

# VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## Coastal Rail Trail – Gilman Drive Segment

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August 2018

### California Department of Transportation

District 11, San Diego County Oversight

Rose Creek Bikeway to UCSD

Prepared by:  Date: 8/15/18  
Michael Singleton  
KTUA Planning and Landscape Architecture  
California PLA 2386  
Project Landscape Architect

Approved by:  Date: 8/21/18

Caltrans District Landscape Architect  
San Diego  
District 11

*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

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### 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 if possible, recommend measures to lessen any detrimental impacts 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 *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in March 1981.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project is the Gilman Drive segment of the Coastal Rail Trail (CRT) that will follow Gilman Drive between University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and Rose Canyon Bikeway. It is approximately 1.8 miles long, and represents Segment 9 of the CRT Project Study Report. The site is located in an urban area of apartments and single-family homes. Undeveloped and naturalized areas are present on steeper, eroded slopes, and in a drainage that parallels Gilman Drive from Via Alicante to the I-5 freeway (at the base of the slope along the east side of the roadway). The site is located within the Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) of the City of San Diego's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) Subarea Plan. The proposed project includes a one-way protected cycle track on each side of Gilman Drive and a continuous sidewalk on the west side of Gilman Drive over a project distance of approximately 8,800 linear feet. The cycle track would be separated from vehicular traffic by either a raised median or on-street parking. To accommodate the cycle tracks, the project would include roadway widenings on the west side of Gilman Drive from Villa La Jolla Drive southerly to an existing private driveway (an approximate distance of 3,000 lf) and on the east side of Gilman Drive from Via Alicante to I-5 southbound off-ramp (an approximate distance of 4,500 lf). In addition to roadway widening, the project would include roadway re-striping, street lighting, replacement landscaping, retaining walls topped with cable railing, drainage improvements, bus stop improvements, and traffic signal modifications at the existing traffic signals at I-5, Via Alicante, Villa La Jolla Drive, and La Jolla Village Drive.

Retaining walls would be required on the west side of Gilman Drive from just north of Villa La Jolla Drive to Via Alicante (an approximate distance of 1,000 lf), from a point south of Via Alicante to a private driveway at La Jolla Hideaway private apartments (an approximate distance of 1,175 lf), and from south of Gilman Court (a driveway to the La Jolla Hideaway) to the new freeway entrance turn lanes (an approximate distance of 250 lf). The walls would be an average of 10 feet tall, with some points extending as high as 15 feet. Three-strand tension cable railings approximately three feet high would be installed at the top of each wall. The cables would be strung between metal posts spaced between four and ten feet apart. All the metal components of the railing would be stained with a rust-brown patina finish.

A new sidewalk would be constructed along the west side of Gilman Drive to connect existing sidewalk segments and create a continuous sidewalk along the entire west side. The sidewalks would be directly next to the proposed retaining walls. The sidewalks on the east side of Gilman Drive north of Via Alicante to La Jolla Village Drive would remain in place, and a new sidewalk would not be constructed on the east side of Gilman Drive south of Via Alicante.

Parallel parking would be protected along both sides of Gilman Drive most of the length between the La Jolla Village Drive ramps and Villa La Jolla Drive, and on the east side, south to Via Alicante. Additional parallel parking would be provided along the west side near the existing apartments and private driveways along the southern portion of the project. The parking spaces would be part of the buffer between the cycle track and vehicular traffic. In these areas, the raised buffer would not be constructed, rather the cycle track and parking would be separated by a striped buffer.

Street lighting would be provided along Gilman Drive along the length of the project. The lighting would be installed per City of San Diego street lighting standards, with light standards on both sides of the street at 300-foot intervals. The lighting would be fully shielded to not shine in adjacent houses or undeveloped areas, and would conform to dark sky glare reduction standards. New street lights would be similar in appearance to existing lights (existing lights can be seen in some of the Candidate Key Views shown in Figures 4a through 4c).

Two existing bus stops on the east side of Gilman Drive (northbound) at the north sides of Villa La Jolla and Evening Way would be shifted to become “floating” bus stops. The stop shelter would be moved into the buffer area between the bike lane and the traffic lanes, and busses would stop in the right-hand lane to pick up passengers. A raised curb buffer would be placed on either side of the bus stop passenger waiting area. The bus stops on the west (southbound) side of Gilman Drive would remain at the sidewalk, and busses would pull into the cycle track area to pick up passengers.

Green paint and striping would highlight the cycle track at intersections and bus stops. Raised buffers also would be constructed on either side of driveway intersections where the cycle track is separated from driving lanes by painted stripes. The traffic signals at Villa La Jolla would be shifted to accommodate the project, and new signals would be added at Via Alicante and La Jolla Village Drive eastbound ramps. **Figure 1a** shows the proposed project alignment on an aerial map of the project area. **Figure 1b** illustrates cross-sections of the proposed roadway and cycle track alignments.

## **PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING**

The project location and setting provides the context for comparing the type of changes with the existing visual environment. The proposed project is located along Gilman Drive between I-5 and La Jolla Village Drive in the City of San Diego. The project area is part of the mid-coastal region of San Diego County, which is characterized by mesas and canyons bordered by steep slopes. The existing setting of the proposed project is a meeting point of suburban and natural areas, where residential development is interspersed with riparian and steep canyon slope open spaces and undeveloped areas. Gilman Drive in the project area is located along one side of a canyon. The southern portion of the canyon is mostly undeveloped, and native and naturalized vegetation are visually prominent along the canyon bottom and adjacent slopes, except for a small area along where a residential development is nestled into cut slopes above Gilman Drive on the west. Along most of the rest of the project area, residential development is located at the top of the slopes to the west, and is not highly visible from Gilman Drive. The steep slopes bordering the west side of Gilman Drive support areas of dense vegetation with some exposed and eroded soils visible. Along the northern half of the project area, north of Via Alicante, dense residential development is located bordering Gilman Drive on the east side. This multi-family residential development is visually prominent, and characterized by houses, apartments, or townhouses clustered between ornamental vegetation, lawns, driveways, and the occasional retaining wall. The residential areas extend southward along the top of the mesa east of the project area, and are not highly visible from Gilman Drive, except for the large trees edging the top of the slope.

