

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

State Route 65 Capacity and Operational Improvements Project

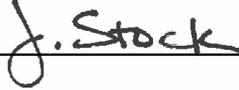
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Statement of Compliance: Produced in compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements, as appropriate, to meet the level of analysis and documentation that has been determined necessary for this project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATED TERMS

BP	business professional/commercial
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CC	Community commercial
CC&R	Conditions, Covenants and Restrictions
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
HDR	high density residential
HOV	high-occupancy vehicle
I-5	Interstate 5
I-80	Interstate 80
kV	kilovolt
LI	Light Industrial
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
OS	open space
PCTPA	Placer County Transportation Planning Agency
PG&E	Pacific Gas and Electric Company
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
SMUD	Sacramento Municipal Utilities District
SR 65	State Route 65
UPR	Union Pacific Railroad
US 50	United States Route 50
VIA	visual impact assessment
VQC	Visual Quality Change
VR	Viewer Response
WAPA	Western Area Power Administration

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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I. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this visual impact assessment (VIA) is to document potential visual impacts caused by the proposed project and propose measures to lessen any detrimental impacts that are identified. Visual impacts are demonstrated by identifying visual resources in the project area, assessing the changes that would occur as a result of the project, and predicting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes. This visual impact assessment follows the guidance outlined in *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in January 2015.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in cooperation with the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency (PCTPA), Placer County, and the Cities of Roseville, Rocklin, and Lincoln, proposes to widen State Route (SR) 65 from north of Galleria Boulevard/Stanford Ranch Road to Lincoln Boulevard (6.6 miles from post miles 6.2 to 12.8). This SR 65 Capacity and Operational Improvements Project (project) has been assigned the Project Development Processing Category 4A for widening the existing freeway without requiring a revised freeway agreement. Caltrans is the lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

SR 65 begins at its junction with Interstate-80 (I-80) and is an important interregional route serving both local and regional traffic. SR 65 generally runs north/south and is a major connector for both automobile and truck traffic originating from the I-80 corridor in the Roseville/Rocklin area to the SR 70/99 corridor in the Marysville/Yuba City area. SR 65 is a vital economic link from residential areas to shopping and employment centers in southern Placer County.

Recurring morning and evening peak-period demand exceeds the current design capacity along SR 65, creating traffic operations and safety issues. These issues result in high delays and wasted fuel, all of which will be exacerbated by anticipated increases in traffic from future population and employment growth.

In 2009, the Caltrans Corridor System Management Plan for SR 65 identified major mobility challenges, including highway and roadway traffic congestion, lack of roadway capacity, and inadequate transit funding. In 2013, a Project Study Report-Project Development Support for Capital Support was approved for adding one vehicle lane in each direction in the median of SR 65 from 0.5 mile north of Galleria Boulevard/Stanford Ranch Road to Lincoln Boulevard. PCTPA has identified the proposed project as a high priority regional network project in its 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (Placer County 2013a). This project is included in the South Placer Regional Transportation Authority Regional Traffic Congestion and Air Quality Mitigation Fee Program.

The primary purpose of the proposed project is to relieve existing mainline congestion by adding to mainline capacity. Additional capacity will also address planned and anticipated growth along the corridor and takes the regional mobility and economic development goals of the PCTPA into consideration. The project also is expected to improve traffic operations and safety in this segment of the highway.

Two build alternatives and a No Build alternative are being considered for this project. The assessment of alternatives is based on 2040 design-year conditions. No decision on a preferred alternative will be made until all alternatives have been fully evaluated.



Figure 1: Project Location

Build Alternatives

This section describes the two proposed build alternatives, the common design features of these alternatives, and the features that are unique to each.

Both build alternatives would allow for inside highway widening as future projects along SR 65 from north of the Blue Oaks Boulevard interchange to Lincoln Boulevard. Both alternatives would accommodate the I-80/SR 65 project and take into consideration the carpool/HOV lane restrictions and weaving volumes from the carpool/HOV lanes proposed by the I-80/SR 65 project.

Alternative 1—Carpool Lane Alternative

This alternative adds a 12-foot carpool/HOV lane on southbound SR 65 in the median from north of Galleria Boulevard/Stanford Ranch Road interchange to Blue Oaks Boulevard interchange. The carpool/HOV lane would connect to the carpool/HOV lanes proposed as part of the I-80/SR 65 interchange project.

