

SUBCHAPTER 3.1

AESTHETICS

Introduction

Regulatory Setting

Environmental Setting

3.1 AESTHETICS

3.1.1 Introduction

The [2012](#) AQMP control measures could potentially create projects that can affect the visual character quality within the district. Specifically, on-road mobile source control measures that include electrification of trucks using a catenary (overhead-wired) system have the potential to adversely affect scenic resources such as scenic highways. Therefore, an overview of existing aesthetic resources, including scenic highways and coastal zones within the district, is provided in this subchapter.

3.1.2 Regulatory Setting

3.1.2.1 Federal

Aesthetic resources on federal lands are managed by the federal government using various visual resource management programs, depending on the type of federal land and/or the federal agency involved with a given project. Examples of federal visual resource management programs include the Visual Resource Management System utilized by the Federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Visual Management System utilized by the United States Forest Service (USFS).

3.1.2.2 State

3.1.2.2.1 California Coastal Act

The California Coastal Act of 1976 was enacted to regulate development projects within California's Coastal Zone. The act includes requirements that protect views and aesthetic resources through siting and design control measures, which are typically implemented at the local planning level through local coastal programs (LCPs) or land use plans (LUPs). According to the California Coastal Act:

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting (California Public Resources Code, California Coastal Act [Chapter 3 (Coastal Resources Planning and Management Policies) Article 6, Section 30251]).

For local jurisdictions that do not have an approved LCP, regulation of development projects within the coastal zone remains under the jurisdiction of the California Coastal Commission (CCC).

3.1.2.2.2 *State Scenic Highway Program*

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature in 1963 to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of land adjacent to those highways. When a city or county nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must adopt ordinances to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor or document such regulations that already exist in various portions of local codes. These ordinances make up the scenic corridor protection program.

Scenic corridor protection programs include policies intended to preserve the scenic qualities of the highway corridor, including regulation of land use and density of development, detailed land and site planning, control of outdoor advertising (including a ban on billboards), careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping, and careful attention to design and appearance of structures and equipment (California Streets and Highways Code §260 et seq.).

3.1.2.3 Local

3.1.2.3.1 *Counties and Cities*

The geographic area encompassed by the district includes numerous cities and unincorporated communities in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside. Each of these counties and incorporated cities has prepared a general plan, which is the primary document that establishes local land use policies and goals. Many of these general plans also establish local policies related to aesthetics and the preservation of scenic resources within their communities or subplanning areas, and may include local scenic highway programs.

3.1.2.3.2 *Local Coastal Programs*

The CCC and the local governments along the coast share responsibility for managing the state's coastal resources. Through coordination with the CCC, coastal cities and counties develop LCPs. These programs are the primary means for carrying out the policies of the California Coastal Act at the local level. In general, these policies are intended to promote public access and enhance recreational use of the coast as well as protection of natural resources in the coastal zone. Examples of counties, cities and local jurisdictions within the district that do have an approved LCP or LUP include Los Angeles County and the County of Orange and the cities of Santa Monica, El Segundo, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, Palos Verdes Estates, Rancho Palos Verdes, Long Beach, Avalon, Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, Irvine, Laguna Beach, Laguna Niguel, Dana Point, and San Clemente.

Following approval by the CCC, an LCP is certified and the local governments implement the programs. LCPs include two main components, a Land Use Plan and an Implementation Plan. These components may include policies or regulations that apply to preservation of visual and scenic resources within the coastal zone. Typically, these policies relate to preservation of views of the coast.

3.1.3 Environmental Setting

This environmental setting subchapter describes the aesthetics resources settings that may be adversely affected by the proposed project. Specifically, this environmental setting subchapter describes visual character and quality, visual resources, scenic highways, and coastal zones within the district.

3.1.3.1 Visual Character and Quality

Visual character and quality are defined by the built and natural environment. The *visual character* of a view is descriptive cataloguing of underlying landforms and landcover including the topography, general land use patterns, scale, form, and the presence of natural areas. Urban features, such as structures, roads, utility lines, and other development associated with human activities also help to define visual character. *Visual quality* is an evaluative appraisal of the aesthetics of a view and is established using a well-established approach to visual analysis adopted from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) based upon the relative degree of vividness, intactness, and unity found within the visual setting, as defined in the following bullet points (FHWA, 1981).

- Vividness is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive patterns.
- Intactness is the visual integrity of the landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements; this factor can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings.
- Unity is the degree to which the visual resources of the landscape join together to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern. Unity refers to the compositional harmony or inter-compatibility between landscape elements.

