2.1.6 Visual/Aesthetics

2.1.6.1 Regulatory Setting

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, establishes that the federal government use all practicable means to ensure all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically (emphasis added) and culturally pleasing surroundings (42 United States Code [USC] 4331[b][2]). To further emphasize this point, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in its implementation of NEPA (23 USC 109[h]), directs that final decisions on projects are to be made in the best overall public interest taking into account adverse environmental impacts, including among others, the destruction or disruption of aesthetic values.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) establishes that it is the policy of the State to take all action necessary to provide the people of the State "with…enjoyment of aesthetic, natural, scenic and historic environmental qualities" (CA Public Resources Code [PRC] Section 21001[b]).

2.1.6.2 Affected Environment

This section is based on the Visual Resources Technical Memorandum (July 11, 2017).

The nearest residential uses adjoin the I-605/Katella Avenue interchange to the east/southeast (south of Katella Avenue and east of I-605) within the community of Rossmoor. Views to the project site from the adjoining residential uses are obstructed by existing intervening soundwalls and ornamental trees. In addition, views from recreational users of Coyote Creek Bikeway towards the project site is generally obstructed by existing landscaping along the west side of the interchange, which would limit views of proposed improvements.

It is anticipated that the proposed project would require limited periods of nighttime construction activities to place temporary railing (k-rail) for work areas, revise striping on the mainline, and construct pavement joints to move traffic to new ramp terminals, amongst other activities. Existing sources of light within the project area are currently limited to vehicle headlights, traffic lights, street lighting on I-605 and Katella Avenue, and nighttime lighting from the various commercial and residential uses in the project area. Light and glare from nighttime construction lighting could potentially cause a nuisance to motorists traveling on I-605 and Katella Avenue, in addition to surrounding residential uses.

2.1.6.2.1 Visual Setting

The project location and setting provides the context for determining the type and severity of changes to the existing visual environment. The project setting is also referred to as the corridor or project corridor which is defined as the area of land that is visible from, adjacent to, and outside the highway right-of-way (ROW), and is determined by topography, vegetation, and viewing distance.

The project site is located in the western portion of Orange County, within the City of Los Alamitos. The project site is located along Katella Avenue within the western portion of the City, between the City's westerly boundary to the west and Civic Center Drive to the east. Land uses surrounding the project site include, but are not limited to, flood control facilities (Coyote Creek), El Dorado Nature Center, Oak Academy Park, commercial, transportation, and residential uses.

Generally, areas north, south, and east of the project site are developed and urbanized. While open space areas occur to the west of the project site (El Dorado Nature Center and El Dorado Golf Course), these areas are segregated from the site by Coyote Creek. The I-605 overcrossing structure over Katella Avenue serves as a prominent visual feature within the central portion of the site.

According to Los Alamitos General Plan Updated Final Environmental Impact Report (General Plan EIR) (dated February 2015), the visual setting of the City is dominated by roadways, homes, businesses, and other elements of the built environment. According to the General Plan EIR, the visual landscape "…is a fine-grained and consistent suburban setting that does not feature any single element that is highly prominent—such as a mountain, ridge, river, or group of tall buildings." There are no designated State Scenic Highways,[1] or locally-designated scenic routes or corridors in the vicinity of the project site.[2] The nearest designated State Scenic Highway is State Route 1 (SR-1, or Pacific Coast Highway [PCH]), located approximately 2.95 miles to the south of the project site. The proposed project would not be visible from this segment of SR-1 at this distance.

2.1.6.3 Environmental Consequences

2.1.6.3.1 Temporary Impacts

Alternative 1 (No-Build Alternative)

Project improvements would not occur under the No-Build Alternative; therefore, the No-Build Alternative would not alter existing views.

Alternatives 2 and 3 (Build Alternatives)

Motorists traveling along I-605 and Katella Avenue and Coyote Creek Bikeway users would be exposed to construction-related activities, equipment, and vehicles; however, views of construction-related activities and equipment/vehicles from these land uses would be temporary in nature and not result in impacts that would require mitigation, minimization, and/or avoidance measures. Construction-related activities, vehicle access, and staging of construction equipment and materials would occur within the I-605, City, Orange County Public Works (OCPW) ROW, and disturbed or developed areas within the boundaries of the project site. As noted above, the project site and surrounding areas are highly developed and urbanized, and the visual setting is dominated by roadways, homes, businesses, and other elements of the built environment. Construction-related impacts would be short-term and would cease upon project completion. Thus, the potential visual impacts during construction of the Build Alternatives would not be adverse.

It is anticipated that construction activities associated with the Build Alternatives would require limited periods of nighttime construction to place temporary railing (k-rail) for work areas, revise striping on the mainline, and construct pavement joints to move traffic to new ramp terminals, amongst other activities. Existing sources of light within the project area are currently limited to vehicle headlights, traffic lights, street lighting on I-605 and Katella Avenue, and nighttime lighting from the various commercial and residential uses in the project area. Light and glare from nighttime construction lighting could potentially cause a nuisance to motorists traveling on I-605

[1] California Department of Transportation, *California Scenic Highway Mapping System*, http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/16_livability/scenic_highways/, accessed August 9, 2017.

