

Appendix J. Visual Impact Assessment

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

State Route 1 (Lincoln Boulevard)

Multimodal Improvement Project

November 12, 2019

California Department of Transportation

District 7, Los Angeles County, Route SR-1
7-LA-1 P.M. 30.16-30.74

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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.

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

State Route 1 (Lincoln Boulevard)

Multimodal Improvement Project

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND ASSESSMENT METHOD

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, measuring the amount of change that would occur as a result of the project, and predicting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes. This visual impact assessment follows the guidance outlined in the publication *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in January 2015.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Caltrans, in cooperation with the City of Los Angeles, proposes to improve circulation and safety along Lincoln Boulevard by constructing an additional southbound lane, installing sidewalks and protected bicycle lanes, and implementing complete streets and other related improvements along an approximate 0.61-mile segment of Lincoln Boulevard between Jefferson Boulevard (PM 30.16) and just south of Fiji Way (PM 30.74). The project primarily occurs in the City of Los Angeles, with potential temporary construction easements and partial right-of-way acquisitions needed in the north and northwest within parcels that are within unincorporated Los Angeles County.

The project's build alternative includes: realignment of the Lincoln Boulevard centerline approximately 50 feet to the east; addition of one southbound lane along Lincoln Boulevard for a length of approximately 1,800 feet; demolition, replacement, and widening of the Lincoln Boulevard Bridge over Ballona Creek; demolition, replacement, and widening of the Culver Boulevard Bridge over Lincoln Boulevard; demolition, replacement, and realignment of the connector ramps between Lincoln Boulevard and Culver Boulevard; construction of active transportation improvements including sidewalks, Class IV protected bicycle lanes on both sides of Lincoln Boulevard, ADA-compliant curb ramps, and signal upgrades at intersections within the project limits. The project would also include: utility relocation; landscaping; low-intensity street lighting, striping, signage, drainage, and water quality improvements. The project would install a striped center median that would allow space to accommodate a future center-running transit facility within the project limits, which is not included as part of the project. Construction of the project build alternative would result in three through lanes in the northbound and southbound directions of Lincoln Boulevard between Fiji Way and Jefferson Boulevard, with additional turning lanes at intersections. Project right-of-way needs are still being refined for the build alternative, but it is likely that partial right-of-way acquisition and/or temporary construction easements would be required from approximately 20 parcels. No full right-of-way takes, residential displacements, or business displacements would be required under the build alternative; however, local parking and driveways may need to be reconfigured for parcels where partial right-of-way acquisition would occur to accommodate the project.

Under the build alternative, the replacement Lincoln Boulevard Bridge over Ballona Creek would include three 12-foot travel lanes in each direction, a 12-foot center median, 2-foot lane buffers, 8-foot shoulders including 6-foot-wide, Class IV protected bicycle lanes, 6-foot sidewalks, and 1-foot edge barriers on both sides of the roadway.

Under the build alternative, the replacement Culver Boulevard Bridge would include one 12-foot travel lane in each direction as well as 5-foot shoulders, 6-foot sidewalks, and 1-foot bridge barriers on both sides of the roadway.

PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING

The project location and setting provide the context for determining the type of changes to the existing visual environment that might occur under the proposed project. The project corridor is located on Lincoln Boulevard between Fiji Way and Jefferson Boulevard in the City of Los Angeles in Los Angeles County, California. The project is located in the coastal region of Southern California. The landscape is characterized by man-made development consisting of highway infrastructure (roadways, ramps, interchange, overpass bridges, commercial and residential buildings); the Ballona Creek Channel; and vegetation situated along both sides of the roadway, at the ramps, at the interchange, and in adjacent undeveloped parcels that belong to the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve. In addition to these open space uses, other land uses within the project corridor include commercial and multi-family residential uses. The term “project corridor” is used in this report to reference 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. Refer to Figure 1 for Project Area Map.

No scenic resources have been identified for this project, and no State or City-designated scenic corridors are located within the vicinity of the project. There are no views of the beach or Pacific Ocean from the project corridor.

The map below identifies the project area.