Each of the three criteria is independent and intended to evaluate one aspect of visual quality; however, no one criterion considered alone equates to visual quality.

The perception of visual quality can vary significantly among viewers depending on their level of visual sensitivity (interest). Sensitive viewers' perceptions can vary seasonally and even hourly as weather, light, shadow, and the elements that compose the viewshed change. Form, line, color, and texture are the basic components used to describe visual character and quality for most visual assessments (FHWA, 1981). Sensitivity depends upon the length of time the viewer has access to a particular view. Typically, residential viewers have extended viewing periods and are often concerned about changes in views from their homes. Visual sensitivity is, therefore, considered to be high for neighborhood residential areas. Visual sensitivity is considered to be less important for commuters and other people driving along surrounding streets. Views from vehicles are generally more fleeting and temporary, yet under certain circumstances are sometimes considered important (e.g., viewers who are driving for pleasure, views/vistas from scenic corridors).

As discussed in the Subchapter 3.1 - Aesthetics, of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) 2012 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Final Environmental

Impact Report (FEIR), various jurisdictions within the SCAG region, which includes the jurisdiction of SCAQMD such as cities, counties, and federal or regional agencies, provide guidelines regarding the preservation and enhancement of visual quality in their plans or regulations¹. An example of such guidance is the Caltrans Scenic Highway Visual Quality Program Intrusion Examples, which are presented in Table 3.1-1. As the table illustrates, a given visual element may be considered desirable or undesirable, depending on design, location, use, and other considerations. Because of the size and diversity of the area within the SCAQMD's jurisdiction, it is not possible to apply uniform standards to all areas within the district.

TABLE 3.1-1

Caltrans Scenic Highway Program – Examples of Visual Quality Intrusions

Minor Intrusion	Moderate Intrusion	Major Intrusion
Buildings: Residential, Commercial, and Industrial Developments		
Widely dispersed buildings. Natural landscape dominates. Wide setbacks and buildings screened from roadway. Forms, exterior colors and materials are compatible with landscape. Buildings have cultural or historical significance.	Increased numbers of buildings, not well integrated into the landscape. Smaller setbacks and lack of roadway screening. Buildings do not dominate the landscape or obstruct scenic view.	Dense and continuous development. Highly reflective surfaces. Buildings poorly maintained. Visible blight. Development along ridgelines. Buildings dominate the landscape or obstruct scenic view.
Unightly Land Uses: Dumps, Quarries, Concrete Plants, Tank Farms, Auto Dismantling		
Screened from view so that most of facility is not visible from the highway.	Not screened and visible but programmed/funded for removal and site restoration. Land use is visible but does not dominate the landscape or obstruct scenic view.	Not screened and visible by motorists. Will not be removed or modified. Land use dominates the landscape or obstructs scenic view.
Commercial Retail Development		
N/A	Neat and well landscaped. Single story. Generally blends with surroundings. Development is visible but does not dominate the landscape or obstruct scenic view.	Not harmonious with surroundings. Poorly maintained or vacant. Blighted. Development dominates the landscape or obstructs scenic view.

¹ California cities and counties are not required to include visual quality elements in their General Plans although many do. However, the General Plans are required to include a Conservation Element, which includes resources such as waterways and forests that frequently are also scenic resources.

TABLE 3.1-1 (Continued)

Caltrans Scenic Highway Program – Examples of Visual Quality Intrusions

Minor Intrusion	Moderate Intrusion	Major Intrusion
Parking Lots		
Screened from view so that most of the vehicles and pavement are not visible from the highway.	Neat and well landscaped. Generally blends with surroundings. Pavement and/or vehicles visible but do not dominate the landscape or degrade scenic view.	Not screened or landscaped. Pavement and/or vehicles dominate the landscape or degrade scenic view.
Off-Site Advertising Structures		
N/A	N/A	Billboards degrade or obstruct scenic view.
Noise Barriers		
N/A	Noise barriers are well landscaped and complement the natural landscape. Noise barriers do not degrade or obstruct scenic view.	Noise barriers degrade or obstruct scenic view.
Power Lines and Communication Facilities		
Not easily visible from road.	Visible, but do not dominate scenic view.	Towers, poles or lines dominate view. Scenic view is degraded.
Agriculture: Structures, Equipment, Crops		
Generally blends in with scenic view. Is indicative of regional culture.	Not compatible with the natural landscape. Scale and appearance of structures and equipment visually competes with natural landscape.	Scale and appearance of structures and equipment are incompatible with and dominates natural landscape. Structures, equipment or crops degrade or obstruct scenic view.
Exotic Vegetation		
Used as screening and landscaping. Generally is compatible with scenic view.	Competes with native vegetation for visual dominance.	Incompatible with and dominates natural landscape. Scenic view is degraded.
Clearcutting		
N/A	Clearcutting or deforestation is evident, but is in the distant background.	Clearcutting or deforestation is evident. Scenic view is degraded.
Erosion		
Minor soil erosion (i.e., rill erosion).	Rill erosion starting to form gullies.	Large slip outs and/or gullies with little or no vegetation. Scenic view is degraded.

