

## 4.6 AESTHETICS

The information below summarizes the visual impact analysis for the North Connector Project (Project). The purpose of the visual analysis is to determine the potential visual impacts and to mitigate adverse visual impacts associated with the construction of the Project on the surrounding visual environment. The Visual Analysis Report is available for public review at the Solano Transportation Authority (STA), One Harbor Center, Suite 130, Suisun City, CA 94585 during normal business hours.

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

#### **Regional Visual Character and Quality**

The West End of the Project is located about 0.5 miles north of I-80 and the East End is located about 0.25 north of I-80. The Project area is predominately located in the flat alluvial plain at the mouth of Green Valley and base of north-northwest trending foothills of the southern North Coast Ranges. In recent years, this portion of Solano County (County) and the City of Fairfield (City) has experienced growth pressures consistent with many of California's inland communities. Once primarily agricultural farmland, much of the surrounding area is now a mixture of industrial, commercial, and residential development.

Solano County is one of nine counties in the San Francisco Bay Area Region and is located halfway between San Francisco and Sacramento. The Project is within the County and encompasses portions of the County and the City of Fairfield. The regional area is surrounded by undeveloped hills on its western and northern borders grazing and grasslands, and I-80 and Suisun Marsh to the south. The County has retained much of its agricultural character; however the City is experiencing rapid growth of new residential neighborhoods, and office and commercial developments have become obvious visual features in the area.

#### **Aesthetic Resources**

Aesthetic or visual resources are those physical features that make up the visual landscape, including land, water, vegetation and man-made elements. These elements are the stimuli upon which actual visual experience is based. Visual resources are not, however, limited to the elements or features that are of outstanding visual quality. A location or element in the visual environment can have values attributed to it by its viewers regardless of its quality. Viewer sensitivity or local values can confer visual significance on landscape features and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional.

Scenic vistas and scenic resources identified in the County and City general plans in the Project vicinity are listed below:

*Solano County General Plan* - The Solano County Scenic Roadways Element identifies I-80, I-680, and SR12 as scenic freeways/expressways and Green Valley Road, Rockville Road, Suisun Valley Road, as scenic minor thoroughfares.

*City of Fairfield General Plan* - The City of Fairfield General Plan EIR identifies portions of I-680, Cordelia Road, Green Valley Road, and Rockville Road as scenic corridors. Furthermore, the EIR indicates that foreground views of light-

colored annual grasslands along I-80, contrast with background views of darker woodland and mature trees.

### **Viewsheds**

For the purpose of this analysis the study area has been divided into two viewsheds: Jameson Canyon and Green Valley/Suisun Valley. A viewshed is generally defined as a visual envelope or broad-range view from a specific viewing location and are generally quite large (see Figure 4.6-1).

#### *Viewshed 1-Jameson Canyon*

The Jameson Canyon viewshed is within Solano County and begins at the I-80/SR12 West interchange and extends west to the first ridge line along SR12 West. The area is rural and is defined by rolling hills, ranches, and a dairy and horse-boarding facility. SR12 is a busy highway that runs through this viewpoint. Twin Sisters, a double-peaked mountain at 2,200 feet elevation, is located to the north, and forms a backdrop to this viewshed.

#### *Viewshed 2-Green Valley/Suisun Valley*

The Green Valley/Suisun Valley viewshed is within both Solano County and the City of Fairfield. This viewshed extends from the I-80/SR12 West Interchange on the west to Abernathy Road on the east. The character of the area varies greatly within this viewshed. Heading west to east, undeveloped hillsides and ranches give way to highly-developed residential and commercial areas, which give way to agricultural uses.

Suisun Valley is a highly scenic agricultural area that extends in a north/south direction from Twin Peaks to south of I-80. Within the Project area, Suisun Valley is visible from Suisun Valley Road and I-80.