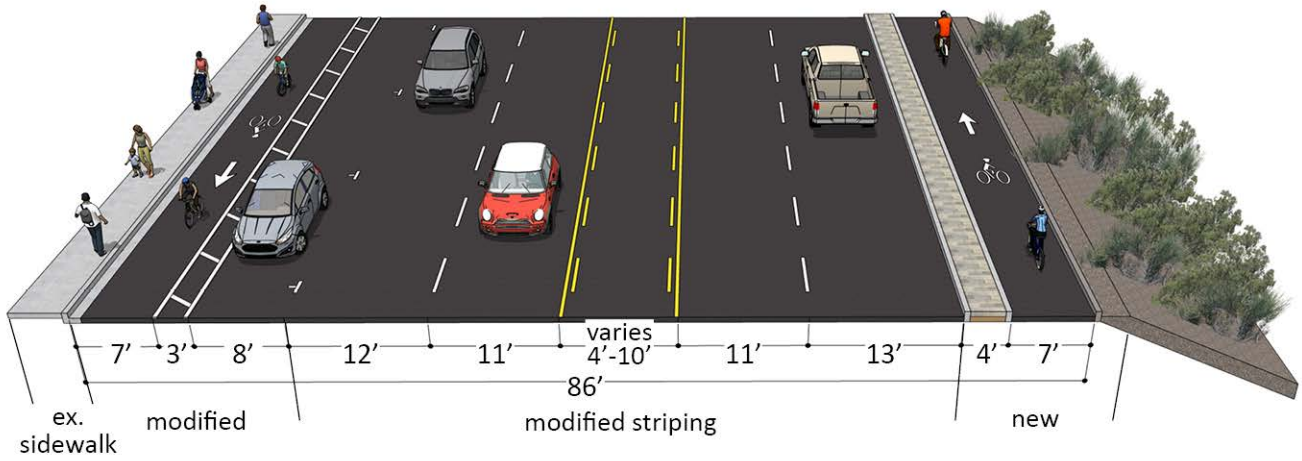


Figure 1a - Proposed Project Alignment

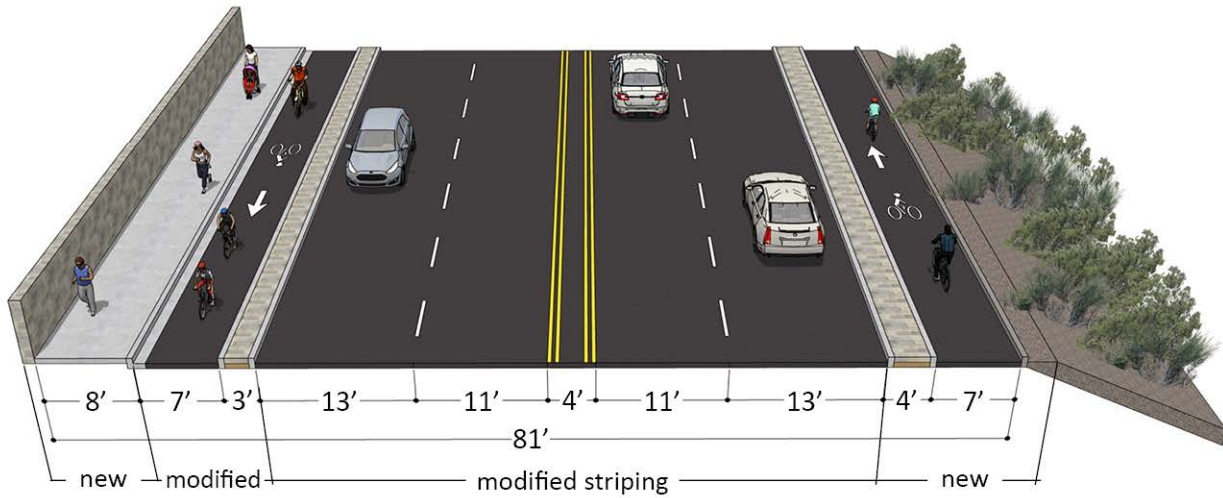




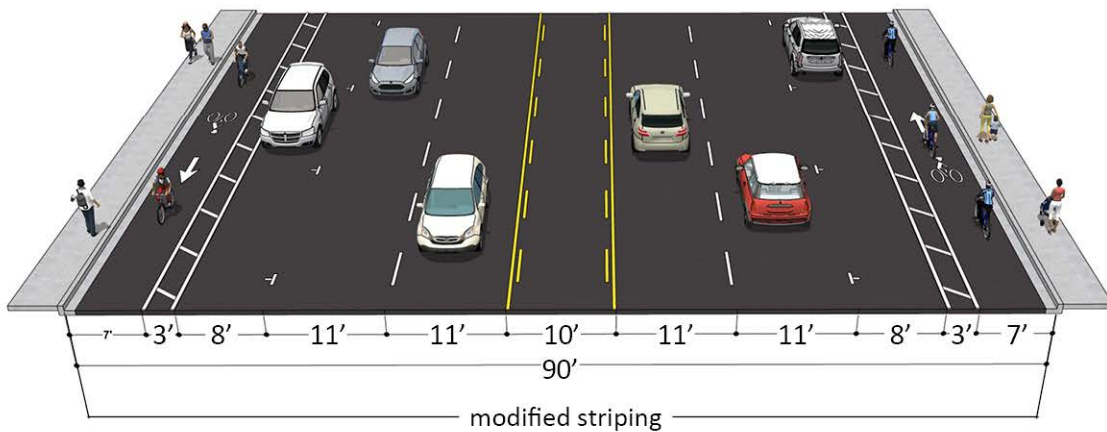
**Figure 1b - Proposed Project Sections**



**Section A-a**



**Section B-b**



**Section C-c**

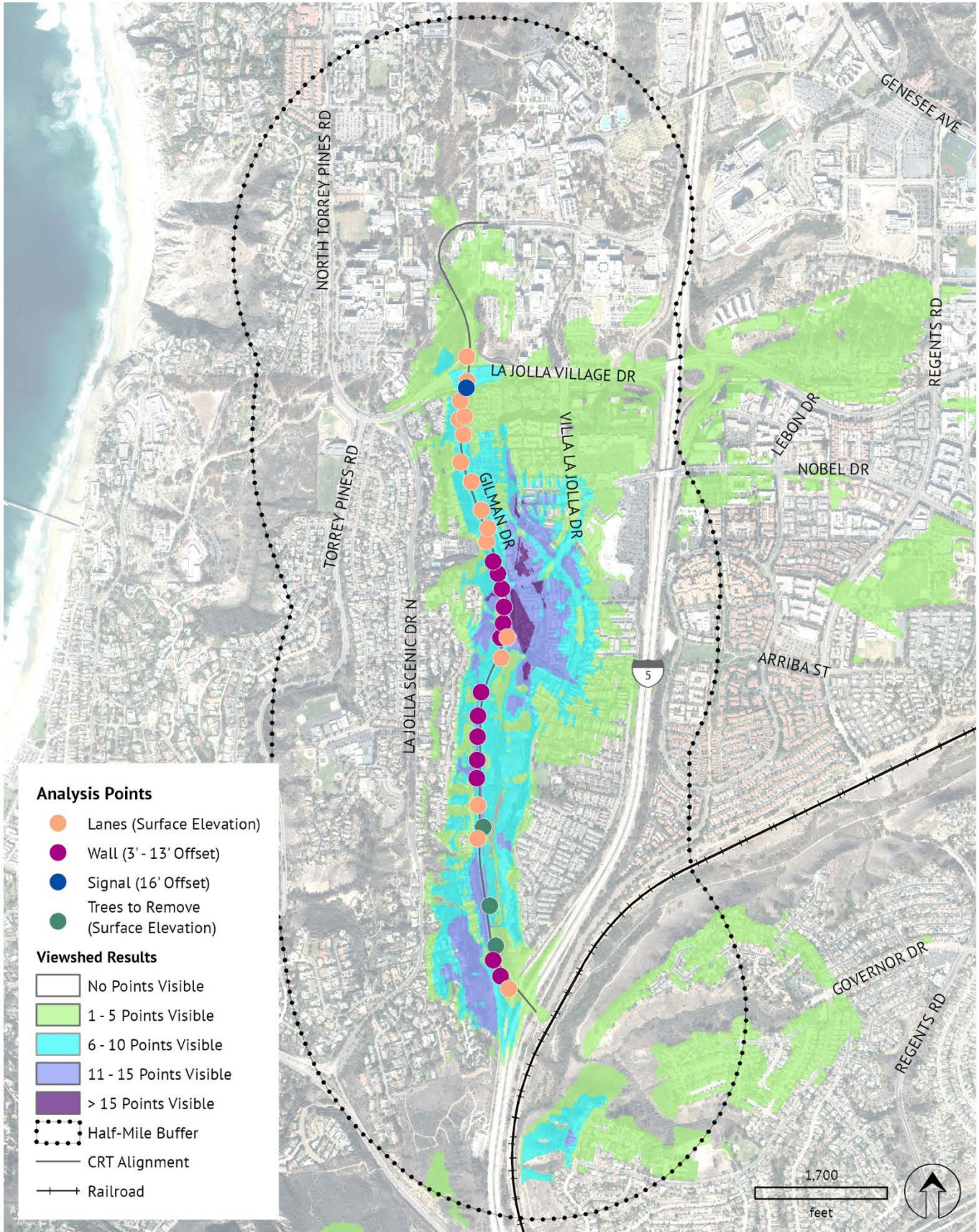
## VIEWSHED

A viewshed can be used to further define the project setting, show where viewers of the proposed project are present, and aid in the analysis of potential visual impacts. The viewshed for this project was developed using a theoretical model developed utilizing Digital Elevation Models (DEM). These DEM files consist of x, y and z data (north-south, east-west and elevational data) representing an area 10 meters by 10 meters per data point. This analysis is considered a theoretical limit since it only takes into account the position of the viewer, the location of the element being viewed, and the intervening topography. It does not analyze the effects of trees, buildings, or other structures that can severely limit the visibility of proposed elements. It also does not account for the effects of distance on the visibility of these elements. It does, however, represent the worst-case visibility of prominent project elements. In reality, intervening uses, structures, and plant materials, as well as distance, can affect the overall significance of visual impacts.