This alternative would also add one 12-foot general purpose lane in each direction of SR 65 from the Galleria Boulevard interchange to the Pleasant Grove Boulevard interchange; and an auxiliary lane in each direction of SR 65 from the Galleria Boulevard interchange to the Pleasant Grove Boulevard interchange, from the Blue Oaks Boulevard interchange to the Sunset Boulevard interchange, and from the Placer Parkway interchange to the Twelve Bridges Drive interchange.

Following the recommendation from the Value Analysis (VA) study, this alternative would also include ramp metering modifications for the slip on-ramps to a 2+1 configuration (2 metered lanes plus 1 carpool preferential lane) and a 1+1 (1 metered lane plus 1 carpool preferential lane) for loop on-ramps along SR 65 from the Galleria Boulevard interchange to Lincoln Boulevard. The southbound Pleasant Grove Boulevard slip and loop on-ramps, Blue Oaks Boulevard slip and loop on-ramps, and Lincoln Boulevard slip on-ramp would be modified to include these ramp metering changes.

Alternative 2—General Purpose Lane Alternative

This alternative would add a 12-foot general purpose lane on SR 65 southbound from north of the Galleria Boulevard/Stanford Ranch Road interchange to the Blue Oaks Boulevard interchange, and another lane northbound from the Galleria Boulevard interchange to the Pleasant Grove Boulevard interchange. For added capacity on southbound SR 65, as recommended by the VA study, this alternative also includes an additional general purpose lane from the Galleria Boulevard interchange to the Pleasant Grove Boulevard interchange. This alternative also includes extending or adding auxiliary lanes and modifying slip and loop on-ramps for ramp metering as described in the Carpool Lane Alternative.

Common Design Features of the Build Alternatives

The two build alternatives include the following components.

Highway Widening

Median widening for additional general purpose or carpool lanes consists of removing existing inside shoulders and paving the median and giving it a standard cross slope. From Galleria Boulevard to Blue Oaks Boulevard, median widening includes removing the existing three beam barrier, paving the entire median, and installing concrete barrier at the center divide. The existing drainage systems, which currently collect the runoff within the median and carry it into the existing cross culverts, would be abandoned, removed, or modified.

The paved median would generate new impervious area for the runoff to sheet flow across the travel way to the outside shoulder. On areas with fill material, runoff would be collected by the toe ditch or gutter and carried to the existing channel or waterway. On cut material, runoff would be channelized by the

asphalt concrete dike on the edge of the roadway shoulder and discharged to the ditch or toe gutter through an overside drain. At shoulder cut locations, the water spread would be checked to see if drainage inlets are needed to avoid water spread encroaching into the freeway edge of travel way. The new roadway drainage system would connect the inlets and pipe down the ditch or toe gutter. Most of the existing ditch or toe gutter would remain to collect runoff, except for segments affected by outside widening for auxiliary lanes; those segments would be replaced or reconstructed. To minimize downstream effects, the proposed project would maintain the existing drainage pattern, which ultimately drains toward two waterways—Pleasant Grove Creek and Orchard Creek.

The median widening along southbound SR 65 would provide standard 10-foot inside shoulders. Along northbound SR 65, the inside paving is limited to a hot mix asphalt overlay for roadway cross-slope correction. The inside shoulder on northbound SR 65 would retain its nonstandard width of 5 feet. Justification for the nonstandard inside shoulder width would be documented in the exceptions to Caltrans' mandatory design standards.

Auxiliary lanes would be constructed by widening the existing pavement to the outside, including the replacement of existing outside shoulder with standard cross slope and side slopes of 4:1 or flatter for the fill for most of the corridor, to meet the minimum requirements specified in the Caltrans Highway Design Manual (Caltrans 2015a). Segments along the corridor between Stanford Ranch Road and Pleasant Grove Boulevard and between the Whitney Ranch Parkway and Twelve Bridges Drive interchanges would require side slope of 3:1 or steeper, with a 30-foot clear recovery zone to avoid encroaching beyond existing right of way and wetlands or overfilling existing drainage ways. These areas along the corridor would require exceptions to Caltrans advisory design standards.