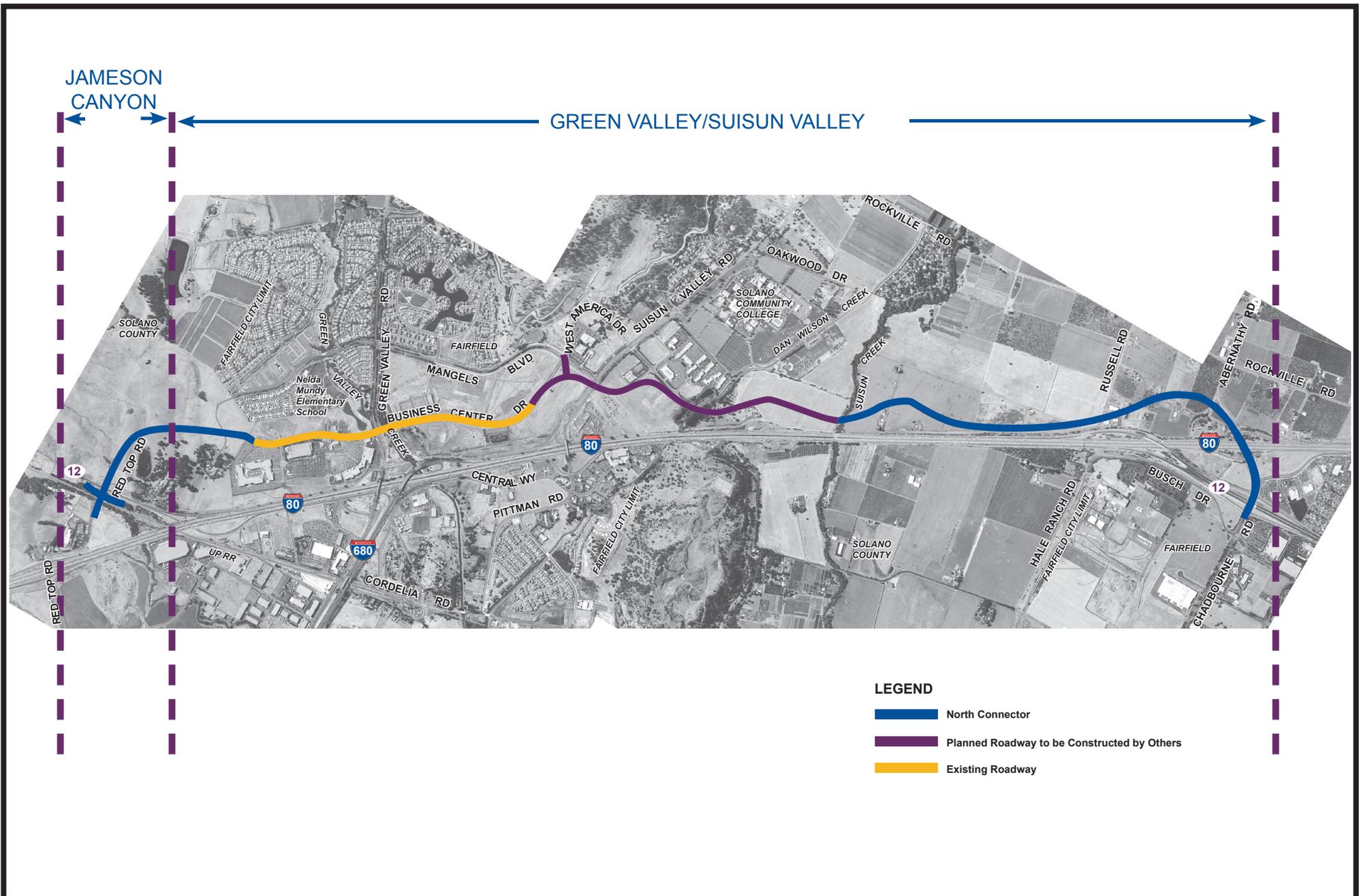


Figure 4.6-1. Viewsheds

### Red Top Road/SR12 (West End)



Intersection of Red Top Road/SR12

Views of the West End include the intersection of Red Top Road and SR12. This area is primarily rural in nature. There is a dairy and horse-boarding facility on Red Top Road, and railroad tracks cross Red Top Road near the busy intersection of Red Top Road and SR12 West. A stream and riparian corridor line the track on the south side of SR12. The rural scenery, the presence of the riparian corridor, and the views of the hills in the distance create a vivid visual experience. However, SR12 West, with its steady flow of traffic, interrupts the visual experience in this area.

## West End



### Grazing Land

Views of the West End (looking west) primarily consists of grazing land and rolling hills. It exhibits a rural character and contains a rock wall, a large sheep barn and cattle fencing (visible in the mid-ground). A non-rural feature in the area includes a line of large power line poles, visible in the background of this view.

### Suisun Creek to Russell Road (East End)



Agricultural Land

Suisun Creek

The Suisun Creek to Russell Road area encompasses mainly active agricultural lands. The topography is mostly level and contains sectioned parcels of agricultural land used primarily for row crops. Suisun Creek runs in a north to south direction. Its banks are vegetated with willow trees and contain typical riparian habitat. Fairfield Linear Park (Linear Park) runs along the west bank of Suisun Creek and at the north side of I-80. Between Suisun Creek and Russell Road, one residence and several outbuildings associated with the agricultural operations are located in this area. The agricultural aesthetic of this area is vivid, given the suburban surroundings to the east and west.

### Russell Road to Abernathy Road (East End)



Abernathy Road Overcrossing and Orchards

Views in the area between Russell Road and Abernathy Road contain a wide variety of aesthetics including: 1) commercial uses such as Moore Tractor Company, Concrete Pipe Distributors, and Green Valley Tractor; 2) agricultural uses including orchards, row crops and vineyards; and 3) residential uses. This area contains large power lines and the Linear Park, which travels along the north side of I-80, crossing under Abernathy Road. The overall aesthetic character is rural, but with many intrusions and visually distracting features.