TABLE 3.1-1 (Concluded)

Caltrans Scenic Highway Program – Examples of Visual Quality Intrusions

Minor Intrusion	Moderate Intrusion	Major Intrusion
Grading		
Grading generally blends with adjacent landforms and topography.	Some changes, less engineered appearance and restoration are taking place.	Extensive cut and fill. Unnatural appearance, scarred hillsides or steep slopes with little or no vegetation. Canyons filled in. Scenic view is degraded.
Road Design		
Blends in and complements scenic view. Roadway structures are suitable for location and compatible with landscape.	Large cut and fill slopes are visible. Scale and appearance of roadway, structures, and appurtenances are incompatible with landscape.	N/A

Source: Caltrans, 2008

The *viewshed* can be defined as all of the surface area visible from a particular location or sequence of locations, and is described in terms of the dominance of landforms, landcover, and manmade development constituting visual character. Views of high visual quality in urban settings generally have several of the following additional characteristics:

- Harmony in scale with the surroundings;
- Context sensitive architectural design; and,
- Impressive landscape design features.

Areas of medium visual quality have interesting forms but lack unique architectural design elements or landscape features. Areas of low visual quality have uninteresting features and/or undistinguished architectural design and /or other common elements.

3.1.3.2 Visual Resources

Visual resources include historic buildings that uniquely identify a setting, views identified as significant in local plans, and/or views from scenic highways. The importance of a view to viewers is related to the position of the viewers relative to the resource and the distinctiveness of a particular view. The visibility and visual dominance of landscape elements are usually described with respect to their placement in the viewshed.

Visual resources occur in a diverse array of environments within the boundaries of the district, ranging in character from urban centers to rural agricultural land, natural woodlands, and coastal views. The extraordinary range of visual features in the region is afforded by the mixture of climate, topography, flora, and fauna found in the natural environment, and the diversity of style, composition, and distribution of the built environment. Views of the coast from locations in Los Angeles and Orange counties are considered valuable visual resources, while views of various mountain ranges are prevalent throughout the district. Other natural

features that may be visually significant in the district include rivers, streams, creeks, lakes, and reservoirs.

The County of Los Angeles General Plan identifies regional open space and recognized scenic areas, generally including the Santa Monica Mountains, as well as the San Gabriel Mountains, Verdugo Hills, Santa Susana Mountains, Simi Hills, Santa Monica Mountains, and Puente Hills. In addition, ridgelines and hillsides are generally considered to be scenic resources, with specific measures for the protection of these areas (LA County, 2010).

The County of Orange General Plan identifies the Santa Ana Mountains along with their distinctive twin peaks known as “Saddleback” as the county’s signature landmark. The Plan designates 10 scenic “viewscape corridors,” which include among others Pacific Coast Highway, Oso Parkway, Ortega Highway, Jamboree Road, Santiago Canyon Road, and Laguna Canyon Road. These designated viewscape corridors provide scenic views of the Santa Ana Mountains, Lomas de Santiago and the San Joaquin Hills, as well as numerous canyons and valleys including the Santa Ana Canyon, Capistrano Valley, Laguna, Aliso, Wood, Moro, San Juan, Trabuco Santiago, Modjeska, Silverado, Limestone, and Black Star Canyons. Finally, the General Plan identifies nearly 42 miles of coastline and approximately 33 miles of sandy beaches as defining scenic resources (Orange County, 2011).

The County of Riverside General Plan identifies regional scenic resources, including Santa Ana River basin, Lake Mathews, Lake Perris, Lake Elsinore, Lake Skinner, Vail Lake, the San Jacinto River, Murrieta Creek, the Santa Margarita River, the vineyard/citrus region near Temecula, the Diamond Valley Reservoir, Joshua Tree National Park, Whitewater River, the Santa Rosa Mountains, and a portion of the Salton Sea (Riverside County, [2011/2009](#)).