The project team produced a viewshed analysis for points representing proposed surface elements, walls, signals, and vegetation that would be removed by the proposed project. Each type of project element analysis point was assigned a relative elevation, from flat to the existing ground (lanes and curb buffers, as well as vegetation that will be removed), to 3 to 14 feet for the top of proposed walls, and 16 feet for the new proposed signal at Gilman Drive and La Jolla Village Drive eastbound ramps. The resulting map (**Figure 2**) shows which areas within approximately ½ mile from the project improvements along Gilman Drive would have views toward one or more of the project element analysis points. Most of the shaded areas within the half-mile buffer would see five or fewer project elements, while some areas within 0.25 mile from the site would see 11 or more of the proposed project elements. As shown by the viewshed analysis, the slopes on the east and west side of the canyon along which Gilman Drive and the proposed project extend limit views of the project site, and consequently would limit views of the proposed project elements. Most of the areas that would see 6 to 10 elements are the slopes themselves, which are not accessible to viewers. The residential area adjacent to the southwestern portion of the site, overlooks the southern proposed elements and would therefore see more points. Similarly, at Via Alicante and Villa La Jolla the topography of the area is flatter and similar in elevation to the project site. The proposed elements therefore would be more highly visible from these points where structures and vegetation would not shield views. It should be noted that the proposed project would be located along a roadway below I-5, and in a canyon, and only a few features of the project would be visible from approximately 1,500 feet of the freeway (just over 0.25 mile).



Figure 2 - Viewshed

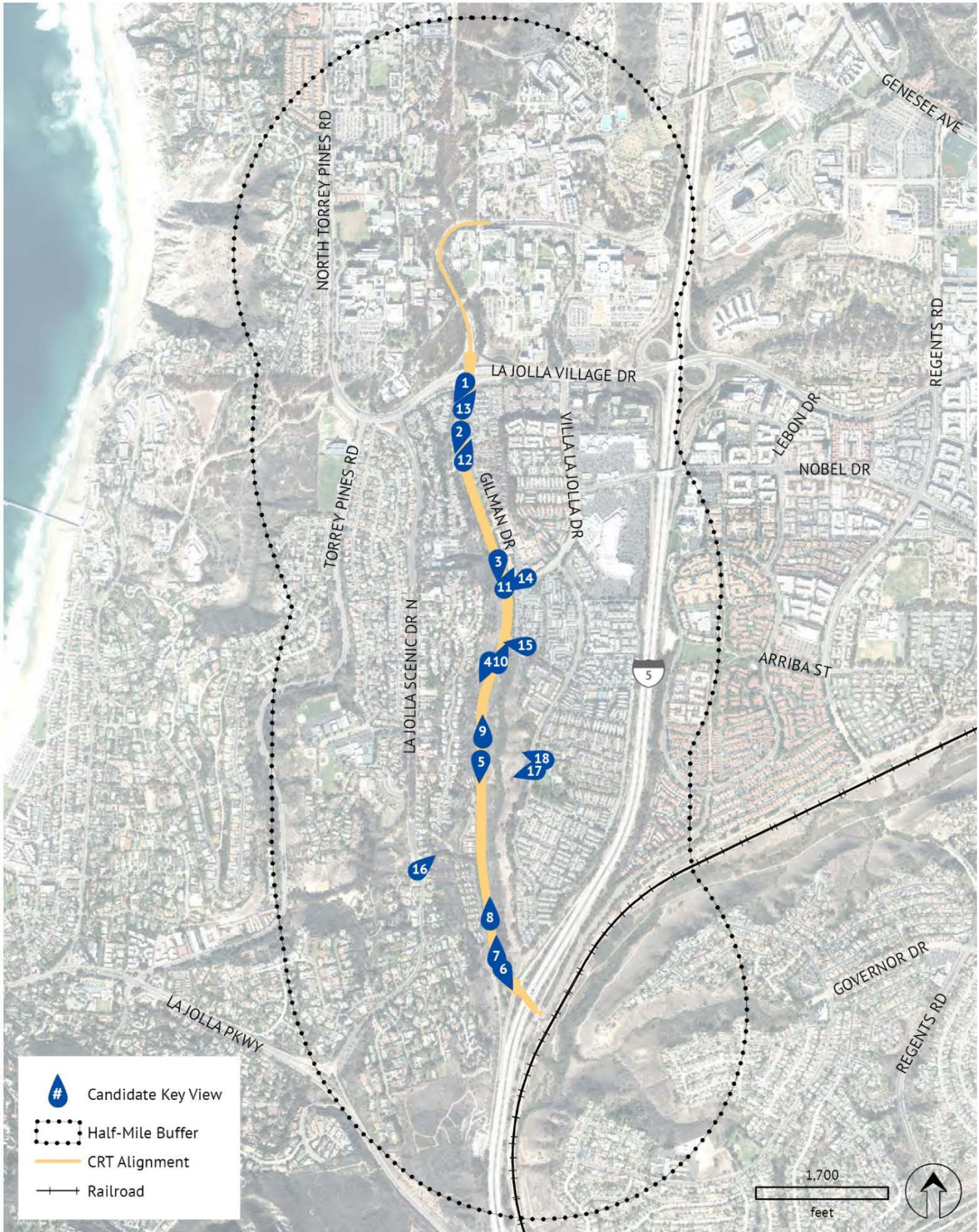


## CANDIDATE KEY VIEWS

To further describe the project location and refine the anticipated change to the visual resources, this analysis discusses selected key views that most clearly display the existing visual environment. **Figure 3** is a map showing where these Candidate Key Views were taken. The key views also are representative of a high number of sensitive viewers. As such, each is a candidate view for visual simulations. **Table 1**, which follows the map figure, is a summary of the visual character and quality of the views, the viewer groups present and their anticipated response, as well as the project elements that may be seen. The table also aids in the selection of Candidate Key Views to simulate. Three Candidate Key Views have been selected to simulate, as indicated in the table and by red outlines on the photograph figure. Photographs of the Key Views are shown in Figures **4a** through **4c**.



Figure 3 - Candidate Key View Location Map



Key View #	Photo Location	Project Feature Potentially Visible	Distance from Viewer	Existing Visual Quality	Viewer Groups	Viewer Response	View Duration	Recommended for Simulation?
1	La Jolla Village Drive eastbound off ramp at Gilman Drive southbound, looking south	New signal, realigned bike lane, parking, and sidewalk	Fore, middle, and background	Moderate: mostly roadway with slopes and vegetation bordering	Motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians	Moderately High	Very brief (motorists) to several minutes (pedestrians)	No
2	Southbound Gilman Drive at Caminito Viva	Realigned bike lane, dividers at driveway, parking, sidewalk, new retaining wall	Fore, middle, and background (wall)	Moderate: mostly roadway with slopes and vegetation bordering	Motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians	Moderately High	Very brief (motorists) to several minutes (pedestrians)	No
3	Southbound Gilman Drive approaching Villa La Jolla Drive	Realigned bike lane, new sidewalk, new retaining wall, shifted traffic signal	Fore, middle, and background	Moderate: mostly roadway with slopes and vegetation bordering	Motorists, bicyclists	Moderately High	Brief	Yes
4	Southbound Gilman Drive south of Via Alicante	Realigned bike lane, new sidewalk, southern end of new retaining wall, shifted traffic signal	Fore, middle, and background	Moderate: mostly roadway with slopes and vegetation bordering	Motorists, bicyclists	Moderately High	Brief	No
5	Southbound Gilman Drive approaching residences north of I-5	Realigned bike lane, new sidewalk, new retaining wall	Fore, middle, and background	Moderate: mostly roadway with slopes and vegetation bordering	Motorists, bicyclists	Moderately High	Brief	Yes
6	Southbound Gilman Drive at I-5 southbound on-ramp intersection	Realigned bike lane and traffic lanes, new sidewalk configuration, crossings	Fore, middle, and background	Moderate: mostly roadway and bordering vegetation	Motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians	Moderately High	Very brief (motorists) to several minutes (pedestrians)	No