## **REGULATORY SETTING**

### **Regional and Local Plans**

Impacts to visual and aesthetics resources are governed by the City and the County general plans. The relevant visual and aesthetic resources related objectives, policies, programs, and goals within the general plans are described as follows.

#### **Solano County General Plan**

The Scenic Roadways Element of the Solano County General Plan includes specific policies depending on the type of views available to a project. The following policies are applicable to the proposed Project:

##### **C. Rolling Grassland**

1. Allowable building construction or road construction which overlaps such a foreground component and is in view of the designated scenic roadway should be subject to site and design review by qualified county or city staff or by an urban design consultant to the staff.

##### **F. Flat Grasslands and G. Flat Cropland**

1. Current general plan provisions for agricultural use should be maintained. Related zoning provisions should be modified where necessary to maintain the current open appearance of large parcel areas and deep setbacks.

#### **City of Fairfield General Plan**

The Open Space and Urban Design elements of the City of Fairfield General Plan include policies related to visual resources. The following policies are applicable to the proposed Project:

Policy OS 6.1 Preserve the views of hills and other vistas surrounding Fairfield.

Policy OS 6.2 Continue to administer adopted preservation ordinances for trees, streams and hillside development.

Policy OS 6.4 All grading shall be integrated and compatible with adjacent areas so as to create a natural topographical appearance and avoid abrupt changes in slope.

Policy OS 6.5 New development within a Scenic Vista Area or its viewshed shall comply with the policies and guidelines in the Scenic Vistas and Roadways Plan.

Policy OS 6.6 Significant natural features shall be preserved wherever development is allowed in a Scenic Vista Area, and views of these significant features shall not be obstructed.

Policy OS 6.7 New development along a Scenic Roadway shall comply with the policies and guidelines in the Scenic Vistas and Roadways Plan.