The County of San Bernardino General Plan identifies several scenic areas, including the San Gabriel Mountains, the San Bernardino Mountains, La Loma Hills, Jurupa Hills, Chino Hills, Yucaipa Hills, Holcomb Valley, and the Mojave Desert. In addition, Big Bear Lake, Silverwood Lake, Lake Arrowhead, and Lake Gregory, along with associated waterways, serve as defining characteristics of the mountain regions within the County. San Bernardino County has a wide variety of scenic and wilderness areas respectively categorized as the Mountain, Valley, and Desert regions. Each region has its own defined measures for protecting the specific resources contained in this region. The County of San Bernardino also considers desert night-sky views to be scenic resources and has enacted measures to reflect this (San Bernardino County, [2007/2012](#)).

In addition to County plans, many of the cities within the district have general plan policies, and in some cases, ordinances, related to the protection of visual resources. In addition to the visual resources related to natural areas, many features of the built environment that may also have visual significance include individual or groups of structures that are distinctive due to their aesthetic, historical, social, or cultural significance or characteristics, such as architecturally appealing buildings or groups of buildings, landscaped freeways, bridges or overpasses, and historic resources.

3.1.3.3 Scenic Highways

Within the district, there are numerous officially designated state and county scenic highways and one historic parkway, as listed in Table 3.1-2.

There are also a number of roadways that have been determined eligible for state scenic highway designation, as listed in Table 3.1-3.

TABLE 3.1-2

Scenic Highways Within District Borders

Route	County	Location	Description	Miles	Designation
2	Los Angeles	From near La Cañada Flintridge north to the San Bernardino County line.	This U.S. Forest Service Scenic Byway and State Scenic Highway winds along the spine of the San Gabriel Mountains. It provides views of the mountain peaks, the Mojave Desert, and the Los Angeles Basin.	55	ODSSH ^(a)
38	San Bernardino	From east of South Fork Campground to State Lane.	This U.S. Forest Service Scenic Byway and State Scenic Highway crosses the San Bernardino Mountains at Onyx Summit. It features forested mountainsides with far-off desert vistas near the summit.	16	ODSSH
62	Riverside	From I-10 north to the San Bernardino County line.	This highway features high desert country scenery and leads to or from Joshua Tree National Monument. Large “windmill farms,” where wind power is used to generate electricity, can be seen along the way.	9	ODSSH
74	Riverside	From west boundary of the San Bernardino National Forest to SR-111 in Palm Desert.	This road goes from the southern Mojave Desert to oak and pine forests of San Bernardino National Forest. It offers views of the San Jacinto Valley and peaks of the San Jacinto Mountains.	48	ODSSH
91	Orange	From SR-55 to east of Anaheim city limit.	This freeway runs along the banks of the Santa Ana River. Views include residential and commercial development with intermittent riparian and chaparral vegetation.	4	ODSSH

TABLE 3.1-2 (Continued)

Scenic Highways Within District Borders

Route	County	Location	Description	Miles	Designation
243	Riverside	From SR-74 to the Banning city limit.	This U.S. Forest Service Scenic Byway and State Scenic Highway traverses forested mountain scenery along a ridge of the San Bernardino Mountains. It then drops in a series of switchbacks offering views of the San Bernardino Valley and the desert scenery.	28	ODSSH
N/A	Los Angeles	Mulholland Highway from SR- 1 to Kanan Dume Road and from west of Cornell Road to east of Las Virgenes Road.	With the dramatic canyons, oak woodlands, open spaces and ocean views of the Santa Monica Mountains, Mulholland Highway offers travelers views of the mountains, the Pacific Ocean, and historic sites along its stretch.	19	ODCSH ^(b)
N/A	Los Angeles	Malibu Canyon- Las Virgenes Highway from State Route 1 to Lost Hills Road.	The rugged terrain and ancient rock formations along this route have been a backdrop of many early California settlers. The formations have known presence dating to the original De Anza expedition of Spanish colonists.	7.4	ODCSH

Source: Caltrans, Officially Designated State Scenic Highways, accessed July 2012.

(a) Officially Designated State Scenic Highway

(b) Officially Designated County Scenic Highway

TABLE 3.1-3

Highways Within District Boundaries Eligible for State Scenic Highway Designation

