Section 3.4
Aesthetics

Introduction

Aesthetics deals with the nature, creation, and appreciation of beauty. Evaluation of aesthetic resources in the landscape requires a process that objectively identifies the visual features (resources) of the landscape, assesses the character and quality of those resources relative to overall regional visual character, and identifies the importance to people (sensitivity) of views of visual resources in the landscape. By establishing these existing (baseline) conditions, a proposed project or another change to the landscape can be systematically evaluated for its degree of impact. The degree of impact depends on the magnitude of change in the visual resource (i.e., in visual character and quality) and on viewers' responses to and concern for those changes. This basic method of evaluating visual impacts follows established federal procedures (Smardon et al. 1986) and is suitable for evaluating nonfederal projects and areas.

Methodology

Identification of a project area's existing visual resources and conditions involves three steps.

- Objective identification of the visual features (visual resources) of the landscape.
- Assessment of the character and quality of those resources relative to overall regional visual character.
- Determination of the importance to people, or sensitivity, of views of visual resources in the landscape.

The aesthetic value of an area is a measure of its visual character and quality combined with the viewer response to the area (Federal Highway Administration 1983). The scenic quality component can best be described as the overall impression that an individual viewer retains after driving though, walking though, or flying over an area (U.S. Bureau of Land Management 1980). Viewer response is a combination of viewer exposure and sensitivity. Viewer exposure is a function of the number of viewers, the number of views seen, the distance of

the viewers, and the viewing duration. Viewer sensitivity relates to the extent of the public's concern for particular viewsheds. These terms and criteria are described in detail below.

Visual Character

Both natural and artificial landscape features make up the character of a view. Visual character is influenced by geologic, hydrologic, botanical, wildlife, recreational, and urban features. Urban features include those associated with development and landscape alteration, such as roads, utilities, structures, earthworks, and the results of other human activities. The perception of visual character can vary significantly seasonally and even hourly, as weather, light, shadow, and the elements that compose the viewshed change. Form, line, color, and texture are the basic components used to describe visual character and quality for most visual assessments (U.S. Forest Service 1974, Federal Highway Administration 1983). The appearance of the landscape is described in terms of the dominance of each of these components.

Viewer Response: Exposure and Sensitivity

Viewer response is the psychological reaction of a person to visible changes in the viewshed, and is based on the sensitivity and exposure of the viewer to a given viewshed. Sensitivity relates to the magnitude of the viewer's concern for a viewshed. Exposure is a function of the number of viewers, the type of view seen, and the distance, perspective, and duration of the view.

The measure of the quality of a view must be tempered by the overall sensitivity of the viewer. Viewer sensitivity is based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, the proximity of viewers to the visual resource, the elevation of viewers relative to the visual resource, the frequency and duration of viewing, the number of viewers, and the type and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

The importance of a view to viewers is related in part to the position of viewers relative to the resource; therefore, visibility and visual dominance of landscape elements are usually described with respect to their placement in the viewshed. Visual sensitivity also depends on the number and type of viewers, the frequency of viewing (e.g., daily or seasonally), and the duration of viewing. Viewer activity, awareness, and visual expectations in relation to the number of viewers and viewing duration also influence visual sensitivity. For example, visual sensitivity is higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure; people engaging in recreational activities such as hiking, biking, or camping; and homeowners. Sensitivity tends to be lower for views seen by people driving to and from work or as part of their work (U.S. Forest Service 1974; Federal Highway Administration 1983; Soil Conservation Service 1978).

Commuters and non-recreational travelers have generally fleeting views and tend to focus on commute traffic, not on surrounding scenery; therefore, they are generally considered to have low visual sensitivity. Residential viewers typically have extended viewing periods and are concerned about changes in the views from their homes; therefore, they generally are considered to have high visual sensitivity. Viewers using recreation trails and areas, scenic highways, and scenic overlooks are usually assessed as having high visual sensitivity.

Judgments of visual quality and viewer response must be made based in a regional frame of reference (Soil Conservation Service 1978). The same type of visual resource in different geographic areas could have a different degree of visual quality and sensitivity in each setting. For example, a small hill may be a significant visual element in a flat landscape but have very little significance in mountainous terrain.

