into architectural treatment wall design to increase the visual quality of the area and to provide an expression of the regional “sense of place.”
presence of retaining walls along the Mid County Parkway (MCP) or interchange off- and on-ramps will require compliance with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) standards for safety.

**VIS-7 Lighting.** Prior to completion of final design, a lighting plan will be prepared by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) for approval by California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 8 in areas under State jurisdiction and for approval by the County or the affected Cities within their jurisdictions. The lighting fixtures will be designed to minimize glare on adjacent properties and into the night sky. Lighting will be shielded with nonglare hoods and focused within the Mid County Parkway (MCP) project right of way.

**VIS-8 MCP Corridor Master Plan.** Prior to completion of final design, a Mid County Parkway (MCP) Corridor Master Plan will be prepared by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC). In preparing the MCP Corridor Master Plan, RCTC shall coordinate with the County and affected Cities for the portions of the project within their respective jurisdictions. RCTC shall also involve the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the context-sensitive design process for the MCP Corridor Master Plan. The MCP Corridor Master Plan will include a design template for aesthetic features applied to any structures throughout the MCP corridor. The purpose of the MCP Corridor Master Plan is to create consistency in aesthetic design throughout the length of the MCP corridor. The Master Plan will be designed in conjunction with the landscape plan for the MCP.
1.0 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The Mid County Parkway (MCP) project was identified as a key west-east regional transportation corridor as a result of several years of comprehensive land use and transportation planning in Riverside County through the Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP). Tier 1 analyses and environmental documents were initiated for the two intracounty corridors in fall 2000, including a west-east corridor known as the Hemet to Corona/Lake Elsinore Corridor. The purpose of the Tier 1 efforts was to select preferred alternatives in order to preserve needed right of way. After a Draft Tier 1 Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) was completed for the Hemet to Corona/Lake Elsinore Corridor and circulated for public review in 2002 with a suite of 14 “build” alternatives, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) Board accepted a staff recommendation in June 2003 to proceed with the accelerated preparation of a project-level environmental document for a west-east alternative that would generally follow the existing alignment of Cajalco Road and Ramona Expressway, known as the MCP project.

Engineering and environmental studies were initiated in 2004 for the MCP project, a proposed 32-mile (mi) facility between Interstate 15 (I-15) and State Route 79 (SR-79), and in September 2007 the RCTC Board selected a Locally Preferred Alternative (Alternative 9 Temescal Wash Design Variation) for the MCP project. In October 2008, a Draft EIR/EIS for the MCP project was circulated for a 90-day public review period. During this time, six public meetings/hearings were held and RCTC accepted public comments for the record at all of these meetings, along with comments via the MCP project website and email. Over 3,100 comments were received from 50 public agencies and organizations, 10 large property owners, 240 individuals, and form letters from over 1,100 individuals nationwide. Two key themes emerged in the public review comments: (1) the cost and timing of available funds for the project, and (2) concerns about the impacts to rural communities and existing habitat reserves.

In Spring 2009, to address the concerns identified in public comments on the Draft EIR/EIS, RCTC as the lead agency under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as the lead agency under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) acting as an agent and providing oversight for the NEPA process, developed an approach for completing the EIR/EIS process for the project. This approach modified the MCP project limits from 32 mi (I-15 to SR-79) to 16 mi (Interstate 215 [I-215] to SR-79) in order to focus transportation funding where the need is the greatest, between I-215 to SR-79. On July 8, 2009, the RCTC Board formally took action to focus the MCP project between I-215 and SR-79 and to prepare a Recirculated Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS for the modified project.

The purpose of this Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) is to determine the visual and aesthetic compatibility of the proposed MCP project with the existing developed and natural areas within the project vicinity. The study assesses the potential visual impacts on the existing visual environment associated with construction of the proposed MCP project and proposes mitigation measures to avoid or minimize any adverse impacts. The “study area” refers to the project’s ultimate right-of-way as
shown on the Conceptual Engineering Plans (provided at Caltrans District 8 and the RCTC) and areas outside the project right-of-way where people can see changes to the environment as a result of the project. Of the original 29 Key Views selected for the previously approved VIA for a 32 mi MCP project (March 2008), 14 Key Views are still applicable for the modified project limits and are analyzed in this VIA. This VIA is being prepared to support the Recirculated Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS for the MCP project.
2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION
The RCTC, in cooperation with FWHA, Caltrans District 8, the County of Riverside, the City of San Jacinto and the City of Perris, proposes to construct the MCP, a new highway project in Riverside County, California. The project area is located in western Riverside County, primarily along or parallel to the existing Ramona Expressway. Figure 2.1 depicts the MCP study area and the regional location of the project. The MCP project study area is approximately 16 mi long and ranges from 1 to 5 mi wide.

The MCP project will serve as a major east-west connection within western Riverside County. The proposed action would adopt an MCP project alignment and construct a major, limited-access freeway to meet current and projected 2040 travel demand from I-215 on the west to SR-79 on the east.

2.2 PURPOSE AND NEED
The purpose of the proposed action is to provide a transportation facility that would effectively and efficiently accommodate regional west-east movement of people, goods, and services between and through Perris and San Jacinto. More specifically, the selected Alternative would:

- Provide increased capacity to support the forecasted travel demand for the 2040 design year;
- Provide a limited access facility;
- Provide roadway geometrics to meet state highway design standards;
- Accommodate Surface Transportation Assistance Act National Network trucks,\(^1\) and
- Provide a facility that is compatible with a future multimodal transportation system.

The MCP project is located in an area of western Riverside County that is undergoing substantial population and employment growth. According to the California Finance Department, in 2009, the population in Riverside County reached approximately 2.1 million people. Specifically, the population in western Riverside County is expected to increase by over 1.3 million people between 2010 and 2035, an increase of more than 60 percent. Growth in employment is expected to occur at an even higher rate, approximately 80 percent between 2010 and 2035.\(^2\) The Inland Empire Quarterly Economic Report states that employment in the Inland Empire is no longer decreasing, and employment is projected to increase by 10,500 jobs in 2010 (approximately 0.9 percent).

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\(^1\) These are larger trucks that are permitted on the federal interstate system and the non-interstate federal-aid primary system.

\(^2\) 2008 Regional Transportation Plan Integrated Growth Forecast, SCAG.
In addition, the report states the housing market in the Inland Empire appears to have bottomed out and is now in the recovery period due to demand and overwhelming supply coming from foreclosures.\textsuperscript{1} Although currently funded transportation improvements will address some of the projected future demand, additional transportation improvements are needed to provide for the efficient movement of people and goods in the future.

2.3 PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

As discussed earlier in this chapter, to address the concerns in response to comments on the Draft EIR/EIS for a 32 mi MCP facility, RCTC, FHWA, and Caltrans developed an approach for completing the EIR/EIS process for the project that would refine the project purpose statement and project alternatives to focus on the transportation needs from I-215 to SR-79. Therefore, the Build Alternatives analyzed in the 32 mi Draft EIR/EIS for the MCP have been withdrawn in response to these concerns (i.e. Alternatives 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9).

The following are descriptions of the modified project alternatives for the MCP facility between I-215 in the west and SR-79 in the east, including two No Project/No Action Alternatives (Alternatives 1A and 1B) and the three Build Alternatives (Alternative 4 Modified, Alternative 5 Modified, and Alternative 9 Modified). These modified alternatives are evaluated in this technical analysis and provided below, and alignments of the build alternatives are shown on detailed figures in this section.

2.3.1 Alternative 1A: No Project/No Action—Existing Ground Conditions

Alternative 1A represents 2040 traffic on the planned street network except for future improvements to Ramona Expressway, which would remain as it exists today. Construction of an MCP project would not be implemented with the No Project/No Action Alternative 1A. The future west-east traffic described in the study area would be served by the existing Ramona Expressway between I-215 and SR-79. This alternative assumes 2040 land use conditions and implementation of planned improvements to the regional and local circulation system, as accounted for in the adopted Riverside County General Plan (2003), RCTC’s Measure A program, and other adopted plans and policies.

2.3.2 Alternative 1B: No Project/No Action—General Plan Circulation Element Conditions

Alternative 1B represents 2040 traffic levels on the planned street network, according to the Circulation Element of the Riverside County General Plan. Construction of an MCP project would not be implemented with No Project/No Action Alternative 1B. This alternative is the same as Alternative 1A but includes implementation of Ramona Expressway consistent with the Riverside County General Plan Circulation Element.

\textsuperscript{1} San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG; October 2009 and January 2010). Inland Empire Quarterly Economic Report.
2.3.3 Alternative 4 Modified: North Perris (Drain)

Alternative 4 Modified proposes a six-lane controlled access freeway. Alternative 4 Modified follows a northern alignment through the city of Perris, adjacent to the Perris Drain (as shown in Figure 2.2). System interchanges (a freeway-to-freeway type interchange) are proposed for all Build Alternatives at I-215 and SR-79. Descriptions of these system-system interchanges are as follows:

- The MCP/I-215 interchange is proposed as a three-level interchange that will not preclude possible future connections to the west. At the highest point, the MCP/I-215 interchange would be approximately 75 to 100 feet (ft) above ground level.
- The MCP/SR-79 interchange is proposed as a three-level interchange at an approximate height of 75 ft. The MCP connection to SR-79 will be made at the proposed realignment of SR-79, south of Ramona Expressway. The MCP provides direct connectors to northbound and southbound SR-79, as well as a six-lane easterly extension that terminates at a proposed signalized intersection at Ramona Expressway. The SR-79 Realignment Project is currently undergoing separate environmental review and is assumed to be constructed prior to the MCP project.

Service interchanges (interchanges that connect a freeway to local arterials) for Alternative 4 Modified are proposed at Perris Boulevard, Evans Road, Ramona Expressway/Antelope Road, Bernasconi Road, Reservoir Road, Town Center Boulevard (proposed new arterial associated with future proposed development), Park Center Boulevard (proposed new arterial associated with future proposed development), and Warren Road.

All of the Build Alternatives, including Alternative 4 Modified, include improvements to I-215. These improvements are as follows: (1) the addition of one auxiliary lane between the MCP/I-215 systems interchange and the adjacent service interchange to the north and south to facilitate movement between the MCP and I-215; (2) the addition of an operational/mixed-flow lane from MCP to the Van Buren Boulevard Interchange to accommodate additional traffic on I-215 as a result of the MCP; (3) the addition of an operational/mixed-flow lane from Nuevo Road to Cajalco-Ramona Expressway or Harley Knox Boulevard to facilitate weaving on I-215; (4) the addition of a new interchange at Placentia Avenue; and (5) modification of the existing interchange at Cajalco Road/Ramona Expressway.

Alternative 4 Modified also includes two Design Variations; see Section 2.3.6 for additional detail.

2.3.4 Alternative 5 Modified: South Perris (at Rider Street)

Similar to Alternative 4 Modified, Alternative 5 Modified is a six-lane controlled-access freeway. However, Alternative 5 Modified follows a southern alignment through Perris along Rider Street (as shown in Figure 2.2).

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1 SR-79 is proposed to be realigned as a four-lane limited access expressway on a new alignment from south of Domenigoni Parkway to north of Gilman Springs Road and is currently undergoing separate environmental review.
FIGURE 2.2

SJRB DV - San Jacinto River Bridge Design Variation
SJN DV - San Jacinto North Design Variation
System interchanges proposed for Alternative 5 Modified are the same as for Alternative 4 Modified, with connections at I-215 and SR-79. However, the I-215 system interchange differs from that in Alternative 4 Modified as it connects the MCP to I-215 near Rider Street. As with Alternative 4 Modified, the system interchange at I-215 is proposed as a three-level interchange that will not preclude possible future connections to the west. The interchange will be approximately 75 to 100 ft above ground level.