Route	County	Location (From/To)	Postmiles
1	Orange/LA	I-5 south of San Juan Capistrano/SR-19 near Long Beach	0.0-3.6
1	LA/(Ventura)	SR-187 near Santa Monica/SR-101 near El Rio	32.2-21.1
2	LA/SB	SR-210 in La Cañada Flintridge/SR 138 via Wrightwood	22.9-6.36
5	(SD)/Orange	Opposite Coronado/SR-74 near San Juan Capistrano	R14.0-9.6
5	LA	I-210 near Tunnel Station/SR-136 near Castaic	R44.0-R55.5
10	SB/Riverside	SR-38 near Redlands/SR-62 near Whitewater	T0.0-R10.0
15	(SD)/Riverside	SR-76 near San Luis Rey River/SR-91 near Corona	R46.5-41.5
15	SB	SR-58 near Barstow/SR-127 near Baker	76.9-R136.6
18	SB	SR-138 near Mt. Anderson/SR-247 near Lucerne Valley	R17.7-73.8
27	LA	SR-1/Mulholland Drive	0.0-11.1
30	SB	SR-330 near Highland/I-10 near Redlands	T29.5-33.3
38	SB	I-10 near Redlands/SR-18 near Fawnskin	0.0-49.5
39	LA	SR-210 near Azusa/SR-2	14.1-44.4
40	SB	Barstow/Needles	0.0-154.6
57	Orange/LA	SR-90/SR-60 near City of Industry	19.9-R4.5
58	(Kern)/SB	SR-14 near Mojave/I-15 near Barstow	112.0-R4.5
62	Riverside/SB	I-10 near Whitewater/Arizona State Line	0.0-142.7
71	Riverside	SR-91 near Corona/SR-83 north of Corona	0.0-G3.0
74	Orange/Riverside	I-5 near San Juan Capistrano/I-111 (All)	0.0-R96.0
79	(SD)/Riverside	SR-78 near Santa Ysabel/SR-371 near Aguanga	20.2-2.3
91	Orange/Riverside	SR-55 near Santa Ana Canyon/I-15 near Corona	R9.2-7.5
101	LA/(Ventura)/ (SBar)/(SLO)	SR-27 (Topanga Canyon Blvd)/SR-46 near Paso Robles	25.3-57.9
111	(Imperial)/ Riverside	Bombay Beach-Salton Sea/SR-195 near Mecca	57.6-18.4
111	Riverside	SR-74 near Palm Desert/I-10 near Whitewater	39.6-R63.4
118	(Ventura)/LA	SR-23/Desoto Avenue near Browns Canyon	17.4-R2.7
126	(Ventura)/LA	SR-150 near Santa Paula/I-5 near Castaic	R12.0-0R5.8
127	SB/(Inyo)	I-15 near Baker/Nevada State Line	L0.0-49.4
138	SB	SR-2 near Wrightwood/SR-18 near Mt. Anderson	6.6-R37.9
142	SB	Orange County Line/Peyton Dr.	0.0-4.4
173	SB	SR-138 near Silverwood Lake/SR-18 south of Lake Arrowhead	0.0-23.0
210	LA	I-5 near Tunnel Station/SR-134	R0.0-R25.0
215	Riverside	SR-74 near Romoland/SR-74 near Perris	23.5-26.3
243	Riverside	SR-74 near Mountain Center/I-10 near Banning	0.0-29.7
247	SB	SR-62 near Yucca Valley/I-15 near Barstow	0.0-78.1
330	SB	SR-30 near Highland/SR-18 near Running Springs	29.5-44.1

Source: Caltrans, Eligible and Officially Designated Routes, accessed July 2012.

LA = Los Angeles SB = San Bernardino SD = San Diego SBar = Santa Barbara SLO = San Luis Obispo
() = County not within the district

3.1.3.4 Coastal Zones

According to the California Coastal Act of 1976, a coastal zone is the land and water area of the State of California from the Oregon border to the border of Mexico, extending seaward to the state's outer limit of jurisdiction, including all offshore islands, and extending inland generally 1,000 yards from the mean high tide line of the sea. In significant coastal estuarine, habitat, and recreational areas, the coastal zone extends inland to the first major ridgeline paralleling the sea or five miles from the mean high tide line of the sea, whichever is less, and in developed urban areas the coastal zone generally extends inland less than 1,000 yards.

The coastal zone within the district generally extends from Leo Carrillo State Park in Malibu in the northwestern corner of Los Angeles County to San Clemente Beach in San Clemente near the southern tip of Orange County.

Local Coastal Plans (LCPs) typically contain policies on visual access and site development review. LCPs are basic planning tools used by local governments to guide development in the coastal zone, in partnership with the California Coastal Commission. LCPs contain the ground rules for future development and protection of coastal resources in the 75 coastal cities and counties. The LCPs specify appropriate location, type, and scale of new or changed uses of land and water. Each LCP includes a land use plan and measures to implement the plan (such as zoning ordinances). Prepared by local government, these programs govern decisions that determine the short- and long-term conservation and use of coastal resources. While each LCP reflects unique characteristics of individual local coastal communities, regional and statewide interests and concerns must also be addressed in conformity with Coastal Act goals and policies.