Environmental Setting

The program area encompasses the Carmel Valley, which features a mixture of agricultural land, undeveloped native habitat, and small areas of development within a topographically varied valley setting. According to the CVMP, "The Carmel Valley is a scenic area. Major views are seen primarily from the Carmel Valley Road and Laureles Grade corridors. Many homes have views of one side of the Valley or the other, with the quality of the view being determined principally by the interrelationship between natural landforms and vegetative masses. While large areas of the Valley qualify as high-quality natural visual settings, many areas have been adversely affected by poorly sited or unscreened development."

Carmel Valley consists of a relatively flat valley bottom bounded to the north and south by the Coast Range Mountains, and drained by the Carmel River. Land on both sides of the valley is comprised of open space and preserved areas, including Santa Lucia Preserve, Palo Corona Ranch Regional Park, Thomas Open Space, Garland Ranch Regional Park, Jacks Peak County Park, and Hatton Canyon State Park. As these areas remain largely undeveloped, the viewshed adjacent to Carmel Valley Road and Laureles Grade tend to support a rich mosaic of oak forests, chaparral scrublands, grasslands, and riparian habitats in the foreground and middle ground, and are generally characterized by rolling hills and broad northwest-southeast trending valleys also in the middleground. Areas of steep, rugged mountainous terrain are also found within the valley, primarily in the background.

Overall, the developed landscapes of the region are comprised of rural residential development, various commercial uses that support the Valley's residents and visitors, and small-scale agricultural pursuits. The valley is also home to three golf courses lining the southern banks of the Carmel River and visible in the middle and backgrounds from the Carmel Valley Road corridor. Carmel Valley has traditionally been divided into three areas: the Lower Valley area, near Highway 1; Mid-Valley area, in the vicinity of Robinson Canyon Road; and

Upper Valley area, in the vicinity of Carmel Valley Village. Higher residential densities have tended to occur in the Upper Valley, while lower density developments have occurred elsewhere, often near golf courses and commercial centers in the Lower- and Mid-Valley areas. Recreational land uses, including several golf and tennis facilities, occur throughout the valley at a variety of locations.

Several scenic routes link the Carmel Valley with other areas of the County. Carmel Valley Road, a County scenic route and the principal arterial through the valley, extends from SR 1 to US 101, connecting to Salinas Valley in the east. Laureles Grade, a County scenic roadway, connects Carmel Valley Road with SR 68, which ultimately extends east to US 101 in Salinas and west to SR 1 in Monterey. SR 1, which traverses the lower end of Carmel Valley, provides a major coastal thoroughfare from Big Sur to Monterey. Portions of this route have been designated as a State Scenic Highway, including the portion in Monterey County that extends from the Carmel River north to SR 68.

Regulatory Setting

Federal Policies and Regulations

Scenic resources are primarily regulated on the state and local level. Relevant federal agencies may require analysis of aesthetic impacts as part of a subsequent project-specific environmental review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. However, there are no specific federal regulations that apply to the aesthetic resources associated with the proposed program.

State Policies and Regulations

California Department of Transportation

State Scenic Highway Program

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963 to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. The Caltrans considers the aesthetic setting adjacent to roadways within the state and then lists them as "eligible" for scenic highway designation. Local jurisdictions may then apply for such designation by preparing and submitting to Caltrans a scenic corridor protection program and gaining the agency's approval. Roads and highways that are eligible for designation and officially designated as scenic highways are identified in Section 263 of the California Streets and Highways Code.

Portions of State Route 1, State Route 68, and State Route 156 within Monterey County are either eligible or officially designated as State Scenic Highways, although the majority of these segments are outside of the program area. One segment of State Route 1 that borders the Carmel Valley Planning Area is officially designated as a State Scenic Highway. The entirety of Laureles Grade, which runs north-south through the Carmel Valley Planning Area connecting State Route 68 with Carmel Valley Road, is designated by Caltrans as a "County scenic highway," meaning that the program applies to the roadway although it is not under state jurisdiction. Although not officially designated by Caltrans as a county scenic highway, Carmel Valley Road is a designated scenic route within the CVMP.

As part of the State Scenic Highway Program, a designated roadway's scenic corridor (the area of land generally adjacent to and visible from the highway) is subject to protection through regulation of nearby land use, site planning, advertising, earthmoving, landscaping, and the design and appearance of structures and equipment, pursuant to its scenic corridor protection program. Caltrans and Monterey County officials review projects proposed along the corridor, including those within the program area, for conformance to and consistency with the corridor protection program. Examples of visual intrusions that would degrade the quality of scenic corridors include installation of highly reflective surfaces, extensive cut and fill, hillside scarring, large slope failures, exposed and unvegetated earth, and dominance of exotic vegetation (California Department of Transportation 1996).