Policy UD 6.1 Preserve existing significant trees and extensively plant new trees where appropriate.

Policy UD 6.2 Landscape materials should consist of drought resistant plant varieties complementary to the area.

## **VISUAL RESOURCES IMPACT ANALYSIS**

### Significance Criteria

#### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines identifies environmental issues to be considered when determining whether the Project could have a significant effect on the environment. STA has applied these standards of significance for evaluating impacts related to the North Connector Project.

The Project would have a significant impact if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

#### **Issues Not Discussed Further**

##### Damage of scenic resources.

No scenic resources identified by the County or City general plans would be affected or damaged by the development of the Project. There are no impacts related to this topic.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **Less than Significant Impacts**

#### Substantial adverse effects on a scenic vista.

##### West End

Although the Project would be immediately adjacent to a scenic roadway (according to the Solano County Scenic Roadways, SR12 is a scenic roadway) on the West End, the Project would generally follow existing topography and would not obstruct any mid- to long- range scenic views or affect any identified scenic resources. Land uses in this area (to the north and west) are primarily agricultural and are used for cattle grazing. Land uses to the east consist of low-rise residential development, Nelda Mundy Elementary School, and commercial development within the City of Fairfield. The visual character and quality of the Project would be consistent with existing scenic character and quality. Furthermore, the view duration of the Project along this portion of SR12 West would be short-lived due to the varying topography of SR12. Therefore, although the Project introduces a non-agricultural public roadway into the view, the effects to the

scenic quality of the area would be minor and impacts related to this topic are considered less than significant.

#### East End

Although the Project would be immediately adjacent to a scenic roadway (according to the Solano County Scenic Roadways Element I-80 is considered a scenic roadway), the Project would be flat and would not obstruct mid- to long-range scenic views or affect any identified scenic resources. Along the north side of the Project, agricultural uses would not be visually altered by the Project. Furthermore, the view duration along this area of I-80 would be short-lived and is currently obstructed in several locations by existing landscaping along the Fairfield Linear Park. Therefore, although the Project would introduce a non-agricultural public roadway into the view, the effects to the scenic quality of the area would be minor and impacts related to this topic are considered less than significant.

#### Create new sources of substantial light and glare.

The Project would not include street lighting and, therefore, would not create a new source of substantial light and/or glare. As a result, impacts related to light and glare are considered less than significant.

#### Degrade existing visual character or quality (East End only).

#### East End

Development in the East End includes construction of a new four-lane roadway and bridge in an area that exhibits an intact agricultural aesthetic. This area is immediately adjacent to the I-80, in an area of mixed land uses including rural, agricultural, and commercial. As a result, introduction of the roadway into this area would not substantially degrade the existing visual character. Removal of one commercial building along Russell Road would have little effect on the overall visual character as this business is not a unique scenic resource.

A photo simulation of the East End of the Project is depicted in Figure 4.6-4, Viewpoint 3: Linear Park, as described below.

#### Viewpoint 3: East End

Viewpoint 3 is located along the existing Linear Park which is located immediately adjacent to I-80. This view looks to the northwest with agricultural lands in the foreground. In the distance a house and several outbuildings are visible. The riparian corridor of Suisun Creek (to the northwest) and a view of the distant hills form a backdrop (see Figure 4.6-4).

From this viewpoint, the Project would be approximately 0.25-mile north of I-80. The roadway would not be clearly visible from this vantage point due to the distance. The land between I-80 and the new roadway would provide a visual buffer or transition zone and provides a visual break between the different transportation facilities (I-80 and North Connector Project). Landscaping in the form of shrubs and trees in the median which would be installed as part of the Project would further reduce the visibility of the new roadway.

Therefore, impacts related to potential degradation of existing visual character or quality in the East End, are considered less than significant.