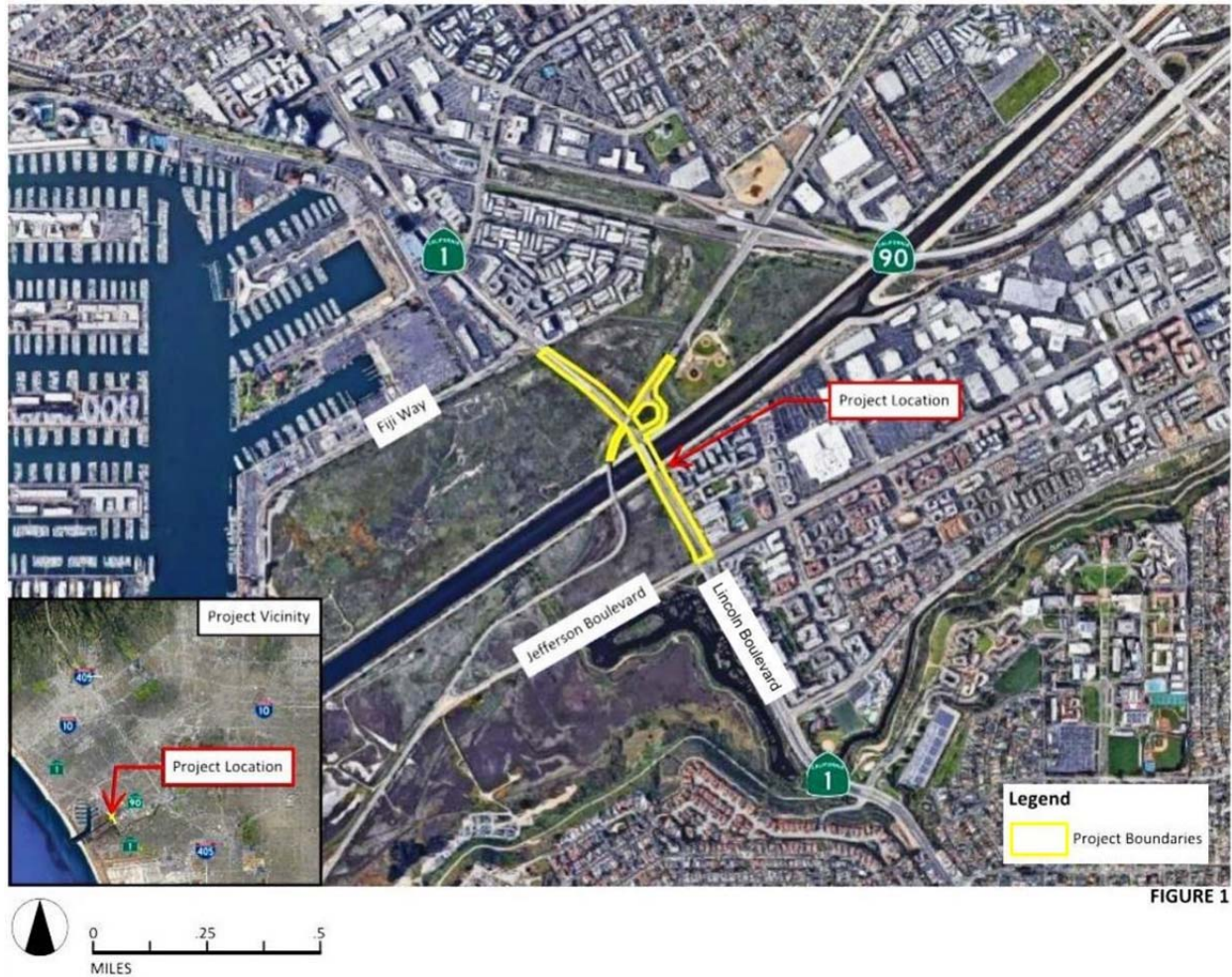


FIGURE 1: PROJECT AREA MAP – The project area consists of proposed roadway improvements for a 0.61 mile segment of State Route 1 (Lincoln Boulevard) between north of Jefferson Boulevard and south of Fiji Way.

VISUAL RESOURCES AND RESOURCE CHANGE

The project site's visual resources are defined below and are described in terms of the *visual character* and *visual quality* that occurs in the project corridor. *Resource change* is assessed by evaluating the visual character and the visual quality of the project corridor before and after construction of the project build alternative.

Visual character includes attributes such as form, line, color, texture, and is used to describe, not evaluate; that is these attributes are neither considered good nor bad. However, a change in visual character can be evaluated when it is compared with the viewer response to that change. Changes in visual character can be identified by how visually compatible a proposed project would be with the existing condition by 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 and hue), and Texture (surface coarseness).