Locations of the service interchanges proposed for Alternative 5 Modified are the same as those in Alternative 4 Modified: Perris Boulevard, Evans Road, Ramona Expressway/Antelope Road, Bernasconi Road, Reservoir Road, Town Center Boulevard (proposed new arterial associated with future proposed development), Park Center Boulevard (proposed new arterial associated with future proposed development), and Warren Road.

Alternative 5 Modified also includes the same improvements to I-215 as described above for Alternative 4 Modified. Also Alternative 5 Modified includes the same Design Variations; see Section 2.3.6 for additional detail.

2.3.5 Alternative 9 Modified: Placentia Avenue

Similar to Alternatives 4 and 5 Modified, Alternative 9 Modified is a six-lane controlled-access freeway. However, Alternative 9 Modified follows a more southerly alignment through the city of Perris along Placentia Avenue (as shown in Figure 2.2).

System interchanges are proposed for all Build Alternatives, including Alternative 9 Modified, at I-215 and SR-79. The system interchange at SR-79 is the same as those proposed for Alternative 4 Modified and Alternative 5 Modified. However, the I-215 system interchange differs from those in Alternatives 4 and 5 Modified as it connects the MCP to I-215 near Placentia Avenue. As with Alternatives 4 and 5 Modified, the system interchange at I-215 is proposed as a three-level interchange that will not preclude possible future connections to the west. The interchange will be approximately 75 to 100 ft above ground level.

Service interchanges are also proposed for Alternative 9 Modified at the following locations: Redlands Avenue, Evans Road, Ramona Expressway/Antelope Road, Bernasconi Road, Reservoir Road, Town Center Boulevard (proposed new arterial associated with future proposed development), Park Center Boulevard (proposed new arterial associated with future proposed development), and Warren Road.

Alternative 9 Modified also includes the same improvements to I-215 as described above for Alternative 4 Modified. In addition, Alternative 9 Modified has been designed to avoid Paragon Park and the fire station located between Spectacular Bid and Redlands Boulevard.

Alternative 9 Modified includes the same Design Variations; see Section 2.3.6 for additional detail.
2.3.6 Design Variation

The following design variations apply to all of the build alternatives:

- **San Jacinto North Design Variation:** Under the San Jacinto North Design Variation, the MCP route diverges from the proposed MCP alignment west of Warren Road and follows an alignment easterly that is approximately 1,140 ft north of the existing Ramona Expressway. The San Jacinto North Design Variation will also provide a connection to existing Ramona Expressway from Warren Road, similar to the base case for Alternative 4 Modified, Alternative 5 Modified, and Alternative 9 Modified.

- **San Jacinto River Bridge Design Variation:** Under the San Jacinto River Bridge Design Variation, the MCP project would construct two bridges in the Lakeview Nuevo area, a 531 ft bridge spanning Martin Street and a 1,941 ft bridge spanning the San Jacinto River, for a total of 2,472 ft of bridge. The base case proposes one 4,321 ft bridge to span the floodplain and Martin Street. The San Jacinto River Bridge Design Variation applies to all three build alternatives (Alternative 4 Modified, 5 Modified, and 9 Modified). The San Jacinto River Bridge Design Variation would also include a total of 1,849 ft of fill on either end of the bridges within the same limits as the base case bridge. Similar to the base case, the bridges under this design variation would be located to the south of the existing Ramona Expressway Bridge, which is 255 ft in length and would remain in place.

2.4 ENGINEERING REQUIREMENTS AND LANDSCAPING

2.4.1 Cut and Fill

All of the Build Alternatives will require cut and fill to construct the transportation system. Figure 2.3 identifies the location of cut and fill areas under each of the Build Alternatives.

2.4.2 Retaining Walls

All of the Build Alternatives will require retaining walls to support various structures throughout the MCP. Figure 2.3 identifies the location of retaining walls under each of the Build Alternatives.

2.4.3 Landscaping

The Build Alternatives will include landscaping for unpaved areas within the MCP right-of-way and impacted right-of-way of I-215 and SR-79. Replacement landscaping will be provided for any existing landscaping impacted by the MCP project. Landscaping will focus on using native plant species, particularly in areas adjacent to undeveloped land and existing/proposed habitat reserve areas with native plant species. All plant species will be drought tolerant to minimize the need for irrigation.

The roadside within the project limits is generally classified as “natural” vegetation. Provisions will be included for “Highway Planting” (using Caltrans highway planting standards) in urban areas. The urban areas along the MCP project that will include “Highway Planting” comprise all areas
between I-215 and SR-79, including I-215 and SR-79. In areas classified as rural or reserve, native vegetation will be provided to replace disturbed natural vegetation.

In addition, the “Highway Planting” will include design components and plant materials intended to reduce the visual impacts of the corridor alternatives on adjacent sensitive land uses.
3.0 VISUAL ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

3.1 FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES

This VIA for the proposed MCP project follows the methodology prescribed in the publication “Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects” (FHWA, August 1981). The following six principal steps were carried out to assess the potential visual impacts of the proposed MCP project:

1. define the existing visual environment;
2. identify key views for visual assessment;
3. analyze existing visual resources (visual quality and visual character) and viewer groups;
4. depict the visual appearance of project alternatives and viewer response;
5. assess the visual impacts of project alternatives; and
6. propose methods to mitigate adverse visual impacts.

3.1.1 Identifying Key Views

To evaluate the potential visual impacts created by the proposed MCP project, specific views were selected that represent the various settings throughout the study area, the visual resources, and a number of sensitive viewer perspectives. Selection of the key views for this VIA was based on the following criteria:

1. Areas that would have the most substantial changes from project implementation such as elevated highway structures, other structures such as sound walls or retaining walls, system or service interchanges, and areas with large cut-and-fill slopes
2. Areas where there are existing Visual Aesthetic Resources such as:
   - Existing visual resources according to the General Plans of the County of Riverside and the Cities of Perris and San Jacinto
   - Scenic views observed from the field visits
   - Scenic Roads. There are no state, county or locally designated scenic roads in the MCP study area.
3. Populated areas with consideration of residential land uses, in particular
4. Representative views from each proposed MCP Build Alternatives (4 Modified, 5 Modified, and 9 Modified)

Key views represent the primary viewer groups (residents, motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists) that would potentially be affected by the project. Twenty-nine key views were originally selected to represent the visual quality of typical existing landscape units in the MCP study area that would be
modified by the original 32 mi MCP project and were analyzed in a previously approved VIA for the MCP project (March 2008). Now that the project limits have been modified to I-215 in the west and SR-79 in the east, only 14 of the original 29 key views remain within the study area for the modified MCP alternatives. These 14 key views are listed and briefly described in Table 3.A. (A map of the key view locations is provided in Section 6.0.) Every proposed MCP project alternative is represented by a key view, and some alternatives are represented by a key view more than once. In general, in the analysis of key views, a build alternative that resulted in the most visual change to an existing view was selected for analysis over a build alternative with less visual impact.

### Table 3.A: Key View Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key View Number</th>
<th>Description of Photo Location and View</th>
<th>Alternative(s) Shown in View Simulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Northbound I-215 looking toward the Cajalco/Ramona overcrossing</td>
<td>4 Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Behind Val Verde Elementary School on Indian Avenue looking north-northwest at I-215</td>
<td>9 Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>South of Paragon Park on Spectacular Bid Street looking north</td>
<td>9 Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Eastern terminus of Ensenada Drive looking southeast at open space</td>
<td>5 Modified and 9 Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Perris Boulevard, north of Ramona Expressway looking north at proposed Perris Boulevard Interchange</td>
<td>4 Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ramona Expressway looking south at Perris Storm Drain</td>
<td>4 Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Looking west at the Perris Storm Drain and residential construction</td>
<td>4 Modified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23b</td>
<td>Evans Road looking south at Placentia Avenue</td>
<td>All Build Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Looking west at Ramona Expressway from open fields (area of proposed residential development)</td>
<td>All Build Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>South of Ramona Expressway near Bernasconi Road looking west at open fields and Bernasconi Hills</td>
<td>All Build Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Davis Road looking southwest at Ramona Expressway</td>
<td>All Build Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ramona Expressway looking east at planned Town Center Boulevard</td>
<td>All Build Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Warren Road looking north at Ramona Expressway</td>
<td>All Build Alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>SR-79 looking south at Ramona Expressway</td>
<td>All Build Alternatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I-215 = Interstate 215  
SR-79 = State Route 79

#### 3.1.2 Identifying Visual Character and Visual Quality

Visual character is descriptive and nonevaluative, which means it is based on defined attributes that are neither good nor bad. A change in visual character cannot be described as having good or bad attributes until it is compared with the viewer response to that change. The existing and proposed
visual character of each key view selected for this VIA will be evaluated with regard to potential viewer response to any changes.

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness, and unity present in the existing viewshed, then comparing these three criteria with the viewshed as modified by the proposed project. The FHWA states that this method should correlate with public judgments of visual quality well enough to predict those judgments. This approach is particularly useful in highway planning because it does not presume that a highway project is necessarily low in visual quality. This approach to assessing visual quality can also help identify specific methods for mitigating specific adverse visual impacts that may occur as a result of a project. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality are defined as follows:

- **Vividness**: Vividness is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns (e.g., Niagara Falls is a highly vivid landscape component).

- **Intactness**: Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. This factor can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes and natural settings (e.g., a two-lane road that meanders through the countryside).

- **Unity**: Unity is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole; it frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the landscape (e.g., an English or Japanese garden).

### 3.1.3 Predicting 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 project. Because the MCP project limits extend linearly approximately 16 mi, existing viewer sensitivity and exposure to the project will vary depending on the particular project segment. Viewer sensitivity to the project and viewer exposure are described for each key view in the visual impact analysis in Chapter 6.0.

### 3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AND POLICIES

The following laws and regulations pertain to the protection of visual resources. The guidelines under these laws were used in this analysis to determine potential effects of the proposed MCP project on the visual aesthetic environment.

#### 3.2.1 Federal Visual Policies

**Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, 1966.** This law is intended to protect and preserve the natural beauty of public park and recreational land uses, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites. The act encourages planning to minimize harm to any of these natural and recreational areas.
Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This Act and the 1976 regulations implementing it define “criteria of adverse effect” (Section 800.8), including the “introduction of visual, audible or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the property or alters its setting.”

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA (1969, as amended) requires that proposed federal projects consider potential effects that the project will likely have on the environment. Visual resources are an integral part of the environment and, therefore, the topic is included under NEPA.

NEPA is concerned with the protection of the existing visual appearance of:

- Scenic highways
- Section 4(f) lands (public parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites)
- Lands managed by the United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (in general, areas of high visual resource)
- Significant cultural and historic resources
- Lands associated with the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system

3.2.2 State, Regional, and Local Visual Policies

California Department of Transportation. A State Scenic Highway is any freeway, highway, road, or other public right-of-way designated by Caltrans that traverses an area of exceptional scenic quality. Suitability for designation as a State Scenic Highway is based on three visual concepts—vividness, intactness, and unity.¹ None of the roads in the MCP study area are designated as State Scenic Highways.

County of Riverside. The County of Riverside General Plan includes scenic resource and scenic corridor policies in its Multipurpose Open Space, Land Use, and Circulation Elements. The Multipurpose Open Space Element describes scenic resources as “hillsides and ridges that rise above urban or rural areas or highways” and “scenic vistas, accessible to the general public that provide a view of the countryside.” The General Plan does not identify specific scenic viewpoints. However, one of the policies to be implemented is the identification of scenic resources for preservation.

The Palomar Observatory, located in San Diego County, requires darkness to observe the night sky. The Mount Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy in Riverside County’s General Plan was designed to limit light flow into the night sky. The policy states: “Adhere to the County's lighting requirements for standards that are intended to limit light leakage and spillage that may interfere with the operations of the Palomar Observatory.” The MCP footprint is located within Zone B of the Mount Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy Area. According to the County of Riverside Ordinance No. 655, Section I, Zone B is defined as the area within the 45 mi radius and the 15 mi radius (the perimeter of Zone A) centered on the Palomar Observatory.