A tie-back wall would be needed at the Pleasant Grove Boulevard interchange to accommodate the highway and ramp widening. A segment on southbound SR 65 between the Whitney Ranch Parkway and Twelve Bridges Drive interchanges would require a cut slope of 3:1 to avoid encroaching into existing right of way; slopes at 3:1 or flatter are considered traversable, but would need approval from Caltrans Landscape.

Pleasant Grove Creek Bridge Widening

Both the northbound and southbound bridges over Pleasant Grove Creek would be widened to accommodate the auxiliary lanes. The widened bridge structures would be similar structure types to the existing bridges, which are reinforced concrete slab bridges with piles. Pile driving within the creek is anticipated.

Utility Relocation

Overhead electric facilities run parallel along northbound SR 65 outside of State right of way. At Pleasant Grove Creek, the overhead line turns east-west and crosses over SR 65. The overhead electric hangs over both the Pleasant Grove Creek bridges that are proposed for widening. The proximity of the overhead line may conflict with bridge foundation activities during construction. The overhead line may therefore need to be temporarily relocated outside of the creek area to accommodate widening the Pleasant Grove Creek bridges.

Cross Culvert Extension

A number of culverts cross the SR 65 corridor. Most of the cross culverts would not be affected by the proposed project because they are of adequate length. A few of the culverts are short and would need to be extended to accommodate the proposed auxiliary lanes along the corridor. The following culverts would be extended.

- Double 72-inch reinforced concrete pipe between Galleria Boulevard and Pleasant Grove Boulevard.

- Double 10-foot x 5-foot reinforced concrete box culvert between Blue Oaks Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard.
- 7-foot x 5-foot reinforced concrete box culvert between Placer Parkway and Twelve Bridges Drive.

Staging/Laydown Areas

No specific staging/laydown areas have been identified. However, the contractor may utilize areas within the existing median and areas between the main line and interchange on- and off-ramps for staging or laydown.

Construction Equipment and Techniques

Equipment that would be used for construction includes graders, excavators, drilling rigs, cranes, pavers, compactors, and various types of construction vehicles. Project design and construction would incorporate the following standard construction measures.

- A preliminary site-specific geotechnical report and initial site assessment will be prepared and will be incorporated into the project's final design. If contaminated soil or groundwater, or suspected contamination, is encountered during construction, work will be halted in the area and the type and extent of the contamination identified. A qualified professional, in consultation with Caltrans, will then develop an appropriate method to remediate the contamination.
- A site-specific storm water pollution prevention plan will be prepared for the construction.
- Fugitive dust emissions during construction will be minimized by applying water frequently from water trucks. Fugitive dust emissions from wind erosion of inactive areas disturbed by construction activities will also be controlled by applying water. Chemical dust suppressants will not be used unless approved for direct application to surface waters.
- The contractor will be required to install temporary Best Management Practices (BMPs) to control any runoff or erosion from the project site, into the surrounding waterways. These temporary BMPs will be installed prior to any construction operations and will be in place for the duration of the contract. Removing these BMPs will be the final operation, along with the project site cleanup.

Construction Access

Temporary construction easements may be required for the contractor to access construction areas. Access to construction areas would be from the interchanges at Pleasant Grove Boulevard, Blue Oaks Boulevard, Sunset Boulevard, Placer Parkway/Whitney Ranch Parkway, Twelve Bridges Drive, and Lincoln Boulevard. Two lanes in each direction on SR 65 are anticipated to remain open to traffic for the majority of project's duration.

Unique Features of the Build Alternatives

The primary difference between the two build alternatives is in the use of one of the additional 12-foot lanes that are to be built on southbound SR 65 from the Galleria Boulevard interchange to the Pleasant Grove Boulevard interchange. Under Alternative 1, Carpool Lane Alternative, this lane would be a carpool/HOV lane alongside a new general purpose lane. Under Alternative 2, General Purpose Lane Alternative, this lane would be a general purpose lane, creating two new general purpose lanes on the southbound SR 65 between those interchanges.

III. PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING

The project location and setting provides the context for determining the type and severity of changes to the existing visual environment. The project setting is also referred to as the *corridor*, or project corridor,

which is defined as the area of land that is visible from, adjacent to, and outside the highway right-of-way, and is determined by topography, vegetation, and viewing distance. Figure 1 illustrates the project vicinity and the project corridor along SR 65, passing through the cities of Roseville, Rocklin, and Lincoln in western Placer County, California.