Key View #	Photo Location	Project Feature Potentially Visible	Distance from Viewer	Existing Visual Quality	Viewer Groups	Viewer Response	View Duration	Recommended for Simulation?
	Northbound Gilman Drive near Park and Ride and residences north of I-5	Trees that may be removed, realigned bike path and traffic lanes	Fore and middle ground	Moderate, mostly the roadway and existing vegetation, along with existing residences	Motorists, bicyclists	Moderately High	Brief	No
8	Northbound Gilman Drive near undeveloped area	Trees to be removed, realigned bike path and traffic lanes	Fore and middle ground	Moderately High. Mostly the roadway but also Slopes and undeveloped areas	Motorists, bicyclists	Moderately High	Brief	Yes
9	Northbound Gilman Drive near undeveloped area	Realigned bike path and traffic lanes, potentially a portion of wall on west side	Fore, middle, and background (wall)	Moderately High. Mostly the roadway but also Slopes and undeveloped area	Motorists, bicyclists	Moderately High	Brief	No
10	Northbound Gilman Drive approaching Via Alicante	Realigned bike path, new right-turn lane, shifted traffic signal	Fore and middleground	Moderately High. Roadway, undeveloped area, residential areas in the background	Motorists, bicyclists	Moderately High	Brief	No
11	Northbound Gilman Drive just north of Villa La Jolla Drive	Realigned bike path, shifted bus stop and parking	Fore and middleground	Moderately High. Roadway and suburban residential areas along with ornamental vegetation and trees	Motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, residences	Moderately High	Very brief (motorists) to several minutes (pedestrians)	No
12	Northbound Gilman Drive at Caminito Viva	Realigned bike lane and parking	Fore, middle, and background	Moderately High. Roadway and suburban residential areas along with ornamental vegetation and trees	Motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, residences	Moderately High	Very brief (motorists) to several minutes (pedestrians)	No
13	Northbound Gilman Drive approaching La Jolla Village Drive	Realigned bike lane and right turn lane, new traffic signal	Fore, middle, and background	Moderately High. Roadway and suburban residential areas along with ornamental vegetation and trees	Motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, residences	Moderately High	Very brief (motorists) to several minutes (pedestrians)	No

Key View #	Photo Location	Project Feature Potentially Visible	Distance from Viewer	Existing Visual Quality	Viewer Groups	Viewer Response	View Duration	Recommended for Simulation?
14	Westbound Villa La Jolla Drive approaching Gilman Drive	New retaining wall, shifted traffic signal	Middleground	Moderately High: suburban roadway, houses, and ornamental vegetation	Bicyclists, pedestrians, and residents	Moderately High	Brief to several minutes	No
15	Westbound Via Alicante approaching Gilman Drive	Southern end of retaining wall, shifted traffic signal	Middleground	Moderately High: suburban roadway, houses, and ornamental vegetation	Bicyclists, pedestrians, and residents	Moderately High	Brief to several minutes	No
16	Eastward view from empty lots off La Jolla Scenic Drive, east of above residences north of I-5	Bike lanes	Middleground	Moderately High: includes mostly Slopes and undeveloped areas	Motorists, Pedestrians	Moderately High	Brief to several minutes	No
17	Westward view from sidewalk west side of Via Mallorca at Villa La Jolla Park, across Gilman Drive from northern residences north of I-5	New retaining wall	Middleground	Moderately High: includes mostly Slope and undeveloped areas	Pedestrians, Residents	Moderately High	Several minutes	No
18	Westward view from high point in Villa La Jolla Park	New retaining wall	Background	High: includes mostly park land and vegetation	Residents, Pedestrians	Moderately High	Several minutes	No



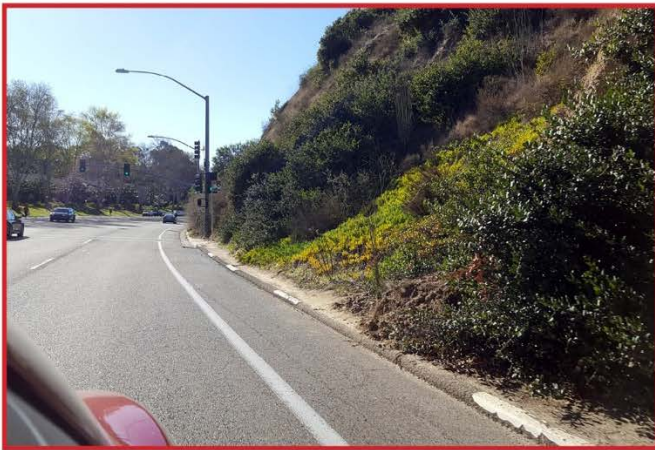
**Figure 4a - Candidate Key Views**



**Candidate Key View 1**  
*Southward view from La Jolla Village Dr. ramp at Gilman Dr.*



**Candidate Key View 2**  
*Southward view at Caminito Viva (private drive)*



**Candidate Key View 3**  
*Southward view approaching Villa La Jolla Drive*



**Candidate Key View 4**  
*Southward view south of Via Alicante*



**Candidate Key View 5**  
*Southward view approaching residences north of I-5*



**Candidate Key View 6**  
*Southward near I-5 entrance*

Note: Red outline of the key view indicates it is recommended for simulation



**Figure 4b - Candidate Key Views**



**Candidate Key View 7**  
*Northward from near Park and Ride and residences north of I-5*



**Candidate Key View 8**  
*Northward near open space*



**Candidate Key View 9**  
*Northward near open space*



**Candidate Key View 10**  
*Northward approaching Via Alicante*



**Candidate Key View 11**  
*Northward at bus stop north of Villa La Jolla*



**Candidate Key View 12**  
*Northward at Caminito Viva*

Note: Red outline of the key view indicates it is recommended for simulation



**Figure 4c - Candidate Key Views**



**Candidate Key View 13**  
*Northward approaching La Jolla Village Dr.*



**Candidate Key View 14**  
*Westward from Villa La Jolla Dr. approaching Gilman Dr.*



**Candidate Key View 15**  
*Westward on Via Alicante approaching Gilman Dr.*



**Candidate Key View 16**  
*Eastward view from empty lot on La Jolla Scenic Dr.*



**Candidate Key View 17**  
*Westward from sidewalk west side of Via Mallorca at Villa La Jolla Park*



**Candidate Key View 18**  
*Westward view from high point in Villa La Jolla Park*

Note: Red outline of the key view indicates it is recommended for simulation

## VISUAL RESOURCE AND RESOURCE CHANGE

Visual resources of the project setting are defined and identified below 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.

The features of the proposed project that may affect the visual environment include shifted roadway features (lane reconfiguration and striping; curbed buffers; new sidewalks; shifted and new traffic signals; shifted parking spaces; and reconfigured bus stops); new street lighting; vegetation removal; grading; and retaining walls. To aid the evaluation, the proposed changes are shown in the three Key Views recommended for simulation. The changes to visual resources and potential viewer responses are discussed following the simulations presented here. The most prominent of the project elements would be the retaining walls topped with cable railing that would be required along portions of the west side of Gilman Drive and the removal of a few mature trees along the east side of Gilman Drive. The other project features would be visible changes, but would introduce into the project environment elements that are similar in appearance to the elements and features that comprise the visual environment.