City of Perris. The central portion of the proposed MCP project is located in the city of Perris. According to the City of Perris General Plan, there are no state or locally designated scenic roads within the MCP project limits.

City of San Jacinto. The eastern portion of the proposed MCP project is located in the city of San Jacinto. According to the City of San Jacinto General Plan, there are no state or locally designated scenic roads within the MCP project limits.

3.3 VISUAL FIELD STUDIES
Field studies were carried out on December 12, 2005; April 20, 2006; June 11, 2006; August 2, 2006; August 15, 2006; and March 16, 2011, to inspect the MCP visual study area and identify potential visual resources and to photo-document the study area. Originally, 29 site photographs were selected to represent key views; however, only 14 of the original 29 are still applicable with the modified project limits, as shown later in this report. The key view photographs were selected because they represented typical views throughout the study area, reflected the views of sensitive viewer groups, identified visual resources in the study area, and showed the seasonal landscape palettes. Prior to the field studies, the engineering plans, aerial photographs, and existing known visual resources were referenced for specific areas to focus on.
4.0 EXISTING VISUAL ENVIRONMENT AND AREA PLANS

4.1 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

The regional landscape establishes the general visual character of the MCP project site, but the specific visual environment upon which this visual assessment focused was determined by defining key views, also called landscape units. The MCP project setting includes several types of land uses and visual characteristics, from rural to urban and commercial to park reserve. The MCP project setting includes or is adjacent to commercial, industrial, agricultural, habitat reserve, and residential land uses; local roads; and highways (i.e., I-215 and SR-79).

4.2 LANDSCAPE UNITS

Landscape units are relatively homogeneous combinations of landform and land cover that recur throughout the region. A landscape unit is a portion of the regional landscape and can be thought of as an outdoor room that exhibits a distinct visual character. A landscape unit will often correspond to a place or district that is commonly known among local viewers. Landscape units were identified throughout the MCP visual study area for this VIA and are described below and shown later on Figure 5.1. Key view descriptions are provided in Table 3.A: Key View Summary, and Section 6.0, Visual Impacts, where each key view is described in detail.

4.2.1 Perris Valley Landscape Unit

The Perris Valley Landscape Unit is located between I-215 and Lakeview Avenue. Geologically, Perris Valley is an approximately 4.5 mi wide alluvial-filled basin that extends from Moreno Valley on the north to Menifee Valley on the south. This unit includes views of the Bernasconi Hills, a distinguishing topographical feature in the northeastern portion of the valley. The Bernasconi Hills separate Perris Valley from the San Jacinto Valley. Similar to the Mead Valley Landscape Unit, Perris Valley includes considerable residential and commercial development, roads, and associated traffic. The elevations in this landscape unit range from approximately 1,420 to 2,450 ft.

The Perris Valley Landscape Unit is represented by Key Views 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, and 26. The vegetation in Key View 19 is ornamental grass and trees. Key Views 21, 22, 24, 25, and 26 show ruderal vegetation, cropland, and developed/graded land.

Wildlife associated with the Perris Valley Landscape Unit includes:

- Botta’s pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*)
- California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*)
- California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*)
- Common side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*)
- House finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)
- White-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

### 4.2.2 San Jacinto Valley Landscape Unit

Farmlands, fields, the Ramona Expressway, and rural residential land use characterize the San Jacinto Valley Landscape Unit between Lakeview Avenue and SR-79. The rural residential land uses are located both north and south of the Ramona Expressway. Mountains are visible to the northeast (the San Jacinto Mountains) and the south (the Lakeview Mountains) from this valley. The elevations in this landscape unit range from approximately 1,420 to 1,480 ft; thus, the unit is relatively flat. The San Jacinto River floodplain is located within a northeast-trending valley between Perris Valley and the San Jacinto Valley, bordered by the Bernasconi Hills on the west and the Lakeview Mountains on the southeast. The San Jacinto River flows toward the Elsinore Valley approximately 20 mi to the southwest. The San Jacinto Valley is an alluvial valley along the northwest-trending San Jacinto fault zone.

The San Jacinto Valley Landscape Unit is represented by Key Views 27, 28, and 29. The vegetation in Key View 27 includes cropland and ruderal vegetation in the foreground, a dairy on the distant left, and nonnative grassland and Riversidean upland sage scrub on hills. Key View 28 is similar with ruderal vegetation in the foreground, with cropland in the distance. The vegetation in Key View 29 includes ruderal vegetation in the foreground, with cropland and a dairy in the distance.

Wildlife associated with the San Jacinto Valley (Dairy/Cropland) Landscape Unit includes:

- Botta’s pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*)
- European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris* *)
- House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
- Mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*)
- Rock pigeon (*Columba livia*)
- Western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)

### 4.2.3 Freeway Landscape Units

I-215 within the project study area represents the Freeway Landscape Unit. The I-215 Freeway Landscape Unit is a north-south direction highway and is relatively straight within the MCP study area. I-215 in the MCP study area is bounded by Mead Valley on the west and Perris Valley on the east. Heavy traffic flow, interchanges, and surrounding commercial and residential development characterize the I-215 Freeway Landscape Units.

The Freeway Landscape Unit is represented by Key Views 16 and 17. Vegetation along or within the Freeway Landscape Unit in the MCP visual study area consists of ruderal and ornamental vegetation.
Wildlife associated with the Freeway Landscape Unit includes:

- American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)
- Botta’s pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*)
- House finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)
- House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
- Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)
- Rock pigeon (*Columba livia*)

### 4.3 AREA PLANS

The Riverside County Area Plans that include the proposed MCP project alternatives are described below from west to east. Components of the Riverside County General Plan and each of the plans includes natural areas and areas that are either currently under development or planned for future development. The future development plans involve residential, commercial, and industrial land uses.

#### 4.3.1 Lakeview/Nuevo Area Plan

The Lakeview/Nuevo Area Plan contains a wide valley formed by the San Jacinto River. The Bernasconi Hills create a border in the northwest, while the Lakeview Mountains form the eastern boundary. Physical features in the Lakeview/Nuevo Area Plan, as seen from the MCP project area, are limited to the Lakeview Mountains south of Ramona Expressway. The MCP alignments in this area generally follow Ramona Expressway, which is located adjacent to existing farmland and proposed residential land uses.

#### 4.3.2 Reche Canyon/Badlands Area Plan

The Area Plan includes predominantly mountainous, rural residential, and rugged natural open space regions in northwestern Riverside County. The Reche Canyon/Badlands area has a well-diversified topography, including prominent features such as Lake Perris, mountainous Norton Younglove Preserve, Box Springs reserve, San Jacinto Wildlife reserve that follows the San Jacinto river corridor, and Reche Canyon Creek. The land is primarily devoted to agriculture, rural/equestrian residential, commercial, mining, public facility, and recreational uses.

The MCP project limits are not in the Reche Canyon/Badlands Area Plan. However, the prominent land feature, Bernasconi Hills, is part of this area plan, adjacent to Lake Perris north of Ramona Expressway, and visible from the MCP study area.

#### 4.3.3 San Jacinto Valley Area Plan

The San Jacinto Valley lies between the Lakeview Mountains in the northwest, the Dawson Mountains in the southwest, and the San Jacinto Mountains along its northeastern flank, and includes the cities of San Jacinto, Hemet, East Hemet, and the Valle Vista area.
The eastern terminus of the proposed MCP project is located in the San Jacinto Valley Area Plan. The San Jacinto mountain range east of SR-79 is visible from the MCP study area.
5.0 EXISTING VISUAL SETTING AND VIEWER RESPONSE

5.1 EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER

Defining the existing visual character establishes a condition that can be discussed in general terms, then it can be compared to the postproject development visual character and any differences identified. The following elements help define the visual character of the MCP study area.

5.1.1 Topography

The topography in the MCP project limits and surrounding areas include flat lands, hills, and mountains. Topography in the project area is diverse, with rolling hills in the west that transition to flat, open, ruderal and agricultural lands in the San Jacinto Valley in the east. The elevation generally increases from west to east, from approximately 1,500 ft near I-215 to approximately 1,470 ft above mean sea level near SR-79. There are several high peaks, up to approximately 2,400 ft above mean sea level, within the project area. Elevations in the project study area are shown in Figure 5.1.

5.1.2 Plant Communities

Large portions of the MCP study area contain plant communities and are absent of manmade structures. The locations and types of plants in a viewshed generally contribute to its visual character. According to the biological studies for the proposed MCP project, the predominant plant communities in the MCP study area are nonnative grassland and Riversidean upland sage scrub. There are also extensive areas of agricultural and developed land. Plant communities and other land cover categories in the MCP study area are described below. Figure 5.2 shows the existing plant communities in the biological study area (BSA) for the MCP. Table 5.A gives total area occupied by each land cover category within the MCP study area boundary.

**Cropland.** Cropland includes hay, grain, and vegetable crops and sod farms. This category also includes areas historically used as cropland but that may currently be dominated by ruderal vegetation and used for pasture or left fallow.

**Dairy.** Lands mapped as dairy include feedlots, dairy waste ponds, and associated ruderal and nonvegetated areas. Small areas of heavily fertilized weedy seasonal wetlands may be present.

**Lake/Pond.** This category includes areas of freshwater ponds and lakes that are inundated during most or all of the growing season to a sufficient depth to prevent rooted vegetation from establishing. Common marsh or riparian plants such as flatsedge or mulefat may inhabit the edges of such water bodies. Common vernal pool plants such as woolly marbles may inhabit receding edges where soils are appropriate. Weedy upland or facultative wetland plants, such as tumbling pigweed, dove weed,
Table 5.A: Land Cover within the MCP Study Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Cover Category</th>
<th>Area (Acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cropland</td>
<td>2,155.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>253.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake/Pond</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed/Ruderal</td>
<td>1,366.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riversidean Upland Sage Scrub</td>
<td>203.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonnative Grassland</td>
<td>169.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alkali Grassland</td>
<td>266.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian Forest</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian Scrub</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Area</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,474</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

common sunflower prickly lettuce, and common knotweed may inhabit previously inundated areas if water recedes late in the growing season. Features classified as Lakes/Pond within the MCP study area include irrigation and stock ponds.

**Developed/Ruderal.** This category includes roads, buildings, paved areas, golf courses, ornamental plantings, and associated areas that are nonvegetated or that have only ruderal vegetation.

**Riversidean Upland Sage Scrub.** This community includes scrub with brittlebush, California sagebrush, or California buckwheat typically dominant. Red brome is usually a dominant species in the herbaceous layer.

**Nonnative Grassland.** This predominantly herbaceous community is composed of a mixture of nonnative and native species. Vegetation must have at least one nonruderal species in order to be classified as nonnative grassland. Areas vegetated entirely in ruderal species were instead classified as Developed/Ruderal, Cropland, or Dairy, depending on the source of disturbance. Most native plant species are nonruderal and would be considered indicators of this plant community. However, some natives, such as common fiddleneck, Canada horseweed, common sunflower, and doveweed are considered to be ruderal species because they are frequently found in areas of extreme disturbance. All common nonnative species are considered to be ruderal species. Common dominant species of nonnative grassland within the MCP study area include red brome, common ripgut grass, foxtail barley, Mediterranean schismus, wild oats, and shortpod mustard.

**Alkali Grassland.** Alkali grassland communities are typically dominated by native alkali-tolerant grasses, forbs, or subshrubs or by nonnative alkali-tolerant grasses such as foxtail barley. This community occurs in sites that are poorly drained, irregularly flooded, or with a water table that fluctuates near the ground surface. Common species of Alkali Grassland/Playa within the MCP study area include various species of saltbush, saltgrass, salt heliotrope, alkali mallow, and bush seepweed.
Marsh. Marshes include permanently flooded areas dominated by perennial, emergent herbaceous species such as flatsedge, bulrush, and cattails in stands that are large enough for use by animal species such as blackbirds, which utilize marshes for foraging or nesting. Common plants of marshes within the MCP study area include tall flatsedge, pale spikerush, common bulrush, alkali bulrush, wire rush, and cattails.