The project lies in the Sacramento Valley, in the transition zone between the flats of the Sacramento Valley and the Sierra Nevada and Lake Tahoe regions. The landscape is characterized by the rolling Sierra Nevada foothills in the eastern portion of the project region, with relatively flat terrain in the western portion. The land use within the project region is primarily agriculture, open space, and developed land uses at the base of the foothills. The urban core of Sacramento is in the southwestern part of the region. The landscape pattern is influenced by the urban sprawl of existing city cores and major roadways, including SR 65, SR 70, I-80, US 50, SR 99 and I-5. Major water bodies in the region include Dry Creek, Auburn Ravine, Pleasant Grove Creek, Folsom Lake, and the American River; smaller creeks and streams also traverse the region.

The immediate project area is characterized by flat to gently sloping terrain with distant views of the Sutter Buttes to the northwest and views of the Sierra Nevada to the east. Open space, agriculture, transportation infrastructure, and developed land uses comprise the areas immediately surrounding the project corridor near the cities of Roseville, Rocklin and Lincoln. The developed land is mostly commercial (business parks, retail, and hospitality), institutional (hospital and medical facilities, churches, educational facilities) and residential, intermixed with open space and recreation. Some industrial land uses also occur throughout the project corridor. Pleasant Grove and Orchard Creeks, and smaller streams and drainages, flow throughout the project area. The project site is not located near a state scenic highway or other designated scenic corridor (Caltrans 2015b). There are no other protected resources within or near the proposed project alignment.

This project falls within Segment 1, R&R to Lincoln, of the *SR 65 Aesthetic Corridor Master Plan* (Caltrans 2012) that classifies this segment as “urban freeway.” The master plan calls for planting treatments along urban freeways in the form of enhanced native revegetation with a greater diversity of native plant materials from the regional plant palette, or highway plantings with denser plantings using an assortment of native and ornamental plant materials organized to create a layering effect along the roadside. In addition to plantings, the master plan specifies measures to improve urban freeway aesthetics with standard or enhanced hardscape treatments. Standard hardscape treatments include stained and painted finishes, concrete formliners, and high mast area lighting; enhanced hardscape treatments include accents and special finishes such as transportation art and the application of high quality finishes, color, and texture to highway structures. These measures are to promote community interface through Caltrans’ highway planting, beautification, and modernization programs (Caltrans 2012: 2-1–2-13).

IV. VISUAL RESOURCES AND RESOURCE CHANGE

Visual resources of the project setting are defined and identified by assessing *visual character* and *visual quality* in the project corridor. *Resource change* is assessed by evaluating the visual character and the visual quality of the visual resources that comprise the project corridor before and after the construction of the proposed project.

Visual Character

Visual character includes attributes such as form, line, color, and texture, and is used to describe, not evaluate; that is, these attributes are considered neither good nor bad. A change in visual character can be evaluated when it is compared to the viewer’s response to that change. Changes in visual character

can be identified by how visually compatible a proposed project would be with the existing condition, using visual character attributes as an indicator. For this project the following attributes were considered.

- **Form**—visual mass or shape.
- **Line**—edges or linear definition.
- **Color**—reflective brightness (light, dark) and hue (red, green).
- **Texture**—surface coarseness.
- **Dominance**—position, size, or contrast.
- **Scale**—apparent size as it relates to the surroundings.
- **Diversity**—a variety of visual patterns.
- **Continuity**—uninterrupted flow of form, line, color, or textural pattern.

The topography along the SR 65 corridor is generally flat, with gently rolling terrain in a few locations, such as near the Placer Center for Health in Rocklin. The SR 65 corridor is largely bordered by commercial, open space, and industrial land uses; residential areas tend to be located beyond the commercial land uses that buffer views of SR 65. Commercial areas are largely comprised of big-box retailers in shopping centers that back on, and face away from, SR 65. A large portion of the project corridor is bordered by open space grasslands with some agricultural grazing land. The industrial areas, primarily located west of SR 65, consist of warehouses and office complexes that include distribution centers, supply warehouses, truck rental and repair centers, and other commercial, retail, and institutional uses. A few institutional land uses are intermixed with commercial and industrial development.