As described in further detail in this VIA, the visual character of the proposed project under the build alternative will be mostly compatible with the existing visual character of the corridor.

The existing visual form of the project corridor consists of generally flat topography and surrounding environment, which consists of vegetated open spaces, existing roadway features, and residential and commercial development. As a result, visual mass within the project corridor is dominated by vegetation, pavement and bridges, with buildings as secondary objects contributing to the uniformity of the project's visual character. The proposed project build alternative would result in a slight increase in visual mass through the addition of pavement and reprofiling of the roadway, but overall the build alternative would have similar characteristics as the existing condition.

The existing alignment of Lincoln Boulevard is mostly linear from a bird's eye view and the same is true from a motorist's perspective at street level. The only occurrence where the highway turns slightly curvilinear is when it crosses under the Culver Boulevard Bridge. The buildings, other roadway components, trees that project perpendicularly from the surface, and the dividing line of vegetated open lands are also linear and bound by the edges of the roadway. In terms of how the proposed project improvements would interface with the existing visual character of line is concerned, the horizontal alignment would remain fairly consistent with the existing corridor's alignment, even where widening, adjustments to ramp alignments and raised elements would occur under the build alternative. Contrasts with the built environment would remain low, since the existing man-made structures, such as buildings, bridges, ramps, and even the vegetation from the existing highway landscaping, are mostly in a linear, perpendicular harmony with the highway and would remain so under the build alternative.

The existing colors that occur within the project corridor are consistent throughout the project corridor and, with the proposed build alternative would present the same experience to all viewer groups. Since the project corridor is situated in a generally urbanized environment, viewer groups would be expected to undergo the same exposure to artificial light at night. During the day, glare from reflective surfaces, such as windows from buildings and vehicles, is expected and intensifies when the direction and angle of sunlight changes, especially in hot summer months. The temporary removal of existing vegetation during project construction, especially mature shrubs and trees, and relocation of existing street lighting would create a new source of light and glare, but should diminish in time as replacement planting becomes established. Increased pavement surfaces would create the same level of glare because the same material and colors would be used to match the existing pavement. Colors that emanate from existing vegetation are predominately light to dark green and would remain the same after the proposed improvements are constructed. The project would not introduce any elements featuring colors or materials that are uniquely or substantially different than the existing condition.

The existing textural pattern of the project corridor has typical characteristics of an urban environment. These textures include: concrete and vegetation, the surface texture of building facades and bridge structures, the coarseness or smoothness of the road, and foliage from trees, shrubs, and groundcovers, are primary visual surface treatments used throughout the site. Of all the visual character attributes discussed, texture is expected to be altered the most, since the proposed improvements would introduce more hardened surface and remove some of the existing vegetation adjacent to the roadway, ramps, and interchange. Viewer groups would be exposed to more pavement, but are not expected to

be substantially impacted, based on the similarities between the proposed changes and the existing condition.

As with most roadway improvement projects, vegetation removal is expected to occur the most at locations where the highway would be widened and ramps realigned and at temporary staging, storage, and other work areas. The removal of existing vegetation adjacent to the roadway, where necessary, would contribute to changes in the visual character attributes discussed above. Alterations to the existing project corridor would remain fairly consistent with the existing corridor's visual character due to the continuity of form, line, color, and textural pattern that are typical in this urbanized setting.

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness, and unity present in the project corridor. Public attitudes validate the assessed level of quality and predict how changes to the project corridor can affect these attitudes. This process helps identify specific methods for addressing each visual impact that may occur as a result of the project. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality are defined as: Vividness (the extent to which the landscape is memorable and is associated with distinctive, contrasting, and diverse visual elements), Intactness (the integrity of visual features in the landscape and the extent to which the existing landscape is free from non-typical visual intrusions), and Unity (the extent to which all visual elements combine to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern).

The visual quality of the existing corridor will be slightly altered by the proposed project based on the information provided below.

