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M E M O R A N D U M

To: Karen Cohoe, P.E. **JN** 10-108022

From: Kristen Bogue and Cathy Johnson,

Date: April 11, 2014

Subject: I-5 Widening Project Addendum to the Approved Visual Impact Assessment

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The Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for the I-5 Widening Project (proposed project), dated October 2012, was approved by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The project considered in the approved VIA proposed additional auxiliary and general purpose lanes along Interstate 5 (I-5), interchange improvements, bridge replacements, ramp reconfigurations, and new/reconstructed soundwalls. Per the findings of the approved VIA, a moderate visual impact would occur due to the proposed additional hardscape (i.e., additional freeway lanes, new soundwalls, bridge replacements), ornamental tree and landscaping removal, and structure demolition. Minimization Measures 1 through 4 were recommended in order to reduce these impacts to freeway travelers, local roadway users, and surrounding residential, non-residential, and recreational uses.

Proposed Project Changes

During the public circulation of the environmental document, the City of Laguna Hills expressed a strong desire to have a masonry block wall constructed along the I-5 southbound shoulder, within State right-of-way, in the vicinity of Aliso Creek. As a result, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) and Caltrans have decided to include a “community enhancement wall” at this location as part of the proposed project. This 14-foot high, 800-foot long masonry block wall (herein referenced as “masonry block wall”) would sit atop the previously proposed retaining wall (included in Build Alternatives 2 and 3 of the approved VIA) from Los Alisos Boulevard to the I-5/Aliso Creek Bikeway undercrossing. The maximum height of the proposed masonry block wall in combination with the retaining wall would be up to 40 feet at the I-5/Aliso Creek Bikeway undercrossing. Note that these changes apply to both Build Alternative 2 and Build Alternative 3. Thus, for the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that this proposed project change would apply to both Build Alternative conditions.

Changes to the Visual Impact Analysis

Changes to Visual Character/Quality

Visual Assessment Unit 2: North-Central

The proposed masonry block wall is located within Visual Assessment Unit 2 (VAU2) of the VIA. Existing visual resources within VAU2 include Aliso Creek to the west and associated vegetation. The Natural Environment Study (NES) indicates the presence of riparian and coastal sage scrub communities along Aliso Creek. Implementation of the proposed project changes would result in the construction of a 14-foot high masonry block wall atop a retaining wall. The wall would be constructed to the west of southbound I-5 for 800 feet from Los Alisos Boulevard to the Aliso Creek Bikeway/I-5 underpass.

As seen from recreational trail users, implementation of the proposed masonry block wall would increase the visible hardscape; refer to Figure 1, *Existing Condition – Recreational Views*, and Figure 2, *Proposed Condition – Recreational Views*. The visible wall face would appear to be up to 40-feet in height, as seen by trail users. Vividness, intactness, and unity would be moderately affected, as the new wall feature would reduce the appearance of the freeway encroaching onto open space uses.

As seen from motorist views, the project changes would be moderate-high. The construction of a 14-foot masonry block wall would reduce the vividness of this view, as view blockage of open space uses and associated vegetation would occur; refer to Figure 3, *Existing Condition – Motorist Views*, and Figure 4, *Proposed Condition – Motorist Views*. The new wall feature would appear similar in character to the existing wall features along the I-5 corridor.

Changes to Anticipated Viewer Response

Viewer Response

The view in Figure 1 represents a typical view from recreational users along the Aliso Creek Bikeway. Recreational users would be exposed to the changes along the freeway at this location due to the proximity of the Aliso Creek Bikeway to the proposed masonry block wall. The viewer exposure duration is considered to be fairly long and recreational viewers are highly aware of the surrounding visual environment. Overall viewer response in at this location would be moderate-high.

The visual changes associated with the proposed masonry block wall would also be noticeable to travelers along I-5, as illustrated in Figure 4. Views to the west of Aliso Creek and associated open space (i.e., mature trees, riparian and coastal sage scrub, and landscaped slopes) are currently afforded, which increase the sensitivity of these views. It should be noted that I-5 is not designated as a State or locally designated scenic highway and motorists would experience these views while traveling at high speeds. However, as these views currently include those to open space in a developed portion of I-5, the new wall feature is anticipated to create a moderate-high viewer response from motorists at this location.

Changes to the Overall Visual Impact

As seen by viewers along the Aliso Creek Bikeway, the majority of views to the I-5 freeway would be replaced by a masonry block wall atop a retaining wall. The proposed changes would be moderate and the anticipated viewer response to those changes are moderate-high. Thus, as illustrated in Table 1, *Visual Impact Ratings Using Viewer Response and Resource Change*, a moderate-high visual impact would occur.

Table 1
Visual Impact Ratings Using Viewer Response and Resource Change

		Viewer Response (VR)				
		Low (L)	Moderate-Low (ML)	Moderate (M)	Moderate-High (MH)	High (H)
Resource Change (RC)	Low (L)	L	ML	ML	M	M
	Moderate-Low (ML)	ML	ML	M	M	MH
	Moderate (M)	ML	M	M	MH	MH
	Moderate-High (MH)	M	M	MH	MH	H
	High (H)	M	MH	MH	H	H

As seen by viewers along I-5 (southbound lanes), existing views of open space associated with Aliso Creek to the west of I-5 would be replaced by a masonry block wall. These proposed changes would be moderate-high and the anticipated viewer response to those changes are moderate-high. Thus, as illustrated in Table 1, a moderate-high visual impact would occur for motorist views as well.