### SIMULATIONS

The three key views chosen to simulate the proposed project represent areas along Gilman Drive where the most prominent proposed features would be visible, as well as where the most viewers are present. Each of the views was taken from a moving vehicle on Gilman Drive, and represents both motorists and cyclists views. Simulation 1 at Key View 3 (**Figure 5**), represents an area where a new sidewalk and retaining wall would be placed, as well as a bus stop configuration. Simulation 2, Key View 5 (**Figure 6**), represents an area that would have similar features, and has existing parallel parking that would be shifted due to the new project. Simulation 3, Key View 8 (**Figure 7**) shows one of the trees that would be removed by the proposed project east of Gilman Drive near the existing undeveloped area, as well as new asphalt and lanes shifted eastward to accommodate the new cycle track.

#### Simulation 1, Key View 3

Key View 3 is a southbound view along Gilman Drive just north of Villa La Jolla Drive. Steep slopes covered with a variety of shrubs and ground cover rise to the viewer's right. The traffic signal, light post, and bus stop in the middle ground of the photograph are located on the west side of Gilman Drive at the end of Villa La Jolla Drive. The slopes, trees, and vegetation in the background are located along the east side of Gilman Drive, bordering the residential area just south of Villa La Jolla Drive. The roofs of these houses are visible as well.

The proposed project features are modeled and overlaid onto Key View 3 in Simulation 1 (**Figure 5**). The proposed project would extend the existing sidewalk north of Villa La Jolla Drive on the west side of Gilman Drive southward to the existing bus stop and crosswalk visible in Key View 3, and then continues southward to meet an existing sidewalk near the residences along the west side of Gilman, near I-5. The steep slopes in the area near Key View 3 would be cut to create the flat area for the sidewalk, and a retaining wall would be placed behind the sidewalk, to the viewer's right. The wall would be a soil-nail wall with a faux-rock face finish, colored to match the existing soil. It would be approximately 10 feet tall in this area. A three-foot tall, three-strand metal cable railing with metal posts would be placed along the top of the wall. All the metal components of the railing would be finished with a rust-brown patina. The existing shrubs and ground cover over the slope would be removed, and any slopes and grading required above the wall would be revegetated, although that vegetation would not be visible from this viewpoint.



At this location along Gilman Drive, the southbound cycle track would be placed in approximately the same location as the existing bike lane, which is delineated in the existing photograph by the solid white line in front of and on the viewer's right. The cycle track would be one foot wider than the existing bike lane, although this difference may not be highly noticeable. The curbed separation of the cycle track from the traffic lanes would end approximately at the point where the picture was taken. Stripes would delineate the cycle track southward to the intersection, and the curbed separation would begin again south of the intersection.

The bus stop on the west side of Gilman Drive at Villa La Jolla, currently marked only with a small sign, would be replaced at the new sidewalk in the same location as the existing stop. A bus would pull into the bike lane at the stop. To raise driver and bicyclist awareness of the potential conflict zone, the cycle track bike lane would be painted green for approximately 25 feet approaching the cross walk. The existing crosswalk also would be restriped with zebra crossing-style stripes. Additionally, the existing signal and street light would be shifted to not conflict with the sidewalk or bike lane.

The traffic lane configurations also would be shifted on the east side of Gilman Drive, south of Villa La Jolla, in the far middle ground and background of this photograph. The proposed improvements would occur within the existing road footprint on the east side in this area, and would not be highly visible from this key view location.

The changes represented in Simulation 1 at Key View 3 would be visible to motorists and cyclists traveling southbound who would be the largest viewer group at this location. Pedestrians are not present in a large number, since there is no sidewalk here. Pedestrians access the bus stop at this location, and would have a similar view as motorists and cyclists, but for a longer duration. The proposed sidewalk would accommodate more pedestrians.

Figure 5 - Simulation 1 (Candidate Key View 3)



Candidate Key View 3  
Existing Conditions



Location Map



Simulated Conditions

## Simulation 2

Key View 5 is also a southbound view from Gilman Drive, and shows existing slopes and vegetation on the west of the street as well. This view was taken farther south, near the northernmost of the existing residences on the west side of Gilman Drive. Not many of the houses in this area are visible in this key view, but the sidewalk and vegetation in front of them can be seen in the far middle ground and background. The existing southbound bike path, which is delineated by a white stripe, extends along the western (right) side of the road. Parallel parking is allowed along the stretch of Gilman Drive in front of the residences, and the bike lane is aligned on the traffic side of the parked cars. Several driveways intersect with Gilman Drive in this area, although they are not distinct in this photograph. The left-turn arrows in the median are an indication of where they occur. Distant hillsides south of and beyond the study area comprise the background of the photograph, and some trees and vegetation growing in the undeveloped area to the east of Gilman Drive are also visible.

The proposed project elements are overlaid onto Key View 5 in Simulation 2, **Figure 6**. As shown in this simulation, the proposed sidewalk along the west side of Gilman Drive would connect to the existing sidewalk in the middle ground of Key View 5, and would require cutting into the steep slopes on the viewer's right. A retaining wall also would be required here, and would be approximately between 3 and 15 feet high. This wall also would be a soil-nail wall with a faux rock finish in a color similar to the existing soil. A three-foot tall, three-strand metal cable railing with metal posts would be placed along the top of the wall. All the metal components of the railing would be finished with a rust-brown patina.

Some of the vegetation near the viewer would be removed to accommodate the new sidewalk, cycle track, and wall, and the graded areas at the top of the wall would be revegetated, although the new vegetation would not be noticeable from this location. The residential area behind the wall supports trees and shrubs that would not be disturbed, which would become more visible.

The proposed cycle track would be aligned at approximately the same location as the existing bike lane on the viewer's immediate right, then would angle slightly westward to be aligned where the parallel parking is currently located next to the new and the existing sidewalk. The proposed project would continue to allow parallel parking in this area, although the parking spaces would be shifted to the street side of the cycle track. Curbed buffers would separate the cycle track from the traffic lane near the wall, with bulb-outs at driveway cuts. Where parking is allowed, a striped buffer would separate the parking from the cycle track. The striping would not be highly visible from this photograph location. The new alignment would also require shifting the signs and light poles in this area.

Because of the addition of the buffer area between the cycle track and the traffic lanes, all of the lanes and the median along this stretch of Gilman Drive would be shifted to the east (the viewer's left). The northbound cycle track also would extend the road surface to the east. However, this change would not be highly noticeable from this angle.

Most of the viewers in this location are motorists and bicyclists. Pedestrians and residents are nearby, slightly south of the point where the view was taken. The proposed extension of the sidewalk northward would accommodate more pedestrians to the north of the residences.



Figure 6 - Simulation 2 (Candidate Key View 5)



Candidate Key View 5  
Existing Conditions



Location Map



Simulated Conditions

### Simulation 3

Key View 8 is a northbound view from the east side of Gilman Drive. The canyon bottom east of the roadway is prominent in this photograph, on the viewer's right. The canyon and the slope east of it comprise half the photograph. The other half shows the roadway, and in the background, some of the residences west of Gilman Drive, along with the existing trees growing behind and above them. In the center of the view is a large eucalyptus tree growing at the eastern shoulder of Gilman Drive, approximately 250 feet north of a group of trees. The eucalyptus is a unique and prominent element in the visual environment of the key view.

The proposed project cycle track, curb buffer, and lane configuration is overlaid onto Key View 8 in Simulation 3, **Figure 7** illustrates proposed features that would be visible in Key View 8. The proposed project would widen the roadway by approximately 10 feet to the east, and the existing lanes would shift eastward as well. The proposed cycle track would be aligned approximately at the eastern shoulder of the existing roadway, directly through the location of the existing eucalyptus tree. This would require the removal of the tree.