The existing project corridor maintains a relatively flat topography and a consistent urban atmosphere. The immediate vision or perspective from the road is typically oriented to the foreground or areas directly adjacent to the roadway, consisting mostly of vegetated open spaces, structures (buildings/bridges), typical highway landscaping, and the channeled Ballona Creek. The project corridor's vividness is limited due to the lack of unique, memorable features common to scenic corridors. Undeveloped vegetated areas within the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve, vegetated buffer zone between residential and commercial developments and the roadway, and man-made structures dominate the visual elements of the project corridor. In terms of unity and intactness, the existing landform and land cover are both consistent throughout with few uncommon features present. Elements in view, such as the vegetated open spaces, transitional buffer zone separating residential and commercial buildings from the roadway are assembled together in a manner that does not create a disorganized appearance. Noticeable intrusions into the existing landscape include typical highway infrastructure, such as pavement and structures.

With implementation of the build alternative, vividness would remain mostly the same since the elements being proposed are typical in the project corridor. Intactness would be slightly impacted due to the widened and realigned ramps and roadways with additional sidewalks and bike lanes, and raised bridge profiles. These encroachments would cut into the existing ground plane and result in removal of some vegetation. Unity is manifested through similarities in land cover, dominated by vegetated open spaces that span the corridor in its entirety and man-made development. Since the proposed alterations to the project corridor would result in similar visual elements with the current condition, impacts to the existing visual quality's unity is not anticipated to be considerable and no new features uncommon to the site would be added. The implementation of the proposed improvements would generate expanded visibility of the "built" characteristics of the environment and would only contribute to the experience described above.

Resource Change (changes to visual resources as measured by changes in visual character and visual quality) would be moderate-low.

The proposed improvements would consist of realigning the roadway and on and off ramps, widening and raising the bridges, and installation of landscaping, street lighting, and signage to a built environment causing a change in visual mass through increased concrete and texture change from the removal of established vegetation. Changes to visual character in terms of line and color would remain low, due to similarities between the existing and proposed components' linear definition and reflective brightness that can be observed from the edges of structures and roadway alignment and reflection from the same components. Visual quality intactness would be impacted by intrusions from man-made components into the existing landscape, most notably from the new travel lane, widened/raised bridges, and roadway realignment. Changes to vividness and unity would remain low due to the lack of naturally occurring features. Although the improvements would be generally compatible with the existing corridor, implementation of these improvements would result in a moderate-low level of resource change, due to slight changes in visual character and visual quality.

VIEWERS AND VIEWER RESPONSE

Neighbors (people with views to the road) and *highway users* (people with views from the road) would be affected by the proposed project.

The viewer exposure for each type of viewer considered for this project is as follows:

- Neighbors consisting of local residents living in the Fountain Park Apartment Homes are viewers who would have the longest duration of viewer exposure to any visual changes caused by the proposed roadway improvements, due to their constant presence in the area. These users are stationary and in a position to view the changes in close proximity to their surrounding and would typically have a higher concern for the impacts caused to their views, based on the severity of changes. They observe the visual environment on a daily basis and for extended periods of time. Factors that limit their exposure to the proposed improvements include the landscape screening that acts as a buffer zone. Viewer exposure for this user group is moderate.
- Employees in Electronic Arts and LA Fitness commercial businesses and Playa Medical Plaza are not expected to be substantially impacted by the proposed roadway improvements, due to the time they spend indoors and their work activities. This highway neighbor group would be exposed mostly to the changes only when they travel to and from work, but in some cases, may be exposed to the proposed improvements through the windows in their buildings. Viewer exposure for this user group is low.
- Highway users consisting of commercial drivers, daily commuters, and tourists would have increased viewer exposure to structural changes to bridges, addition of hardened surfaces, and reduction in vegetation when their travel speeds are reduced by traffic. Without traffic, highway users would travel at constant driving speeds and focus their attention on their driving with shorter views of the built environment. The proposed improvements would not differ too much from the existing condition; therefore, motorists are not expected to drive through a completely different experience. Viewer exposure is low.

- Recreational users, such as bicyclists and people who use the Ballona Creek bike path and Ballona Wetlands trail, are particularly more exposed to the environment since they travel at a much slower pace than motorists and experience their surroundings for longer durations. This viewer group have views for longer periods of time than highway users but shorter than highway neighbors. Viewer exposure is moderate-low.