Riparian Forest. As mapped for this project, this category includes riparian communities with four or more trees of western cottonwood, tree willows, or western sycamore with combined vegetative cover of at least 20 percent.

Riparian Scrub. This community includes riparian areas dominated by shrubby willows, mulefat, or broom baccharis, and some areas that would be expected to support these species but that are temporarily nonvegetated due to scouring by floods or to mechanized removal of vegetation from a channel.

Invasive Species. Forty-seven of the plant species observed during field studies are known to be invasive in the non-desert areas of southern California and are rated “High,” “Moderate,” or “Low” by the California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) according to their degree of ecological impact. Some of these species may not be present within the final BSA, which does not include all areas surveyed. Species observed that are rated as “High” include hottentot-fig, fennel, yellow star-thistle, mediterranean tamarisk, giant reed, red brome, and pampas grass. Of these, red brome was observed in grassland and scrub areas throughout the MCP study area. The remaining species were observed in isolated patches.

5.1.3 Effects of Weather and Air Pollution
Precipitation and temperature affect the appearance of the undeveloped landscapes throughout western Riverside County. From December to May, plants are usually greener than from June to November. Summer months are typically dry and produce landscape palettes of browns and tans, while winter months tend to provide enough precipitation to trigger plant growth, turning the landscape green. The photographs in this report were taken in wet and dry seasons to display the variety of landscapes that are influenced by the amount of precipitation.

The visual quality in western Riverside County is sometimes degraded by the presence of smog. Smog is ozone and ground-level pollutants that produce a haze. The human environment, weather conditions, and topography influence the presence and severity of smog. Smog in western Riverside County is typically more visible during the warmer, dryer summer and fall months than in winter and spring. The site photographs in this report display various air quality conditions.
5.2 EXISTING VISUAL QUALITY
The MCP study area varies in visual quality, sometimes quite dramatically, depending on the location or point of view. Therefore, assigning the project site with one overall visual quality (vividness, intactness, and unity) rating does not clearly describe the visual study area. Because, the quality and number of visual resources vary from low to high depending on the specific area and the season, several key views were selected for analysis. The key views represent the variety of settings throughout the study area such as parks, open space, residential, views from the road, and farmland. The existing visual condition for each key view is described in Chapter 6.0. The existing visual quality is then compared to the proposed project visual quality to determine the extent of visual change and potential adverse visual impacts.

5.3 EXISTING VIEWER SENSITIVITY
Understanding viewer sensitivity is a factor in assessing the potential visual effects of a project. Viewer sensitivity is defined both as the viewers’ concern for scenic quality and the viewers’ response to changes 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 be considered unexceptional in a visual resource analysis.

Existing viewer sensitivity to the proposed project was assessed through review of the public comments received during the public scoping process and through field studies. The field studies allowed estimates to be developed as to the number of viewers in a particular area, and areas of particularly high visual quality and character were identified. Citizen participation in the development of the MCP project occurred during the public scoping meetings conducted in 2004 and 2005. Opinions about the project were also gathered from agencies and the general public during the Notice of Preparation and Notice of Intent processes. Public and agency comments on the project are included in the MCP Scoping Summary Report (2008). In addition, public and agency comments were received in response to the Draft EIR/EIS for the 32-mi MCP Build Alternatives. A recap of the comments relating to visual impacts is as follows:

5.3.1 Public Scoping Meetings
Several prescoping public meetings and public scoping meetings were held in September 2004, December 2004, and August 2005, to introduce the MCP project and gather public input on the possible alternative alignments. Comment cards were passed out to citizens so that written comments on the proposed alternatives could be collected. While there was general support for improving transportation, concerns were raised relating to preservation of the natural resources and rural character in Riverside County.

5.3.2 Notice of Preparation
The Notice of Preparation for the MCP project was circulated to agencies and other interested parties in November 2004 in compliance with CEQA. The comments received were focused primarily on the preference of the proposed alternative alignments. None of the State, regional, county, or city agencies expressed specific visual impact concerns. However, comments on topics such as biological
resources, trails, cultural resources, and encroachment are linked to visual resources. Two organizations, the Friends of the Northern San Jacinto Valley and the Sierra Club, specifically, commented on visual impacts. One citizen commented, but no comments were related to visual impacts.

5.3.3 Notice of Intent
The Notice of Intent for the MCP project was published in the Federal Register on November 22, 2004. The United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, commented on scenic highway status and bike paths that relate to visual resources.

5.3.4 Supplemental Notice of Preparation
The Supplemental Notice of Preparation for the MCP project was circulated to agencies and other interested parties in July 2007 in compliance with CEQA. The Supplemental Notice of Preparation was specifically issued to inform the public that a refined suite of alternatives had been proposed since the previous Notice of Preparation in 2004.

5.3.5 Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement
A Draft EIR/EIS was circulated in October 2008 for a 90-day public review period. During this time, six public meetings/hearings were held and RCTC accepted public comments for the record at all of these meetings, along with comments via the MCP project website and email. Over 3,100 comments were received from 50 public agencies and organizations, 10 large property owners, 240 individuals, and a form letter from over 1,100 individuals nationwide. While public comments raised concerns about many aspects of the project throughout its entire length, including visual resources, two key themes emerged from the comments: (1) concern about the cost and timing of available funds for the project; (2) suggestions that improvements to existing facilities rather than building the MCP facility would be a better expenditure of public funding in the western portion of the project area between I-15 and I-215. Additional comments included suggestions of and explanation of establishing the existing and future visual quality values, concern about residential or commercial uses adjacent to the roadway; and suggestion to include mitigation to prohibit billboards along the entire length of MCP regardless of which build alternative is selected.

5.4 EXISTING VIEWER GROUPS AND VIEWER EXPOSURE
5.4.1 Viewer Groups
Any person with a view of a project can be considered a sensitive viewer. However, for analysis purposes, sensitive groups can be more narrowly defined as groups that are exposed to a project. The primary viewer groups in the MCP visual study area are motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and residents, as well as employees and patrons of commercial land uses.
5.4.2 Viewer Exposure

Viewer exposure is assessed by measuring the number of viewers exposed to the resource change, type of viewer activity, the duration of the view, the speed at which the viewer moves, and the position of the viewer. High viewer exposure heightens the importance of early consideration of design and architecture and their roles in managing the visual resource effects of a project. Viewer exposure was assessed for each key view and is provided in Chapter 6.0.
6.0 VISUAL IMPACTS

6.1 LEVELS OF VISUAL IMPACT

The visual impacts of a project are determined by assessing the existing visual resources, the visual resource change due to the project, and predicting viewer response to that change. Visual resource change is the sum of the change in visual character and change in visual quality. Determining visual resource change involves assessing the visual compatibility of the proposed project with the existing resources.

The viewer response to a project is the sum of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity to the project as described in the preceding sections. The resulting level of visual impact is determined by combining the severity of resource change with the degree to which people are likely to be affected by the change. The levels of visual impact are described as follows and are summarized under each key view discussion in Section 6.2:

- **Low**: Minor adverse change to the existing visual resource, with low viewer response to change in the visual environment.
- **Moderate**: Moderate adverse change to the visual resource with moderate viewer response.
- **Moderately High**: Moderate adverse visual resource change with high viewer response or high adverse visual resource change with moderate viewer response.
- **High**: Excessive adverse visual 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.

6.2 ANALYSIS OF KEY VIEWS

6.2.1 Visual Quality Evaluation

Table 6.A, Existing and Proposed Visual Quality, provides the visual quality ratings of the key views, including points of view from the road and of those people with a view of the road. The overall visual quality rating (from 1 to 7 or very low to very high) is an average of the three criteria ratings described in Section 3.1.2 (i.e., vividness, intactness, and unity). The use of these evaluative criteria helps to establish an existing baseline to evaluate effects on visual quality. In addition to the visual quality analyses, viewer groups are identified, and viewer exposure, viewer sensitivity, and visual character are analyzed for each key view in Section 6.2.2.
Table 6.A: Existing and Proposed Visual Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key View</th>
<th>Vividness (V)</th>
<th>Intactness (I)</th>
<th>Unity (U)</th>
<th>Existing Visual Quality</th>
<th>Proposed Visual Quality</th>
<th>Difference from Existing Visual Quality</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(V)</td>
<td>(I)</td>
<td>(U)</td>
<td>(V+I+U)/3</td>
<td>(V+I+U)/3</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating Scale: 1.0–7.0 (1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = moderately low, 4 = moderate, 5 = moderately high, 6 = high, 7 = very high)

The proposed visual quality ratings are based on a conceptual idea of what the views would look like with the project. The change in overall visual character at project build out is the difference between the “Existing Visual Quality” rating and the “Proposed Visual Quality” rating. For example, if the overall existing visual quality rating was 6 and the proposed rating is 5, then the difference from existing would be -1.0. A negative number indicates the potential for visual impact to the existing visual setting. The greater the negative number the more substantial the visual impact (e.g., a -1.0 rating would have more visual impact than a -0.4). A positive number represents a potential improvement in the visual setting with implementation of the proposed project.

6.2.2 Key View Simulations

This visual analysis is based on the maximum right-of-way for the proposed MCP Build Alternatives. The MCP preliminary engineering plans are available for public review at RCTC and Caltrans District 8. The visual simulations in this study were created by applying the conceptual designs of the proposed MCP project to the 14 key view photographs between I-215 and SR-79 to show the anticipated post-project conditions. The visual simulations are strictly for conceptual analysis and are not intended to provide a precise, scaled depiction of the proposed MCP project; rather, they illustrate the potential future post-project visual character of the project area. The visual simulations represent typical views and the potential changes that would be expected. The points where each key view photograph was taken are shown on Figure 6.1.
**Key View 16.** The existing setting and view simulation for Key View 16 are shown in Figure 6.2. The photograph was taken from I-215 traveling north, just south of the Cajalco Road/Ramona Expressway exit.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing view is given a low visual quality rating of 2.3 because there are little or no pleasing visual features in the view. Motorists on I-215 see various industrial and commercial land uses interspersed with vacant lots (planned for future development) that typically have some trash and weeds.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows the MCP/I-215 interchange that would be constructed under Alternative 4 Modified; however, the view would be similar at the MCP/I-215 interchanges for Alternatives 5 Modified and 9 Modified. As discussed in Chapter 2.0 of this VIA, all of the Build Alternatives, including Alternative 4 Modified, include improvements to I-215. These improvements are as follows: (1) the addition of one auxiliary lane between the MCP/I-215 systems interchange and the adjacent service interchange to the north and south to facilitate movement between the MCP and I-215; (2) the addition of an operational/mixed-flow lane from MCP to the Van Buren Boulevard Interchange to accommodate additional traffic on I-215 as a result of the MCP; (3) the addition of an operational/mixed-flow lane from Nuevo Road to Cajalco-Ramona Expressway or Harley Knox Boulevard to facilitate weaving on I-215; (4) the addition of a new interchange at Placentia Avenue; and (5) modification of the existing interchange at Cajalco Road/Ramona Expressway.

The visual quality in this Key View decreases in rating to 2.0 due to reduced intactness and unity as a result of the MCP/I-215 interchange structures. As shown in Figure 6.1, areas of approved residential development are located on the west side of I-215 in this view. The Riverside County General Land Use designations for areas west and east of I-215 in this Key View include: Commercial Retail, Commercial Center, and Light Industrial.