No retaining walls are proposed in the area visible in Key View 8. The slopes east of Gilman that descend to the canyon bottom would be regraded, and the proposed project would replace lost vegetation and place it onto the newly graded slopes.

Changes to the parking and cycle track on the west side of the road would not be prominent in this view. Most of the viewers in this location are northbound motorists and cyclists. There is no sidewalk along the southern portion of the east side of Gilman Drive, and none is proposed in this location either.



**Figure 7 - Simulation 3 (Candidate Key View 8)**



**Candidate Key View 8**  
*Existing Conditions*

**Location Map**



**Simulated Conditions**

## **VISUAL CHARACTER**

The visual character of the proposed project generally will be compatible with the existing visual character of the corridor, with the exception of the proposed lighting along a portion of the corridor, which would not be compatible in with the existing visual character of the corridor.

### **Shifted Roadway Features**

The majority of the proposed project roadway features would not create a highly noticeable change in the visual environment of the project area. The reconfigured lanes, shifted parking, replaced signals and signs, and newly striped areas would not remove any characteristic features. The shifted roadway features would be visually similar to the existing features in form, line, and texture. The new green paint at key points along the cycle track would be a different color feature than currently exists, but would be compatible with the visual environment overall. The shifted roadway features would not create a high visual contrast with the existing visual character of the corridor.

### **Retaining Walls**

As shown in the simulations, the walls would be noticeable and would represent a contrasting new element in the views along the west side of Gilman Drive, especially southbound views. The walls also would be visible in Candidate Key Views 2, 13, and 14, and in areas shown as falling within the project viewshed (Figure 2). The walls would be flatter, more vertical, and more linear than the natural slopes against which they would be placed. They also would have less color and texture variation than the existing vegetation on those slopes. However, the proposed faux rock texture and color similar to existing soil would ensure that they are compatible with the existing visual environment. The cable railing that would be installed at the top of each wall would not be highly visible because the metal components, such as the vertical support posts and the three tension wires, would be finished with a rust-brown patina which would minimize the potential visible contrast that shiny metal-colored fences would otherwise introduce into the visual environment. Thin cables and sparsely spaced posts also would ensure that the railings would not be highly visible nor highly contrasting. The change to the visual character of the corridor would be moderate due to the introduction of the retaining walls.

### **Grading and Vegetation Removal**

The grading that would be required to accommodate the expansion of the roadway on either side would not be highly noticeable. The grading above the proposed retaining walls would be above viewers primary focus, and the grading along the east side of the roadway would be below viewers' normal viewing perception. The exposed soil may be somewhat noticeable when first constructed, but the angle of viewing and the project's proposed revegetation of the exposed slope areas would reduce the visibility of exposed slopes. The required removal of vegetation may be more noticeable than the resulting exposed slopes. Vegetation would be removed along both side of Gilman Drive, but would be most noticeable in the southern portion of the project area where some mature trees along the east side of Gilman Drive would be removed.

Grading, therefore, would not cause a change to the visual character of the corridor. Vegetation removal, however, would reduce the dominant green, textured vegetation masses that create continuity along the corridor. The noticeable removal of trees would cause a moderately high level of change to the visual character of the southeastern portion of the corridor. For example, a few prominent large trees along the eastern edge of the southern portion of Gilman Drive would be removed, as represented in Simulation 3, Figure 7.



## **Street Lighting**

The proposed project would include new street lighting along the length of Gilman Drive beyond what currently exists. The new lights, following City of San Diego Street Lighting standards, would be placed every 300 feet, on alternating sides of the roadway. The objective would be to create a uniformly lit roadway, with no light spillage into undeveloped and residential areas.

New light standards placed along the corridor would be similar in style, size, and brightness to the existing lighting standards. In this way, they would be visually compatible with the visual character (form, line, color, and texture) of the developed areas along the corridor.

However, the placement of light standards along the southeastern stretch of the corridor would introduce tall, vertical man-made feature that would contrast with the existing views of undeveloped areas. Refer to Simulation 3, Figure 7 for an illustration of the proposed lighting fixtures next to the undeveloped areas. At night, the color and brightness of the new lights would highly contrast with the existing dark undeveloped areas. Shielding and cut-offs would reduce any spill-over into undeveloped areas, which would lessen the potential for a negative impact in those areas at night, however, the poles would still be visible in the daytime, and in the southeastern portion of the corridor the proposed project lighting would highly contrast with the existing visual character.

## **VISUAL QUALITY**

### **Shifted Roadway Features**

Due to the similar visual character of the shifted roadway features, this aspect of the proposed project also would not create a high level of change in the vividness, intactness, or unity of the project corridor. The widened roadway, new curbs, and realigned fixtures may create more unity, as shown in the visual simulations above, by providing more cohesion and overall compositional harmony. The resulting intactness also would not change, and the vividness of the area also would remain the same, since the shifted roadway features and new curbs and sidewalks would not introduce new memorable components.

### **Retaining Walls**

The new retaining walls would contrast with and be less visually interesting than the vegetated slopes they would replace. Several factors, however, would reduce their contrast and negative aesthetic and contribute to greater intactness and unity. The retention and replacement of vegetation on the slopes that would remain above the walls, and the proposed faux rock texture that would partly mimic the color and texture of the exposed soil in the areas where the walls would be placed. This treatment would create some continuity between the new features and the existing visual environment, ensuring a low change to the visual unity of the area. The walls, although tall, would not be highly memorable features or create distinct patterns, therefore the change to the vividness of the area would only be moderate. The wall treatments would ensure that they would not encroach on the visual integrity of the area and would not create a high level of change to the intactness of the area. Similarly, the rust-brown patina on the proposed cable railing at the top of each wall would ensure that the railings would not visually contrast with the surrounding area. The color and texture of the walls would also lower the chance of graffiti, which if it were to occur, would bring a much higher level of contrast to the setting and would be considered more negative from all viewers' perspectives. The overall change to visual quality due to the retaining walls would be moderately low.

## Grading and Vegetation Removal

As mentioned above, grading and exposed soil would not be highly noticeable and would not change the visual quality of the area. However, the removal of vegetation would reduce the noticeable visual pattern of vegetated hillsides and stands of trees, thereby reducing the vividness of the corridor. Similarly, the visual integrity of the area would be lessened until replacement vegetation matures, and the intactness would be lower. The unity would also be lessened because the visual coherence of vegetated road edges would be reduced. Overall, this change would be moderate, however, in the southeastern portion of the corridor where large trees would be removed, the change would be moderately high.

## Street Lighting

The street lighting along Gilman Drive currently is mostly concentrated near existing residential areas, and most of the roadway is dark. The new lighting would visually contrast with the existing dark roadway areas. Along the west side of Gilman Drive, the lighting levels would create more visual uniformity and the resulting contrast would be low. Similarly, along the east side of Gilman Drive north of Via Alicante near the residential areas, new street lights would create a low level of change. In both these areas, along the west and northeast edges of Gilman Drive, the light poles would be similar in appearance to existing poles and would be placed among existing trees and/or up against existing slope areas, and thus not be silhouetted against undeveloped with low-growing vegetation.

In contrast, the new street lighting that would be placed along the southeastern edge of Gilman Drive next to the open canyon bottom area would be visually prominent in the daytime, with the poles being silhouetted against views of the open sky. Refer to Simulation 3, Figure 7 for an illustration of the proposed lighting fixtures next to the undeveloped areas. These would be vivid, new suburban development features that would contrast with the intactness of the undeveloped area and reduce the unity of the southeastern portion of the corridor. The change to visual quality of daytime views would be moderately high.

The nighttime lighting would potentially contrast prominently with the dark undeveloped area, however careful shielding and use of directional bulbs that reduce any spillover into undeveloped areas would reduce the potential for a negative nighttime impact.

