

# **VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

## **SAFETY PROJECT**

**October 12, 2012**

### **California Department of Transportation**

12-Ora-74  
Post Mile 2.9/5.1  
EA 0L7200  
E-FIS 1200020180

**Caltrans District 12**

**Landscape Architecture**

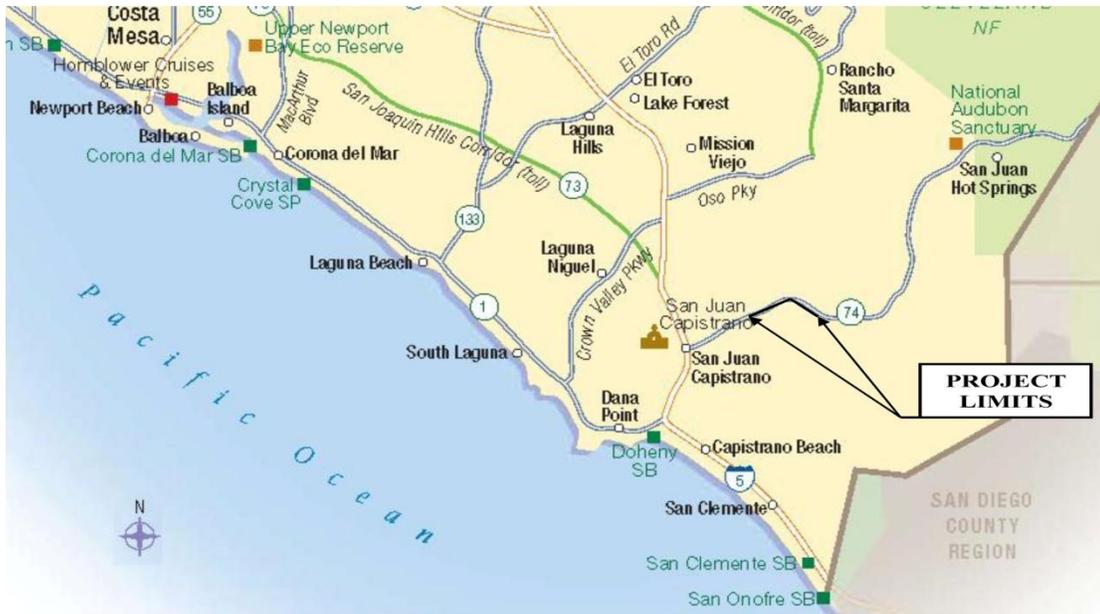
## I. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to assess the visual impacts of the proposed project and to propose measures to mitigate any adverse visual impacts associated with the construction of widening an existing shoulder to a 4 foot continuous shoulder in both directions, and roadway safety features, on the surrounding visual environment. This analysis determines if a change in the visual environment will be viewed as positive or negative, and the degree of any change relative to the existing setting.

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This safety project on Route 74 (Rte-74) begins east of Antonio Parkway/La Pata (2.9 PM) to west of Conrock entrance (5.1 PM) in an unincorporated area of the County of Orange. This project proposes measures to widen existing shoulder to a continuous 4-foot shoulder in both directions, install centerline rumble strips, construct turn-outs and install metal beam guard rails at various locations. Shoulder widening will require roadway excavation in certain cut sections and construction of retaining walls in certain fill sections. Most existing culverts within the project limits will be replaced as part of the scope of the project. Major grading would occur for construction of retaining walls, certain widening locations, and for replacement of drainage culverts, removing existing vegetation including native oak trees.

**Vicinity Map**



On Route **Ortega Highway (Route-74)**  
Between **East of Antonio Pkwy/ La Pata (PM 2.930)**  
And **West of Conrock Entrance (PM 5.069)**

### III. VISUAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PROJECT

The regional landscape establishes the general visual environment of the project, but the specific visual environment upon which this assessment will focus is determined the project view shed. Route 74, Ortega Highway, is an eligible State scenic highway. It is the only east-west route that connects south Orange County to Riverside County. This section of Route 74 is a two-lane winding highway with hilly and mountainous terrain surrounded by undeveloped areas. This section runs along San Juan Creek on hilly areas that generally overlook the lower lying creek bed /floodplain to the north, and hills with Oak Woodland plant community to the south.