The existing SR 65 corridor has a low to moderate profile, blending nicely within the landscape. It includes a number of interchanges and overcrossings that tend to draw attention toward transportation facilities. Although the overcrossings are visually apparent, they do not dominate views because they are in keeping with the many transportation facilities located within the project vicinity. Industrial warehouses, business parks, and the Thunder Valley Casino Resort provide the greatest vertical visual relief within the project area. Commercial and industrial areas are larger in form and scale than single- and multifamily residential development. Vegetation in the project corridor varies in height, from low-growing, unmanicured grasslands, to trees and shrubs growing naturally along waterways, to more manicured lawns and trees and shrubs planted for landscaping associated with residential and business areas. This variation gives an overall medium- to coarse-textured appearance in the project area.

The color of vegetation generally changes seasonally in correspondence to the amount of rain in the region and ranges from tan grasses and green trees in summer and dryer, warmer months to green grass and dormant trees in winter and when cool air and rain are present. In addition, evergreen species provide greenery year-round.

The project corridor is fairly well-lit, except for open space areas. Currently, lighting is focused at existing highway interchanges and concentrated within the residential and business developments, typical of other residential and business developments in the area.

The proposed project would not alter the attributes of visual character in the project corridor because the proposed modifications are mostly in keeping with the existing visual character of the project corridor and would not affect lands outside of the right-of-way. Thus, the project would not greatly alter the visual character or quality of views compared to existing conditions. Accordingly, the project would be compatible with the existing visual character of the project corridor.

Visual Quality

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness, and unity present in the project corridor. It is also important to predict how changes to the project corridor can affect public attitudes. Assessing public perception helps identify specific methods for addressing each visual impact that may occur as a result of the project. Three criteria are used to evaluate visual quality.

- **Vividness** is the extent to which the landscape is memorable and is associated with distinctive, contrasting, and diverse visual elements.
- **Intactness** is the integrity of visual features in the landscape and the extent to which the existing landscape is free from non-typical visual intrusions.
- **Unity** is the extent to which all visual elements combine to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern.

The visual quality of the existing corridor will not be altered by the proposed project. Most of the project area is transitional suburban in character. The vividness of the SR 65 right-of-way is moderately high because the SR 65 corridor does not have a great deal of development immediately adjacent to the highway, such as highway infrastructure (e.g., sound walls, guardrails, overpasses, bridges, light standards, or other barriers) or adjacent residential or commercial buildings. In addition, the grassland median and right-of-way provide an attractive view compared to other more highly developed highways in the region. The sparsity of development adjacent to the highway allows for attractive views toward the surrounding grasslands and to the Sierra Nevada foothills and the Sutter Buttes, depending on the location, angle, and speed of the viewer. The intactness and unity of the existing corridor are also moderately high because the lack of highway infrastructure allows the highway to better blend with the surrounding grassland landscape, and utilities and signage that could act to detract from within the corridor are minimal.

Views beyond the project corridor are moderate in vividness because they are largely characterized by open space, agriculture, transportation infrastructure, and developed land uses such as warehouses, business parks, and residential communities. The open grasslands with views towards the foothills and mountains provide visual interest. Views beyond the project corridor are moderate in intactness and unity because while the developed land uses interrupt views of the surrounding rural landscape, the open grasslands with views towards the foothills and mountains provide visual interest.

The resulting visual quality is moderately high. The project would not alter the overall visual quality and it would remain moderately high. The overall visual quality of views beyond the project corridor is moderate, and would not be greatly altered by the proposed project. Slight changes would occur in small portions such that the overall visual quality would remain relatively unchanged.

Resource Change

Resource Change is defined by changes to visual resources as measured by changes in visual character and visual quality. Based on the potential level of significance of the visual changes introduced by the proposed project, Resource Change is characterized to be Low, Moderate-Low, Moderate, Moderate-High, or High. Generally, a reduction in the visual quality ratings from one degree of significance to another is considered a significant impact/adverse effect. Primary visual resource changes associated with the proposed project include the addition of general purpose and carpool/HOV lanes, widening of the existing median, extension or addition of auxiliary lanes at three locations, and modifications to slip and loop on-ramps for ramp metering within the existing right-of-way, which would include the relocation of exiting lighting fixtures. These changes would be accomplished by reducing the SR 65 median, maintaining much of the grassland areas along the outer lanes. The modifications are mostly in keeping with the existing

visual character of the project corridor and would not affect lands outside of the right-of-way. The project would not greatly alter the visual character or quality of views compared to existing conditions. The proposed project would also be consistent with the applicable rules, regulations, standards and policies relating to visual elements and aesthetic quality within the project area, such as the *SR 65 Aesthetic Corridor Master Plan*, the *City of Roseville General Plan* and associated specific plans (City of Roseville 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), the *City of Rocklin General Plan* (City of Rocklin 2012), the *City of Lincoln General Plan* (City of Lincoln 2008), and the *Placer County General Plan* (Placer County 2013b). Accordingly, Resource Change will be Low and the project would not constitute a major visual resource change for most viewers, as discussed in Section V.