The viewer sensitivity for each type of viewer considered for this project is as follows:

- Neighbors in close proximity to the proposed roadway improvements would have the highest viewer sensitivity to the changes in existing visual resources, due to their familiarity with the area. This user group would be less preoccupied and be more engaged to see the proposed roadway improvements from their locations during construction and after completion. The improvements would be closer to their buildings due to the reduced landscape buffer zone. The majority would still be sensitive to the additions caused by the improvements, even though no major building structures are being removed and the project blends with the existing built environment. Viewer sensitivity is moderate.
- Highway users would have low viewer sensitivity, since they focus their attention on the road, traffic, and getting from one place to another. Couriers, for example, are preoccupied with important priorities that include timely arrival of deliveries, condition of the goods being delivered, and their safety, so they are more engaged with their planned destinations. Due to these priorities, they pay minimal attention to the surrounding environment, regardless of the range of views. In some cases where traffic congestion contributes to the length of time a view is observed, viewer sensitivity would remain the same since motorists have become familiarized with the built environment. This viewer group would experience the project corridor as one common view of the built environment and may not concentrate exclusively on specific improvements of the roadway. Even tourists traveling for pleasure are expected to have the same viewer sensitivity since the result of the proposed improvements would be consistent with the existing.
- Recreational users are anticipated to have low viewer sensitivity due to the types of activities in which they are involved. Bicyclists, for example, take regular routine trips, and when this occurs, their awareness become less specific and they become less sensitive to the changes. Trail users are expected to be more engaged in observing their surroundings since their path is predetermined. Their awareness is more concentrated and their appreciation for aesthetics is greater. Viewer sensitivity for this group still remains low since the proposed improvements are not expected to cause extreme changes to their viewing experience.

It is anticipated that the average response for neighbors would be moderate-low and highway users would be low.

VISUAL IMPACT

Visual impacts are determined by assessing changes to the visual resources under the proposed project, and predicting viewer response to those changes.

Based on the analysis provided under Visual Resources and Resource Change and Viewers and Viewer Response, the proposed improvements would present a low to moderate-low degree of alterations to

the existing visual character and visual quality due to similarities with the current condition of the project corridor. For this reason, the visual impacts of the Build Alternative would not severely change the existing condition of the environment. The primary viewers of the changes are motorists travelling on Lincoln Boulevard and neighbors consisting of residential and commercial users. Offsite views that include the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve and high buildings in the distance beyond the Lincoln Boulevard Bridge would not be obstructed by the proposed raising of the roadway profile and higher bridge structures. This is especially true for residents living in the upper levels of the Fountain Park Apartment Homes that have private coastal views. Their views would not be impaired since they are higher above the roadway and the distance of off-site views expands beyond the project limits. Due to the orientation and proximity of the proposed improvements to these viewers, highway neighbors are expected to be more exposed and sensitive to the changes due to the time they spend at their locations as opposed to highway travelers moving at constant speed.

Visual impacts resulting from temporary construction would occur throughout the construction period. Foreseeable construction activities include the use of dust control, temporary structures, hauling equipment, construction staging and/or laydown yards, and traffic detours. Night lighting would generally not be required since construction activities would occur between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. Limited nighttime lighting may be needed in construction staging areas but would be downcast and shielded to avoid spillover lighting to areas outside of the project construction limits and would be limited to the extent feasible. Impacts of construction night lighting to residential use areas are not expected since these areas have street lights and are not located in close proximity to construction staging areas. Even though the visual impacts from construction activities may be unavoidable to some extent to highway users and highway neighbors, avoidance and minimization would not be necessary due to the temporary nature of these impacts. Once construction is complete, permanent roadway planting and replacement planting measures would be implemented to reduce the impacts of construction.

The proposed project would not create adverse impacts on visual quality. Only minor adverse changes to the project setting, viewer exposure, and viewer awareness are anticipated under the build alternative. These minor changes would not constitute adverse impacts; therefore, the overall viewer response and visual quality are both considered moderate-low.

The no-build alternative would not cause visual impacts to neighbors or highway users because it involves no improvements, vegetation removal, or other alterations to the visual setting.

In consultation with Caltrans, one key view was selected. Key View #1 is viewed from Fountain Park Apartment Homes looking northwest. The existing view consists of a transitional buffer zone separating the complex from the roadway, open vegetated area belonging to the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve, and the Lincoln Boulevard Bridge. This key view was selected to best demonstrate potential changes to the project corridor's existing visual resources and represents the primary viewer group that would potentially be impacted by the proposed improvements. Table 1 summarizes and compares the narrative ratings for visual resource change, viewer response and visual impacts for the selected key view under the build and no-build alternatives.