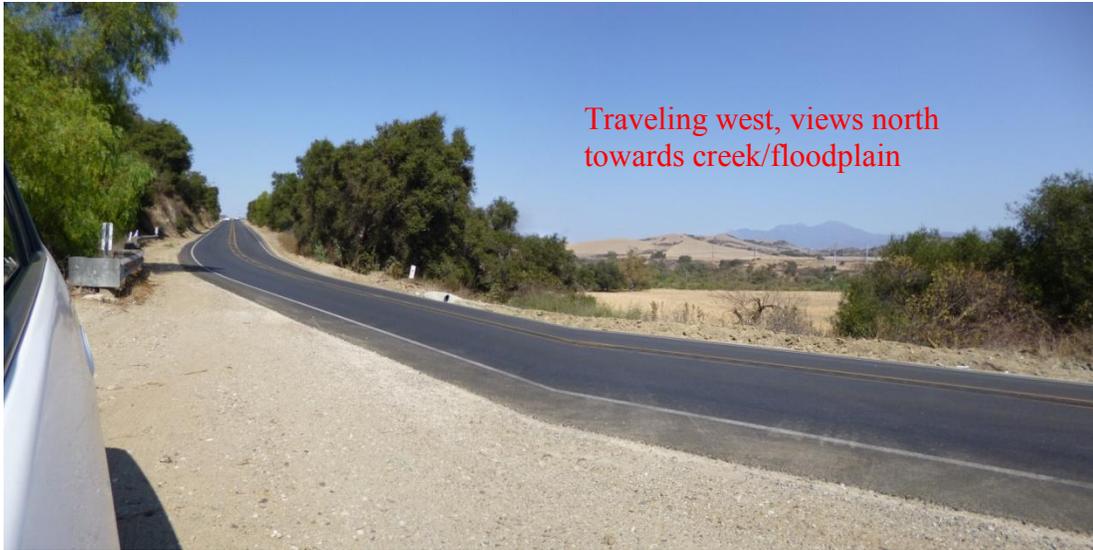


Beginning eastbound with views overlooking creek/floodplain to the north (left).

### IV. EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES AND VIEWER RESPONSE

The project site travels hilly terrain above and parallel to San Juan Creek and its floodplain. The roadway is lined with native Oak Woodland plant communities consisting mostly of native grasses, shrubs, and oak trees. This unincorporated roadway has a rural characteristic that overlooks views of a creek and wide floodplain that is partly used for agricultural purposes, and takes on an appearance of a valley. With native oaks growing adjacent to the roadway, many of the views are obstructed.

Viewer exposure comes mainly from the traveling public, as there is little residential community or commercial sites nearby. A majority of the viewers commute between Orange County and Riverside County and businesses located off of Nichols Institute Road.



Westbound with vegetated hills on the south(left) and San Juan Creek/floodplain on the north (right).



Eastbound with views towards the north upon construction removal of existing roadside vegetation. Vegetated hills on the south (right).

## V. VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Viewers will see vegetation and tree groupings removed during construction. At various locations, trees will be removed to repair drainage culverts and to add retaining walls/concrete barriers. MBGR will be added for safety. The removed vegetation on the south (hill side) for widening, existing vegetation and tree groupings beyond removal, will still provide a vegetative background that should not

affect visual character. To add retaining walls and repair culverts on the north (creek side), the removed vegetations could open up views to the creek/ valley below and in many places have existing vegetation beyond. Along with more view opportunities, viewers will now see MBGR, retaining walls, and concrete barriers. To minimize visual impacts caused by the widening, retaining walls/concrete barriers can be stained to blend with the surrounding area, and if needed, a copper sulfate stain can be applied to give the MBGR an aged appearance. Also, the concrete barriers will have an aged appearance to match the upper 74 concrete barrier treatment, from a previous roadway project. Avoidance or minimization measures have been identified and can lessen the visual impacts caused by the project. Furthermore, vegetation removal on the north could improve views towards the creek/floodplain. Due to roadway construction, removal of existing native vegetation, including oak trees, would require highway planting revegetation as mitigation.