**Viewer Group.** Motorists on I-215 are the primary viewer group in this Key View. The overall level of viewer exposure is low to moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** High due to the high traffic volumes on I-215
- **Activity of Viewers:** Driving—Low
- **Duration of View:** Low due to high freeway speeds
- **Distance/Location:** The view is within the project limits—High

**Viewer Sensitivity.** Key View 16 is within an area undergoing rapid growth, with many planned commercial/industrial developments in addition to those uses that exist today. Viewer sensitivity for motorists on I-215 is considered low since this type of view is typical along a busy interstate highway. There is no known local or cultural significance to this view.
Figure 6.2

Existing Conditions: Northbound I-215 looking toward the Cajalco/Ramona exit and overcrossing

Visual Simulation: MCP Alternative 4 Modified

Legend
- Key View Location
- Mid County Parkway Proposed Right of Way

Key View Location

Study Area
Visual Character. The existing visual character in this Key View and the surrounding area is semi-urban, becoming more urban as the area continues to develop. With implementation of the MCP, the existing visual character would not change substantially since a system interchange would not be an unusual feature in an urban setting. Viewer response to the change in visual character would be low due to the levels of exposure and sensitivity.

Key View 16 Impact Summary. The level of adverse impact to the visual setting in Key View 16 under Alternative 4 Modified would be low due to the low sensitivity of viewers and the limited visual change.

Key View 17. The existing setting and view simulation for Key View 17 are shown in Figure 6.3. The photograph was taken from behind Val Verde Elementary School (located on Indian Avenue) in the city of Perris. The view faces north-northwest.

Visual Quality Existing View. The existing view is given a moderately low visual quality rating of 3.0. The canopied picnic area is a manmade feature in the view. The asphalt, chain-link fence, and I-215 in the background encroach upon the intactness and unity of the view. Key View 17 may not be a scenic view, but it is viewed from a sensitive land use (i.e., the school).

Visual Quality Proposed View. The visual simulation shows Alternative 9 Modified and its interchange at I-215. The visual quality rating decreases to 2.3 with implementation of the project. The new, elevated road structures associated with the new MCP/I-215 interchange would be visible in this view from the school area, creating new encroachments on the intactness of the view. As shown in Figure 6.1, currently there is no future residential development proposed for this area. However, the areas surrounding Placentia Avenue and I-215 in this Key View are designated Commercial Retail and Business Park in the Riverside County General Plan.

Viewer Group. School children and people employed at the school, in addition to people dropping off children, are exposed to this view. The overall level of viewer exposure is low to moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Low to moderate
- **Activity of Viewers:** Daytime school—High
- **Duration of View:** Some daytime views, usually brief—Low to moderate
- **Distance/Location:** The school is immediately adjacent to the MCP right-of-way—High
Existing Conditions: Behind Val Verde Elementary School on Indian Avenue looking northwest and north toward I-215 and Placentia Avenue

Visual Simulation: MCP Alternative 9 Modified
**Viewer Sensitivity.** Key View 17 is from a public school within an urbanizing area. Viewer sensitivity is considered high due to the type of viewers (school children, school staff, and parents) and their proximity to the project. However, there is no known local or cultural significance to this view.

**Visual Character.** The existing visual character in this Key View and the surrounding area is urban. With implementation of the MCP, the existing visual character would appear more urban. Viewer response to the change in visual character would be high considering the levels of exposure and sensitivity. From this viewpoint, the MCP would create a visual barrier low on the northwestern horizon. Although the horizon view already includes I-215, the view’s character would be altered substantially with introduction of the interchange structures.

**Key View 17 Impact Summary.** The level of adverse impact to the visual setting in Key View 17 under Alternative 9 Modified would be high because of the new, elevated structures associated with the interchange and its close proximity to a school. Viewers would have sporadic views of the MCP (i.e., daytime views during outdoor school activities) but the viewer sensitivity is high. The view with the project would have a low visual quality rating due to its close proximity to the MCP/I-215 interchange.

**Key View 18.** The existing setting and visual simulation for Key View 18 are shown in Figure 6.4. Key View 18 faces north toward Paragon Park from Spectacular Bid and Chant Street in the city of Perris.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality of this view is rated moderately high (5.0) with all the features rated the same. The view is of a community park (Paragon Park) from a residential street. The vividness or positive visual features in the view include the large grassy areas, trees, and distant mountains. Handball and tennis courts are also part of this view, along with a fire station. The intactness of this view is hindered slightly by the parking areas and street sign. The unity is also rated moderately high because the components in the view (i.e., the grass and trees) complement one another to create a harmonious scene that is typical of a suburban park.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows Alternative 9 Modified. The MCP is not visible from this view because it is depressed below grade beyond the park in the foreground. Implementation of Alternative 9 Modified would not alter the view (as did the original Alternative 9 which removed several park elements) and the visual quality would not be adversely affected. As shown in Figure 6.1, currently there are future additional residential developments proposed for the surrounding area.
Existing Conditions: Looking north-northwest at Paragon Park from Spectacular Bid

Visual Simulation: MCP Alternative 9 Modified (MCP is depressed below existing ground level at this location, on the other side of Placentia Avenue)
**Viewer Group.** Residents and park users are the primary viewer groups at this Key View. The viewing duration is relatively short for park users and permanent for some residents. Viewer exposure level is moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Approximately 100–200 per day—Low to moderate
- **Activity of Viewers:** Residential activities and park users—High
- **Duration of View:** Occasional park users to permanent residential land use—Moderate to high
- **Distance from View:** Paragon Park is immediately adjacent to the project limits—High

**Viewer Sensitivity.** Because the view includes a park, viewer activity and awareness are high. Viewer sensitivity is high. There is local and cultural significance to this view because it is an active city park.

**Visual Character.** The visual character for Key View 18 is suburban and would remain suburban with implementation of the proposed MCP project. Alternative 9 Modified would not alter the visual character for Key View 18.

**Key View 18 Impact Summary.** The MCP project would not result in an adverse impact to the visual setting in Key View 18.

**Key View 19.** The existing setting and view simulation for Key View 19 are shown in Figure 6.5. The photograph was taken from the eastern terminus of Ensenada Drive in the city of Perris. The view faces southeast.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing view is given a moderate visual quality rating of 4.0. The open field in the foreground and Bernasconi Hills in the background are the pleasing visual features in this view. The dirt road and concrete structure with graffiti encroach upon the intactness of the view. Since the photograph was taken, this area has been graded for residential development.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows Alternative 5 Modified and the associated elevated structure. The visual quality rating decreases slightly to 3.8 with implementation of the project. The proposed Redlands Avenue overcrossing structure over the MCP would be visible in this view from the residential area, creating a new encroachment on the intactness of the view. The cluster of homes, mobile homes, and trees in the middle-ground would be removed by the project. As shown in Figure 6.1, residential development is approved and proposed in this area, north and south of Rider Street. Residents of future houses planned for this area would experience similar effects on their views of the area.
Existing Conditions: Eastern end of Ensenada Drive looking northeast

Visual Simulation: MCP Alternatives 5 Modified and 9 Modified

Legend
- Key View Location
- Mid County Parkway Proposed Right of Way

Figure 6.5

Mid County Parkway Visual Impact Assessment
Key View 19

06-RIV-MCP PM 0.0/16.3, 06-RIV-215 PM 28.0/34.3
EA 06-0F3200 (PN 0800000125)
**Viewer Group.** Residents are the viewer group for Key View 19. The level of viewer exposure is high as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Several hundred existing and planned houses in this area—Moderate
- **Activity of Viewers:** Residential activities—High
- **Duration of View:** Permanent for residential viewers—High
- **Distance/Location:** The viewpoint location is approximately 500 ft from the project limits—High

**Viewer Sensitivity.** Key View 19 is in a developing suburban area. Viewer sensitivity is high because of high activity and awareness. However, there is no known local or cultural significance to this view.

**Visual Character.** The existing visual character in this Key View and the surrounding area is semi-rural. With implementation of the MCP, the existing visual character would become more urban by introducing a major highway facility where none was planned previously. The MCP would create a visual barrier between the residential area and the field and distant mountains. Viewer response to the change in visual character would be high considering the levels of exposure and sensitivity.

**Key View 19 Impact Summary.** The level of adverse impact to the visual setting in Key View 19 under Alternative 5 Modified would be high because of the addition of a highway with an elevated structure in a semi-rural setting. Viewer exposure and sensitivity to this view are high.

**Key View 20.** The existing setting and visual simulation for Key View 20 are shown in Figure 6.6. The Key View 20 photograph is taken from Perris Boulevard approximately 500 ft north of existing Ramona Expressway in the city of Perris. The view faces north.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality of this view is rated moderately low (2.8) and the vividness, intactness, and unity are also rated low to moderately low. The view is of a semi-rural road where the existing land uses transition from commercial (at Ramona Expressway) to residential and agricultural fields as one travels north on Perris Boulevard. The vividness or positive visual features in the view include some farmland and distant mountains with some vehicles visible along Perris Boulevard. The intactness of this view is hindered by traffic, utility poles, and wires. The unity is rated moderately low because there are several elements in the view such as the road, homes, and fields.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation in Figure 6.6 shows Alternative 4 Modified, which involves construction of an interchange at Perris Boulevard and the MCP. This
Existing Conditions: Perris Boulevard, north of Ramona Expressway looking north

Visual Simulation: MCP Alternative 4 Modified looking north at proposed Perris Boulevard Interchange

Figure 6.6
interchange would require acquisition of some parcels along Perris Boulevard. Perris Boulevard would cross under the MCP. Implementation of the project would alter the view substantially due to the fill material and overcrossing structure required to elevate MCP over Perris Boulevard, thus reducing the vividness and intactness of the view. The resulting visual quality remains moderately low with a rating of 2.3. As shown in Figure 6.1, residential development is proposed in this area west of Perris Boulevard.

**Viewer Group.** Motorists are the primary viewer group at this Key View. The viewing duration is relatively short. Viewer exposure level is low to moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Hundreds per day—Moderate
- **Activity of Viewers:** Driving—Low
- **Duration of View:** Short—Low
- **Distance from View:** The viewpoint is within the project limits—High

**Viewer Sensitivity.** Viewer activity and awareness are low for Key View 20. The location is not a place where people would pause to look and enjoy the view because there are a lack of aesthetic features at this location. The view does not have any known local or cultural significance, therefore viewer sensitivity is low.

**Visual Character.** The visual character for Key View 20 is semi-rural and would transition to semi-urban with implementation of the proposed MCP project, as well as future land development in the area. The proposed visual character would have a more modern appearance due to the new roadway and landscaping. Viewer response to the change in character would be low considering the low viewer exposure and sensitivity.

**Key View 20 Impact Summary.** The level of the adverse visual impact to Key View 20 from MCP Alternative 4 Modified would be low because although the visual quality would decline slightly, the viewer exposure and sensitivity are low.

**Key View 21.** The existing visual setting and visual simulation for Key View 21 are shown on Figure 6.7. The Key View 21 photograph is a south-facing view of the Perris Valley storm drain and vicinity from the Ramona Expressway.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality of this view is given a low to moderate rating of 3.3, mostly due to the lack of aesthetic features or distinct composition. The vividness of this view is enhanced by some vegetation in the storm drain channel and the open fields, with a slightly visible cluster of trees and mountains on the horizon. The intactness of this view is also considered low due to the presence of the disturbed area (residential construction), orange construction fencing east of the storm drain, and the unpaved road that runs parallel to the
**Existing Conditions:** Ramona Expressway looking south at Perris Valley Storm Drain

**Visual Simulation:** MCP Alternative 4 Modified

**Key View Location**

**Legend**
- Key View Location
- Mid County Parkway Proposed Right of Way

Figure 6.7 Mid County Parkway Visual Impact Assessment

Key View 21

08-RIV-MCP PM 0.0/16.3, 08-RIV-215 PM 28.0/34.3
EA 08-0F3200 (PN 0800000125)
channel. The overall unity of this view is moderate as the channel and unpaved road form a linear pattern that contrasts with the horizon.