TABLE 1 Summary of Key View Narrative Ratings by Alternative							
VISUAL ASSESSMENT UNIT	KEY VIEW	BUILD ALTERNATIVE			NO-BUILD ALTERNATIVE		
		Resource Change	Viewer Response	Visual Impact	Resource Change	Viewer Response	Visual Impact
Developed Land	1	Moderate Low	Moderate Low	Moderate Low	No Change	No Change	No Change

Refer to Figure 2 for selected key view location and visual simulation for the proposed condition.

AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES

Avoidance and minimization measures have been identified for the build alternative, which would lessen visual impacts that could result from the project and would be implemented with the concurrence of the Caltrans District Landscape Architect.

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

1. Damage to existing vegetation and established trees, especially mature vegetation, shall be minimized to the maximum extent feasible.
2. All existing landscaped areas that would be temporarily disturbed by project construction would receive replacement planting that is compatible with the existing landscape to remain where feasible. Vegetation mapping has been prepared for the Project, including temporary impact areas, and is provided in the Natural Environment Study (Psomas 2019). All proposed revegetation within temporary construction easement (TCE) areas would receive an appropriate non-invasive, native plant palette in consultation with each property owner. Revegetation that would occur within Caltrans right-of-way would be seeded with an appropriate erosion control seed mix, which would be coordinated with the District Landscape Architect. The proposed re-seeding of these temporarily impacted areas would minimize the impact of the roadway encroaching closer to the residence by softening the edge of the road and sidewalk and providing a continuous planting buffer that would blend in naturally with the existing landscape when fully matured. All proposed landscaping would conform to the latest Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance and applicable local ordinances.

Table 2 below summarizes the numbered avoidance and minimization measures from above for each alternative.

TABLE 2	
Summary of Avoidance and Minimization Measures by Alternative	
ALTERNATIVE	AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION
BUILD	1, 2
NO-BUILD	NONE

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the recommended avoidance and minimization measures in Table 2 is to reduce visual effects that would be caused by the project’s build alternative. Although common visual impacts associated with alteration to scale and increased pavement would remain, the recommended measures would allow the proposed improvements to integrate well into the existing landscape and ensure aesthetic compatibility with the surrounding environment. Even with the proposed improvements in place, the alignment and topography of the corridor would remain consistent with the existing highway’s condition and the project corridor’s existing urbanized setting would remain the same. As a result, the proposed build alternative would slightly alter the existing visual quality and visual character of the project corridor, resulting in a moderate-low visual impact.



STATE ROUTE 1 (LINCOLN BOULEVARD) MULTIMODAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

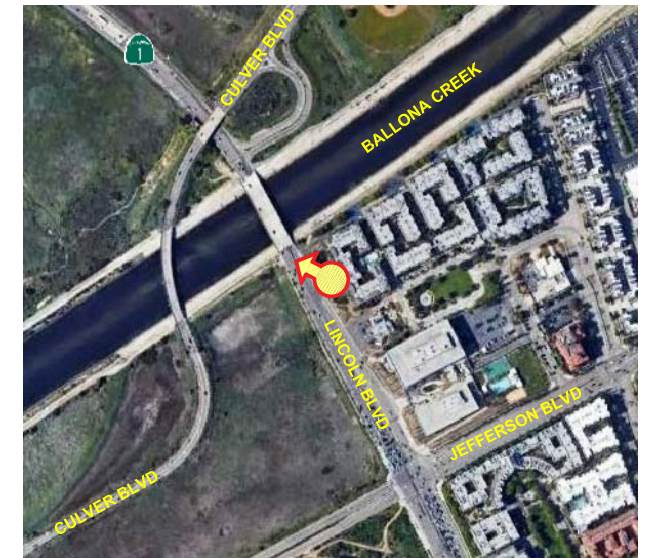
7-LA-1 PM 30.15/30.74, EFIS ID No. 0717000061, EA 33880

KEY VIEW #1

PROJECT AREA



KEY VIEW ENLARGEMENT



EXISTING CONDITION



BUILD ALTERNATIVE

LEGEND:

PROJECT AREA

PHOTO LOCATION & DIRECTION

FOUNTAIN PARK APARTMENT HOMES (Looking Northwest)

FIGURE 2



DATE: 9/6/2019