Avoidance/Minimization Measures 2 and 3, recommended as part of the approved VIA would be required to reduce these visual impacts from the new masonry block wall. To minimize visual quality loss and to minimize the visual disruption from the new wall, architectural treatments would be required to be provided to the wall, consistent with local plans pertaining to wall design. Thus, upon implementation of Avoidance/Minimization Measures 2 and 3 of the approved VIA, these moderate-high visual impacts would be reduced.

Other CEQA Considerations

Scenic Vistas

The proposed masonry block wall would not affect any designated scenic views or views in the City of Laguna Hills. No new impacts have been identified in this regard as a result of the proposed project changes.

Visual Character

As discussed in Section VI, *Visual Resources and Resource Change*, of the approved VIA, the I-5 corridor is characterized with visual resources such as mature trees and vegetation, landscaped slopes, and views to Aliso Creek and Oso Creek. The resultant visual impacts to Aliso Creek Bikeway users and freeway motorists would be moderate-high. After implementation of the proposed masonry block wall, the visual character of the area may be affected due to the increased hardscape. The new wall would also obstruct views of Aliso Creek and the associated vegetation from I-5 viewers. The freeway views are not designated as scenic. However, the viewer response is anticipated to be moderate-high. Avoidance/Minimization Measure 2 of the approved VIA would require architectural treatments to wall features that would reduce visual quality loss, and Avoidance/Minimization Measure 3 would require Caltrans to administer an Aesthetic Design Review Team to ensure the wall would be in compliance with the aesthetic requirements of the *Master Plan of Freeway and Transit Corridor Enhancements: Creating a Quality Environment Along Orange County's Transportation Network* (prepared for Orange County Transportation Authority and Caltrans District 12 by Dames & Moore, Inc., dated December 1995). Implementation of the approved VIA's Avoidance/Minimization Measures 2 and 3 would reduce potential visual character impacts in this regard.

Scenic Highways

There are no eligible or officially designated State scenic highways in the viewshed of the proposed project changes."[1] Therefore, the proposed wall feature would not result in any new impacts associated with a State scenic highway.

The City of Laguna Niguel General Plan has locally designated Alicia Parkway, La Paz Road, Moulton Parkway, Crown Valley Parkway, Pacific Island Drive, Niguel Road, Street of the Golden Lantern, and Camino del Avion as scenic highways. Implementation of the proposed masonry block wall would not hinder or obstruct any views from the aforementioned locally designated scenic highways due to site distance (the nearest scenic highway is Alicia Parkway, located approximately 1,700 feet to the southeast). Therefore, the proposed wall feature would not result in any new impacts associated with a locally designated scenic highway.

Light and Glare

Implementation of the masonry block wall would not introduce additional sources of light and glare associated with vehicle headlights, traffic signals, or street lighting. Viewer groups in the vicinity of the project site would likely benefit from the new wall feature, as the wall would provide screening from light and glare, as compared to existing conditions. The proposed wall would screen lighting and glare from the I-5 corridor along the Aliso Creek Bikeway and adjacent residential uses to the south/southwest. With implementation of the previously recommended Avoidance/Minimization Measure 2 (Architectural Treatments), walls would be required to apply an architectural treatment to the wall that would reduce reflective light and

[1] California Department of Transportation, *California Scenic Highway Mapping System*, accessed at http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm on February 26, 2014.

glare impacts. Therefore, no new light and glare impacts would result from implementation of the proposed project changes.

Temporary Construction Visual Impacts

No new construction impacts compared to that analyzed as part of the previously approved VIA would result with implementation of the proposed masonry block wall.

Cumulative Visual Impacts

No changes to cumulative visual impacts would occur with implementation of the new masonry block wall feature as compared to that analyzed in the previously approved VIA.

Avoidance/Minimization Measures from the Approved VIA

The following avoidance/minimization measures from the approved VIA would be incorporated into the project:

2. **Architectural Treatments.** To minimize visual quality loss and to minimize the visual disruption from the elements of the highway construction, architectural treatments shall be provided to the walls in accordance with the *Master Plan of Freeway and Transit Corridor Enhancements: Creating a Quality Environment Along Orange County's Transportation Network*. All wall aesthetics shall be approved by the District Landscape Architect.

3. **Aesthetic Design Review.** The District 12 Landscape Architecture Branch shall administer and chair an Aesthetic Design Review Team (ADRT) that includes local agency representatives to ensure the project landscape and structural elements are in compliance with the aesthetic requirements of the *Master Plan of Freeway and Transit Corridor Enhancements: Creating a Quality Environment Along Orange County's Transportation Network*.

4. **Construction Lighting.** Construction lighting types, plans, and placement shall be reviewed at the discretion of the District Landscape Architect in order to minimize light and glare impacts on surrounding sensitive uses.

ATTACHMENTS

A: Changes to Photosimulations

ATTACHMENT A
Changes to Photosimulations

Proposed Community Wall Feature

Direction of Photo
Key View Location

I-5 WIDENING PROJECT FROM SR-73 TO EL TORO ROAD • VIA

Existing Condition - Recreational Views

4/10/14 JN 130170-20014 MAS

Figure 1

Previously Analyzed Build Alternatives 2 and 3

Revised Project

I-5 WIDENING PROJECT FROM SR-73 TO EL TORO ROAD • VIA

Proposed Condition - Recreational Views

4/10/14 JN 130170-20014 MAS

Figure 2

Proposed Community Wall Feature

Direction of Photo
Key View Location

I-5 WIDENING PROJECT FROM SR-73 TO EL TORO ROAD • VIA

Existing Condition - Motorist Views

4/10/14 JN 130170-20014 MAS

Figure 3

Existing Condition

Revised Project

I-5 WIDENING PROJECT FROM SR-73 TO EL TORO ROAD • VIA

Proposed Condition - Motorist Views

4/10/14 JN 130170-20014 MAS

Figure 4