Visual Quality Proposed View. The visual simulation shows Alternative 4 Modified with the elevated highway running along the west side of the channel. Implementation of the proposed project would alter the current view of the channel, and the new elevated structure would block the distant view of the mountains, reducing the visual quality. The elevated highway profile would create a dominant and distinct encroachment in the foreground, thus reducing the visual quality of this view. This same reduction in visual quality would be experienced by the future residents of the houses under construction or proposed for development in this area, as shown on Figure 6.1.

Viewer Group. Motorists traveling west or east on Ramona Expressway are the primary viewer group for this Key View, as well as the future residences along the Perris Valley storm drain. The overall level of viewer exposure is moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Thousands of motorists per day and hundreds of future residents—Moderate to high
- **Activity of Viewers:** Driving - Low; Residents—High
- **Duration of View:** Less than 1 minute while traveling along Ramona Expressway—Low; Permanent for future residents—High
- **Distance/Location from View:** The viewpoint is directly adjacent to Alternative 4 Modified, with the MCP at a higher elevation than the viewpoint—Moderate to high

Viewer Sensitivity. The viewer sensitivity is low for motorists and high for future residents adjacent to the storm drain. Activity and awareness is low for motorists. Traffic on the Ramona Expressway travels at 45–55 miles per hour (mph) in this area, making motorists’ view of the MCP brief. Future residents can be expected to have a high level of viewer sensitivity to a new elevated highway in a location where none was planned previously.

Visual Character. While the view in Figure 6.7 is rural/agricultural in nature, it is rapidly changing to suburban with many housing tracts either under construction or in the planning/entitlement stage. The elevated structure required under Alternative 4 Modified would contribute to the urbanization of this area. Viewer response to the change in character would be low for motorists and high for future residents of this area.

Key View 21 Impact Summary. The level of adverse visual impact of the proposed MCP project to Key View 21, or anywhere for motorists on the Ramona Expressway, would be low due to the short duration of the view. However, for the future residents that would live in this area prior to construction of the MCP project, those immediately adjacent to the MCP would experience a high level of adverse visual impact due to the elevated design of the facility.
Key View 22. The existing visual setting and visual simulation for Key View 22 are shown on Figure 6.8. The photograph in Key View 22 faces west toward the Perris Valley storm drain and a residential construction site. However, since the photograph has been taken in 2006, a park (Morgan Street Park) has been constructed and is located in the northern portion of Key View 22 in the foreground.

Visual Quality Existing View. The existing visual quality of this view is given a moderate rating of 3.6. The view includes a community park (Morgan Street Park) in the foreground. The vividness or positive visual features in the view include the large grassy areas, trees, sports fields, playground equipment, and distant mountains. However, the intactness of this view is hindered by the construction site in the southern portion of the view. The unity is rated moderate because while the view includes the park, manmade encroachments, such as the construction site and utility poles and wires, reduce the unity of the view by adding nonaesthetic visual elements.

Visual Quality Proposed View. The visual simulation shows Alternative 4 Modified with the raised profile of the highway in the foreground. Implementation of the proposed project would partially block the distant view of the mountains and would shift the viewer’s attention from a graded/disturbed landscape of the construction site and the grassy areas of the park to a dominant manmade structure. The vividness, intactness, and unity of this landscape would decrease. The overall visual quality rating for this view would be considered low because of the manmade encroachments. As shown in Figure 6.1, residential development is approved (and under construction) in the foreground and proposed in the background, west of Redlands Avenue.

Viewer Group. The viewer group is the future residents who will live in the area once the residential construction is completed (but prior to construction of the MCP). The overall level of viewer exposure would be high as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Moderate to high once construction of the residential units is complete and people move in
- **Activity of Viewers:** Residential activities—Moderate to high
- **Duration of View:** Permanent—High
- **Distance/Location from View:** The residential construction area is adjacent to the proposed MCP—High

Viewer Sensitivity. The viewer sensitivity is also high due to the close proximity to Morgan Street Park and the future residential units to the proposed MCP. There is no known local or cultural significance to this view. Viewer activity and awareness of this view are high.
Existing Conditions: Looking west from residential development (under construction) located at Morgan Street

Visual Simulation: MCP Alternative 4 Modified

Figure 6.8
Visual Character. Under the proposed MCP project, the visual character at Key View 22 would change from rural/open space to semi-urban because of the addition of a large elevated roadway structure. The viewer response to the change in visual character would be high because of the close proximity of the future residential land uses to the elevated road structure.

Key View 22 Impact Summary. The level of adverse visual impact of the proposed MCP project Alternative 4 Modified at Key View 22, or from any similar setting along the Perris Valley storm drain where there is adjacent residential land use, would be high due to a reduction in all of the visual rating criteria.

Key View 23B. The photograph in Key View 23B is south-facing from Evans Road as it leads into Placentia Avenue, as shown on Figure 6.9.

Visual Quality Proposed View. The visual simulation shows the proposed project under all proposed modified MCP Build Alternatives. Implementation of the proposed MCP project would require acquisition of some residential land use and vegetation to allow for the new interchange and local road expansion. A new partial-diamond/partial-cloverleaf interchange would be constructed and a cul-de-sac would be constructed at Old Evans Road. Under the MCP project, Evans Road would be widened and paved, and the new highway and ramps would be elevated over the existing road. As shown in Figure 6.1, this area is approved for residential development.

Viewer Group. The viewer groups are drivers and residents. The overall level of viewer exposure is moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers**: Hundreds to several thousand per day by vehicle and from residential land uses—Moderate to high
- **Activity of Viewers**: Driving and residential activities—Moderate
- **Duration of View**: For drivers it would be short—Low; for residents it would be permanent—High
- **Distance/Location**: The viewpoint is approximately 500 ft from the proposed interchange—Low to moderate

Viewer Sensitivity. Viewer activity and awareness are moderate for drivers and high for residents, thereby making viewer sensitivity moderate for drivers, particularly local residents, and high for any residents who would have views of the new interchange and widened local streets. There is no known local or cultural significance to this view.

Visual Character. The existing visual character is semi-rural and would change to become more urban with implementation of the proposed MCP project as well as ongoing land development in the
Existing Conditions: Old Evans Road looking south at Placentia Avenue

Visual Simulation: All MCP Build Alternatives (Evans Road interchange)

Figure 6.9

Mid County Parkway Visual Impact Assessment
Key View 23b

Simulations: Softmirage, 2006

I:\JVC531\G_Mod\VIA\Key_View_23b.cdr (5/11/11)
area. The viewer response to the change in visual character would be moderate for drivers. The road may be limited in aesthetically pleasing features, but local drivers are sensitive to changes to the area. Viewer response to the changes would be high for residents with views of the project because they would have a permanent view of a new elevated transportation structure in their vicinity.

**Key View 23B Impact Summary.** The future visual quality would be less in rating than the existing visual quality due to the introduction of a new, large transportation structure in the area. Both residents and drivers would be subject to the adverse visual effects of the MCP project in this area. The level of adverse visual impact would be moderate.

**Key View 24.** The existing visual setting and visual simulation for Key View 24 are shown on Figure 6.10. The photograph in Key View 24 is a southwest-facing view of the Ramona Expressway from the fields, which is land approved for residential development.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality is given a rating of 4, which is considered moderate. The vividness of this view is enhanced by the grassland vegetation and the McCanna Hills in the background (approximately 1.0 mi from the viewpoint). The intactness of this view is moderate due to the presence of the utility poles lining the Ramona Expressway. The unity rating is also moderate because the view consists of flat grassland surfaces that are balanced by the contrasting hills in the horizon.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows the proposed MCP project under all of the Build Alternatives. The proposed visual quality of this view remains almost the same as the existing setting, although the intactness of the view diminishes slightly. The cut of the MCP through the McCanna Hills is visible, but is not overwhelming. The MCP does not result in visual encroachments because it blends into the overall viewshed. As shown in Figure 6.1, this area is proposed for residential development.

**Viewer Group.** The viewer group is currently farm workers. Future viewers in the area include new residents of houses that will be built prior to the construction of the MCP. The overall level of viewer exposure is currently low but potentially moderate in the future as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Currently very few—Low, but possibly several hundred in the future as the area is developed into housing—Moderate
- **Activity of Viewers:** Currently farming—Low, but there would be residential activities in the future as the area is developed—Moderate to high
- **Duration of View:** Currently brief and temporary for farmers—Low; Permanent for future residents with a view of the MCP—High
- **Distance/Location:** The viewpoint is approximately 1,000 ft from the project—Low
**Existing Conditions:** Looking west at Ramona Expressway from a proposed residential development area

**Visual Simulation:** All MCP Build Alternatives

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**Legend**
- Key View Location
- Mid County Parkway Proposed Right of Way

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**Figure 6.10**

Mid County Parkway Visual Impact Assessment

Key View 24

08-RIV-MCP PM 0.0/16.3; 08-RIV-215 PM 28.0/34.3

EA 08-0F3200 (PN 0800000125)
**Viewer Sensitivity.** The current activity and awareness of Key View 24 are low. However, because the area is planned for residential development, future activity and awareness will be high. Viewer sensitivity will increase as permanent residents move into the area. There is no known local or cultural significance to this view.

**Visual Character.** The existing visual character is rural farmland, and the visual character with the proposed project will remain rural farmland, as seen in the visual simulation in Key View 25. The visual character will change to suburban as housing tracts are developed in the area. Viewer response to the change in character would be high due to the moderate viewer exposure and high sensitivity related to the planned future residential areas.

**Key View 24 Impact Summary.** The level of adverse visual impact at Key View 24 is low to moderate, related to the slight reduction in the intactness of the view resulting from the cuts through the McCanna Hills.

**Key View 25.** The existing visual setting and visual simulation for Key View 25 are shown on Figure 6.11. The photograph in Key View 25 is a southwest-facing view of fields and Bernasconi Hills from south of the Ramona Expressway in an area approved for residential development.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality of this view is rated 4 (moderate) due to the aesthetically pleasing character of the landscape. The vividness of this view is defined by the green fields in the foreground and hills in the background. The intactness of this view is moderate, reduced by the visible utility poles that traverse the middle of the photo and also the Ramona Expressway. The overall harmony of this view results in a moderate unity rating.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows the proposed MCP project under all of the Build Alternatives generally following the Ramona Expressway along the base of the Bernasconi Hills. The natural elements remain unchanged with the exception of the visible structure in the right side of the visual simulation that would be part of the MCP/Bernasconi Road interchange. As shown in Figure 6.1, this area is approved for residential development. The proposed visual quality of this view is slightly lower than the existing visual quality due to the addition of the manmade encroachments. However, the overall composition of this view is still harmonious and the landscape cohesive.

**Viewer Group.** The viewer group is currently farm workers. Future viewers in the area include new residents of houses that will be built prior to the construction of the MCP. The overall level of viewer exposure is currently low but potentially moderate in the future as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Currently very few—Low, but possibly several hundred in the future as the area is developed into housing—Moderate
Existing Conditions: Looking west from Ramona Expressway from approved residential development site

Visual Simulation: All MCP Build Alternatives

Figure 6.11

Mid County Parkway Visual Impact Assessment
Key View 25

Legend
- Key View Location
- Mid County Parkway Proposed Right of Way
• **Activity of Viewers:** Currently farming—Low, but there would be residential activities in the future as the area is developed—Moderate to high

• **Duration of View:** Currently brief and temporary for farmers—Low; Permanent for future residents with a view of the MCP—High

• **Distance/Location:** The viewpoint is approximately 1,000 ft from the project—Low

**Viewer Sensitivity.** The current activity and awareness of Key View 25 are low. However, because the area is planned for residential development, future activity and awareness will be high. Viewer sensitivity will increase as permanent residents move into the area. There is no known local or cultural significance to this view.