V. VIEWERS AND VIEWER RESPONSE

There are two major types of viewer groups for highway projects: *highway neighbors* (people with views to the road) and *highway users* (people with views from the road). Each viewer group has its own particular level of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity, resulting in distinct and predictable visual concerns for each group that help to predict their responses to visual changes.

Neighbors include people living in or using residences, grazing lands, businesses, and commercial development. Residents and business occupants generally view the project site for an extended period and are more likely to be affected by changes in the views from their homes or businesses than business patrons or recreationists. However, they are considered to have Moderate visual sensitivity because they are accustomed to views of the existing roadway and passing traffic. Neighbors' views of the project vary based on location within the landscape and distance from the project site. Additionally, for this project, viewer exposure for those who would have longer-term, stationary views (i.e., residents) would be limited, because most roadway neighbors in the project area do not have immediate and direct views of the project site (views are limited by development, vegetation, topography, and other factors).

Highway users include local commuters traveling to and from work, shoppers, recreational travelers, agricultural transporters, and haulers in vehicles that travel at speeds ranging from a stop to approaching 75 miles per hour (the posted speed limit is 65 miles per hour). Depending on speed, drivers and passengers are able to take in brief to longer views of the scenery around them. Slightly elevated sections or gradual undulations of the road provide more expansive views, allowing drivers and passengers slightly higher vantage points and a view of more of the surrounding area. Therefore, highway users are considered to have Moderate visual sensitivity.

Based on these characteristics, neighbors and highway users will not be affected by the proposed project. It is anticipated that the average response of all viewer groups will be Moderate.

VI. VISUAL IMPACTS

Visual impacts are determined by assessing changes to the visual resources and predicting viewer response to those changes. This VIA considers the potential impacts of a No-Build Alternative the two build alternatives.

No Build Alternative

Under the No Build Alternative, no new construction, roadway widening, or interchange improvements would take place within the project corridor, aside from projects that are currently under construction or funded and approved for construction and operation. Accordingly, no new visual elements would be introduced and no resource change would occur under this alternative. There would be no visual impacts on the existing visual character, visual quality, or affected viewer groups.

Build Alternatives (Alternatives 1 and 2)

As describe under *Unique Features of the Build Alternatives*, Alternatives 1 and 2 are visually the same, and the difference is primarily in how the new lanes would be classified. Under Alternative 1, one of the two new lanes would be classified as a carpool/HOV lane, while it would be classified as a general purpose lane under Alternative 2. Alternatives 1 and 2 also both include extending or adding auxiliary lanes and modifying slip and loop on-ramps for ramp metering in the same way. Because the alternatives are visually the same, they are discussed together.

Construction

Equipment that would be used for construction includes graders, excavators, drilling rigs, cranes, pavers, compactors, and various types of construction vehicles. General construction activities, construction staging/stockpiling, the storage of road-widening/building materials, the presence of construction equipment, and temporary traffic barricades would result in temporary construction impacts by altering the composition of the viewsheds (all the surface areas visible from an observer's viewpoint) throughout the project corridor. However, construction activities would be minor and temporary in duration. Furthermore, they would be governed by city, state, and federal regulations and standards designed to minimize their potential to adversely affect adjacent sensitive uses, such as those in local general plans (Cities of Rocklin, Roseville, and Lincoln, and Placer County) and the *SR 65 Aesthetic Corridor Master Plan*. Because of the temporary nature of construction, the transient nature of viewers passing by the project site, and viewers' familiarity with heavy equipment in the project area for recent development within the project vicinity, adverse effects would not occur.