Local Policies and Regulations

Overview

This section presents visual resource and aesthetics policies that could affect or be affected by the proposed traffic improvements. Policies may either support or conflict with proposed improvements. The policies listed below were excerpted from the Monterey County General Plan and the CVMP.

Monterey County General Plan

The County's General Plan, which was first adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1982, addresses all aspects of future growth, development, and conservation throughout the unincorporated areas of Monterey County. The current General Plan contains visual resource policies intended to preserve the County's scenic and rural character. These include:

Policy 26.1.6. Development which preserves and enhances the County's scenic qualities shall be encouraged.

Policy 26.1.20. All exterior lighting shall be unobtrusive and constructed or located so that only the intended area is illuminated, long range visibility is reduced, and offsite glare is fully controlled.

Policy 40.2.1. Additional sensitive treatment provisions shall be employed within the scenic corridor, including placement of utilities underground, where feasible; architectural and landscape controls; outdoor advertising restrictions; encouragement of area native plants, especially on public lands and dedicated open spaces; and cooperative landscape programs with adjoining public and private open space lands.

Policy 40.2.2. Land use controls shall be applied or retained to protect the scenic corridor and to encourage sensitive selection of sites and open space preservation. Where land is designated for development at a density which, should maximum permissible development occur, would diminish scenic quality, the landowner shall be encouraged to voluntarily dedicate a scenic easement to protect the scenic corridor.

Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plan

The Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plan (GMPAP) is one of eight non-coastal areas of the County for which "Area Plans" are required. The GMPAP is more specific than the General Plan, as its policies are more precisely adapted to its area of focus than are the more general policies of the General Plan. Figure 10 of the GMPAP depicts areas of visual sensitivity in northwestern Monterey County, from the Big Sur Coast and Cachagua planning areas in the south to the Greater Salinas planning area in the north. Portions of the program area are in a visually sensitive area of the GMPAP. Specific policies regarding visual sensitivity include:

Policy 1.1.3. The County shall take comprehensive measures to ensure protection of sensitive scenic areas as shown on the Greater Monterey Peninsula Visual Sensitivity Map. Implementing policies are located in the transportation section of this plan.

Policy 40.2.6. Areas shown as "highly sensitive" on the Greater Monterey Peninsula Visual Sensitivity Map should be preserved as open space to the maximum extent possible through scenic easements or, if necessary, fee acquisition.

Policy 40.2.7. New development should not be sited on those portions of property which have been mapped as "highly sensitive." Where exceptions are appropriate to maximize the goals, objectives and policies of this plan, development shall be sited in a manner which minimizes visible effects of proposed structures and roads to the greatest extent possible and shall utilize landscape screening and other techniques to achieve maximum protection of the visual resource.

Policy 40.2.9. New development to be located in areas mapped as "sensitive" or "highly sensitive" and which will be visible from the scenic route shall

maintain the visual character of the area.1 In order to adequately mitigate the visual impacts of development in such areas, the following shall be required:

- Development shall be rendered compatible with the visual character of the area using appropriate siting, design, materials, and landscaping;
- Development shall maintain no less than a 100' setback from the scenic route right-of-way;
- The impact of any earth movement associated with the development shall be mitigated in such a manner that permanent scarring is not created;
- Tree removal shall be minimized;
- Landscape screening and restoration shall consist of plant and tree species consistent with surrounding native vegetation;
- Architectural review of projects shall be required to ensure visual compatibility of the development with the surrounding area; and
- New development in open grassland areas shown as "sensitive" or "highly sensitive" on the Visual Sensitivity Map should minimize its impact on the uninterrupted viewshed.

Carmel Valley Master Plan

The CVMP was enacted as part of the County General Plan and is intended to guide future land use within the CVMP area boundary. Specifically the plan area boundary is defined as "the primary watershed of the Carmel River from SR 1 to just east of Carmel Valley Village, except for the upper reaches of Garzas Creek and Robinson Canyon." (Monterey County 1996.) Visual policies in the CVMP support the County's overall goal of preserving the "rural residential" character of the valley. They include the following:

Policy 26.1.21. It is intended that Carmel Valley remain rural residential in character.