**Visual Character.** The existing visual character is rural farmland and the visual character with the proposed project will be slightly altered to appear more urban with the parkway, as seen in the visual simulation in Key View 26. The visual character will change to suburban as housing tracts are developed in the area. Viewer response to the change in visual character would be high due to the moderate viewer exposure and high sensitivity related to the planned future residential areas.

**Key View 25 Impact Summary.** The level of adverse visual impact at Key View 25 is moderate to high, due to high sensitivity for future residents and a reduction in visual quality with the introduction of the interchange structure into the viewshed.

**Key View 26.** The existing visual setting and visual simulation for Key View 26 are shown in Figure 6.12. The photograph in Key View 26 is a southwest-facing view of the Ramona Expressway from Davis Road.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality of this view is rated 5 (moderately high) because the natural landscape creates an aesthetically pleasant composition. The vividness of this view is moderate due to the presence of the fields in the foreground as well as the cluster of trees and mountains in the background. There are no visible manmade encroachments. Thus, the intactness of the view is also rated moderate. The overall unity of this view is moderate. The mountains create a pleasant contrast to the fields, while the cluster of trees enhances the natural setting of this landscape.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows the proposed MCP project under all of the Build Alternatives with the raised profile of the Ramona Expressway in the background. Implementation of the proposed project would result in a lower visual quality rating due to the encroachment of the MCP into the middle-ground that removes some trees and partially blocks the view of the mountains in the background. However, the unity of this view is only slightly reduced compared to the existing setting because all manmade elements associated with the MCP
Existing Conditions:  Davis Road, at a proposed residential development site, looking southwest toward Ramona Expressway

Visual Simulation:  All MCP Build Alternatives

Legend
- Key View Location
- Mid County Parkway Proposed Right of Way

Figure 6.12
blend into the natural environment, thus maintaining its natural form and line. As shown in Figure 6.1, this area is proposed for residential development.

**Viewer Group.** The viewer group is currently farm workers. Future viewers in the area would be new residents of houses that are proposed for construction. The overall level of viewer exposure is currently low but potentially moderate in the future as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Currently very few—Low, but possibly several hundred in the future as the area is developed into housing—Moderate
- **Activity of Viewers:** Currently farming—Low, but there would be residential activities in the future as the area is developed—Moderate to high
- **Duration of View:** Currently brief and temporary for farmers—Low; Permanent for future residents with a view of the MCP—High
- **Distance/Location:** The viewpoint is approximately 1,000 ft from the project—Low

**Viewer Sensitivity.** The current activity and awareness of Key View 26 are low. However, because the area is proposed for residential development, future activity and awareness will be high. Viewer sensitivity will increase as permanent residents move into the area. There is no known local or cultural significance to this view.

**Visual Character.** The existing visual character is rural farmland and the visual character with the proposed project will slightly alter the character to appear more urban with the parkway, as seen in the visual simulation in Key View 27. The visual character will further change to suburban as housing tracts are developed in the area.

**Key View 26 Impact Summary.** The level of adverse visual impact would be moderate when considering the reduction in the overall visual quality rating from 5 to 4.3 and the high viewer sensitivity of probable future residential land uses.

**Key View 27.** The existing visual setting and visual simulation for Key View 27 are shown in Figure 6.13. The photograph in Key View 27 is an east-facing view from the Ramona Expressway at planned Town Center Boulevard.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality of this view is rated 3.2 (moderately low) due to its lack of memorability. The vividness of this view consists of the mountains and cluster of trees in the background. The intactness in this view is moderately low due to the presence of the utility poles on the south side of the Ramona Expressway. The unity is rated slightly higher than the other features because the view is mainly of a highway, which is a consistent feature in this view.
Existing Conditions: Ramona Expressway facing east

Visual Simulation: All MCP Build Alternatives with planned Town Center Boulevard interchange

Figure 6.13
Visual Quality Proposed View. The visual simulation shows the proposed MCP project under all of the Build Alternatives with the new Town Center Boulevard overcrossing and elevated on- and off-ramps. Implementation of the proposed project would partially block the view of the mountains and residential area in the background. The overall visual quality will be lower in rating due to the greater width of the MCP when compared to the existing Ramona Expressway and implementation of the overcrossing, which is the dominant manmade structure in the foreground. The unity of the view is slightly reduced because the overcrossing blends with the hills and mountains. As shown in Figure 6.1, this area is proposed for residential development.

Viewer Group. The viewer group includes motorists traveling on Ramona Expressway (and future motorists on the MCP). The overall level of viewer exposure is moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers**: Currently thousands per day, but over 50,000 per day in the future—High
- **Activity of Viewers**: Driving—Low to moderate
- **Duration of View**: The duration of the view is brief under existing and future conditions due to high speeds—Low
- **Distance/Location from View**: The viewpoint is within the project limits—High

Viewer Sensitivity. The viewer sensitivity is moderate. Existing motorists travel through an area that is currently agricultural but will undergo substantial development in the next 20 to 30 years.

Visual Character. The existing visual character is rural farmland and the visual character with the proposed project will remain rural farmland, as seen in the visual simulation in Key View 28. The visual character will change to suburban as housing tracts are developed in the area. Viewer response to the change in character is moderate because of the moderate viewer exposure and sensitivity.

Key View 27 Impact Summary. The level of adverse visual impact at Key View 27 is moderate due primarily to a much wider highway facility than what exists today as well as the introduction of a new structure into the viewshed. The overall visual quality rating declines from 3.2 to 2.3.

Key View 28. The existing setting and visual simulation for Key View 28 are shown in Figure 6.14. Key View 28 faces north toward the Ramona Expressway from Warren Road in the city of San Jacinto.

Visual Quality Existing View. The existing visual quality of this view is rated low (2.0) with the three visual quality criteria equally rated 2.0. Warren Road is the central component in this view. The vividness or positive visual features in the view are the farmland, the house, and the
**Existing Conditions:** Warren Road looking north at Ramona Expressway

**Visual Simulation:** All MCP Build Alternatives with the San Jacinto South alignment

Figure 6.14

Mid County Parkway Visual Impact Assessment
Key View 28
mountains in the distance. The intactness of this view is encroached upon by trash on the side of Warren Road, street signs, and utility poles and wires. The unity is also rated low because there is little or no compositional harmony to the view.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows all of the proposed Build Alternatives with the San Jacinto North Segment. An interchange would be constructed at MCP and Warren Road, north of the Ramona Expressway. Implementation of the project would change Key View 28 very little. Viewers would see an increase in traffic activity because of the new MCP. The proposed visual quality would remain the same as the existing visual quality with a rating of 2.0. As shown in Figure 6.1, currently future residential development is proposed for this area east of Warren Avenue. The County’s General Plan designates this area for light industrial and agricultural land uses.

**Viewer Group.** Local drivers are the primary viewer groups at this Key View. The viewing duration is short. Viewer exposure level is low as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Low
- **Activity of Viewers:** Driving—Low
- **Duration of View:** Low
- **Distance from View:** The viewpoint is approximately 2,600 ft from the project limits—Low

**Viewer Sensitivity.** The view does not have high activity, awareness, and local values associated with it nor any known local or regional cultural significance. Therefore, viewer sensitivity is low.

**Visual Character.** The visual character for Key View 28 is semi-rural and would change to semi-urban with implementation of the proposed MCP project and planned land development in the area. Viewer response to the change would be low because viewer exposure and sensitivity are low.

**Key View 28 Impact Summary.** The level of the adverse visual impact from the project would be nominal because of minimal change to the visual quality, low viewer exposure and sensitivity, and a minimal change to the visual character.

**Key View 29.** The existing setting and visual simulation for Key View 29 are shown in Figure 6.15. The photograph in Key View 29 is a south-facing view from SR-79 toward its intersection with the Ramona Expressway.

**Visual Quality Existing View.** The existing visual quality of this view is rated 2.7 (moderately low) because viewers mostly see the road, agricultural fields, and a very distant view of the
Existing Conditions: State Route 79 looking south toward Ramona Expressway

Visual Simulation: All MCP Build Alternatives with the San Jacinto North Design Variation

Figure 6.15
mountains. The vividness of this view includes mountains in the background and a cluster of trees on the west side of SR-79. The intactness and unity of this view are relatively low because of the presence of utility poles on the west side of SR-79.

**Visual Quality Proposed View.** The visual simulation shows all of the proposed Build Alternatives with the San Jacinto North Segment, including the MCP/SR-79 system interchange. Implementation of the proposed project would block the distant view of the mountains and require removal of the tree cluster on the side of SR-79 and right-of-way to allow for project construction. The proposed visual quality will be lower in rating due to the dominance of the interchange structures in the foreground and wider highway. As shown in Figure 6.1, residential development is proposed for this area. Also, commercial, light industrial, and conservation land uses are designated for this area in the County’s General Plan.

**Viewer Group.** The viewer group includes existing and future motorists on SR-79. The overall level of viewer exposure is moderate as summarized below:

- **Number of Viewers:** Currently thousands per day, but over 50,000 per day in the future—High
- **Activity of Viewers:** Driving—Low to moderate
- **Duration of View:** The duration of the view is brief under existing and future conditions due to high speeds—Low
- **Distance/Location from View:** The viewpoint is within the project limits—High

**Viewer Sensitivity.** The viewer sensitivity is moderate. Existing motorists travel through an area that is currently agricultural but will undergo substantial development in the next 20–30 years.

**Visual Character.** The visual character would change from a rural four-lane highway to a major system interchange. Viewer response to the change would be low to moderate because of the moderate exposure and low sensitivity to the view.

**Key View 29 Impact Summary.** The level of adverse visual impact at Key View 29 would be high due to the introduction of a system interchange that will be approximately 50 ft high.

### 6.3 SUMMARY OF PROJECT IMPACTS BY ALTERNATIVE

All of the MCP Build Alternatives would result in both short-term and long-term adverse visual impacts. Short-term impacts would occur during the construction period, and include demolition of existing structures, clearing of existing vegetation, grading of cut and fill slopes, construction vehicles, and construction staging areas. Construction activities are temporary, and the adverse visual impacts related to construction would cease after completion of construction. The effects of vegetation clearing would gradually improve over time as landscaping for the MCP project matures.
Long-term impacts would result from the permanent alteration of the visual environment through construction of the highway and associated bridges, interchange structures, retaining walls, and sound walls. As noted in the discussion of Key Views 16-29, visual impacts of the MCP include changes to the visual character of many areas (particularly areas that are rural residential or open space) and blocking views of existing viewer groups in other locations. The following section discusses visual impacts under each alternative.

6.3.1 Alternative 1A (No Project/No Action Existing Ground Conditions)

Alternative 1A would not change the existing visual setting and would, therefore, not create visual impacts to the MCP study area. No mitigation is required.

6.3.2 Alternative 1B (No Project/No Action General Plan Circulation Element Conditions)

Alternative 1B is also a No Action Alternative in that the MCP would not be constructed, but Ramona Expressway would be constructed to the ultimate width and alignment as shown in the Riverside County General Plan. The widening of Ramona Expressway between I-215 easterly to SR-79 would include some removal of agricultural land but would not include the construction of any interchange structures in this area.

6.3.3 Alternative 4 Modified: North Perris (Drain)

Based on the analysis of Key Views 16–29 presented above, the visual impacts of Alternative 4 Modified can be summarized as follows:

- In the north Perris area, the MCP would traverse existing agricultural lands, as well as encroach upon some residential and commercial land uses. As shown in the visual simulations in Key Views 16 and 20, the MCP will add a major transportation facility in an area that is rapidly developing; therefore, the visual character would not change that much for affected viewer groups (motorists and some residents). The MCP/I-215 systems interchange would introduce a major multi-level structure.

- The level of adverse visual impact of the proposed MCP project Alternative 4 Modified at Key View 22, or from any similar setting along the Perris Valley storm drain where there is adjacent residential land use, would be high due to a reduction in all of the visual rating criteria.