The active construction and staging areas would be within the SR 65 right-of-way and would have construction signs and barricades to delineate the work zone. Temporary visual changes from construction signaling, signage, and lighting would occur, though they are not considered to be adverse. Nighttime construction would occur and some nighttime lighting at the construction site(s) would be required and could result in nuisance light if not properly designed. Avoidance and Minimization Measure 1 (see Section VII, *Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures*) would ensure that lighting used for construction would be directed downward and that spill light would be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

In order to avoid the complete shutdown of traffic, or the constriction of traffic along substantial portions of the corridor at one time, construction activities would occur either sequentially or on a leap-frog basis. The contractor would provide daily visual inspections to ensure the immediate surroundings of construction staging areas are free from construction-related clutter and would maintain the areas in a clean and orderly manner throughout the construction period. Upon completion of project construction, the visual quality and character of the existing corridor would be maintained, and significant impacts or adverse effects are not anticipated. Implementation of Measure 2 (Section VII) would provide visual interest and enhance roadside aesthetics by adding wildflowers to erosion control seed mix that would be applied to disturbed areas.

Operation

During operation, the proposed project elements, (additional general purpose and carpool/HOV lanes, widening of the existing median, extension/addition of auxiliary lanes at three locations, and modifications to slip and loop on-ramps for ramp metering) would not impede sightlines to surrounding grasslands in the project area, the Sierra Nevada foothills, the Sutter Buttes, or any other visual resources within the project corridor. Median widening would pave the entire median and require installation of a concrete barrier as the center divider, removing the existing grassy median. However, while this would slightly alter views for roadway users, it would limit widening on the outer lanes and retain larger areas

of grasslands along the roadway corridor, for which the corridor is noted. Implementation of Measure 2 would provide visual interest and enhance roadside aesthetics by adding wildflowers to erosion control seed mix that would be applied to disturbed areas. Preserving the grassland areas associated with the freeway may be desirable; however, in accordance with the *SR 65 Aesthetic Corridor Master Plan*, landscape plantings may be appropriate for all or portions of the affected project corridor. Measure 3 (Section VII) would ensure the proper coordination with Caltrans to determine whether to implement landscaping.

The bridges over Pleasant Grove Creek would be widened to accommodate the auxiliary lanes. These widened bridges would be very similar to the existing bridges, using the same materials. No sensitive viewers would be affected by the widening and roadway users would only see wider bridge decks. Therefore, the widened bridges would only result in minor visual changes and would be in keeping with the existing views of the current bridge. Overhead electric lines over both Pleasant Grove Creek bridges would also be extended to accommodate the bridge widenings and would only result in very minor visual changes. Three culverts would be extended to accommodate the proposed auxiliary lanes along the corridor and would not affect visual resources because they would only slightly lengthen existing visual features associated with the roadway corridor.

Both build alternatives would pave the median section of the highway and result in the installation of a median concrete barrier. This would increase the amount of pavement and human made materials within the highway corridor and slightly lower the existing visual quality and character of the freeway corridor. Though the proposed project may slightly alter the visual composition of views within the project corridor, it would result in low resource change for all viewer groups because the changes would not result in a drastic alteration in views of and from the project corridor and corridor aesthetics would still be consistent with applicable regulations, standards, and policies specified in guidance documents such as local general plans (Cities of Rocklin, Roseville, and Lincoln, and Placer County) and the *SR 65 Aesthetic Corridor Master Plan*. The proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, substantially damage a scenic resource (trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings within a state scenic highway), or substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Relocation of existing lighting fixtures at the gore of the ramps would be required, though no additional permanent light sources would be introduced. Existing lighting at the ramp gores will be relocated and would not change lighting levels. Therefore, besides ramp metering, no new lighting of the SR 65 corridor or ramps is proposed, and ramp metering would result in an inconsequential amount of new light. Similarly, the new pavement associated with the widened roadway surface would be dark asphalt, which generally absorbs light. Therefore, the proposed project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area. No mitigation measures are necessary. However, avoidance and minimization measures are included in the project to help soften the slight increased presence of hardscape features and to improve corridor aesthetics for affected viewers.

VII. AVOIDANCE, MINIMIZATION, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures are necessary. Avoidance and minimization measures have been identified that can reduce visual impacts caused by the proposed project. In addition, including aesthetic features in the project design can help generate public acceptance of a project. This section describes avoidance and minimization measures that apply to all proposed build alternatives to address specific visual impacts. These will be designed and implemented with the concurrence of the District Landscape Architect.