## Significant and Potentially Significant Impacts and Mitigation Measures

### **4.6-1: The Project could potentially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings in the West End. This is considered a potentially significant adverse impact.**

The analysis of impacts to visual character and quality are organized by Project area. Visual simulations of the proposed Project are presented below.

#### **West End**

Development in a new roadway combined with the creation of a signalized intersection at Red Top Road/SR12/North Connector would constitute a substantial change to the rural character of this area. Furthermore, grading activities on nearby hillsides necessary to construct the Project would result in changes in views and would potentially degrade existing visual quality and character.

A photo simulation of the West End of the Project is depicted in Figure 4.6-2, Viewpoint 1: Red Top Road and 4.6-3, Viewpoint 2: Venus Drive at Mangels Boulevard, as described below.

#### Viewpoint 1: Red Top Road

Three viewer groups were identified that would be affected by the change in visual quality in this area: motorists, residents, and recreational users. Motorists include both drivers and passengers traveling on local highways and roadways in the Project area. Residents include those who live along or near the Project, and recreational users include pedestrians and bicyclists.

Viewpoint 1 is looking north at the intersection of Red Top Road and SR12. In the foreground are the willow trees of the riparian corridor and stream which run parallel to the railroad tracks. The railroad tracks cross Red Top Road just south of SR12. Across SR12 rolling hills and grassland used for cattle grazing are visible. Twin Sisters is visible in the distance and provides a scenic backdrop for this viewpoint. An old barn is also visible from this viewpoint. Motorists would experience this view when traveling north on Red Top Road to SR12.

The Project would dramatically change the visual character at this location. The current aesthetic of a two-lane country road and stop-signed intersection would be replaced by a much wider signalized intersection more typical of a suburban setting. Construction of the new roadway would introduce a substantial new visual element into the hillside aesthetic, greatly reducing the visual character and quality to the north of SR12.

Development of the Project would detract from the scenic character of SR12 in this area. However, motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists would continue to be able to view grasslands, hillsides and riparian corridors along SR12, which are the primary elements which make SR12 a designated scenic roadway in Solano County.

#### Viewpoint 2: Venus Drive at Mangels Boulevard

Viewpoint 2 is located behind the rear yards of homes on Venus Drive off of Mangels Boulevard. The foreground and mid-ground views consist of flat to rolling grassland. Stands of eucalyptus and oak trees are visible in the distance on a small hill.

The Project would introduce a new visual element that would detract from the rural character of this area and view; however, the primary scenic elements within this view (rolling hills, grassland, and wooded hillside) would not be removed or substantially degraded. The Project would introduce a visual element that would detract from these features and reduce visual character and quality of the overall view.