## RESOURCE CHANGE

The changes to the visual resources of the corridor, as measured by changes in visual character and quality, would be low due to shifted roadway features, proposed retaining walls with cable railings, and grading, and would be moderately high due to vegetation removal and introduction of lighting in the southeastern portion of the corridor.

## VIEWERS AND VIEWER RESPONSE

*Neighbors* (people with views *to* the project) and *users* (people with views *from* the project) will notice the proposed project. A viewer's expected response to changes that would be caused by the proposed project can be predicted through a combination of their exposure and sensitivity.

Viewer **exposure** can be estimated by the size of the viewer group, the proximity of a viewer in relation to the proposed project location, and the duration of views available of the project site. Viewer **sensitivity** to change in the visual environment can be estimated through a combination of their level of activity (allowing them to focus on the views), their awareness (which can limit their focus), their engagement in local interests, and the value



they place on local views. The following is a discussion of the main viewer groups' sensitivity, exposure, and anticipated response.

There are four main viewer groups in the project area: Motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, residents. It is anticipated that the average response of all viewer groups will be **moderately high**.

**Motorists** are drivers and passengers on Gilman Drive, Villa La Jolla Drive, Via Alicante, La Jolla Village Drive, I-5, and other local streets. This viewer group contains the largest number of viewers, considering traffic on Gilman Drive and the other streets combined. Motorists on Gilman, La Jolla Village Drive, and I-5 travel through the viewshed at a high speed (in most cases, at about 45 to 50 miles per hour) except when approaching a traffic signal or ramp. The rate of travel limits a driver's attention to the roadway, although passengers have the freedom for more comprehensive views. Motorists on Villa La Jolla Drive and Via Alicante may view the project features while slowly approaching the traffic lights at Gilman Drive. Their overall exposure is moderately high. Motorists are likely to mostly be residents and students and employees of UCSD, who are likely to know the roadway well due to long familiarity, and their sensitivity therefore also would be moderately high. Motorists' response to changes in the visual environment would be **moderately high**.

**Cyclists** would be the main users of the proposed project. Gilman Drive currently has a bike lane on each side of the road that is frequently used by recreational and commuter cyclists. These users have a similar view of the visual environment of the project site as motorists, but at a slower speed. They also would have the most direct view of the proposed features, and their exposure therefore would be moderately high. Cyclists are seeking a safe place to ride and must navigate traffic as a vehicle would, but are highly likely to notice changes to the visual environment, and their sensitivity therefore is anticipated to be moderately high. Cyclist's response to changes in the visual environment would be **moderately high**.

**Pedestrians** using the sidewalks along Gilman Drive are present mostly beside the residential areas. These viewers mostly would residents, and may be students or employees at UCSD who park along Gilman Drive and walk to campus. Pedestrians are considered in a separate viewer group from Residents because their experience of the visual environment from walking is different from within a house. They are a small viewer group compared to motorists, and because there are not sidewalks along the entire length of Gilman Drive, they are not exposed to as much of the proposed project site or visual environment as motorists or bicyclists. However, where they are present, they move at slow speeds and are able to take in more views. Their exposure, therefore, can be considered to be moderate. Pedestrians in the project area mostly are residents of the local area as well as students and employees at UCSD. These viewers tend to know their local area well, and are highly likely to notice changes to the visual environment, and therefore would have a high sensitivity. Pedestrians' response to changes in the visual environment would be **moderately high**.

**Residents** are a large neighboring viewer group encompassed by most of the suburban landscape assessment unit. They are often motorist, bicyclists, and pedestrians as well, however the main consideration for this group is views from their property. Most residential units within the project viewshed are located on mesa tops above the project site, which limits views of the proposed project itself (refer to the viewshed discussion below). Some residences at the southern end of Gilman Drive and those at the northeastern side are directly adjacent to Gilman Drive, and as such have direct views of the site. Generally, a resident's view is stationary and of a long duration. However, due to the limitations of topography and structures, the number of residences with this direct view is limited. Their exposure, therefore would be moderate.

Due to their investment in property and land in the project region, this group takes an active interest in the changes occurring in their community and are concerned about how the project would affect their views and the character of the community, and their sensitivity would be high. Residents' response to changes in the visual environment would be **moderately high**.

## **VISUAL IMPACT**

Visual impacts are determined by assessing changes to the visual resources and predicting viewer response to those changes. Construction of the proposed CRT along Gilman Drive in the City of San Diego would result low to moderately high changes to visual resources. Viewer response is expected to be moderately high. Overall, the visual impact of the proposed project would be to visual resources would be moderate.

### **Shifted Roadway Features**

The low level of change to the visual environment that would be caused by shifting lanes, parking, and roadway features combined with the moderately high viewer response would result in a moderately low adverse visual effect.

### **Retaining Walls**

The moderate level of change that would be caused by introduction of new retaining walls with cable railings (assuming the proposed treatments) combined with the moderately high viewer response would result in a moderately high adverse visual effect.

### **Grading and Vegetation Removal**

The low level of change that would be caused by grading activities and the moderate to moderately high level of change due to vegetation removal combined with the moderately high viewer response would result in a moderately high adverse visual effect without the proposed vegetation replacement. The addition of slope planting and planting of trees in the southern portion of the undeveloped area on the east side of Gilman Drive would reduce this effect to a moderate level.

### **Street Lighting**

The low level of change to the visual environment that would be caused by the introduction of new street lighting along the west and northeastern sides of Gilman Drive combined with the moderately high viewer response would result in a moderate adverse visual effect. The moderately high level of change to the visual environment of the daytime views in the southeast side of Gilman Drive combined with the moderately high viewer response would result in a moderately high adverse visual effect.

### **Temporary Impacts**

Most of the construction of the proposed project would take place within the project footprint. The temporary impacts would expand the project footprint slightly for grading staging and access areas. The main features that would be added within the project corridor during construction would be vehicles for grading and equipment for the installation of the paving and walls. Exposed soil may also be visible during construction, as well as soil and material stockpiles. The vehicles would generally be bigger than most vehicles present on the roadway, and the equipment would be more complex and colorful than existing features. Material stockpiles may be similar in color but contrasting in form from the existing natural features along the corridor. During construction of the proposed project, the visual character of the project area would be more chaotic and diverse, and less unified, with lower vividness and intactness. The change to visual character and quality would represent a temporary moderate adverse effect. The grubbed, graded, and disturbed areas beyond the location of new permanent elements would represent a temporary construction related visual change that would be moderately adverse.



Revegetation of these disturbed areas with hydroseeding, container plants, and irrigation would assure these impacts remain temporary.

Construction generally would take place during daytime hours. Any lighting used during construction would be for security purposes. The lights would be shielded and directed toward the project site and would not cause a significant source of glare or spillover. Construction period features would be visible to all the viewer groups.

The moderate level of change caused by temporary construction impacts combined with the moderately high viewer response would result in a moderately high level of change. Due to the temporary nature of the construction period, however, the change would result in a low visual effect.

## **AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES**

The inclusion of wall face treatments, rust-brown coloring of the cable railings at the top of the retaining walls, and revegetation of graded areas as part of the proposed project features would ensure that the level of contrast created by the proposed project would be moderate, and no additional avoidance or minimization measures would be required.

The inclusion of directional lighting and shielding to reduce light spillover into undeveloped areas would reduce the potential impact to night-time views in the southeastern portion of the corridor. Daytime views would remain impacted, however, because the light poles would be silhouetted against the background sky. The moderately high level of contrast to daytime views due to the placement of light poles along the undeveloped areas at the southeastern portion of the project corridor could be avoided by not installing 18 of the proposed street lights between Gilman Court and Via Alicante along the eastern side of Gilman Drive. Daytime views would thus remain with a moderately high adversity.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Construction of the proposed CRT along Gilman Drive in the City of San Diego would result in **low** (shifted roadway features), **moderate** (retaining walls with railings, grading, and vegetation removal), and **moderately high** (street lighting) changes to the visual environment. Viewer response is expected to be moderately high. Overall impacts to visual resources would be moderate, and no mitigation measures above and beyond those already included as project design features would be required. However, if the lighting is included on the south and east sides of the project study area against the undeveloped portion of this area, then a **moderately high visual adverse** effect would still remain. Minimization measures for nighttime views include careful shielding that would reduce the visual contrast. However, due to the anticipated moderately high viewer response, the visual impact would remain moderately high. The moderately high impact could be avoided by not placing the light poles along the southeastern stretch of Gilman Drive between Via Alicante and Gilman Court. Since part of the issues from aesthetics is related to the lighting of adjacent dark open spaces that change the character of this corridor, shielding of the lighting will slightly help in reducing the impact.