The following measures to avoid or minimize visual impacts will be incorporated into the project:

1. **Minimize Fugitive Light from Portable Sources Used for Construction.** At a minimum, the construction contractor shall minimize project-related light and glare to the maximum extent feasible, given safety considerations. Color-corrected halide lights will be used. Portable lights will be operated at the lowest allowable wattage and height and will be raised to a height no greater than 20 feet. All lights will be screened and directed downward toward work activities and away from the night sky, highway users, and highway neighbors, particularly in residential areas, to the maximum extent possible. The number of nighttime lights used will be minimized to the greatest extent possible.
2. **Use Native Grass and Wildflower Species in Erosion Control Grassland Seed Mix.** The project proponent might require construction contractors to incorporate native grass and wildflower seed to standard seed mixes, which may be nonnative, for erosion control measures that will be applied to all exposed slopes. Wildflowers will provide seasonal interest to areas where trees and shrubs are removed and grasslands are disturbed. Only wildflower and grass species that are native will be incorporated into the seed mix, and under no circumstances will any invasive grass or wildflower plant species be used as any component in any erosion control measures. Species will be chosen that are indigenous to the area and for their appropriateness to the surrounding habitat. For example, upland grass and wildflower species will be chosen for drier, upland areas, and wet-adapted species will be chosen for areas that will receive more moisture. If not appropriate to the surrounding habitat, wildflowers should not be included in the seed mix.
3. **Work with Caltrans to Implement Appropriate Freeway Landscaping.** Landscaping within interchange loops and on the side of the widened freeway may improve the visual quality of the roadway corridor by improving corridor aesthetics, as noted in the *SR 65 Aesthetic Corridor Master Plan*. However, it may be desirable to retain the existing visual character of roadside grasslands that allow views to the foothills and mountains. Therefore, the project landscape architect will work with the Caltrans' landscape architect to determine the appropriate freeway landscaping for the portion of SR 65 affected by this project. In accordance with the *SR 65 Aesthetic Corridor Master Plan*, plantings may include enhanced native plantings or more traditional highway plantings; however, it is recommended that plantings rely mostly on drought-tolerant native plants. If landscaping is installed, the following is recommended:
 - Species composition should be 100 percent species that are native and indigenous to the project area and California. Native plant species can be used to create attractive spaces, high in aesthetic quality, that are more drought-tolerant than traditional landscape plant palettes. Use of native species promotes a visual character of California that is being lost through development and reliance on nonnative ornamental plant species.
 - The species list should include trees, shrubs, and an herbaceous understory of varying heights, as well as both evergreen and deciduous types at interchange loops. Plant variety will increase the effectiveness of the roadside planting areas by providing multiple layers, seasonality, diverse habitat, and reduced susceptibility to disease. Evergreen groundcovers or low-growing plants, such as *Ceanothus* spp., should be used in areas where taller vegetation would potentially cause driving hazards by obscuring site distances.
 - Low-growing plants should be used along the freeway corridor, to maintain views of the foothills and mountains.
 - Under no circumstances will any invasive plant species be used at any location.
 - Vegetation should be planted prior to project completion.
 - An irrigation and maintenance program may be implemented during the plant establishment period and carried on, as needed, to ensure plant survival. However, design of the landscaping plan will try to maximize the use of planting zones that are water efficient. The design may also incorporate aesthetic features, such as a cobbling swales or shallow detention areas, which can reduce or eliminate the need for irrigation in certain areas.

- If an irrigation system is required, irrigated areas will use a smart watering system that evaluates the existing site conditions and plant material against weather conditions to avoid overwatering such areas. To avoid excess water flows, the irrigation system will be managed such that any broken spray heads, pipes, or other components are fixed within 1–2 days, or the zone or system will be shut down until it can be repaired.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Under both build alternatives, the proposed project would result in a Resource Change that is considered Low, and the average response of all viewer groups would be Moderate. Both build alternatives would pave the median section of the highway and result in the installation of a median concrete barrier. This would increase the amount of pavement and human made materials within the highway corridor. This would slightly lower the existing visual quality and character of the freeway corridor. However, the proposed project would not substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Avoidance or minimization measures, including highway plantings along the corridor and within interchange loops to soften and screen hardscape and structures from all viewers, have been identified to help improve project aesthetics.

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