# Existing Viewpoint



# Simulation of Proposed Project

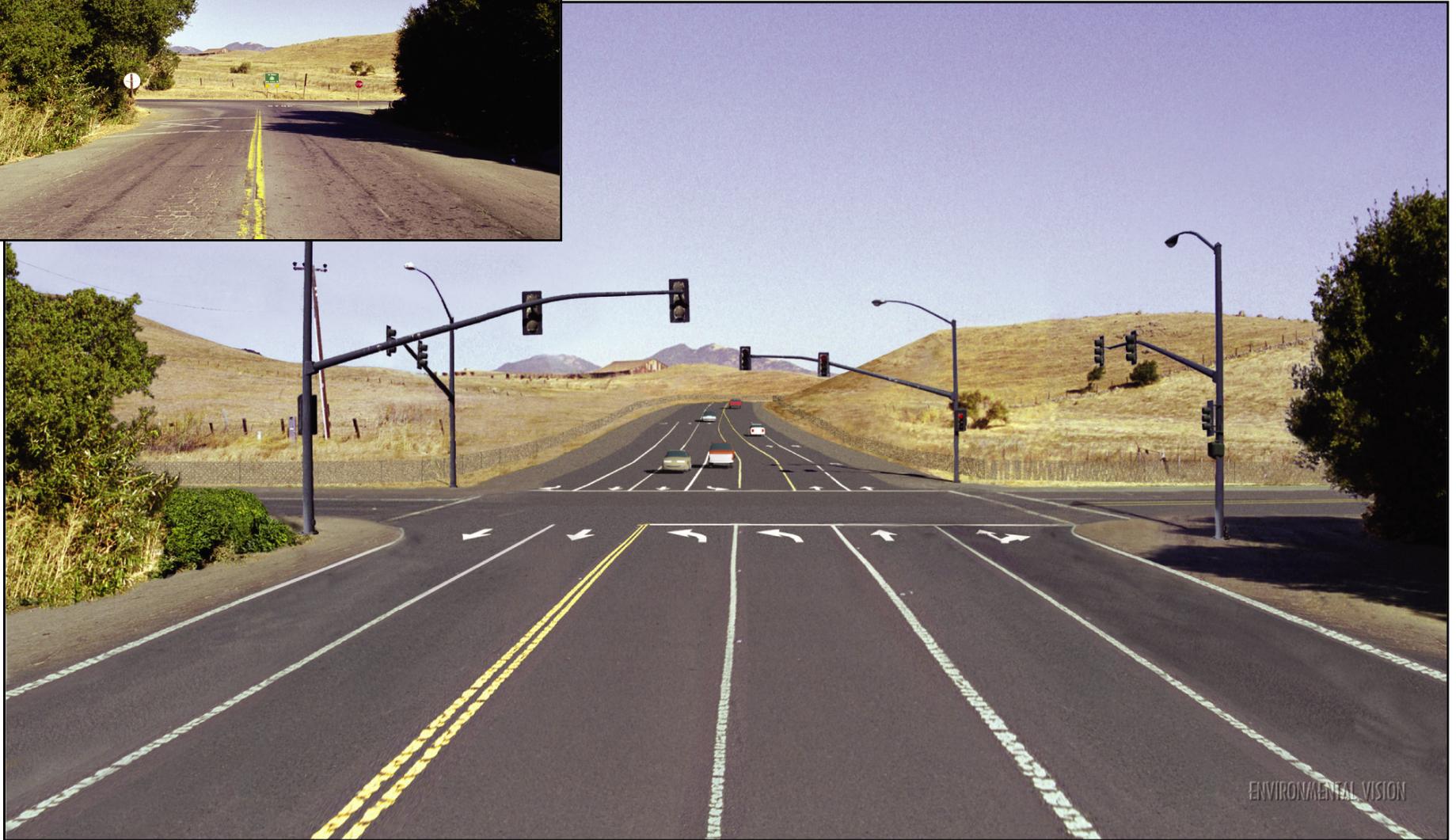


Figure 4.6-2. Visual Simulation 1: Red Top Road

## Existing Viewpoint



## Simulation of Proposed Project



Figure 4.6-3. Visual Simulation 2: Business Center Drive

# Existing Viewpoint



# Simulation of Proposed Project



Note: This simulation does not depict planned landscaping which would include shrubs and trees.

Figure 4.6-4. Visual Simulation 3: Fairfield Linear Park

Therefore, for the reasons stated above, impacts related to visual character and quality in the West End are considered potentially significant. To reduce Project impacts related to visual character and quality in the West End, the following mitigation would be required:

**Mitigation Measure 4.6-1a:** In areas of rolling grasslands in the West End, contour grading shall be utilized to minimize alteration of the natural terrain. Slope rounding shall also be employed in conjunction with contour grading as to provide a smoother and more natural appearing finished grade and smoother transition between grade slopes and natural topography.

**Mitigation Measure 4.6-1b:** In the West End, landscaping and native species should be used to reflect the rural character of the surrounding areas. Trees (if planted) shall be of species consistent with the existing natural landscape and spaced to allow for view corridors. Graded slopes should be re-seeded with native grasses.

**Significance After Mitigation:** Less than significant.