Policy 26.1.24. Every attempt should be made to minimize hillside scarring by avoiding cuts and fills where possible and where cuts and fills are unavoidable, by creating slopes that shall be revegetated. Permanent non-revegetated scarring of hillsides is strongly discouraged and should occur only if no other reasonable alternative is available.

Policy 26.1.25. The visible alteration of natural landforms caused by cutting, filling, grading, or vegetation removal shall be minimized through sensitive setting and design of all improvements and maximum possible restoration including botanically appropriate landscaping.

[1] As shown in Figure 10, Visual Sensitivity, of the Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plan, areas identified as "highly sensitive" possess those scenic resources which are most unique and which have regional or countywide significance. Areas identified as "sensitive" possess scenic resources which have local or community significance.

Policy 26.1.26. Development either shall be visually compatible with the character of the valley and immediate surrounding areas or shall enhance the quality of areas that have been degraded by existing development.

Policy 26.1.28. Structures located in open grassland areas where they would be highly visible from Carmel Valley Road and Laureles Grade shall be minimized in number and clustered near existing natural or man-made vertical features.

Criteria for Determining Significance

In accordance with State CEQA Guidelines, applicable federal and state regulations, and local plans and policies, the proposed program would be considered to result in a significant impact if it would:

A. Visual Character and Quality

Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the corridor and/or its surrounding area.

B. Scenic Vistas and Corridors

Have substantial adverse effects on a scenic vista, public viewing area, or view corridor, including obstructing or obscuring public views or visually prominent areas;

Result in removal of or damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcrops, historic buildings, or natural landforms such as waterways along a state scenic highway or County-designated scenic roadway; or

Result in visible alteration of sensitive natural landforms caused by cutting, filling, grading, or vegetation removal.

C. Light and Glare

Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views or activities in the area or pose a nuisance.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

A. Visual Character and Quality

Impact AES-1: Changes in Visual Character or Quality Related to Roadway Improvements (Less than Significant)

Construction activities associated with the addition of passing lanes and construction of turnouts would require roadway alterations and may include the use of heavy equipment and associated vehicles (e.g., bulldozers, graders, scrapers, and trucks). Construction activities, equipment, and vehicles would be present in the viewshed of the Carmel Valley Road and Laureles Grade corridors and adjacent residences, commercial facilities, and public open space areas. However, construction activities are temporary, and the existing visual character of a specific roadway improvement site would be restored after completion of roadway construction.

Changes to the visual character of the existing roadway corridors resulting from implementing the proposed roadway improvements would not be considered significant since construction activities are considered temporary, and addition of passing, turning, or other ancillary lanes are not considered major changes to the roadway corridors. In most cases, the proposed improvements would expand or modify existing paved surfaces and include the addition of ancillary features, such as guardrails, road signs, etc. One grade separation project is proposed at Laureles Grade and Carmel Valley Roads. While introducing a grade separated roadway in this portion of the corridor would be a change in the topography, this project, if implemented, is not expected to significantly alter the overall rural character and quality of the roadway as it is one location in the 12-mile Carmel Valley Road corridor. Furthermore, no other aerial road structures are proposed, nor are any medians proposed such that the overall visual character or quality of the project corridors would be permanently altered. Therefore, this impact is considered **less-than-significant**. No mitigation is required.

B. Scenic Vistas and Corridors

Impact AES-2: Changes in Views from Adjacent Land Uses and Other Public Viewpoints (Less than Significant with Mitigation)

As discussed in the "Environmental Setting" above, Carmel Valley Road is a locally designated scenic roadway in the CVMP, and Laureles Grade is a County designated scenic roadway under Caltrans' State Scenic Highway program. Consequently, any improvements conducted on these roadways could result in impairment of scenic views from or of these corridors. In general, the response of various viewer groups to the proposed improvements would vary in accordance with the types of activities they engage in and the overall frequency

and duration of their views. For instance, recreational users of adjacent parks, golf courses, or other open space areas would have a moderate sensitivity to visual changes because their line-of-sight would shift frequently as a result of their recreational activity. Furthermore, roadway travelers are considered to have a low sensitivity because their line-of-sight is typically fleeting and at higher speeds. Adjacent residential viewers in areas where prominent views of the scenic corridors exist would likely have the most acute response to changes resulting from roadway alterations. Introduction of new visual elements into the foreground that could obstruct views of prominent topographic features is considered potentially significant. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-2.1** would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measure AES-2.1: Implement Measures to Reduce Visual Intrusion for Existing Residences and other Public Viewpoints