- As shown in the visual simulations in Key Views 21 and 22, some of the most substantial visual impacts occur along Alternative 4 Modified, where the MCP would be constructed on an elevated structure almost 13,000 ft long that would be visible to park users at Morgan Street Park and existing and future residents of this developing residential area in Perris.

- Where improvements follow closely along Ramona Expressway (area common to all MCP Build Alternatives, including Alternative 4 Modified), the visual effects of the MCP will be experienced by a relatively small number of existing motorists, residents, and farm workers; however, as this area continues to develop, an increasing number of residents would be exposed to views of the
highway. This portion of the alignment requires a cut section through the McCanna Hills (see Key View 24).

- As shown in the visual simulations for Key Views 25–27, the primary visual effect of the MCP is the introduction of a major transportation facility (including local service interchanges) into an existing agricultural area. As this area continues to develop, an increasing number of residents would be exposed to views of the highway.

- At its eastern terminus with SR-79, the primary visual impact of all the MCP Build Alternatives, including Alternative 4 Modified, is associated with the multi-level MCP/SR-79 systems interchange structure, as seen in the visual simulation in Key View 29. The affected viewer groups would be motorists and a few scattered residences and businesses in the vicinity of the proposed interchange.

- Key Views 28 and 29 show visual simulations of Alternative 4 Modified with the San Jacinto North Design Variation. Visual effects resulting from the San Jacinto South design variation would be similar to those of the all MCP Build Alternatives with San Jacinto North Design Variation due to the similarity of visual character and affected viewer groups in the area.

6.3.4 Alternative 5 Modified: South Perris (at Rider Street)

The visual impacts of Alternative 5 Modified are similar to those described above for Alternative 4 Modified, except for the connection to I-215 and improvements through the city of Perris. The visual impacts associated with these areas are described below.

- Alternative 5 Modified is located in the city of Perris along Rider Street and would impact the visual environment by introducing a major transportation facility into the landscape where none was previously planned. As with Alternative 4 Modified, the MCP/I-215 systems interchange would introduce a major multi-level structure; however, under Alternative 5 Modified this interchange would be located south, at Rider Street. Since the land uses in the area near the interchange are primarily commercial industrial properties, there are a limited number of sensitive viewers in this area.

- Through the city of Perris, the MCP would impact the visual environment by introducing a major transportation facility into the landscape where none was previously planned. Sensitive viewers include existing and future residents, particularly in the eastern portion of this city. The proposed service interchange at Perris Boulevard introduces a structure that may impact the views of some residents in the immediate vicinity of the interchange.

6.3.5 Alternative 9 Modified: Placentia Avenue

The visual impacts of Alternative 9 Modified are similar to those described above for Alternatives 4 Modified and 5 Modified, except for the connection to I-215 and improvements through the city of Perris. The visual impacts associated with these areas are described below.

- Alternative 9 Modified is located in the city of Perris along Placentia Avenue and would impact the visual environment by introducing a major transportation facility into the landscape where none was previously planned. As with Alternatives 4 Modified and 5 Modified, the MCP/I-215
systems interchange would introduce a major multi-level structure; however, under Alternative 9 Modified this interchange would be located further south, at Placentia Avenue.

- Through the city of Perris, Alternative 9 Modified would introduce a major transportation facility into the visual environment where none was previously planned. As shown in the visual simulation of Key View 18, much of the MCP would not be visible because it is proposed to be constructed below existing ground level between Evans Road and I-215. However, the proposed service interchange at Redlands Avenue introduces a structure that may impact the views of some residents in the immediate vicinity of the interchange.

6.4 COMPATIBILITY WITH VISUAL RESOURCE POLICIES

The proposed project would not have an impact on the following visual resources as defined under NEPA: scenic highways, lands associated with the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, United States Forest Service or BLM land, and cultural and historic resources.

The MCP Build Alternatives would have short-term visual impacts during construction to several Section 4(f) properties, including nearby schools and parks; however, these impacts would be temporary and cease after completion of construction.

The MCP Build Alternatives also have a potential to result in long-term visual impacts to Section 4(f) properties directly impacted and/or adjacent to Alternatives 4 Modified, 5 Modified, and 9 Modified. Section 4(f) properties with the potential to experience long-term visual impacts include Val Verde High School, Val Verde Elementary School, May Ranch Elementary School, Sierra Vista Elementary School, Lakeside Middle School, Morgan Park, and Basin Park. However, mitigation measures described in Chapter 7 of this VIA are required to reduce potential long-term impacts to visual quality and character for these Section 4(f) properties, as well as other areas in the MCP Study Area. Refer to the MCP Section 4(f) Evaluation (LSA, 2011) for additional detail of Section 4(f) properties in the MCP Study Area.

6.5 LIGHT, GLARE, SHADE, AND SHADOW

Existing urban and suburban areas within the MCP study area receive light at night from traffic, street lighting, and lighted parking lots; signalization at the intersections and freeway on- and off-ramps; and commercial zone and limited light sources from residential development. Existing lighting on existing streets and freeways would be modified or relocated as a part of the MCP project. Safety lighting would also be provided along the MCP in existing developed areas and at interchanges.

Light and glare would increase as a result of the MCP in those areas that are currently open space or are rural in character. Specifically, all Build Alternatives would increase light and glare in the open space/agricultural areas between the McCanna Hills and SR-79. To minimize this effect, no lighting would be provided along the highway alignment, with safety lighting provided only at the service interchanges. To minimize light spill into adjoining areas, light fixtures would be designed with hoods that would direct light downward to only those areas requiring illumination for safety purposes.

The MCP project footprint is located within Zone B of the Mount Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy Area. According to County of Riverside Ordinance No. 655, Section I, Zone B is defined as the area within the 45 mi radius and the 15 mi radius (the perimeter of Zone A) centered on the Palomar
Observatory. Development of any of the MCP Build Alternatives would introduce new sources of light that would have the potential to impact the Palomar Observatory. Adherence to County of Riverside Ordinance No. 655, Regulating Light Pollution for Zone B, would be required under any of the MCP Build Alternatives. Project compliance with Ordinance No. 655 would minimize potential adverse impacts to the nighttime use of the Palomar Observatory.

All Build Alternatives would create new sources of shadow and shade associated with fill slopes, bridges, and other structures. These shade and shadow effects are considered minimal because very few, if any, sensitive viewers would be within shade or shadow footprints.

6.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

All of the MCP Build Alternatives would contribute to a cumulative effect with regard to visual impacts and change of visual character within the MCP study area. As one of the fastest growing areas in the United States, western Riverside County in general and the MCP study area in particular, are changing from open space and agricultural landscapes to a more urbanized one. Large tracts of land within the MCP study area are either approved or planned for future land development. The provision of transportation infrastructure, such as the MCP, typically accompanies the development of land for residential or commercial purposes. Therefore, although the MCP would contribute to a cumulative visual impact within the MCP study area, this is not unexpected or unplanned.
7.0 VISUAL AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES

The avoidance and minimization measures listed below are designed to avoid, minimize, or reduce the potential adverse visual impacts that may result from the construction and operation of any of the MCP Build Alternatives.

**VIS-1 Construction Plan.** Prior to construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will locate construction and staging areas within public rights of way and within the maximum project disturbance footprint defined for the Mid County Parkway (MCP).

**VIS-2 Landscape Plan.** Prior to construction, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will prepare a Landscape Plan that will be incorporated into the final design of the Mid County Parkway (MCP) project. The local entities will be responsible for long-term maintenance of the roadside landscaping until such time as the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) assumes responsibility for the MCP if it is designated as a State Highway. Highway planting is warranted on new highways where adjacent properties are developed at the time the highway is accepted. The Landscape Plan shall be submitted for review and approval by the Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect. The Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect shall approve the parts of the Landscape Plan applicable to State Highway right of way.

The landscape plan will include the following components:

- Incorporation of applicable procedures and requirements as detailed in the publication Caltrans *Highway Design Manual*, Section 902.1, Planting Guidelines (September 2006), and the applicable local agency General Plan.
- Identification of areas within the project limits for revegetation, including landscaping for graded areas with plant species consistent with adjacent vegetation and enhancement of new project structures (ramps, sound walls, and retaining walls) to the extent feasible.
- Planting of trees and shrubs along the MCP and at interchange locations to enhance the existing visual planting character of the area.
- Planting of drought-resistant plants along the MCP so as to be consistent with Metropolitan Water District guidelines which promote the use of xeric (adapted to arid conditions) landscaping techniques. The irrigation design and implementation practices will also conform to the water conservation measures established in Assembly Bill 325, the Water Conservation in Landscaping Act of 1990 (in effect January 1, 1993). Plants should also be durable, relating to urban pollutants such as smog.
- Incorporate soil erosion control planting (groundcover, native grasses, wildflowers) into the embankments and within the areas of steeper slopes. Vegetation planted
adjacent to walls will not be highly sensitive to shadow and shade. All plantings will be drought-resistant and, where applicable, shadow-resistant to ensure plant longevity and the sustainable use of water resources.

- Incorporate slope rounding and contour grading to minimize the slopes and visually soften grade changes.

**VIS-3 Trees.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Project Engineer minimize removal of existing mature trees. If removal of mature trees cannot be avoided, additional landscape improvements will be incorporated into the final design. The replacement ratio of any trees removed shall be determined in consultation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 8 Landscape Architect.

**VIS-4 Hardscape.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will require that the Project Engineer incorporate attractive walls, medians, and other visually pleasing hardscape in the project design.

**VIS-5 Sound Walls.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will include aesthetic enhancements for sound walls in the final design. The designs of sound walls require compliance with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) standards for sound attenuation (where the walls provide that function), safety requirements, and other pertinent standards. The design of sound walls requires compliance with the Highway Design Manual Standards and aesthetic treatments shall be reviewed by the Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect. The Caltrans District 8 Landscape Architect shall approve the design of any sound walls within State Highway right of way. The walls should include the following features:

- Attractive, decorative elements like local art should be incorporated into wall design in order to increase the visual quality of the area and to provide an expression of the regional “sense of place.”
- Areas in front of sound walls shall be landscaped, where landscaping can be accommodated within the public right of way, including trees, shrubs, and vines (depending upon the space available), to break the visual monotony, soften the appearance of sound walls, and deter graffiti.

**VIS-6 Retaining Walls.** Prior to completion of the final design, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will include aesthetic enhancements for retaining walls in the project design. Attractive, decorative elements such as local art should be incorporated into architectural treatment wall design to increase the visual quality of the area and to provide an expression of the regional “sense of place.” The presence of retaining walls along the Mid County Parkway (MCP) or interchange off- and on-ramps will require compliance with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) standards for safety.

**VIS-7 Lighting.** Prior to completion of final design, a lighting plan will be prepared by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) for approval by California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 8 in areas under State jurisdiction and
for approval by the County or the affected Cities within their jurisdictions. The lighting fixtures will be designed to minimize glare on adjacent properties and into the night sky. Lighting will be shielded with nonglare hoods and focused within the Mid County Parkway (MCP) project right of way.

**VIS-8**  
**MCP Corridor Master Plan.** Prior to completion of final design, a Mid County Parkway (MCP) Corridor Master Plan will be prepared by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC). In preparing the MCP Corridor Master Plan, RCTC shall coordinate with the County and affected Cities for the portions of the project within their respective jurisdictions. RCTC shall also involve the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the context-sensitive design process for the MCP Corridor Master Plan. The MCP Corridor Master Plan will include a design template for aesthetic features applied to any structures throughout the MCP corridor. The purpose of the MCP Corridor Master Plan is to create consistency in aesthetic design throughout the length of the MCP corridor. The Master Plan will be designed in conjunction with the landscape plan for the MCP.
8.0 REFERENCES


County of Riverside General Plan. 2003.


NEPA or the National Environmental Policy Act. 1969, as amended.

9.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

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9.2 SOFT MIRAGE VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS
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