# APPENDIX A

## CEQA ANALYSIS

### VIEWS

- a. The proposed project is not located within a designated public view corridor shown in an adopted community plan, General Plan, or Local Coastal Program.
- b. The proposed project would not cause substantial view blockage from a public viewing area of a public resource. No views to the Pacific Ocean or mountains are available from the study area that also encompass the proposed project location. The project is located adjacent to an undeveloped canyon bottom. However, none of the proposed project features would block views of the canyon.
- c. The proposed retaining walls (shown in Simulations 1 and 2, Figures 5 and 6) with cable railings would be placed against existing slopes, and would block views of any visual resources behind them. Only the proposed light poles that are silhouetted against the background undeveloped at the south and east side of the project study area (as shown in Simulation 3, Figure 7), represent a contrast with the current setting. However, because the lights are so narrow, no views from designated open space areas, roads, or parks to significant visual landmarks or scenic vistas would be impacted.
- d. The proposed project would provide roadway improvements to areas already developed, and the proposed features would not have a cumulative effect of opening an area for development that would ultimately cause view blockage.

Construction of the proposed CRT along Gilman Drive in the City of San Diego would not result in the blockage of public views from designated open space areas, roads, or parks or to significant visual landmarks or scenic vistas.

**The proposed project would not result in a significant impact to views or view blockage.**

### NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER/ARCHITECTURE

- a. Although the proposed project would include retaining walls with cable railings along the west side of the roadway, the walls would not exceed the allowable height or bulk regulations in the area or contrast with the existing patterns of development. Application of a faux-rock treatment and color in keeping with the soil of the slopes against which the walls would be placed would further reduce any visual contrast introduced by the proposed project.
- b. The proposed project consists of new and rearranged roadway elements that would not contrast with the existing visual features, and no impact would occur due to contrast in visual style.
- c. The proposed project would result in the removal of some trees, such as illustrated in Simulation 3, Figure 7. The eucalyptus trees that would be affected along the east side of the roadway, next to the canyon bottom, are not native, and are not considered a community identification symbol or landmark. Additionally, while some trees would be removed, many others would remain. Construction of the proposed project would not result in a substantial degradation of community character due to the removal of trees. The proposed project includes planting three 24" box native trees, to be placed in the riparian or near riparian area of the slopes. The addition of slope plantings and some tree replacement in the lower portion of the undeveloped area on the east side of Gilman would be considered a replacement of the loss of the mature trees. These trees should represent a more typical riparian form of native trees such as Willows or Sycamores instead of the Eucalyptus



trees that would be removed, and this project feature would eliminate the adverse visual impact associated with mature tree removal.

- d. The project is not located in a highly visible area, as shown in the viewshed analysis in Figure 2, above. Views to and from the project site are restricted by the canyon within which the project is located. Additionally, the proposed project would not add elements that would contrast in terms of excessive height, bulk, signage, or architectural projections, and would not highly contrast with the surrounding area.
- e. The proposed project would not change the overall character of the area or open up any new areas to development. No structures would be introduced, and the walls with cable railings would not substantially differ in character from the existing visual environment.

Due to incorporated design measures that would reduce the visual appearance of proposed walls with cable railings and replace removed trees, **the project would not result in a significant visual impact to neighborhood character/architecture.**

### LANDFORM ALTERATION

- a. The proposed project would not alter more than 2,000 cubic yards of earth or disturb steep slopes. The project would include retaining walls up to 14 feet high, with three-foot high cable railings at the top of each. Creation of the walls would require the removal of existing vegetation, and would introduce tall, flat surfaces into the visual environment. Faux-rock surface treatment in the color of the existing soil and rust-brown coloring of the cable railing and posts would reduce the potential visual conflict and revegetation would help to blend the new wall back into the natural slope. **This treatment of the proposed walls with cable railings therefore would avoid a significant visual impact.**

### DEVELOPMENT FEATURES

- a. The proposed project would not create a disorganized appearance, nor would it conflict with City codes that guide visual appearances.
- b. The proposed project would not conflict with height, bulk, or coverage regulations. The proposed retaining walls with cable railings would not exceed the allowable height or bulk regulations, and the proposed treatment and color would further reduce any visual contrast introduced by the proposed project.
- c. The project would include walls up to 15 feet high with 3-foot tall cable railings, and upward of 1,175 feet long. These walls would be highly visible to the public and would not have landscape screening. As such, they have the potential to have a negative visual appearance.

The walls would be visible from Gilman Drive and some areas within the adjacent Landscape Assessment Units (refer to Figure 2 for the project Viewshed). The walls would not be visible from parks or significant visual landmarks, and maybe somewhat visible from the undeveloped near the project. However, the slopes and canyon bottoms are not publicly accessible, and therefore no viewers are present in these areas. Additionally, the proposed project retaining walls would be finished with colored faux-rock treatment, similar to what is illustrated in the simulations, and the cable railings at the top of each wall would be finished with a rust-brown stain. This treatment would reduce the walls' contrast with the existing visual environment. Overall, the proposed walls with cable railings would not result in significant visual impact.

- d. The project would not be large or monotonous, but would consist of mostly low-scale linear roadway elements similar in appearance to the existing visual environment. The project is not located in a coastal area, nor does it include shoreline elements.

**Overall, the proposed project development features would not result in significant visual impacts.**

## **LIGHT/GLARE**

The new street lighting that would be placed along the southeastern edge of Gilman Drive next to the open canyon bottom area would be visually prominent in the daytime, with the poles being silhouetted against views of the open sky. The nighttime lighting contrast with the dark undeveloped area would be visually prominent and out of character with the canyon bottom. Although considered an adverse visual character impact, this proposed project feature would result in a less than significant CEQA impact.

- a. The proposed city street lights would be installed per the City of San Diego design standards and must include shielding and cut-offs to reduce the potential for light to spill onto adjacent natural canyon bottom areas. The conformance to City of San Diego standards would ensure that the proposed project does not result in adverse visual impact due to light and glare. There are no reflective surfaces to create a glare problem. The project would not light more than 50 percent of any single elevation of a building's exterior that would be built with a material with a light reflectivity greater than 30 percent (see LDC Section 142.07330(a)), although the project would be adjacent to a major public roadway or public area.
- b. The project would not shed substantial light onto adjacent, light-sensitive property or sensitive land use area, or will not emit a substantial amount of ambient light into the nighttime sky. City guidelines regarding lighting near MHPA areas, such as the undeveloped area within the southeastern portion of the project corridor, directs that the fixtures have cut-offs and shielding to reduce spillover. If the project includes lighting in this area, it must follow these guidelines, therefore spillover into the undeveloped area would be minimal and not significant. The amount of light that would be seen that would affect the character based on the lighting of the street and pathway would be minimal. No visually prominent elements are going to be lit by this street lighting other than the flat surfaces of the roadway and adjacent walkways.

**Therefore, from a visual perspective and from the viewpoint of the thresholds, no significant light or glare impact is expected.**

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Construction of the proposed CRT along Gilman Drive in the City of San Diego will not result in a significant visual impact under CEQA due to its position in a limited viewshed, and the incorporation of wall face treatments, metal post and railing stains, and revegetation. These project features work together to reduce the contrast of the proposed retaining walls with cable railings with the surrounding visual environment to below a level of significance.