The County will implement the following measures to reduce visual intrusion for existing residences and other public viewpoints:

- Retain mature trees and existing woody vegetation to the maximum extent feasible.
- Use non-reflective building materials to minimize glare and obtrusiveness.
- Provide a vegetative buffer around the periphery of the proposed project sites to provide screening from adjacent residents. Vegetation should be chosen and planted to be compatible with patterns of existing vegetation. Vegetation should be planted within the first year following project completion.

Impact AES-3: Degrade Scenic Resources or Visibly Alter Sensitive Natural Landforms along a State Scenic Highway Related to Traffic improvements (Less than Significant with Mitigation)

As discussed in the "Environmental Setting" above, Carmel Valley Road is a locally designated scenic roadway in the CVMP, and Laureles Grade is a county designated scenic roadway under Caltrans' State Scenic Highway program. Proposed roadway improvements such as additions of passing and turning lanes, grade separation, shoulder widenings, or spot realignments could require the removal of or damage to scenic resources (including vegetation) and/or visibly alter sensitive natural landform due to cutting, filling, or grading activities. These impacts are considered potentially significant. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-3.1** would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measure AES-3.1: Implement Measures to Minimize Loss of Scenic Resources and Alteration of Natural Landforms within Scenic Roadway Corridors
Prior to commencement of construction activities, the County shall develop landscape design plans that limit the removal of vegetation, and/or incorporate a re-vegetation plan, which restores similar vegetation within the roadway corridors within one year of project completion. The County shall develop roadway design plans that minimize or avoid significant cutting, filling or grading activities within areas where natural land forms contribute prominent visual features. Landscape design and/or roadway design plans shall be developed in coordination with County agencies that oversight of all development design review.

C. Light and Glare

Impact AES-4: Creation of New Sources of Light and Glare (Less than Significant with Mitigation)

Proposed roadway improvements that require roadway alterations, such as lane additions, could create temporary light or glare if nighttime construction is used. Installation of temporary lighting for night construction activities could introduce a source of light during nighttime hours, affecting views and casting light onto adjacent properties and obstructing the line-of-sight of nighttime roadway travelers. However, these impacts would be temporary and any associated light or glare from construction activities would cease upon completion of a specific project.

Expansion of roads as a result of lane additions may require installation of new street lights or relocation of existing street lighting that would introduce a new source of light and glare, or move existing sources of light and glare closer to adjacent sensitive land uses (e.g., residences, wildlife habitats and/or open space areas). Other improvements such as the addition of new traffic signals at an existing unsignalized intersection may also introduce new sources of light and glare. These effects may be noticeable from adjacent sensitive land uses within the project corridor. Therefore, this impact is considered potentially significant. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-4.1** would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measure AES-4.1: Implement Measures to reduce Temporary and/or Permanent Sources of Light and Glare
During nighttime construction, if required, all construction lighting shall be focused on-site and lighting shall be directed downward to avoid spillage onto adjacent land uses and minimize glare onto the line-of-sight of nighttime roadway travelers.

Where new street lighting is required or proposed, the County shall incorporate appropriate lighting design specifications to meet minimum safety and security standards and reduce the impact of introduced light

and glare. The specifications can include, but are not limited to the following:

- Luminaries shall be cutoff-type fixtures that cast low-angle illumination to minimize incidental spillover of light onto adjacent private properties and undeveloped open space. Fixtures that project light upward or horizontally shall not be used.
- Luminaries shall be directed away from residential, habitat and open space areas adjacent to the project site.
- Luminaries shall provide good color rendering and natural light qualities. Low-pressure sodium and high-pressure sodium fixtures that are not color-corrected shall not be used. Intensity shall be approximately 10 lux for roadway intersections.
- Luminary mountings shall be downcast and the height of the poles minimized to reduce potential for back scatter into the nighttime sky and incidental spillover of light onto adjacent private properties and undeveloped open space. Light poles shall be 20 feet high or shorter. Luminary mountings shall have non-glare finishes.
- All required or proposed lighting plans detailing the locations and specific types of lighting fixtures shall be submitted to the Monterey County Resource Management Agency - Planning Department for final review.