[2] City of Los Alamitos, *Los Alamitos General Plan*, March 2015.

and Katella Avenue, in addition to surrounding residential uses. With the use of light shielding and positioning the light away from land uses outside the project area, toward the specific area of construction (PF-VIS-1), there would be little to no visual intrusion as a result of temporary construction nighttime lighting. Moreover, as part of the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) phase, construction lighting types, plans, and placement would be reviewed by the District Landscape Architect to ensure that effects would be minimized.

PF-VIS-1 **Light Shielding.** Temporary construction safety lighting will be installed and used during nighttime construction. Light shielding will be utilized so that lighting does not blind approaching drivers. The lighting will be contained and directed away from land uses outside the project area, and directed toward the specific area of construction.

2.1.6.3.2 Permanent Impacts

Alternative 1 (No-Build Alternative)

Project improvements would not occur under the No-Build Alternative; therefore, the No-Build Alternative would not alter existing views or visual characteristics of the project area.

Alternatives 2 and 3 (Build Alternatives)

The Build Alternatives include modifications to interchange ramps and Katella Avenue. The existing I-605 mainline would not be modified, with the exception of the northbound No. 4 lane at the northbound exit ramp. This lane would be restriped from a through lane to a through lane/ramp exit option to accommodate a proposed second lane on the exit ramp. Katella Avenue would be widened and lane geometries would be modified to provide standard lanes and shoulders through the interchange and to tie in with proposed ramp improvements. Proposed modifications to the northbound ramps and Katella Avenue east of the northbound ramps are similar in both Build Alternatives 2 and 3.

As noted in the Visual Resources Technical Memorandum, the project would not result in substantial changes to the visual environment. The Build Alternatives include widening and improvements to the existing I-605 and Katella Avenue on- and off-ramps. The proposed widening and improvements along the I-605 on- and off-ramps and Katella Avenue would be similar to their existing condition, and would not introduce any obstructive elements, structures, or other features that would substantially alter the existing visual environment.

The project site is primarily composed of existing developments (e.g., commercial, residential, and transportation land uses), roadways, medians, pedestrian sidewalks, landscaped areas, and channelized waterways. The landscaped areas associated with the existing developments are comprised of ornamental landscaping and mature trees. The project would include removal and replacement of existing highway landscaping including mature trees. However, removed trees would be replaced at a ratio and size depending on the tree type (PF-VIS-2). Other replacement planting could include native plantings and other non-invasive groundcover.

PF-VIS-2 **Tree Removal and Replacement**. Removed trees will be replaced at a 10:1 ratio. Trees replaced with Eucalyptus trees will be a minimum of 15 gallons in size; pine trees and the other species will be a 24-inch or larger box container. Additional replacement plantings may include native/non-invasive groundcover. Final landscape plans will be developed during the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) phase.

Both alternatives propose a retaining wall to accommodate widening of the northbound entrance ramp. The proposed wall would be located along the right edge of shoulder. In Build Alternative 3 only, in addition to the retaining wall along the northbound entrance ramp, two retaining walls would be constructed along the left edge of shoulder of the southbound direct entrance ramp to accommodate widening of the ramp and avoid ROW impacts to the adjacent Rossmoor Flood/Retention Basin. None of the proposed retaining wall locations would be visible from surrounding sensitive receptors. At both the northbound entrance ramp and southbound direct entrance ramp locations, views towards the retaining walls from surrounding uses would be interrupted by existing landscaping/vegetation and topography. In addition, architectural treatments for the retaining walls would be considered during the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) phase.

The existing soundwalls adjacent to the residences to the east of I-605 and south of Katella Avenue would remain in place. Based on the *Noise Study Report*, dated September 2017, noise levels are not predicted to approach or exceed the noise abatement criterion or result in a substantial increase in noise. Thus, noise abatement, including the construction of soundwalls, is not required. As such, upon completion of the proposed project, the visual character/quality and landscape of the project area would not be altered.

The nearest residential uses adjoin the I-605/Katella Avenue interchange to the east/southeast (south of Katella Avenue and east of I-605) within the community of Rossmoor. Views to the project site from the adjoining residential uses are obstructed by existing intervening soundwalls and ornamental trees. In addition, views from recreational users of Coyote Creek Bikeway towards the project site is generally obstructed by existing landscaping along the west side of the interchange, which would limit views of proposed improvements. Overall, implementation of the Build Alternatives would be similar to the character and quality of the existing I-605/Katella Avenue interchange and Katella Avenue. No modifications to the existing I-605 structure over Katella Avenue would occur, and no new bridges or overcrossings are proposed. Thus, the proposed improvements along I-605 and Katella Avenue would not affect any scenic resources, and the visual character and quality of the area would not be degraded.

For both build alternatives, existing traffic signals at the intersections of Katella Avenue at the northbound ramps and Civic Center Drive would be modified to accommodate changes to intersection geometries and lane configurations. These modifications would not introduce new light and glare to the area. However, Build Alternative 3 proposes to install a new signal and associated street lighting at the intersection of Katella Avenue and the southbound entrance ramp to accommodate westbound left turn movements onto the ramp and a pedestrian crossing on the west leg of the intersection. Existing sources of light within the project area include vehicle headlights, traffic lights, street lighting on I-605 and Katella Avenue, and nighttime lighting from the various commercial and residential uses in the project area. As such, the new signal and pedestrian safety signal would be consistent with the current lighting in the area. Thus, the proposed signal and pedestrian safety signal would not have an adverse effect in this regard.

2.1.6.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are required with adherence to the project features described above.